

# **THE WORK OF GOD: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF OPUS DEI**

**Przemysław Piątkowski**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Management Studies

Department of Accounting, Finance & Management  
University of Essex

July 2009



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is (...).

Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,  
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,  
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.

T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*

No evil shall befall you, no affliction come near your tent.  
For God commands the angels to guard you in all your ways.  
With their hands they shall support you, lest you strike your foot against a stone.  
Psalm 91:10-12

I would like to thank all those who guarded me on my way.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family: my mother Maria, my father Stanisław, my sisters Zofia and Joanna, my grandmother Janina, my brothers: Rafał (cousin) and Jarosław (in-law), and, of course, my three lovely little nieces: Maria, Jadwiga, and Janina. I would like to thank my supervisors, Heather Höpfl and Monika Kostera, but I honestly don't know how. Each in her very distinctive ways, you have opened up new worlds in front of me. You also let me into your lives and entered mine. It simply cannot stop here, I sincerely hope that we will stay in these relations "until death do us apart" and later. My gratitude also goes to Olga Belova, my second supervisor, and all the colleagues in the Essex Management Centre. It has been a privilege to be even a modest part of such an outstanding academic community.

What can I say? To you, and to all my friends in Warsaw, Essex and scattered around the world, I promise to guard you on your ways too. There is no way I can repay you, but one has to learn to live with such a debt. Freely I received, freely I will give to others too, thinking of you.

## **SUMMARY**

The thesis examines the work of Opus Dei, a personal prelature within the Roman Catholic Church. In particular it focuses on the very specific ways in which Opus Dei organizes the symbolic reality for its members, mainly through defining and interpreting the “meaning of work”. The thesis draws upon extensive empirical material in order to explore the ways in which such definitions create meaning in the lives of Opus Dei members. The approach which has been adopted is in the ethnographic tradition. Since the subject of enquiry is a religious organization, parallels are made between ethnography and exegesis, more specifically to patristic (as opposed to scholastic) method of enquiry. The thesis uses a number of stylistic devices in order to communicate both the evolution and the development of the organization and also, and perhaps more explicitly, to explain the epistemological journey of the researcher. In consequence, there are two emergent concerns which both locate the thesis and provide the primary contribution to knowledge. These are the ethnographic work itself which offers unique insights into an organization still relatively little researched (at least from certain perspectives) and for which access is limited. The second, and arguably more significant, is the method of inquiry which refers to a tradition which deserves further attention. A more complete explanation of these issues is given below.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

### FOREWORD 5

### OVERVIEW 14

*I.OPUS DEI 14*

*II.METHODOLOGY 35*

### PART I: THE DOGMA 57

*GENESIS OF OPUS DEI 58*

*THE MESSAGE 78*

*PSALM 105*

*ANALYSIS OF THE DOGMA 114*

### PART II: EMPIRIA 127

*BOOK OF PERSIS 127*

*BOOK OF JULIA 134*

*BOOK OF TRYPHAENA 144*

*BOOK OF EPAENETUS 154*

*BOOK OF PRISCA AND AQUILA 167*

*BOOK OF PHOEBE 185*

*BOOK OF GAIUS 193*

### ANALYSIS OF EMPIRIA 200

### BIBLIOGRAPHY: 219

## FOREWORD

This research project took well over six years of my life all together. It started sometime in 2002, when, guided by Professor Monika Kostera, we were asked to choose an organization as a subject of enquiry in our master's dissertation seminar. We were a group of students in the School of Marketing and Management at the Warsaw University who chose Professor Kostera as their supervisor. The seminar was supposed to last for the whole of two years; it started in October 2001 and was entitled "Organizational Anthropology". It meant that the choice of a supervisor involved also, to a large extent, a commitment to an epistemological standpoint and subsequently to a methodological tradition – ethnography. In other words, this choice and commitment translated into a certain disposition towards the world, something that we acquired along the way during these two years. The choice of the subject of enquiry, as crucial as it usually is, was rather secondary. The method, the disposition, were the starting points. In my case though the subject outgrew and ate everything else, as I chose The Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei – the Work of God.

The extent to which I did not know what I was doing, the extent of my ignorance, was huge. On the other hand, the circumstances of making this choice were trivial – being tired of, and/or completely uninterested in much of what was going on in the course of my studies, I simply wanted to combine management with something that I would be, at least to some extent, passionate about. To use a very clumsy metaphor, tea leaves are awful when eaten raw, choosing Professor Kostera and organizational anthropology was like drying them and pouring boiling water on them. Opus Dei was supposed to be just a spoonful of sugar. All I wanted was something bearable, a few years later I ended up in

the middle of a sugar factory, holding a tiny cup of bitter tea in my hand, not knowing what to do with all the bloody sugar. The reasons behind my choice were personal, as, I suppose, were the reasons of all the other students – one went for an art gallery, another for a supermarket that was at the same time a relic of the communist era in Poland, yet another went for an informal group dedicated to esoteric spiritual practices, and so on. We were allowed to assume the widest possible definition of organization and felt liberated by it, as it often meant an escape from corporate utilitarianism that never goes beyond the notion of effectiveness. Yet my choice turned out to be personal perhaps much more literally, in that, to a large extent subconsciously, I projected through it my deepest and most fundamental questions on my research project. I naively put my “restless heart” (Augustine, *Confessions* I, 1, 1) into it, while I should have, perhaps, constrained myself to the enquiring intellect searching for truth.

Being a Catholic myself, all my life I had been trying to reconcile my Christian faith with everyday reality, but the struggle had always happened somewhat outside my studies at the university and outside many other spheres of my life. By choosing Opus Dei, a part of the Church founded by a saint – Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, I naively condemned myself to years of internal struggles. Why such dramatic words, one may ask. Well, the entire thesis is the answer, and only a partial one too. Let me just say now that not only the fact that Opus Dei is a Catholic organization is at play here, but rather the ‘way’ it is Catholic, a very particular way: it challenges and rarely fails to put a potentially interested person in a desperately defensive position about himself. It all grew on me; in the end I only managed to complete my master’s dissertation because of the unbearable pressure from the outside, as the fieldwork itself never felt completed, and hence I never felt as if I

had enough authority to say something. It is very much the same now, as I write these words. I am in the middle of a 'living' process, my heart beats in it, while:

Analysis of almost any kind requires the death or at least mutilation of that which is analyzed. To identify anything as an *explanandum* is to offer it up for execution. To alight upon anything as an *explanans* is to provide at the very least a fearsome weapon of mutilation. Thus words, especially in the form of conceptualizations, serve to imprison, immobilize, and injure that which they seek to address. (Burrell 1996:645)

I knew very little about Opus Dei when I started researching it; the interest was based entirely on one newspaper article (Siennicki 2002), written in a relatively favourable tone, which, as I found out in a due course, managed completely to miss the point. That is, however, irrelevant now. What is important is that, in spite of my apparent ignorance, or perhaps because of it, I was strongly advised not to read more. This placed my research in many ways close to grounded theory (see: Glaser and Strauss 1967) and proved to be a blessing in disguise. Otherwise I would surely have ended up stuck among all the controversies and contradictory opinions surrounding the Work before I even entered the field, controversies of which those caused by Dan Brown's famous *The Da Vinci Code* (2004) are just a tip of the iceberg. To find my way out, I would have to prematurely make up my mind and begin with a clear agenda. To a large extent it would ruin my project methodologically, but more importantly, it would also strip it of all its originality. Almost without a single exception publications on Opus Dei have such a prescribed agenda, the literature on the subject is shockingly polarised, and so one of the key contributions of this thesis lies in its 'political ambiguity', so to speak. I strongly believe that it is not possible not to have an agenda at some level, especially when dealing with phenomena like Opus Dei, but here the agenda is far from clear even to me as the author. This thesis reflects a never-ending sinusoid of my personal attitude, only the amplitude

decreased over the years. At first it literally ranged from euphoria to total condemnation, from serious thoughts about getting involved personally to equally serious questions about my own place in a Church which embraced something that I simply could not accept. In other words, I eventually internalized two contradicting views and struggled with them personally for a long time, and, perhaps paradoxically to some, precisely this internal struggle is the source of such authority as I have as a researcher. I feel I can honestly say that I experienced Opus Dei, because Opus Dei is this contradiction, especially as a cultural phenomenon, or simply as a “culture” (Smircich 1983:347).

The implications of such a situation are vast. First of all, paradoxically again, on this radical subjectivity of my approach rests my claim to objectivity and truth. This is nothing new. It has been widely discussed, since from one point of view this is simply what ethnography is all about:

It rests on the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others. Ethnography is therefore highly particular and hauntingly personal, yet it serves as the basis for grand comparison and understanding within and across a society. (Van Maanen 1988:ix)

On the other hand, however, my situation gave rise to many ethical and methodological problems I had to deal with along the way. Some of the solutions to these problems became the key contributions to knowledge that this thesis can lay claim to, while others remain unresolved, sometimes painfully so. Perhaps this is the way it has got to be. After all, to quote Herman Hesse’s *Narciss and Goldmund*, all being is “built on opposites, on division” (1968:228) and “life itself has a kind of guilt in it” (1968:92).

At any rate, between autumn 2002 and summer 2003 in Warsaw the first stage of my data collection was conducted: a series of interviews with Opus Dei members or with people closely but still informally connected to the organization, participant observation during a few standard events open to nonmembers, and eventually some reading of relevant texts, mainly those written by Josemaría Escrivá, recently (2002) canonized by the Catholic Church, the founder himself. The master's thesis was a standard ethnography, forty-six thousand words, the empirical material divided into clear categories was supposed to 'speak for itself', that is, let the field speak with least possible author's interference. The work, limited in terms of methodological and theoretical reflection, was nevertheless well-received, mainly in recognition of the fieldwork behind it. Conclusions were built around Lewis Coser's concept of a "greedy institution" (1974) and Michael Pratt's "ideological fortress" (2000a), and yet, interestingly, the thesis was appreciated by the Opus Dei members who read it. In February 2004 I defended my master's thesis, six months later I was offered a scholarship at the University of Essex and an opportunity to work with Professor Heather Höpfl.

I left for England in September with the idea of continuing my research project, so in effect beginning the second stage of the data collection. This time in-between the stages, however, proved to be crucial for the entire project, as after having written and defended my master's thesis I had not considered continuing along the academic path, not to mention the particular research project, and yet I still remained in touch with the organization in Poland. The contact was purely personal, based on good relations with a few Opus Dei members and sympathisers in Warsaw and on my private interest in the organization itself. So between February and August, when the opportunity to continue my former research project appeared, my position in the field changed dramatically. From

a hardly accepted outsider doing strange research (I had substantial problems with getting access and for most of the time I had been treated with a certain degree of distrust) I became, in the eyes of those people, someone who officially ‘sympathizes’ with the Work. In the meantime my sister got partly involved and I also attended regularly the so-called ‘evenings of recollection’. Becoming a native, if only a ‘marginal’ one (Freilich 1970, cited in Van Maanen 1988:2), had to affect my methodological choices for further research. There were obvious good sides to it, as once I became ‘native’ in Poland, it was fairly easy to get in-touch with Opus Dei in England, but on the whole it created more problems.

The very fact of having to come back, as it were, to the field marked the whole project profoundly. It was more the case of me trying to come back to the role, as the field itself changed a bit – instead of Poland, I was supposed to do my research in England. After a few months of planning to widen the scope (I was considering ideas for a comparative study with either the Society of Jesus, or the Order of Saint Benedict, or new movements, sects, or Amway, etc.) or simply to force myself back into what I thought was ‘the researcher’s mindset’ and do much more of the same (interviews, observations), I decided to leave everything as it was. It was risky, as at some level, especially bearing in mind how the concept of culture is treated and researched in organization studies as opposed to cultural anthropology, it did not feel like doing empirical research at all. After establishing myself in England as a sympathizer, someone potentially interested in Opus Dei and its formation, a status that I had had “in normal life”, before even considering doing doctoral research, I simply stayed there for four years. I lived with Opus Dei as a reference point, so to speak, always there at the back of my head. Everything became like or unlike in the Work – literally my entire life! – the distinction between work and the

private sphere collapsed. It had been intense, but it had not translated into pages and pages of transcribed empirical material. Even though in the field I was open about the fact that I had been doing research, I stopped interviewing altogether, as it would require playing roles I did not want to play and forcing others into situations which seemed artificial, to say the least. I could call myself an observer, but the reality I ‘observed’ was somewhat of a different kind, it was more the case of me ‘letting in’ certain ideas and checking what it is like to live with them every day, while desperately struggling to retain some kind of a distance. After four years of such a struggle I ended up with shockingly little written material, worried that I had nothing to say, but paradoxically at the same time fully convinced that I actually experienced Opus Dei. True, in a “highly particular and hauntingly personal” way (Van Maanen 1988:ix), but nevertheless I did. And not only that, I came to realize that this ‘way of experiencing’ the field is worth attention in itself, and not just as a means to arrive at conclusions. Therefore it will be presented among the key contributions to knowledge of this project.

Turning what appeared to be the biggest weakness of the project into its valuable contribution may seem like a cynical move, perhaps inspired by the mainstream managerial discourse, for example the famous SWOT model. On the contrary, it happened naturally, although the help of my current supervisor, Professor Heather Höpfl, proved itself invaluable. We had numerous conversations about my ideas about the field, methodology, the structure of the whole thesis, and, among many other pieces of advice, I was repeatedly told to simply start writing, that everything was there. For a long time I could not believe that out of this apparent chaos of self-contradictory ideas something constructive might emerge, but it did. Once I forced myself to start writing, it turned out that if I had a problem it was because I had too much to say, not the other way around. In

the end, having spent a long time worrying that I was not doing anything even resembling a good piece of empirical research, I found out that all this time I was intuitively getting very close to my methodological ideal. Again, a *highly particular* one, but valuable precisely because for all this time my consciousness as a researcher was and still is “*synonymous* with the perspective from which research is undertaken and is what makes possible the data collection (...); [research] demands an experiencing self, it is a product of an active meeting (emergence) of a subject (self) and an object (world)” (Letiche and Boje 2001:16). Hence, to use one of my favourite quotations from an English anthropologist Nigel Barley, “like monastic life, academic research is really all about the perfection of one’s own soul” (1986:9).

This thesis is then about Opus Dei, about the way in which the Work as a phenomenon understands and organizes reality for its members and other people involved, so about the way in which Opus Dei is an organization, but at the same time about a certain way of being in the field. It is a piece of work and is about work, as it is through the concept of work that Opus Dei does most of the organizing at the ideological level. What is more, and here is where the title of the thesis comes from, it is a work of God (Work of God, or a work of god). The ambiguity of the title is, of course, intentional, as it is supposed to reflect the political ambiguity of the thesis. God is involved either because Opus Dei is actually a Work of God, and/or because this piece of “academic research is really all about the perfection of [my] own soul” (Barley 1986:9), finally and/or simply because the author has to assume a god-like distance to his “object (world)” (Letiche and Boje 2001:16) to be able to “pass judgement”, as “the burden of authorship cannot be evaded” (Geertz 1988, cited in Czarniawska 2004:108). Since the first person narration has to cease here and we are about to enter the ‘sacred’ (separated from the object – world)

reality of the actual thesis, this ambiguity is later reflected in the form and the structure of the thesis. The empirical material is presented and, to some extent, treated as a sacred text. It is up to the reader to decide if he treats it as belonging to the canon, or as mere apocrypha, or some kind of a heretical attempt to divide what is objectively united. I only hope that it does not come across as pretentious and that the reader will enjoy reading this piece of work.

## OVERVIEW

### I. OPUS DEI

#### Introduction

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1902 a small Spanish town called Barbastro saw the birth of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the future founder of The Catholic Prelature of Opus Dei and the Holy Cross, the future saint of the Holy Catholic Church. Josemaría received a very pious Catholic upbringing, and from the age of fifteen he started suspecting that God wanted him for something “special and specific” (Coverdale 2002:25), something which he could not yet grasp and define, could not see at that point. Nevertheless, in spite of this lack of clarity, after graduating from high school, he decided to become a priest. He did not consider priesthood as an end in itself, but more as a means to become more available for God’s will, for this unknown future task (Bernal 1991:57; Gondrand 2000:36).

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1928, three years after being ordained, when Fr Escrivá lived and worked in Madrid, a certain supernatural event took place, an event which changed the life of a young priest completely. Escrivá claimed to have had a divinely inspired vision (he “saw” Opus Dei – Coverdale 2002:14, *Friends of God*, 59, etc.) of an institution which was supposed to be founded within the Catholic Church, an institution devoted to reminding all Christians that they are called to holiness simply by virtue of baptism, that holiness is within their reach wherever they are and whatever they do for living. Apart from spreading this message of “holiness in the midst of the world” (see for example:

Rodriguez 2003:22), the institution also had a mission – to provide practical help to all those who wanted to respond to that call. Later Saint Josemaría would explain: “I was not the founder of Opus Dei; Opus Dei was founded in spite of me” (Allen 2005:16) – meaning that the actual founder was God himself, as, through the supernatural vision, the institution was believed to be firmly and directly rooted in his will. Bearing these circumstances in mind, Josemaría had been reluctant give a name to the organization, he called it simply “the work of God”. At first the name was used in a descriptive sense, as yet “without special reference to the sanctification of work” (Coverdale 2002:71), in waiting for something specific to come up. In time, however, it turned into the officially used one, in Latin – Opus Dei, colloquially in Spanish “la Obra”, so “the Work” (see: Vázquez de Prada 2002:361-374). The vision was completed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1930 when, while saying mass, Josemaría understood that the new organization should also admit women. This event only confirmed in his eyes that Opus Dei is truly God’s, as Escrivá had openly and repeatedly claimed before that there would never be a place for women in the newly founded institution (Gondrand 2000:69).

The early years of Opus Dei were turbulent for various reasons, mainly because of the socio-historical context in which it had to strive to develop. Nevertheless, John Coverdale, a member of the Work who wrote a book focusing on this particular period, claims that “by 1943, Opus Dei’s founder, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, had a concept of all its essential features and of how they would be fleshed out. Everything that has come later, and what has yet to come, is, therefore, a development of what was already in place by 1943” (2002:9). During that time, in spite of a sometimes extremely difficult situation, the Work grew from a small group of young men under Fr Josemaría’s spiritual guidance to an organization with a few hundred members. More significant growth happened in the

conceptual, legal and ideological spheres though. In 1934 Escrivá finished writing his first book entitled *Consideraciones Espirituales*, commonly considered to be the basis of Opus Dei's spirituality. Its final version was published in 1939 under a different title – *Camino*, that is, *The Way* (2001a). It consists of 999 short thoughts “whispered” in the reader's ear (*The Way*, Author's preface) and has been a great success with around 4.5 million copies sold so far, becoming probably the most effective means of spreading the message of Opus Dei in the world. In 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out, it was followed by almost four decades of the Franco regime. Rightly or not, taking its roots in Spain of that period, Opus Dei has been labelled Francoist and, also for different reasons, generally right-wing, and has struggled against these labels ever since, largely unsuccessfully. Finally, 1943 saw the birth of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, “a juridical solution that [permitted] incardinating priests in the Work (...), a way to have priests ordained for Opus Dei without compromising Opus Dei's true character” (Coverdale 2002:367). After the II World War had finished, Escrivá moved to Rome to seek the papal approval for the Work and to affirm its universal character. The definitive approval was granted in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. Among other things, it finally “made it possible for married people actually to become members” (as the so-called “supernumeraries”, as opposed to “numeraries” – celibate members), something which had been a part of Escrivá's vision from the very beginning, but more importantly it “greatly facilitated [Opus Dei's] continued international expansion” (Coverdale 2002:370).

In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican which lasted until 1965 and in many respects began a new era in the history of the Catholic Church. Even though the Council itself has been acclaimed a huge success, the so-called

post-conciliar period has been tough for the Church. It saw, for example, a sudden drop in church attendance and a significant decrease of priestly and religious vocations. The Society of Jesus, the largest religious order, often and for various reasons considered Opus Dei's biggest ideological enemy within the Church, had fallen in numbers from 36.038 in 1966 to 19.216 in 2007 (source: [www.catholic-hierarchy.org](http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org)). The Work seemed unaffected by this general trend and grew rapidly. When on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1975 Escrivá died in Rome, Opus Dei had around 60 000 members (Coverdale 2002:372) and continued the expansion thereafter under Alvaro del Portillo and, since 1994, under Javier Echevarria.

Promulgating the apostolic constitution *Ut sit* (2003, promulgated in 1982), Pope John Paul II granted Opus Dei the legal status of a personal prelature and, in this way, ended a very long struggle for a fully satisfactory legal form that would suit the nature of the Work. Even though the idea of a personal prelature itself had been developed nearly twenty years earlier by the Council, the Work was the first institution to be given it and remains the only one until this day. Hence, along with "Opus Dei" and "the Work", the organization is sometimes simply called "the Prelature", its members are "the faithful of the Prelature". Parallel to those developments, the canonization process of the Founder was already on its way. Started in 1980, only 5 years after his death, it proceeded at a record-breaking speed and not without controversies. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1992 the Pope beatified Escrivá, while only ten years later he was officially counted among the saints of the Catholic Church. John Paul II called him "the saint of the ordinary". Both ceremonies were attended by hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world gathered on Saint Peter's square in Rome and overflowing into nearby streets.

From 1928 until Josemaría Escrivá's death in 1975, and since then, Opus Dei has not stopped growing, in spite of the so-called "black legend" surrounding it from the very beginning (see: Messori 1998:15-38) and constant attacks from various directions. The Work has become a huge international institution with the official aim of spreading "the quest for holiness and the practice of apostolate through the sanctification of ordinary work in the middle of the world, without changing one's place" (*Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, n.d.). Currently it has over 86.000 members (around 30% of those are celibate, nearly 2.000 are priests) and hundreds of thousands of the so called "sympathizers" in 61 countries all over the world. The members run universities, hospitals, schools, foundations – the whole phenomenon is impossible to encompass. What is so special about Opus Dei then? Why does it grow so rapidly and yet provokes such outrage, both outside and within the Catholic Church? Who was Josemaría Escrivá? More importantly for this thesis, what does it mean for an organization to be "a work of God"? Of course, since the belief in the literal meaning of such a statement has to be suspended here, and bearing in mind the epistemological assumptions behind this thesis, the question translates into the following one: what does it mean to be a member of an organization which claims to have God's authority (literally God as the author, in a "moral" sense, see: Höpfl, Harro 1999:220) behind it?

Opus Dei seems to find itself in a very specific stage of organizational development. Saint Josemaría is already seen by many of his biographers as one of the great Founders in the history of the Church, along with saint Francis of Assisi or saint Ignatius Loyola for example. Bearing in mind what kind of trouble the Jesuit or Franciscan orders suffered after the deaths of their founders, it is increasingly interesting to observe in which direction Opus Dei goes, led by Escrivá's successors. Especially in that from the very

beginning he seemed to be very aware of possible problems that could arise when he was gone. The process of “routinization” (Weber 1968) and consolidation of Opus Dei as an institution was started consciously decades before Escrivá’s death. It makes it very difficult to distinguish between the phase of charismatic leadership (charismatic in a more religious way, connected with “the Spirit”) and the phase of consolidation and routinization for example. To a large extent the aim of this thesis is precisely to throw some light on these and many other questions concerning Opus Dei. More importantly, to do it from a very unique position and therefore to, hopefully, contribute to the debate about the Work in particular, and to knowledge about organizations in general.

## **Opus Dei in the literature**

So what is Opus Dei? Exclusively a “spiritual services agency”, which offers “training” to all the baptised, a spirituality that is nothing else than plain, ordinary Catholicism, “the mainstream” of Catholicism (Messori 1998:180)? In the words of Saint Josemaría:

Opus Dei is a spiritual and apostolic organisation. If one forgets this fundamental fact, or refuses to believe in the good faith of the members of the Work who affirm it, it is impossible to understand what we do. And this very lack of understanding can lead people to invent complicated stories and secrets which have never existed. (*Conversations*, 30)

Many disagree (“refuse to believe”?) and have disagreed from the very beginning and at every stage of Opus Dei’s history. The criticism came both from outside and from within the Church, like for example, already in the 1930’s, accusations of stealing religious vocations and of questionable spiritual practices coming, famously, mainly from a certain

Jesuit (del Portillo 2004:133-134; Vázquez de Prada 2003:338). Much more recently, the Centre for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN, Belgium) counted Opus Dei among harmful sectarian groups (along with Scientologists, Mormons, Southern Baptists, and many others) due to a risk of brainwashing, financial exploitation and isolation from family (Craner 2001). According to some, the Work, although officially a part of the Church, is in fact a fundamentalist sect which merely “operates in a Catholic environment” (Schaefer 2001). In 1991 Dianne DiNicola, mother of a former member, founded the Opus Dei Awareness Network (ODAN) – “a worldwide community of people who have had painful experiences as a result of their association with Opus Dei” – “to meet the growing demand for accurate information about Opus Dei and to provide education, outreach and support to people who have been adversely affected by Opus Dei” (ODAN, n.d.). And these are just a few examples, as the questions concerning the phenomenon of Opus Dei have been repeatedly tackled by many authors and from various perspectives, especially recently, after the publication of extremely popular novel *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown 2004). One thing remains surprisingly unchanging: almost all the publications on Opus Dei can be very easily classified into either clearly hostile or openly enthusiastic; the literature is extremely polarised.

Opus Dei as a cultural phenomenon has grown over the years. There are many aspects to it: theological, spiritual, but also social, political, organizational, etc. The merely “pastoral phenomenon” of the Work (*Conversations*, 42), that is a group of people committed to living in accordance with a certain spirituality, for a long time now has had a very real impact on all these other dimensions in a wider sense, either that of the whole Catholic Church, or society at large. There is then an obvious temptation to engage in the debate surrounding this cultural phenomenon. Instead, and it is very important to state it at this

point, a large part of the ‘friendly’ literature on the Work is treated in this thesis simply as evidence about how members of Opus Dei understand themselves and the Work, and for this reason accepted uncritically. This includes the works by the founder and other members, but also clearly favourable texts coming from the outside. This is because these works form the cultural phenomenon which is the subject of this study. The only criterion for judging relevance is their influence – whether they are read by the faithful of the Prelature; the question of quality is secondary, the question of trustworthiness is suspended.

### **Works of the Founder**

First of all, one needs to consider the written works of the founder himself. Almost every favourable book on Opus Dei has a bibliography of his works in it, sometimes with short descriptions added (see for example: Tourneau 2004:144-151), there is a very good website, [www.escrivaworks.org](http://www.escrivaworks.org) (English version), which contains almost all of his published works in twelve languages. Escrivá was a prolific writer but, apart from his doctoral thesis in canon law *La Abadesa de las Huelgas*, first published in 1944, the vast majority of what he wrote was private notes, letters and homilies. He thought of that as consistent with the lay spirit of Opus Dei – to proclaim the message in a “lived” way (Illanes 2003:150). As a consequence many of his works, not only the post-mortem ones, are simply collections of thoughts taken from private notes and letters, or collections of homilies.

The most famous of Saint Josemaría's works, already mentioned here, is *The Way* (2001a) originally published in 1939. Another two, very similar in style and content, *Furrow* (2001b) and *The Forge* (2001c), were published posthumously, in 1986 and 1987 respectively. Each consists of around a thousand short thoughts (points) taken from Escrivá's private, personal notes or letters, grouped in several chapters covering various aspects of Christian life, as seen by Escrivá. Characterized by a direct, intimate style, these books are not, however, addressed exclusively to Opus Dei members, although their aim was very much in line with the general message of the Work (see: *Conversations*, 36). They are supposed to be used for meditation, that is, provide topics and a guide to personal conversation with God; as a consequence they have a potentially huge influence on shaping fundamental ways of thinking of the faithful. These texts are, then, the key to studying Opus Dei as a culture. *The Way* in particular caused some controversy, or at least was a topic of a fairly serious theological debate. Described by some reviewers as the modern equivalent of *The Imitation of Christ* (see: Tourneau 2004:146) – a medieval classic of spirituality ascribed to Thomas a Kempis (1952) – and widely assumed to be Opus Dei's "spiritual code" (*Conversations*, 36), *The Way* has also received heavy criticism. Most notably, Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considered it theologically and spiritually inadequate (to say the least) to be the basis of a serious movement within the Church (des Mazery and des Mazery 2006:77-78). On the other hand, the book was praised for its simplicity by such authorities as Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and a famous spiritual writer, and by Cardinal Albino Luciani of Venice, the future Pope John Paul I (Allen 2005:64-65).

Other works of Josemaría Escrivá include *Holy Rosary* (1987) and *The Way of the Cross* (1999). The former, written in one sitting in 1931, consists of short commentaries on the

fifteen mysteries of the Rosary – a devotional Catholic practice of praying the Hail Mary's on the rosary beads while meditating on key mysteries of Christianity. Similarly, the latter, edited and published posthumously, gives points for meditation and comments on the fourteen Stations of the Cross – a devotional practice which in turn is supposed to take one on a spiritual pilgrimage through the Passion of Christ. Both texts, although with a narrower scope, serve a similar purpose to *The Way* for example, that is, they seek to provide and shape the substance of personal prayer.

The “most mature form of [Escrivá's] thought” (Allen 2005:65) is, however, supposed to be found in his homilies, especially those gathered in a book entitled *Christ Is Passing By* (2003), prepared by the preacher himself in 1973, just two years before his death. It contains eighteen sermons for various feasts and solemnities, delivered between 1951 and 1971 and arranged to cover the entire liturgical year, from the first Sunday of Advent to the feast of Christ the King. Two other collections of homilies appeared posthumously, *Friends of God* (2005) in 1977 and *In Love with the Church* (1989) in 1985. These three publications were preceded by another collection, this time a series of seven interviews which Escrivá gave right after the Council concluded its proceedings, between 1966 and 1968, entitled *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer* (1993), or simply *Conversations*. The questions and answers revolve mainly around Opus Dei itself, its structures, message and spirituality, apostolate. This is understandable considering the fact that until then very little information had been publicly available; the Work as an institution had been, and still is to a lesser extent, surrounded by an atmosphere of secrecy. Seeing that, Fr Josemaría, who as a matter of principle had always refused to talk to the media, changed his mind “for the good of the souls” (Gondrand 2000:276). In other words, the book was a major breakthrough at the time it was published (already in 1968 in

four languages!), even though it may not seem so from today's perspective. Apart from explaining Opus Dei, it also touches upon more general subjects: the condition of contemporary society, the situation of the Church in it, etc., particular attention (separate interviews) is given to the questions of the role of women in the Church and the role of universities in society.

Both *In Love with the Church* (ss.51-61) and *Conversations* (ss.113-123) contain a very important text for this thesis, namely the homily entitled *Passionately Loving the World*. Given in 1967 during an open-air mass at the University of Navarra, it arguably culminates Escrivá's teachings, even though the early 1970's were also very fruitful for him in this respect. The mass was part of a huge event: the university, founded by Saint Josemaría himself in 1952 and officially linked to Opus Dei, had just awarded six doctorates *honoris causa*. Nearly 40 000 people took part in the celebrations. The homily is said to encapsulate Escrivá's teachings, and therefore somehow to summarize the entire message of Opus Dei; according to many it manages to grasp the spirit and the essence of this message (Gondrand 2000:274-277; Tourneau 2004:148). In this thesis it is a subject of a detailed commentary (*the Message*), treated precisely as a synthesis of the Opus Dei's doctrine in the words of its founder.

### **Biographies of the Founder and works on Opus Dei**

As a source of secondary empirical data, next to the works of the Founder, his biographies are arguably almost equally important. This is because of the enormous emphasis placed on imitating Escrivá as the purest embodiment of the spirit of Opus Dei, especially after

his death, beatification and canonization, but also very much present while he was still alive. He had always presented himself as someone who simply “does” and embodies Opus Dei, as opposed to being a teacher, theologian with a doctrine or a leader with an agenda (Illanes 2003:150). His “children” in the Work, often convinced of his sanctity long before his death, gathered every detail about his life they could possibly find, wrote down almost every word from his lips, observed attentively how he behaved in most ordinary situations. It allowed the later biographers to draw from a huge archive containing data about their founder – The General Archive of the Prelature of Opus Dei. This crucial subject, the very specific attitude towards imitation of the founding father, will be touched upon and developed in a few places later in the thesis. Let it be said here that, because of all the mentioned above, the biographies are commonly read by the faithful of the Work and serve as a crucial source of knowledge about the spirit of Opus Dei.

There are many biographies to choose from, however, the largest one and the most recently published is the one entitled *Founder of Opus Dei: The Life of Josemaría Escrivá* by Andres Vázquez de Prada. It consists of three thick volumes: *Volume I: The Early Years* (2002), *Volume II: God and Daring* (2003), and *Volume III: The Divine Ways on Earth* (2005), each around 600 pages long. It seems to be a milestone in the short history of writing on Escrivá’s life, “a monumental accomplishment” (Coverdale 2007), as it is overwhelmingly wider and more detailed than any other, and therefore likely to stop the proliferation of similar projects that could be observed in the first 20 years after Josemaría’s death. It seems to be the *summa* of the information on the Founder’s life for years to come. It is also worth attention for another reason, in that among all the biographical texts on Saint Josemaría, it strikes one as being fairly balanced. The author

achieves that in a paradoxical manner, by simply stating at the very beginning that Escrivá's holiness is unquestionable. In this way he relieves himself, to a certain extent, of the task of being an advocate in Josemaría's canonization cause (the book was originally written in Spanish between 1997 and 2002) and proceeds with his project in a reasonably detached manner, something that previous publications painfully lack. A small step in a good direction, but that is true only as far as the style is concerned: the content remains very much "hagiographic", as John Coverdale, himself a member of Opus Dei, remarks in his review. Almost all the "delicate" (read: highly controversial) matters and events are barely touched upon or simply omitted. Coverdale then adds: "It is understandable, and perhaps inevitable, that a biography which was completed while Escrivá's cause of canonization was still pending should focus primarily on illustrating his sanctity and should go to great lengths to insure that readers never draw any negative conclusions about him" (2007). Is it? In any case, Vázquez de Prada, just like all the authors before him, including Coverdale himself, focused far too much on presenting Escrivá as the perfect embodiment of "the letter" of the message of Opus Dei and, in doing so, once again managed to make him look completely unreal. This, in turn, is in obvious tension with what is considered to be "the spirit" of the Work.

The other biographies, indirectly mentioned in the previous paragraph, include Salvador Bernal's *A Profile of Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá* (1991), already published in Spanish in 1976, and François Gondrand's *At God's Pace* (2000), first published in French in 1982. Both authors are Opus Dei faithful who knew the Founder personally and gave accounts of his life relatively shortly after his death in 1975. The latter book especially is an important source in this thesis, since English and Polish translations of the third volume of the book by Vázquez de Prada appeared in the later stages of this research project.

These two are supported by William Keenan's *St. Josemaría Escrivá and the Origins of Opus Dei: The Day the Bells Rang Out* (2004), Jose Luis Soria's *Maestro de buen humor: el Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer* (2002, no English translation) and numerous biographical sketches in almost every other book related to the Prelature and on many websites, including a fairly extensive one (in comparison with other saints) on the website of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, an institution within the Roman Curia. The official website dedicated to Josemaría Escrivá himself ([www.josemariaescriva.info](http://www.josemariaescriva.info)), in turn, divides works on the saint's life into two categories: "biography" and "accounts". In fact, Bernal's book (1991) is placed in the latter category. This thesis, as far as personal "accounts" are concerned, apart from countless short ones available from the internet, relies mainly on two books by Escrivá's successors in leading Opus Dei, or rather on two long interviews with them published in a form of a book. Alvaro del Portillo's *Immersed in God* (2002) and Javier Echevarria's *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá* (2006, no English translation) were first published in 1993 and 2000 respectively. Perhaps understandably, since they come from his closest associates, these books lead the way in painting Escrivá as an ideal, spotless human being and a "perfect" incarnation of the spirit of Opus Dei. After all, del Portillo for example, one of the first few members of the Work and one of three first priests to be ordained for Opus Dei, had been Escrivá's confessor for thirty one years, from the day after his ordination(!) until the Founder's death in 1975 (del Portillo 2004:147-148), and then succeeded him as prelate. However, even bearing all that in mind, the level of detail in which Josemaría's life is described is striking, symptomatic of Opus Dei's organizational culture.

This thesis also relies heavily on the book, already quoted here, entitled *Uncommon Faith: The Early Years of Opus Dei (1928-1943)* by John Coverdale (2002) – something

in-between a biography of the first half of Escrivá's life and a book on the institution he founded, matters hardly separable in "the early years" anyway. It is an entertaining read, a lively storyline is set against a solid historical background. The author, who holds a PhD in history and specializes in that period, worked with the Founder in the 1960's, so the book "is naturally coloured by [his] personal experience" (2002:12). It also states openly a very important fact, an important insight into the way Opus Dei functions and a key reason for why the literature on it so polarised, at least according to the author of this thesis, namely that:

The sources on which this book rests are fragmentary and uneven. On many events there is an abundance of material, on others very little, and on some none at all. For a number of reasons, including charity towards those who did not persevere in Opus Dei, the available sources focus almost exclusively on the people who stayed the course and contributed to Opus Dei's growth and development. (Coverdale 2002:11)

Arguably, the emphasis on success stories accompanied with almost total exclusion of the voices of those who failed to persevere, so typical for the "internal" literature on the Work, is one of the key reasons for the existence of the "black legend" (Messori 1998:15-38), which becomes simply an expression of the repressed side of reality, of the "the Organization Shadow" (Bowles 1991). This theme, however, will be developed later in the thesis.

Other books on the Work used here include: Giuseppe Romano's *Opus Dei, Who? How? Why?* (2002), first published in 1995, Dominique le Tourneau's *What is Opus Dei* (2004) from 1984, and finally Vittorio Messori's *Opus Dei: an Investigation* (1998) originally in Italian, from 1994. They seek to provide an overview of the aims and main characteristics of the Prelature, more or less extensive, accompanied with responses to the key

accusations circulating in the mass culture. The latter task is undertaken especially by Messori, his book is supposed to be an objective “journalistic investigation” into Opus Dei, a form seen as most suitable to respond to the growing cloud of rumours after years by almost completely ignoring it, in line with a famous quote from Saint Josemaría’s *The Way*:

Don't waste your time and your energy — which belong to God — throwing stones at the dogs that bark at you on your way. Ignore them. (s.14)

This form, however, works very much like a two-edged sword in case of Opus Dei. In fact, Messori’s book can be seen as a favourable response to the whole range of other independent, but often hostile, journalistic investigations that tried to fill the gap in public’s knowledge about this rapidly growing “theological and pastoral phenomenon” (*Conversations*, 42). If remaining moderate and neutral was at all possible when talking about this phenomenon, then John Allen’s *Opus Dei* (2005) would certainly be close, at least in terms of the origin of sources. The author makes an effort to present a balanced judgement, taking into account the apparent and potential bad sides, or at least negative side-effects, of having a certain set of beliefs, attitudes and practices. The apparently hostile books, to various degrees, read by the author of this thesis include: Andrzej Kruczkowski’s *Dzieło Boże w Hiszpanii* (1981), published only in Polish, Michael Walsh’s *The Secret World of Opus Dei* (1989), *L’Opus Dei: Enquête sur une Eglise au coeur de l’Eglise* by Benedicte and Patrice des Mazery (2006, no English translation), and Matthias Mettner’s *Die Katholische Mafia* (1995, no English translation). Walsh, for example, a former Jesuit, concludes his work by posing a question whether Opus Dei is, in fact, a sect (he uses works of Jose Casanova to define the term). A sect that combines extreme orthodoxy with “protestantification” of Catholicism, or rather does the latter by

virtue of the former (1989:180-181). His argumentation brings to mind, to some extent, von Balthasar's criticisms (1963). He leaves his question unanswered, the final diagnosis being: Opus Dei divides the Church (Walsh 1989:183). Benedicte and Partice des Mazery in turn, whose book (2006) is based almost entirely on memories of former members (and their families), conclude with a statement from one of the most prominent of them, Monsignor Vladimir Felzmann. According to him, only people who desperately need order and structure, who have to live according to a plan, who do not want to think independently, can be truly happy in the Work (des Mazery and des Mazery 2006:185).

This modest literature review is far from complete. One would have to mention powerful critiques coming from former members like Maria Carmen del Tapia (1997 and 2006) for example. On the other hand there are many publications officially recommended and often sold in Opus Dei houses, like a famous series of books with meditations for every day by Francisco Carvajal entitled *In Conversation with God* (1998) and many others (see for example: Carol 2002, Lorda 2005). Everything mentioned in the previous paragraphs is just a sample then: there are thousands of newspaper articles, the internet is full of data, there are many Opus Dei run websites and quite a few critical ones, most notably the already mentioned ODAN. The vast majority of these sources is of very poor quality, or have a very clear agenda, either hostile or apologetic, triumphant. There is no easy way out of this apparent chaos. Fortunately this thesis, by virtue of being an ethnography, bypasses the problem, that is, it hardly bases any of its analyses and conclusions on these secondary sources. It is done only to "negotiate" findings based on the author's own empirical research or, in the majority of cases, treated simply as secondary empirical data rather than sources of normative knowledge on Opus Dei. The side-effect of this may be the feeling that the "hostile" side is neglected. It is true in some sense, but it is a result of

being a researcher in the field, a field to which most of the critical publications had no access and, in effect, did not directly “form” the members. They surely are an important part of the larger cultural phenomenon, but often do not feature in the lives of the faithful, and therefore do not naturally cross the researcher’s way.

## **Theology**

When talking about the literature on Opus Dei, one cannot avoid talking explicitly about theology. After all, the Work is a “theological and pastoral phenomenon” (*Conversations*, 42). However, according to the Founder himself the “pastoral” side takes precedence:

[When] the Life-giving Spirit wants to raise up in the Church something new (...) the first thing He does is establish the pastoral phenomenon, which can be full of a theology. (...) [It is] necessary to keep in mind that the repetition of acts produces the custom, and from there the juridical norm is born: the law has to proceed from the custom, from the lived pastoral phenomenon. The theory comes afterwards. You will write it after the years go by. You will be able to write magnificent treatises on the theology of Opus Dei... (Escrivá 1964)

The parallel between what he says and the epistemological approach adopted in this thesis is clear. This whole theme will be further developed later, in the analysis of the “dogmatic” part. It is, however, important at this point to make one simple but crucial distinction. There seem to be two theologies, so to speak, at play here. One, described above by Saint Josemaría, follows and is secondary to the pastoral phenomenon which, in turn, is moved by the Spirit, “the first mover”. Even though the belief in the very existence of the Spirit has to be, again, suspended here, this whole thesis *is* full of a theology, but in this particular sense, namely by virtue of being “the theory [that] comes

afterwards” (Escrivá 1964), that observes the *theological* phenomenon and then theorizes about it. Almost all the texts discussed in this chapter fall under this category in a way, there are, however, a few which fall under it more explicitly. The key one here is the book entitled *Opus Dei in the Church: A Theological Reflection on the Spirit and Apostolate of Opus Dei* (2003), first published in 1993. It is a collection of three longer essays written by Opus Dei’s leading contemporary theologians (Pedro Rodriguez, Fernando Ocariz, and Jose Luis Illanes), with a foreword by Alvaro del Portillo (prelate until 1994) and a common conclusion. This book, as far as the Work’s ‘internal’ theology is concerned, is supported by theological studies taken from the online version of the *Romana: Bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei*. Published on a six-monthly basis for over twenty years now, each issue of the *Romana* consists of a theological study, usually written in a fairly approachable language, sometimes by a well-known person like Scott Hahn (2002) or Cardinal Leo Scheffczyk (2006).

The other theology is the one that was there before, the theological environment in which Opus Dei came into being and grew, the language which it has had to use to justify its own existence, to be recognized as Catholic, a tradition and an academic discipline – the dealings with this theology are consciously restricted in this thesis to absolute minimum. So, although it may not look like it, since the text is at times almost dominated by theological language, it has no theological pretensions as such. It is not a work of theology, but merely uses the language of the field, which happens to be very theological. In other words, as a “marginal native” (Freilich 1970, cited in Van Maanen 1988:2) in the field, the author was forced to be an amateur theologian, but consciously decided to stay at the amateur level by limiting himself to basics in terms of external theological sources, as well as through a fairly uncritical manner of approaching these sources – treating them

merely as self-evident means to explain the basic assumptions in the field, as points of reference to paint a wider background.

This limited number of sources includes two obvious ones, which feature heavily in the analyses of the empirical data: the Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995). Both are available from the website of the Holy See (the Vatican) and precisely this ‘official’ availability determined the choice of the translation of the Sacred Scriptures (*The New American Bible*, 2002). The *Catechism*, in turn, “is a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium (...), a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith” (John Paul II, 1992). Only in situations in which these two seemed for some reason insufficient, has the author turned to other sources, mainly to the documents of the Second Vatican Council, like the constitutions *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and *Gaudium Et Spes* (1965), and also to official papal documents, mainly encyclicals by John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II. Another important text for this thesis, though rarely quoted directly, is Joseph Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* (2004), first published in German in 1968, almost immediately after the Council. It is of value not only because it is a very good introductory text and its author is the current Pope, Benedict XVI, but also because the book is an important attempt to reinterpret the foundations of Christianity (its structure is based on the Apostles' Creed) in a modern way, in the light of the Council. The Conclave in 2005, by electing a theologian to be the Pope, more or less directly elevated his understanding of the Council to the dominant position. This is not to make a value judgement, it is merely a statement of a fact, a fact that makes Ratzinger's book a valid point of reference, along with other sources mentioned above. Jean Leclercq's *Love of*

*Learning and the Desire for God* (1982), another introductory text, served as a source of inspiration for the methodological part of the thesis. Finally, some authors are present in the thesis almost entirely because of the author's personal interest in them, independently of the doctoral project. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD) is the key example here, his *Confessions* (1960), but also other works plus a wonderful intellectual biography of his written by Peter Brown (1967), is quoted quite a few times, often in comparison to Escrivá's ideas, as an 'amateur' theological link to a wider, more general Tradition. There are many others present silently and sometimes unconsciously, most notably the Desert Fathers, Saint Benedict and the entire monastic tradition within the Church up to Thomas Merton, and so on.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This thesis is an ethnography, and “ethnography is not a matter of sorting strange facts into familiar categories but a kind of writing” (Geertz 1988, cited in Czarniawska 2004:105). In organization studies the term is understood in two different ways. Sometimes it refers only to a textual form, the physical effect of fieldwork, and the methodological tradition is then called “organizational anthropology”, or it means both methodology and text. The latter, wider understanding is used here. The first and most obvious characteristic of ethnography is that it is fundamentally concerned with people, who are seen as both participants and creators of culture. Since the whole discipline takes its roots in cultural anthropology, the concept of culture is naturally at the very core, it conceptualizes the studied phenomenon, namely the organization. To study culture one has to “go to the field”, because it is precisely where “the Other” lives, and “fieldwork is an expression of curiosity of the Other, about people who construct their worlds differently from the way I construct mine” (Czarniawska 1998:21). Ethnography is often ontologically rooted in phenomenology and/or social constructivism (Kostera 2006:21), as it does not abstract the phenomenon in question from its authors and consequently seeks to research it in its original context (Kostera 2006:39).

This phenomenological, qualitative approach relies on inductive (or abductive, like in this case) reasoning, on interpreting the empirical data gathered during fieldwork, hence it allows neither formulating any kind of hypothesis at the beginning (Kostera 2006:28) nor arriving at a universal theory at the end. The author has to come up with a research

problem, which is, however, rarely stated before the fieldwork starts and usually crystallizes in the process of data collection. The effect of this inductive procedure is a birth of a more abstract model or theory grounded in field material. This approach has become increasingly influential in organization studies over the past three decades:

It has “become very sophisticated in terms of its emerging understandings of the practical, philosophical, and epistemological problems facing those who chose to study the social world. There is, in fact, some reason to believe that fieldworkers are the leading edge of a movement to reorient and redirect theoretical, methodological, and empirical aims and practices in all social sciences...” (Van Maanen 1988:125)

### **Sources and inspirations**

The inspirations for the this kind of research lay in cultural anthropology (“the mother-discipline” for organizational ethnography) and sociology. These disciplines provide the organization theory with interesting insights into many aspects of widely defined organizational life. Bearing in mind the general theme of this research project, analyses of different forms of religious expression seemed particularly interesting to the author as sources of inspiration (see for example: Weber 1968; Durkheim 1995; Benedict 1999), the relations between rituals and mystical experiences, magic and religion, the institution of priesthood, notions like charisma, church, and so on. At the same time organization theory got closer and closer to exploring how these or similar concepts work in a modern, business or business-like environment. The author of this thesis is especially indebted here to a very good book by Gideon Kunda entitled *Engineering Culture* (1992), but also to the works of his supervisor Heather Höpfl (2003c, 2005; 2008), Harro Höpfl (2000a) or

Michael Pratt (2000a; 2000b), as well as, although to a limited extent and viewed only from a critical perspective, to the growing field of management spirituality (see for example: Calas and Smircich 2003; Bell and Taylor 2003; Höpfl, Heather and Piątkowski 2007; Bell 2007, 2008). As far as the concept of work is concerned, arguably the main “organizing concept” in Opus Dei’s ideology, the arguments are based mainly on Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958), and a book entitled: *Work, Death, and Life Itself: Essays on Management and Organization* by Burkard Sievers (1994).

Coming back to the main thought, as far as the translation of the methodological tradition into organization theory goes, the backbone of the author’s understanding rests on Monika Kostera’s *Organizational Ethnography: Methods and inspirations* (2006, first published in Polish in 2003), supported by the classic introductory text – John Van Maanen’s *Tales of the Field: On writing ethnography* (1988). These two were the main reference points, signposts to explore other dimensions in the literature. And so, for inspirations from sociology and cultural anthropology, the author of this thesis turned to classical names and texts like Emile Durkheim (1995), Margaret Mead’s famous *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1986), Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1999), William Foote-Whyte and his *Street Corner Society* (1969), or Nigel Barley’s humorous *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a mud hut* (1986) to name just a few. These then were supplemented by a number of other texts coming from the same field, but needed for more particular, narrower reasons at some stage of the research project, for example Lewis Coser’s *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of undivided commitment* (1974), Ruth Behar (1996) or James Fernandez (1986).

While, as it has been just said, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research project are to be found mainly in phenomenology, most of the references to philosophy come from the field of philosophical hermeneutics. In spite of the fact that the author has reached for this literature and read a substantial part of it, the references to authors like Paul Ricoeur (1980; 1981; 2005) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1993) are taken mainly from the secondary sources. It happens partly out of lack of confidence on the side of the author of this thesis, partly so that the attention of the reader is not diverted from the empirical data, the fieldwork is supposed to occupy the central place in this text. Here the author is especially indebted to a very good book by John B. Thompson entitled *Critical hermeneutics: a study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas* (1983), as well as many good scholars working either in the field of anthropology or organization theory.

The previous paragraphs obviously cannot be treated as a literature review, or even an attempt at one. The aim is to merely give the reader a general idea about the intellectual background behind this thesis, especially that many books (mentioned above or not mentioned at all) are not used directly in the text, and yet they are very much present in it. The directly relevant ones will be discussed in more detail in a due course. It is important to mention, already at this stage, another key fact about the use of literature. Given the epistemological assumptions adopted by the author, inductive reasoning and the nature of ethnography as a textual representation, “portrayal” of one culture “in terms of another” (Van Maanen 1988:ix), it seems perfectly justifiable to restrict writing exhaustive literature reviews and analyses to the literature on the subject of inquiry (mainly Opus Dei itself) and methodology. In other words, to restrict it to the literature on the ‘alien’ culture and to that which justifies intellectually the position of the fieldworker in this culture, to

provide the reader with a key to decipher it, propose a way into the text. As far as “another culture” goes though, that is, the culture in terms of which Opus Dei is portrayed (is translated into), the author assumes that he shares it with the reader. Even if not immediately, it has to be assumed at least that the reader is capable of learning and understanding, while the author is capable of explaining and justifying the use of concepts coming from widely defined contemporary social sciences. Since this project is a work of translation between cultures, it would simply be practically impossible to exhaustively justify the usage of every single “word” (concept) in “the mother tongue”. Especially given that many of these concepts (work, labour, sacrifice, ideology, charismatic leadership, change, organization, community, spirituality, strategy, etc.) have an enormous intellectual history. To a limited extent the reader will get a chance to judge the translation, but the remaining gap will have to be filled either with trust or simply by letting go of “orthodox views on the scientific character of fieldwork” (Van Maanen 1988:92). This is where ethnography “falls short”, this is why it is “highly particular and hauntingly personal, [and] yet it serves as the basis for grand comparison and understanding within and across a society” (Van Maanen 1988:ix). ‘Serving as the basis’ is both ambitious and humbling, and definitely requires a careful balance when it comes to interpreting, and a certain degree of restraint when it comes to theorizing and writing conclusions.

## **Cultures and symbols**

The concept of culture “has been borrowed from anthropology, where there is no consensus on its meaning. It should be no surprise that there is also variety in its

application to organization studies” (Smircich 1983:339). Of course, here the concept of culture serves as a conceptualization, it is an epistemological metaphor of organization, but up to the late 1970s or even early 1980s organization studies were absolutely dominated by a different understanding of this concept, which is still very much present today:

Culture is usually defined as social or normative glue that holds an organization together. (Siehl and Martin 1981; Tichy 1982) Organizations are seen as social instruments that produce goods and services, and, as a by-product, they also produce distinctive cultural artefacts such as rituals, legends, and ceremonies. Although organizations are themselves embedded within a wider cultural context, the emphasis of researchers here is on socio-cultural qualities that develop within organizations. (Smircich 1983:344)

The anthropological understanding is much wider. Culture is a concept “as stimulating, productive, yet fuzzy to fieldworkers and their readers as the notion of life is for biologists and their readers.” It is not only those “socio-cultural qualities” within organizations, it is...

...expressed (or constituted) only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to (...). Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible only through its representation. (Van Maanen 1988:3) [As] a root metaphor [it] promotes a view of organizations as expressive forms, manifestations of human consciousness. (Smircich 1983:347)

Although the narrower understanding of culture (as “a dependent variable”, Kostera 2006:34), is not given up in this thesis – on the contrary, often these “distinctive cultural artefacts such as rituals, legends, and ceremonies” (Smircich 1983:344) are very much the focus of attention (like in Gideon Kunda’s *Engineering Culture*, 1992) – the basic perspective remains the same.

There are, of course, more fundamental assumptions behind such an understanding of organization. Culture is “a network of meanings” which “structuralizes our perception” (Kostera 2006:38), while the tiniest “particles of meaning” in culture are symbols. Language itself is symbolic by nature. What is more, symbols do not merely reflect “the world”, but rather through the conscious or subconscious use of them people grant meaning to “reality” (Schütz 1982, cited in Kostera 2006:36), they do that by associating the particular with a wider, more abstract, concept or meaning (an over-determined symbol). Otherwise, at the level of particulars, “what is real” would seem chaotic and meaningless, or at least simply beyond comprehension.

These are, in a nutshell, the basic ontological assumptions behind this research project, that is why people are seen as both participants and creators of culture. The question of the status of “what is real” can be, to some extent, bypassed at this point. Given the basic assumptions above and the fact that this project deals with a social phenomenon (culture, organization), and so something more obviously constructed out of symbols, discussions on the nature of “reality” behind the symbols has to be suspended for now. It seems enough to assert that to study the social phenomena, one has to study symbolization, and one of the ways of studying symbolization is ethnography. As Mary Jo Hatch rightly observed, commenting on Ernst Cassirer’s *Language and Myth* (1953), it is “a mistake to interpret Cassirer as arguing that there is no reality apart from symbolic forms; his argument is that the ability to intellectually apprehend reality is limited by a person’s recognition of symbolic forms” (Hatch 1993:670). Analogically, by studying Opus Dei as a culture, a network of symbols, the author of this thesis does not want to imply that there is no reality, however defined, beyond this network. On the contrary, he does claim that

only at the level of symbolization can Opus Dei be studied as a phenomenon, in a holistic way.

Language (and text) provide the symbolic representations required for both the construction and communication of conceptions of reality and thus make the notions of thought and culture inseparable. (Van Maanen 1995a:141)

If so, then to get to the roots of such thinking one would have to turn to philosophical hermeneutics, most notably to the work of two great followers of Martin Heidegger, namely Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. A good example of the application of their work to anthropology can be found in an interesting paper entitled *Symbolic Dimensions in Cultural Anthropology* by Mark Kline Taylor (1985). This professor of theology tried to undermine and unmask “anthropology’s frequent claims to objectivity” as presupposing “a pre-reflexive totality often nurtured symbolically” (1985:167), and turned his critique mainly against Claude Levi-Strauss and Marvin Harris. After introducing the concept of a symbol, basing largely on Ricoeur’s *Interpretation Theory* (1976), and the key distinction between the two “ideals” of understanding and explanation, coming from the German tradition and crucial to both Gadamer and Ricoeur, he wrote:

Ricoeur (1976) goes on to point to the dialectical relation between these two ideals: human inquiry moves (1) from understanding as a guess about the whole (2) to explanation as a moment of testing and structuring one’s guesses and (3) back to understanding as comprehension. In the first moment of the dialectic, there is intuitive understanding. This is a necessary moment but one that Ricoeur characterizes as a “naive grasping.” However preliminary, it is productive for the totality of meaning, drawing into a whole the many particulars of the inquirer’s subject matter. This is the “guess” about the whole. (Taylor 1985:168)

In other words, “in understanding we are drawn into an event and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we ought to believe” (Gadamer 1975, cited in Taylor 1985:181). Too late, because the event is already affected by “the intuitive understanding”, “naive grasping”, “the guess about the whole” one had to make to be able to even engage with it. A failure to understand that and reflect on one’s own “conceptions of the general order of existence” results in quasi-religious explanations merely surrounded with an “aura of factuality” to make it all seem “uniquely realistic” (Geertz, cited in Taylor 1985:181). It is an interesting observation bearing in mind the fact that the whole argument was turned against Levi-Strauss and Harris. In the field of organization theory, in a heated debate with Jeffrey Pfeffer (1993, 1995), John Van Maanen put analogical problem much more bluntly:

Our generalizations often display a mind-numbing banality and an inexplicable readiness to reduce the field to a set of unexamined, turgid, hypothetical thrusts designed to render organizations systematic and organization theory safe for science. (Van Maanen 1995a:139)

All this means neither the end of thinking (“but [rather] a different kind of rational effort” – Taylor 1985:181), nor that now there is no choice but to attribute everything to the author’s subjectivity, as a pure construct. It is rather a dialectical view that “allows for a world to be explained even while stressing that this world is a symbolically understood one” (Taylor 1985:180).

## Metaphors and paradigms

Partly as a consequence, partly parallel to what has been said in the previous section about symbols, culture is still (merely?) a metaphor of organization: a figure of speech in which one thing is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two. To some extent then it “narrows down and simplifies the phenomenon” (Kostera 2006:20), as “the use of metaphor implies *a way of thinking* and *a way of seeing* that pervade how we understand our world generally” (Morgan 1986:12). This may seem limiting; however, the idea that the whole of “scientific knowledge is grounded in metaphorical thinking is more or less commonly accepted” now (Czarniawska 1998:6). The immediate positive consequence for researchers in organization studies is that, since all “our taken-for-granted ideas about organizations are metaphorical” (Morgan 1986:13), the key concepts like “structure, hierarchy and efficiency are problematic social constructs (...), should be the topic of research in sociological analysis and should not be taken for granted” (Bittner 1974, cited in Burrell and Morgan 1993:263). This development in social sciences weakens claims to objectivity according to some, but definitely opens up the field, deepens understanding, allows more reflection and space for critical thinking. Fundamentally though, the dominating metaphor structures the scientific inquiry, and so gives rise to what is called a paradigm.

The concept of paradigm became well known thanks to Thomas Kuhn (1962, cited in Kostera 2006:15) and it was originally understood as a general way of perceiving the world, dominant in a given place and time, which determined the kind of scientific research that was usually undertaken. Kuhn himself, however, had many doubts about the

possibility of existence of paradigms in social sciences. Gibson Burrell's and Gareth Morgan's *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* (1993, first published in 1979) analyzed this problem and came to a conclusion that in social sciences there are four currently accepted, incommensurable paradigms. These are: functionalism, interpretive, radical structuralism and radical humanism. Their very influential paradigm model "has been widely welcomed and admired as an antidote to the orthodox Functionalist hegemony" (Jackson and Carter 1993:721) in organization studies and beyond. Cultural anthropology, for which "everyday life is accorded the status of a miraculous achievement (...), the world of human affairs is cohesive, ordered and integrated" (...) and which foundations "reflect a social philosophy which emphasises the essentially spiritual nature of the social world" (Burrell and Morgan 1993:31), found its place in the interpretive paradigm:

The interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action. (Burrell and Morgan 1993:28)

The fundament of it lies in "sociology of regulation":

'Sociology of regulation' refers to the writings of theorists who are primarily concerned to provide explanations of society in terms which emphasize its underlying unity and cohesiveness (...); the basic questions which it asks tend to focus upon the need to understand why society is maintained as an entity. It attempts to explain why society tends to hold together rather than fall apart. (Burrell and Morgan 1993:17)

Within this framework the metaphor of culture seems hardly limiting. To quote John Van Maanen again, it is rather "stimulating, productive (...) as the notion of life is for

biologists” (1988:3). And yet the limitation lies precisely in the fact that a kind of pre-reflective unity, cohesiveness, order is assumed in it, something that allowed Burrell and Morgan to talk about the belief in an “essentially spiritual nature of the social world” (1993:31) as the base for the interpretive paradigm. So even though, as Hatch (1993) and many others tried to argue, the question of the “reality” behind symbolic representations can be suspended or bypassed, there exists a strong belief in this “spiritual” nature of the social world. Such an approach does not rule out anything, it merely relegates what has been previously uncritically assumed as the base of inquiry to the status of a mere possibility. It reverses the epistemological order, so to speak, as it is “the spirit”, the substance behind the symbolic representations, that one is trying to arrive at. Hence, bearing in mind what has been said in the *Cultures and symbols* section, the author of this thesis strongly supports Burrell and Morgan’s idea of the incommensurability of paradigms, fundamental to their model, yet paradoxically one of the most heavily contested in the debate that followed the publication of their book (see for example: Hatch 1993, Willmott 1993; but also strongly defended, see: Jackson and Carter 1993).

There is then “something to be gained by reconsidering our conceptions and formulations of the “real”, by making exotic much of what we take for granted, and by focusing more self-consciously on the categories and concepts through which we are writing the world” (Rabinow 1986, cited in Smircich 1995:233). Precisely this “something” is organizational ethnography’s very reason of existence, as the results of “making exotic” one’s own assumptions can be truly interesting and worthwhile. The following observation by Edgar Shein, an accomplished consultant and academic, simple as it is, is a good example:

On the level of social process, I saw many parallels between what the Chinese Communists were doing and what we do every day (...) under the concepts of

training, development and socialization (Schein 1961b). The goals are different, but the methods are remarkably similar. When we disapprove, we call it a cult and deplore it. (Schein 1996:234)

While regarding fieldwork the distinction between the classic disciplines remains fairly clear: “sociologists study the West, anthropologists get the rest” (Sahlins 1979, cited in Van Maanen 1988:21), organizational ethnography, with its studies of organizational cultures and subcultures, positions itself almost as the natural synthesis of the two. Its “claim to fame” rests somewhere else, arguably beyond the distinction, it is based on the development and rapid expansion of what is called the industrial (or post-industrial for that matter) society:

Emile Durkheim has shown that the development of organizational societies is accompanied by a disintegration of traditional patterns of social order (...). [Some] social scientists believe that it is often more useful to talk about the culture of industrial *society*, rather than of industrial societies, since the detailed differences between countries often mask more important commonalities. (Morgan 1986:113)

## **Interpretations and implications**

This turning point in social thought, the paradigmatic shift, has one obvious implication – fieldwork is an interpretive act:

Fieldwork constructs now are seen by many to emerge from a hermeneutic process; fieldwork is an interpretative act, not an observational or descriptive one (Agar 1986). This process begins with the explicit examination of one’s own preconceptions, biases, and motives, moving forward in a dialectic fashion toward understanding by way of a continuous dialogue between the interpreter and interpreted. (Van Maanen 1988:93)

“Interpretation involves countless engagements of the hermeneutic circle” (Hatch 1993:675), “arriving too late” innumerable times, to paraphrase Gadamer (1975, cited in Taylor 1985:181). There are three major factors that need to be taken into account, perhaps best conceptualized by Umberto Eco in his *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990). He made a crucial distinction there: between the intention of the author, the intention of the reader, and the intention of the text. The last of the three constitutes the most objective limitation for any fieldworker / interpreter; here Eco follows Saint Augustine and his *De doctrina christiana* and says:

“The only way is to check [the interpretation] against the text as a coherent whole. (...) In this sense the internal textual coherence controls the otherwise uncontrollable drives of the reader.” (Eco 1992:821)

Since ethnography is a translation between cultures, the author of this thesis is at the same time “the reader” of the field, he reads it through his own experience in it. So on the one hand, the final text needs to be somehow in agreement with the totality of this experience there (“the guess” has to be about “the whole”), with the entire body of the empirical material, something which is difficult to verify from the outside, even for the natives. On the other hand, the interpretation has to be a meaningful whole in itself, a coherent account, a believable story. As far as the intentions of the natives go, their account is “morally privileged” and a fieldworker has an obvious duty to listen to them, however, it is “a mistake” to think of it “as epistemologically privileged” (Rorty 1982, cited in Czarniawska 1998:21). Also because the author should take full responsibility for what he writes, to quote Geertz once again, the “burden of authorship cannot be evaded, however heavy it may have grown; there is no possibility of displacing it onto ‘method’, ‘language’, or ‘the people themselves’ re-described as co-authors” (Geertz 1988, cited in Czarniawska 2004:108). In a opposition to this mistake, there exists an obvious danger of

“vanity ethnography” (Van Maanen 1988:93), ethnography that focuses too much on the author himself (see: Behar 1996 for a borderline case).

Some of the technical details about data gathering have already been described in the *Foreword*. The project had two distinct stages. Originally one of the most commonly used combination of ethnographical methods had been chosen. The material had been collected in “an interview situation” (Czarniawska 2004:47-59) and the “triangulation” of methods (Kostera 2006:116) achieved through the addition of text analysis and participant observation. The author started his fieldwork with a healthy dose of naivety and ignorance about his field. It proved to be beneficial and placed the master’s thesis, the immediate result of this stage of data collection, close to grounded theory as far as methodology is concerned.

The time in-between the stages (March – August 2004) was crucial as the author stayed in touch with his former (and future) field on a personal level. It affected the second stage profoundly, since then it had been hardly possible to assume “the role” of a fieldworker once again, the distinctions blurred. The position ranged from “a harmless idiot who brings certain advantages to this village” (Barley 1986:56), to a “marginal native” (Freilich 1970, cited in Van Maanen 1988:2). Or more precisely, from a harmless idiot who, as a fellow Catholic, obviously has a very twisted way of coming to terms with his vocation, most likely a vocation to Opus Dei, to a “native” who, for some strange reason, desperately struggles to stay “marginal”. The ways of collecting data had to follow these changing, undefined relations, it seemed, and they did, but instead of a conscious choice from a range proposed by the academic literature, the author settled for a largely intuitive, non-methodical, reflective approach of “guessing” and checking the guess

against “the whole”. In other words, he simply decided not to force himself into the classic fieldworker’s role and simply leave things as they were, bearing in mind that “there is nothing more sure to kill research and sweep it off into the leftovers of abandoned works, nothing more sure, than method” (Barthes 1971, cited in Czarniawska 1998:76). A constant struggle to maintain a distance to the researched field proved to be the only real disadvantage of this “non-approach”, a serious one, but relatively insignificant in comparison with the gains. Retrospectively it could be categorized as similar to the “one used by Boje and Orr: recording of spontaneous incidents of storytelling during prolonged field research”, something that “requires a special sensibility (which can be acquired, however, in the field) and a good memory” (Czarniawska 2004:42-43).

The written, textual results of both stages were very different too. Proper interview transcripts and thorough descriptions of observed events gave way to loose notes, correspondence with friends, and personal reflections in a form of a diary. On the other hand, the influence of the “technical” (mainly theological) literature increased substantially. The original, “grounded-theory-like” innocence had been lost, the author exposed himself fully to the internal literature, but later also to the hostile publications. As the reader will soon find out though, the written material from the second stage of data gathering is not quoted in this work at all, due to practical but also ethical reasons. This issue will be reflected on later in the thesis, it must be said now that the “experience” of Opus Dei gained (gathered) during the second stage is very much present in the text, but indirectly. The structure and layout of the thesis mirror this crucial fact (see the next section for details), the interview transcripts and a few key texts are revisited, so to speak. They are reread in the light of these four years of direct, personal experience of Opus Dei,

however fragmented, shallow and non-methodical this experience may seem. All this made the author's role more difficult, "the burden of authorship" heavier, but the final product, hopefully, a much more interesting read. All the bits and pieces needed to be made into one coherent, huge narrative, in other words provided with "emplotment" (how things are connected; a structure that makes sense of the events – Czarniawska 2004:23) to make it a proper story (ethnography). Precisely the this two-staged tale of the research project is reflected in the structure and layout of the empirical part of the thesis.

### **A guide to reading the thesis**

Everything described above, starting with the *Foreword* but especially the methodology, is reflected in the way the fieldwork material is dealt with. The body of the thesis is divided into two main parts: *The Dogma* and *Empiria*. The former consists of three "dogmatic" texts for the culture of Opus Dei: *Genesis* is a compilation of Saint Josemaría's words describing the founding vision of the Work, the founding experience; *The Message* is basically a shortened version of his most famous homily, one which is said to encapsulate his teachings; *Psalm*, in turn, is taken from the widely distributed official prayer card, written after Escrivá's death, the text is a plea for his intercession. On the other hand, *Empiria* consists of extracts from seven interviews with Opus Dei members, who are called "prophets" throughout the thesis and whose real names are substituted with names of early Christians taken from the *Letter to Romans*, chapter 16. All ten texts are called "books" and are preceded by an introduction and followed with a commentary. They follow one after another, interrupted only by the analysis of the dogmatic part.

As the reader surely sees by now, the empirical material is then treated analogically to the way sacred texts are treated. The intention behind it is by no means mockery of any sort, but rather an attempt to tie up the fundamental structure of the thesis with possibly the strongest “meta-plot” in the Western culture, or rather to make this relation visible and ever-present, and not merely stated in the introduction using academic language. This one basic analogy obviously has many further implications, other parallels will appear at different levels of analysis.

All the “sacred” texts were collected in the first stage of this research project, so they are all either commonly available (*The Dogma*) or were “handed down” to the naive researcher by the members themselves during the interviews. In this way Opus Dei “revealed itself” in front of the researcher: the division between the subject of inquiry and the fieldworker was clear, it was Opus Dei “who spoke”, either directly through texts or through “prophets” with a first-hand experience of it, so with a mandate, authority from “above”. The other side struggled not to interrupt the monologue, to be a listener, to remain humbly “below”. The second stage disturbed this balance but, as has been already said, it is not present in a textual form, rather it changed and now constitutes the position from which the author speaks; the “epistemological priority” (Rorty 1982, cited in Czarniawska 1998:21) is no longer naively granted to the native side, mostly because the very distinction between native and non-native hardly stands. Hence what happens in this thesis is, again, a rereading of the first stage from the position of the second. To take the revelation analogy further – it bears resemblance to the way in which Christians read the Old Testament.

The aim of having a structure like this is twofold. First, it is to express the journey of a researcher into the organization, a very personal journey. As in it everything happens in a religious, Christian context, it is a sort of a pilgrimage, journey of faith that has one aim: to convert the pilgrim. It allows reflection on the way the researcher is gradually immersed into the field, to describe it and visualize this immersion. The second reason is political. Even though the link between the structure of the thesis and that of the Christian Scriptures appears to be purely metaphorical, let it be openly stated that the author in some way nevertheless still aspires to the authority of the Scriptures by linking the two, or rather pretends to hide behind this authority, in this way to assume some of it. Dante and his *Divine Comedy* (2003) is a classic example here (see: Freccero 1993; Piątkowski 2008). This (innocent?) trick is supposed to help in maintaining this “political ambiguity” of the thesis (as described in the *Foreword*), something crucial given the fact how the literature on Opus Dei is polarised, crucial in trying to escape categorization.

However, the fundamental, epistemological reason for using this meta-narrative of revelation is plain and simple, to make it all “a meaningful whole”:

Organizations reproduce themselves and produce things, services, social relations, and organization actors. They also produce economic facts. (...) Global economy is produced locally. But all these local products must be connected into a meaningful whole. Although statistics and lists of categories are some of the ways of such connection, the narrative is the dominant one. (Czarniawska 1998:20) [Tables and lists] can fulfil certain functions that narratives cannot, the reverse applies even more. Almost certainly the greater part of societal learning happens through the circulation of stories. (Czarniawska 2004:35)

The meta-plot reflects then the social philosophy behind the interpretive paradigm, the assumption that “the world of human affairs is cohesive, ordered and integrated” by nature (Burrell and Morgan 1993:31). The “local products” of culture, in the case of this

thesis the empirical material set aside for interpretation, are meaningful only in the light of this fundamental assumption, that is, to the extent they explain why Opus Dei “tends to hold together rather than fall apart” (Burrell and Morgan 1993:17).

The empirical material is divided into ten “books”, these, in turn, are divided into chapters and verses, to make them easier to analyze in the commentaries that follow. Every part, both *The Dogma* and *Empiria*, has an analysis at the end. These serve as further translations into the widely defined language of the social sciences, the one after the *Empiria* is at the same time the concluding chapter of the whole thesis. There is substantial difference in style and method between the commentaries and analyses. It is intentional, reflects the dialectical relationship between understanding and explanation, but on the metaphorical level it is also inspired by the distinction coming from Catholic theology, namely the distinction between patristic and scholastic theologies. Here the author is indebted to a very good introduction to monastic theology, a book by Jean Leclercq OSB entitled *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (1982). And so, analogically to the distinctions made by Leclercq and very much in line with the epistemological assumptions behind this research project, commentaries depend on author’s experience in the field and avoid being purely abstract (1982:224), their key rule is “reminiscence”, they are full of comparisons and digressions (1982:74) as the author moves in the “shade of meaning” (1982:201). As opposed to the scholastic “series of distinctions” to obtain knowledge (1982:6), for the Church Fathers, and later for monks, “to understand things is to realize the relationship they have to Christ” (1982:39). They not only read the most profane texts in this allegorical manner, but also nature around them, to save these “things”, to make them “reality” rather than just a set of empty words or images (1982:118-119). Similarly here, Opus Dei is read in the light of the concept of

culture as a root metaphor, which conceptualizes the belief in its underlying unity as an organization. On the other hand, analyses are supposed to be more “scholastic”, scientific in style and aims. All the described above will be further analyzed, as the reflections on methodology and the position of the researcher in the field coming from this project are seen as one of its key contributions to knowledge.

## A guide to referencing and a list of abbreviations

Published works of Josemaría Escrivá are referenced by their title, the title is followed by a number which indicates either a section or a point, rather than a page number. All published work by Saint Josemaría is divided into sections or points. These are: *The Way*, *Furrow*, *The Forge*, *Friends of God*, *Christ is passing by*, *In love with the Church*, *Holy Rosary*, *The Way of the Cross*, *Conversations*. Most of these were read by the author of this thesis in Polish, English translation is taken from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/>.

In the commentaries to the empirical material, italics indicate a quotation from the “book” currently commented on, it is followed with a reference to the chapter and the verse of that book, for example “(3:2)”. Whenever a “book” is cited outside its own commentary, an abbreviation is used. And so, in *the Dogma*: “Gns” stands for Genesis, “Msg” for Message, “Psl” for Psalm; in the *Empiria*: “Prs” for Persis, “Jul” for Julia, “Trp” for Tryphaena, “Epn” for Epaenetus, “PaA” for Prisca and Aquila, “Phb” for Phoebe, and “Gai” for Gaius. These are also followed with an indication of a chapter and verse.

All quotations from the Christian Scriptures are taken from the *New American Bible*, available online from the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/>). The name of the book that is being quoted is followed with a reference to the chapter and verse, for example “(Romans 4:11)”. Quotations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* come from the same source (<http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/>), they are indicated by an abbreviation “CCC” followed with the number of the paragraph that has been quoted. The official documents of the Holy See are taken from the website of the Vatican ([http://www.vatican.va/phome\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm)) and referred to by their title followed by the number of the paragraph quoted. An exception is made for the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the following abbreviations are used: “LG” for the *Lumen Gentium*, “GS” for *Gaudium et Spes*, “PO” for *Presbyterorum Ordinis*.

## PART I: THE DOGMA

### Introduction to the Book of Genesis

*The meaning of the name of this Book is clear, it is an obvious allusion to the first book of the Bible, which in Hebrew is called B'reshit (from the first words: "in a beginning"), while Genesis is a Greek title (from the Septuagint) meaning "the origin" or "coming into being". This literally corresponds to what this Book is about. The material chosen and edited for its purpose amount to 'the Genesis' of Opus Dei. It consists of many short texts circulating around a certain visionary experience which marks the exact moment of the Work's "coming into being", in the words of the very person who had the experience – Josemaría Escrivá. Since he had been very reluctant to talk about it throughout his life, the choice was very limited and the majority of the texts found their way to the final version of this Book.*

*The texts come from various sources. 1:1-5 is taken from a book entitled Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, a collection of interviews with the founder of Opus Dei. This particular one, Freedom and Pluralism in the People of God, was conducted by Fr. Pedro Rodríguez and first published in October 1967 in "Palabra", the text is a part of Saint Josemaría's answer to the following question: "(...) Opus Dei is now a noteworthy factor in the life of the Church. Could you explain to us how, being a young priest, you were able to have sufficient foresight and*

*understanding to carry out this task" (Conversations, 17)? The phrase "Madrid is my Damascus" (1:6) had been often repeated by Escrivá as a very short thanksgiving prayer for the founding of Opus Dei, at least according to his successor as a Prelate – Bp Alvaro del Portillo (see his memoirs about the founder entitled Immersed in God – 2004:79). The verse: "I saw Opus Dei" (1:7) appears in almost every account of the founding of the Work, it is pointless to enumerate the sources in this case. 1:10-12, 3:13-14 and 3:19 are taken from the "www.josemariaescriva.info" website, the former from an introductory section entitled simply Opus Dei (the paragraph describing the founding moment), the latter from the biographical profile of the Founder, section The Founding of Opus Dei. 1:8-9, 2:1-5 and 3:1-2 come from John Coverdale's Uncommon Faith: The Early Years of Opus Dei (2002:13-14), but all of them are translated from Spanish and quoted from other sources. And so 1:8-9 is the "earliest surviving written account of the foundational event, dated October 2, 1931" (2002:14), only the phrase "whole and entire" was added, John L. Allen quoted it in his Opus Dei (2005:16), but without giving the exact reference. 2:1-5 "is a private note taken by Escrivá in 1930 [which] records, in almost telegraphic fashion, a series of ideas that may summarize the content of his October 2*

vision” (Coverdale 2002 p.13-14). Similarly, 3:1-2 is a loose comment by Escrivá quoted by Coverdale (2002:14). 3:3-12.15-16 come from the Friends of God (2005), the second collection of homilies by Saint Josemaría, to be precise 3:3-6 comes from the homily entitled Time is a Treasure (delivered in 1956, s.54) while 3:7-12 and 3:15-16 from Working for God (originally delivered in 1960, both quotes from s.59). Finally, 3:17-18 also come from John L. Allen’s Opus Dei (2005:16).

The texts have been edited and put together by the author of this thesis in a particular order, first comes the background (1:1-6) and the description (1:7-12) of the event in question, then the content of the vision (2:1-5), and finally the key effects of it: the immediate ones (3:1-14) and the final one, Opus Dei as a reality today (3:15-19). This Book is of key importance to the whole thesis, as the definition of the subject of inquiry is based almost entirely on this selection of texts. The poetic layout is not original, it is supposed to encourage slow and attentive reading.

## GENESIS OF OPUS DEI

### Chapter 1: The Vision

1. I never had any other aim than that of fulfilling the Will of God.
2. Please do not ask me to go into details about the beginnings of the Work,
3. which the Love of God began to make me suspect back in 1917.
4. They are intimately connected with the history of my soul and belong to my interior life.
5. All I can say is that I acted at every moment with the permission and affectionate blessing of the Bishop of Madrid, who was my very dear friend

- and in whose diocese Opus Dei was born on 2nd October, 1928.
6. Madrid is my Damascus.
  7. I saw Opus Dei.
  8. I received the illumination about the entire Work.
  9. Clear general idea, whole and entire.
  10. I received the Vision about the Work while I was reading my notes.
  11. Deeply moved, I kneeled down I was alone in my room and gave thanks to the Lord
  12. and I remember with emotion the sound the church bells of Our Lady of the Angels.

## Chapter 2: **The Work of God**

1. Plain Catholics
2. The mass of dough being leavened and rising
3. Our thing is what is ordinary, with naturalness
4. The means: professional work
5. Everyone a saint!

## Chapter 3: **Exodus**

1. God our Lord treated me like a child.
2. He didn't show me all the weight at once but led me forward bit by bit.
3. I perceived the full depth of what it meant to serve Our Lord in Opus Dei,
4. I asked with all my heart to be granted the maturity of an eighty year old man.
5. With the childlike simplicity of a beginner, I asked my God to make me older,
6. so that I would know how to use my time well and learn how to make the best use of every minute, in order to serve him.
7. Let me open my heart to you so that you can help me give thanks to God.

8. When I saw in 1928 what Our Lord wanted of me, I immediately set to work.
9. I was taken for a madman.
10. Some people in an excess of understanding, called me a dreamer, but a dreamer of impossible dreams.
11. In spite of all this and of my own shortcomings, I went ahead without getting discouraged
12. and since the project was not of my doing it found its way through the difficulties.
13. I had God's grace and good humour and nothing else.
14. And I had to do Opus Dei.
15. Today it is a reality spread throughout the world from pole to pole,
16. and it seems so natural to most people, because Our Lord made sure that it was recognised as something of his own doing.
17. I was not the founder of Opus Dei.
18. Opus Dei was founded in spite of me.
19. This is not something I have thought up; it is from God.

## Commentary

### 1:1-5

Opus Dei was founded, it is a fact. It had to have a beginning, because *today it is a reality spread throughout the world* (3:15). But although it is commonly said that it had been founded by Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the man himself had a different story to tell. The Work was founded *in spite of him; it is from God* (3:19). Already the first verse of this book seems to suggest that whatever happened, it was just a side-effect of Josemaría's main life project – *fulfilling the Will of God* (1:1). It was an event that happened on his way to God, on the life-journey which has a much bigger aim and ends in eternity. Through the words of this verse he says that he did not want to become famous, he did not try to achieve anything for himself; that his intentions were clear to the point that he had not even particularly had other people in mind, the society at large or the good of the Catholic Church. First and foremost he was simply trying to follow Christ, “to respond to God's call wholeheartedly, without reservations” (Coverdale 2002:25) and, in doing so, simply save his own soul. Of course, whereas to a non-Christian this might seem like selfishness or at least suggest an instrumental motivation, in Christian terms this is usually the exact opposite of egoism, because it necessary involves an act of complete self-giving, self-emptying to allow God to work through a given person. Nevertheless this verse expresses not only Escrivá's humility, but paradoxically also self-confidence: the sort of confidence which is needed to be able to say *I never had any other aim* (1:1) but to follow Christ. It suggests that in spite of his weaknesses (3:11) and therefore natural mistakes, his consciousness was absolutely clear and his faith firm.

Right until his death in 1975, Saint Josemaría had always been reluctant to give details about his founding vision, but one thing remains strikingly clear: the vision marks the exact moment in which Opus Dei was born, to the minute (1:5.12). True, he had had suspicions since 1917 (1:3) that God had chosen him for something specific (Coverdale 2002:25), but until 1928 it all remained undefined.

The Work of God is then built on this vision and with this vision in mind. Whatever Opus Dei is, it does not depend on or is defined by its structure, number of members or community of the first few members with its particular charism, or even the personality, biography and sanctity of its founder. By refusing to describe the vision Escrivá tried to put himself outside the equation and say “you are free to believe or disbelieve it, but I claim to have had a vision of Opus Dei inspired by the Holy Spirit” (*the Love of God* – 1:3). However, it is not the content that confirms the very fact of him having the vision, the authority is supposed to spring from what one can see now (3:15-16), Opus Dei as a reality *today* (3:15) as the fruits of the vision:

Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 7:17-19)

The truth and authenticity of the vision is then inalienably connected to the reality of Opus Dei, so if one accepts this reality as inspired by the Holy Spirit (and perhaps wants to become a member of the organization), then belief in the divine intervention in Saint Josemaría’s life has to follow. There are obvious paradoxes here that will be further developed later. Let us just say that the same logic that put Escrivá humbly outside the

equation so that all the glory is God's, also placed him among the great founders in the history of the Church, among people who received special gift of the Holy Spirit.

This divine reality is *connected with the history of* [Saint Josemaría's] *soul* (1:4), which suggests that he was meant to be the Founder of Opus Dei before he was born. The details of his vision *belong to* [his] *interior life* (1:4), life which is not to be shared with the wider public, even close friends and brothers in faith, life of an ongoing personal conversation with God. To be fruitful, it has to remain a secret:

[W]hen you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (Matthew 6:6)

The interior life of prayer is secret also because it goes beyond the external, "religious" practices; it is a result of internal struggles, full of uncertainty, so it has to mature before it "comes out". The history of the soul in this sense is only partly a history of growth, to a much larger extent it is a history of coming to realize who one is in God, so to speak. Growth happens almost accidentally, naturally; the same goes for obedience to any moral code (the Law). But the Law and the authority given to the Church act as a measure for what comes out of the intimate and direct conversation with God. The idea being that whatever appears from this personal process can go beyond and develop the existing Magisterium (the deposit of faith held and preserved by the Church), but never against it. So *the permission (...) of the Bishop of Madrid* (1:5) to act guaranteed that Escrivá's idea of Opus Dei was orthodox. That is all, it does not say anything about the divinely inspired vision, it just says: Opus Dei is potentially from God, because it is not against his Law and the will of his Church. If God's grace is truly behind it, then it will surely develop and we will judge it by its fruits. Nevertheless it was definitely very important for Saint

Josemaría at that point. He was still alone with the whole weight of the mission divinely assigned to him, but at least he knew that the content of it was not contrary to the Magisterium. It was still very much private, a part of his *interior life* (1:4), he was simply discerning his own, personal vocation.

### **1:6**

It is very interesting that later in his life, at least according to Alvaro del Portillo (2004:79), Escrivá often used the phrase *Madrid is my Damascus* (1:6) as a thanksgiving prayer for Opus Dei. It seems obvious then that he considered his visionary experience as somehow similar to what happened to Saint Paul of Tarsus *as he was nearing Damascus* (Acts 9:3); or at least the story of Josemaría's vocation to Opus Dei, culminating in the visionary moment, is similar to the biblical story of Saint Paul's conversion.

Paul (or Saul) of Tarsus was a great persecutor of the early Christians until when on his way to Damascus (some time after 34 A.D.) he “saw a light from the sky, brighter than the sun, shining around” him (Acts 26:13), and from within the light the Lord himself spoke to him: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting (Acts 9:5). Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything appointed for you to do” (Acts 22:10). Since he “could see nothing because of the brightness of that light, [he] was led by hand by [his] companions and entered Damascus” (Acts 22:11). In the city there lived Ananias, a Christian, traditionally counted as one of the seventy two (Luke 10:1). The Lord spoke to him: “Get up and go (...) and ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul” (Acts 9:11), “this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites” (Acts 9:15). So he went, laid his hands on Paul and healed his blindness, then said to him: “the God of our ancestors designated you

to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of his voice; for you will be his witness before all to what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:14-15). So, to put it simply, Paul learnt about the Good News in a very special way, that later allowed him to say: “For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Therefore, among other consequences, he also did not feel obliged to consult his understanding of Christ’s message with the authority of the Apostles in Jerusalem until a long time after he started preaching (Galatians 2:1-10).

Josemaría’s claims, coming indirectly from such a comparison (or at least a metaphor) are potentially very strong and give much insight into the way in which he viewed his own visionary experience. One could argue that this is the key to understanding this text. Many analogies and conclusions immediately come to mind, but those of the “founder”, “mediator”, or even a prophet seem to be most obvious. It would put Escrivá among the religiously “talented” in the words of Joseph Ratzinger:

Here, too, one meets people who are religiously “talented” and other who are “untalented”; here, too, those capable of direct religious experience and thus of something like a religious creativity through a living awareness of the religious world are few and far between. The “mediator” or “founder”, the witness, the prophet, or whatever religious history likes to call such men who are capable of direct contact with the divine, remains here, too, the exception. Over against these few, for whom the divine thus becomes undisguised certainty, stand the many whose religious gift is limited to receptivity. (Ratzinger 2004:94)

### **1:7-12**

As is noted in almost all the texts describing the founding moment of Opus Dei, Saint Josemaría always used the verb “to see” to describe what happened, therefore it is

obvious to talk about a vision. What has been established so far is that this vision was a fruit of Escrivá's personal, intimate relationship (conversation) with God, that it came directly from God (*in spite of* Josemaría – 3:18), and that Escrivá's actions based and motivated by this vision were from the very beginning approved by the local ecclesiastical authority, the Bishop of Madrid. What becomes interesting now is what exactly Saint Josemaría meant by saying that he had had a vision. Some *light* on the matter was thrown by the biblical story of Saint Paul's conversion, but the explanation still remains on the metaphorical level. The following passage (1:7-12) deals with the problem in a much more direct way.

During this “seeing” Escrivá *received the illumination* (1:8), in another place he calls it simply an *idea* (1:9). Illumination should obviously be read here as an intellectual or spiritual “enlightenment”, and since it was close to an idea, then most of the texts about the founding moment of Opus Dei tend to talk about an “intellectual vision”. It is difficult to say what it means exactly, nevertheless Saint Josemaría said that he had seen Opus Dei in its entirety (1:9), the full depth but without details (*general idea*). It seems it was not a dream-like prophetic sight of a particular situation or situations from the future. He received it while reading his notes (1:10), it seems that all the bits and pieces of this grand idea suddenly fell into place. Before he had only suspected that the grand idea existed (since 1917, 1:3), now, at some level, it became a “reality” that he could *see*.

However (almost disappointingly) down-to-earth Escrivá's visionary experience may now seem, it still left him *deeply moved* (1:11). It all came together *while reading notes* (1:10), in a very ordinary way, yet he felt that as a deep religious experience. Even though he was alone in his room, he knelt down and started praying – it indicates that he must have felt

the intervention and presence of God very strongly. Since thanksgiving prayer was Josemaría's natural response, the vision of Opus Dei must have felt like a huge and, most of all, undeserved gift from God. In the midst of his visionary experience, in spite of all the excitement, Escrivá still specifically remembered the sound of church bells. It seems that he took this coincidence as a sign of final confirmation. These bells announced the feast of the Guardian Angels (Covardale 2002:13), a call for celebration, a joyous occasion. Perhaps, since the sound of bells is also connected with reciting the old prayer called the Angelus (which commemorates the event of Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, in other words the vocation story of Mary, Christ's mother), it brought to his mind the words "be it done unto me according to Thy word".

## **2:1-5**

Chapter 2 "is a private note taken by Escrivá in 1930 [which] records, in almost telegraphic fashion, a series of ideas that may summarize the content of his October 2 vision" (Coverdale 2002:13-14). However modest it looks (only five verses), there are no better sources publicly available which would directly describe the vision, as Escrivá had always been reluctant to talk about it and, what is more important, in 1932 he...

...burnt the notebook containing the notes he had been reading when he received the foundational vision. At the same time, he destroyed the notes he took on October 2, 1928, and also those he took during the following year and a half. (Coverdale 2002:57)

Saint Josemaría always claimed that he had done this to maintain the ordinary outlook of the Work, which could be threatened or at least overshadowed if his followers would place too much emphasis on the extraordinary, supernatural visionary experience that he

had. Whether burning the notebook and refusing to talk about the event achieved this goal, or did the exact opposite, is another story.

As it has been said above then, the private note from 1930 (2:1-5) summarizes Escrivá's "intellectual vision" of Opus Dei. The first two verses are a metaphorical description of the kind of people that are to belong to Opus Dei – *plain* Catholics (2:1) compared to a *mass of dough* (2:2) probably for baking into bread. It immediately brings to mind the words of Christ:

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened. (Matthew 13:33)

In the Biblical parable the Church (as the mystical body of Christ – see for example Ephesians 1:22-23 – and therefore the kingdom of heaven present on earth) is compared to yeast that leavens the dough of humankind. Saint Josemaría's words are a bit ambiguous (who is *the mass of dough?*), but probably he thought of this particular parable when writing the note. *Plain Catholics* (2:1) – "without special pretensions, superiority, elegance, etc.; ordinary", but bearing "the food metaphor" in mind – "not rich, highly seasoned, or elaborately prepared" (*Dictionary.com* n.d., "plain"). This phrase would then mean more or less the laity, as opposed to clergy and members of religious orders, and indicate the secular character of Opus Dei. Perhaps it means even more: to be a *plain* believer equals not to belong to any religion-based community, even lay in character, apart from that of a particular parish of course, and the universal Church in general. To be the real *yeast* in the *dough* of humankind is to remain fully in the world, which means to belong naturally to all sorts of communities, groups and associations, but only the secular ones, because gathering in communities based on shared faith in Jesus the Christ

inevitably means, to some extent, exclusiveness and withdrawing from the world. To be the yeast is to stay and leaven the whole dough, this is Escrivá's (naturally not only his) interpretation of the Biblical idea of the priestly nation:

[L]et yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (...) [Y]ou are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises” of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:5.9)

All this is obviously further developed in the teachings of Saint Josemaría and in theology written around the Work. What is interesting for the purpose of this text, however, is the hidden but sharp distinction between organization and community. Just to signal the issue, “Opus Dei is a spiritual and apostolic organisation” (*Conversations*, 30), but it is not a community of faithful, at least not at the natural level. It is a very important theme and will be further developed later.

The following three verses (2:3-5) refer in a very condensed way to the charism (even if only by virtue of its absence) and to the main message of the Work. “Our thing is what is ordinary” (2:3) – the word “ordinary”, similarly to natural and *naturalness*, is one of the most frequently used in the language of Opus Dei. *What is ordinary* becomes the freely chosen “*our thing*”, as opposed to something to escape from, or something to define ourselves against. It also means refusing to choose certain bits of this *naturally ordinary* reality to emphasize and build “*our thing*” around them or, depending on the point of view, it simply means choosing all the bits. This follows from being a *plain Catholic* (2:1), and it seems that already at this early stage (1930) Opus Dei defines itself against the religious (monastic, mendicant, apostolic, clerical) tradition in the Church. It happens,

perhaps paradoxically, through this strong emphasis placed on the ordinary and the natural (all this has to be read in the context of pre-Vatican II, fairly clerical self-perception of the Church). So the Dominicans may be friars preachers, the Franciscans may be poor by choice, monks – enclosed and contemplative, but Opus Dei, since it consists of *plain* people and therefore it is not a religious community (although it is a religious organization!) refuses to be defined in these terms. *With naturalness* (2:3), so basing on natural principles, the Work chooses everything. The key to understand it lies then not in finding its distinctive features, but in trying to establish what Escrivá and other members meant and mean by *ordinary* and *naturalness*.

The next verse (*The means: professional work* – 2:4) is crucial for understanding Opus Dei, because it, once and for all, to a large extent defines what is natural and ordinary for a human being – work, as a duty and as a privilege. In the context of the Church, for *plain* faithful this work must be *professional*, meaning engagement “in a specified activity or occupation for money or as a means of earning a living, rather than as a pastime” (*Oxford English Dictionary* n.d., “professional”). The centrality of work in the Christian life is perhaps the most important feature of Saint Josemaría’s subsequent teachings and therefore will be further discussed at length, but, what is much more important, work as a means of earning money at the same time serves as a means of achieving sanctity. “Everyone a saint!” (2:5) – here the vision culminates, with “the universal call to holiness of all the baptized”. It immediately becomes the central message behind Opus Dei, its only aim and purpose, everything serves it – professional work is a means to get there, to be a saint is naturally the desired state for every Christian; and the only justification for the very existence of Opus Dei as an organization is spreading this universal call.

**3:1-6**

There is a common sense, yet important distinction between the depth and the weight of the founding vision; or rather the depth of this short visionary experience is set against the weight of the reality of Opus Dei itself. Saint Josemaría uses the word “deep” twice in this short text, he describes himself as being *deeply moved* (1:11) by the experience, then later he says: *I perceived the full depth of what it meant to serve Our Lord in Opus Dei* (3:3). Deep emotion is somehow connected with the depth of meaning; it most likely simply followed the realization of this meaningfulness, or rather, since Opus Dei did not feel like Escrivá’s own idea (3:19), the wisdom of the One behind it. In other words, the “intellectual vision” was so profound and overflowing with meaning, that Josemaría could not think of it as his own, for some reason knew that he would not be capable of coming up with all this by himself. And since it was God’s grace, the glory must be his as well.

The weight is connected with moving forward (*bit by bit* – 3:2) in time, more specifically with growing up (the child metaphor – 3:1) and the process of maturing. Escrivá was not shown *all the weight at once* (3:2), but the full depth, and possibly that made the experience all the more spectacular – the enormous contrast between a gift of grace, abundance of meaning and the suffering that comes with it, “the cross” in Christian terms. In time he was to learn about the cross as well, but this disproportion seems to have helped him give the right response (thanksgiving – 1:11) and appreciate the full beauty of the Work of God. In a nutshell, Escrivá was simply presented with a calling (*to serve Our Lord in Opus Dei* – 3:3); he saw the meaning of his own earthly life. With that, because of its divine origin, came the promise: “your life will always be meaningful”. Whatever the pain, every time grace will overflow it, there will always be this difference, this

disproportion (your vocation will remain a gift), therefore, in faith, you can build on it in this life and it will not fall. All this bears resemblance to the story of the calling of Abraham, one of the strongest “meta-plots” in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Genesis 12:1-9). Interestingly, right after the thanksgiving prayer it would seem, Escrivá asks for maturity (3:4-5). In the context of what has just been said, he then asks for the full knowledge of the cross involved in “doing Opus Dei”. He asks God to close this gap between the gift and the burden, he almost asks for the vision to disappear. He reacted to it with emotion, *kneeled down* in awe and *gave thanks* (1:11), but now he wants to act on it and that is impossible when one is overwhelmed by the supernatural presence.

There are several ways of understanding what *the weight* in the words of Escrivá could mean. The most obvious one is simply the clash of the supernatural vision with everyday reality and its down-to-earth problems. As Opus Dei from the very beginning was to be a world-wide organization (*the mass of dough* – 2:2), perhaps the burden was his personal role in all that – maybe he somehow sensed that he was to become one of the great founders in the Church’s history, the vast majority of them canonized, hundreds of books written on their lives and work... How to live up to the “external” expectations like these? It could also be that the depth represented his personal calling while the burden was the obligation and responsibility to spread it. In any case Saint Josemaría asked for maturity (*of an eighty year old man* – 3:4) to be able to deal with the situation, he asked his God to make him older (3:5). What is immediately noticeable is that old age here is not directly a metaphor for wisdom or experience. Escrivá said these things more in the light of *memento mori*, he wanted to learn how to value his time more, how to be always alert and awaken, in other words, to live as if he was close to death. An eighty year old man has no

time to waste, but also very little consideration for his own ambitions and future achievements, so he is unlikely to be discouraged by the size of the undertaking.

### 3:7-14

The words that follow are addressed to a different audience. While at the beginning of the text, when asked by a journalist, he refuses to give the details about the foundation of the Work (1:2) and almost hides behind the authority of the hierarchical Church, here Escrivá “opens his heart” (3:7) in front of his “sons and daughters”. He does that so they can *help* him *give thanks to God* (3:7), a paradox which only adds to an already interesting interplay between a gift and a burden around Escrivá’s visionary experience. It brings to mind Jesus’ famous words:

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”  
(Matthew 11:29-30)

But also Saint Paul’s advice for the Galatians:

“Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

It seems, then, not only that God’s grace always overflows the *weight* of the undertaking (a calling *to do Opus Dei* – 3:14), creating this everlasting gap which sustains and guarantees meaning, but on top of that, this gap creates another kind of a burden. True, a joyful one, *easy* and *light*, as the response to it (thanksgiving prayer) comes naturally and happily from within a believer’s soul, rather than being imposed from the outside (by “the world”). Nevertheless the soul subject to this burden can still ‘ask’ for help (3:7) in yet

another effort to bridge the gap. Deeply happy, Saint Josemaría could not thank God enough for what had been given to him and to other members of the Work, what overwhelmed him then was an excess of joy.

Again, as with of Saint Paul's conversion ("he began at once to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues" – Acts 9:20), after having the vision of Opus Dei Escrivá *immediately set to work* (3:8). Until then there was mainly searching and contemplation, but after having discovered the *Will of God* in his life, he *immediately* turned to action. The relation between contemplation and action (work) is crucial to Escrivá's teachings and will be further developed later. The key theme of the following passage (3:9-12) seems to be faith. Saint Josemaría in a few words summarizes here the obstacles he had to face: internal struggle against his own weaknesses (3:11), and both lack (*taken for a madman* – 3:9) and *excess of understanding* (3:10) coming from the world, and then he says *I went ahead without getting discouraged* (3:11). In other words, he did not think he was good enough, what is more, the initial responses that he received were either directly hostile (*madman*) or seemingly positive but, in effect, highly discouraging. Of course, against a background like this, especially in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, his faith manifests itself naturally. Again, it inevitably brings to mind Abraham, the father of all who believe (Romans 4:11), in the words of Saint Paul:

He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "Thus shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body as (already) dead (for he was almost a hundred years old) and the dead womb of Sarah. He did not doubt God's promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to do. That is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:18-22)

Obedience to the Will of God follows directly from faith and faith manifests itself through it, in the purest form, and therefore most strikingly, in actions performed against “the common sense”. God’s will comes with a promise, Saint Josemaría’s vision then must have entailed one. His faith, shown through an *immediate* (3:8) response against all odds, mysteriously opens up a space for God to act. Two situations from Jesus’ life come to mind:

Then he said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.” (Luke 17:19)  
 And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.  
 (Matthew 13:58)

All the above mentioned (the search, the vision, and the following action) is only strengthened with the underlying assumption that one’s own, individual and egocentric will inevitably leads astray “among the reefs of the interior life” (*The Way*, 59), very much present in the teachings of the founder of Opus Dei. There was nothing else left for him than *to do Opus Dei* (3:14, an obvious wordplay), to live this vocation himself, as he was simply the first member of an already existing *project* (3:12). It is only because he was the first chosen for this undertaking, he could be considered to have a special place in God’s plan. Neither the project itself, nor it finding *its way through the difficulties* (3:12), can be attributed to Josemaría Escrivá’s efforts. According to his own words gathered in this short text, he was simply a channel for God’s grace, his tool, as he would often put it himself. All he did was to open up to what was coming from God, therefore the only thing about him that is worthy of praise is his faith. It is also by faith that he is a member of the Christ’s Church which, as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14), is a sacrament of God’s presence in the history:

The Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. In later usage the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term *mysterium*. (...) The Church, then, both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies. It is in this analogical sense, that the Church is called a “sacrament.” (CCC, 774) The sacraments are “of the Church” in the double sense that they are “by her” and “for her”. They are “by the Church”, for she is the sacrament of Christ's action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit. (CCC, 1118)

### 3:15-19

The final passage of this text consists of two parts. The first one (3:15-16) is particularly interesting, because it seems to give evidence for the divine origins of Opus Dei, or at least tries to point in the right direction as to where to look for proofs. The second one (3:17-19) is a sort of a summary of what was said before about the relations between God, Opus Dei and Josemaría Escrivá.

As it was said earlier, even though this text is about the founding vision, it is not in this vision where the proofs of the divine origin of Opus Dei are to be found. Instead, Saint Josemaría points in two other directions. Firstly, at the *fruits* (“By their fruits you will know them.” – Matthew 7:16) meaning Opus Dei as a reality today (in this case in 1967), *spread throughout the world from pole to pole* (3:15). In other words, it is the universality of the Work similar to that of the entire *Catholic* Church. Secondly, it is Opus Dei’s “naturalness” (2:3). These are the two things through which Our Lord *made sure that it was recognized as something of his own doing* (3:16). Both have a bearing on the way in which Opus Dei understands itself and the world. The idea of being plain, ordinary is verified here against what *seems natural to most people* (3:16); verified but not taken from – it suggests that it is to some extent pre-determined. The last three verses summarize, what was already hinted in many places before – Opus Dei is God’s will done through Saint Josemaría, *in spite of him* (3:18) and his *shortcomings* (3:11), but thanks to

his extraordinary faith which allowed God's grace to flow. Opus Dei is immediately beyond its founder and the historical and social context, because *it is from God* (3:19).

## Introduction to the Message of Opus Dei

*The message of Opus Dei is the intellectual content of the founding vision that had been entrusted to Saint Josemaría Escrivá on October the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1928. As he himself put it, the “only mission of Opus Dei is the spreading of this message (...), and to those who grasp [the] ideal of holiness [presented in it], the Work offers the spiritual assistance and the doctrinal, ascetical and apostolic training which they need to put it into practice” (Conversations, 60). The basic links between the message and the vision have already been explored in the Genesis. As far as the organization as a subject of inquiry is concerned, to quote one of Opus Dei’s leading theologians, the institution “is both an implementation of, and a permanent service to, the message”, so the “message is the first thing God is concerned about; the institution is something he desires insofar as it can spread it” (Rodríguez 2003:30). In other words, the intellectual content of the vision comes first, and yet Opus Dei “is the message itself understood and structured in terms of its ability to change people” (Rodríguez 2003:29). This part of the thesis aims at describing and analyzing the theoretical framework of the Work, so to speak, a model later applied to the lives of the faithful of the Prelature.*

*There exists a vast number of texts and quotations that, in one way or another, seek to explain, describe, summarize or creatively expand on what is called the*

*message of Opus Dei, so from this point of view the choice of one particular text was very difficult. Yet there seems to be a widespread agreement among the people concerned that the homily entitled Passionately Loving the World manages to capture the essence of the message in the fullest way and in reasonably few words (see: Allen 2006:63; Tourneau 2004:148). It was originally delivered to the students of the University of Navarra on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1967 and later published in the Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer (113-123). The official Opus Dei website in the US describes it as “a homily by the founder (...) that encapsulates his teachings” (<http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=12476>). This book is then merely an edited version of the homily.*

*There seems to be an obvious tension between the supposedly universal character of the message and the contextual form of its presentation here – a homily, delivered 29 years after the “October 2” event, to a particular audience, and relating to a particular day in the Liturgical Calendar (daily readings, etc.). However, this “lived” form of delivery is very much in line with the spirit of Opus Dei and with the epistemological assumptions in this thesis. Nevertheless, in the process of edition the key criteria for cutting out a given chunk of the text was its limited value to the “universal” side of the message. And so, the following*

*paragraphs have been removed: the introductory remarks and the description of the surroundings (it was an open air mass) from s.113; a repetition of a paragraph on discovering God in material things, against leading a “a double life”, from s.114; whole ss.118-120 that provide a very basic description of Opus Dei as an organization and its works; from the s.121 on married life only the last paragraph on contemplative prayer has been kept; similarly ss.122-123, consisting mainly the concluding remarks of the homily, have been*

*omitted, except for an interesting exegesis of Saint Paul’s “shield of faith” metaphor from the Letter to Ephesians (6:16). The remaining core of the homily has been divided into six parts, Chapter 1 describes Escrivá’s fundamental diagnosis, a certain misunderstanding of Christian orthodoxy against which the actual message is presented (in Chapters 2-4); Chapter 5 provides the reader with an example of the application of the message (to the social sphere), while Chapter 6 consists of just a few concluding thoughts.*

## **THE MESSAGE**

### **CHAPTER 1**

<sup>1</sup> We are celebrating the holy Eucharist, the sacramental Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord, that Mystery of Faith which links all the mysteries of Christianity. <sup>2</sup> We are celebrating, therefore, the most sacred and transcendent act which man, with the grace of God, can carry out in this life.

<sup>3</sup> To communicate with the Body and Blood of our Lord is, in a certain sense, like loosening the bonds of earth and time, in order to be already with God in heaven, where Christ Himself will wipe the tears from our eyes and where there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor cries of distress, because the old world will have passed away (cf Apoc 21:4).

<sup>4</sup> This profound and consoling truth, which theologians call the eschatological significance of the Eucharist could however, be misunderstood. <sup>5</sup> And

indeed it has been, whenever men have tried to present the Christian way of life as something exclusively 'spiritual', proper to pure, extraordinary people, who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world or at most, tolerate them as something necessarily attached to the spirit, while we live on this earth.

<sup>6</sup> When things are seen in this way, churches become the setting par excellence of the Christian life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated world, which is considered to be the ante-chamber of heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate path. <sup>7</sup> The doctrine of Christianity and the life of grace would, in this case, brush past the turbulent march of human history, without ever really meeting it. <sup>8</sup> On this October

morning, as we prepare to enter upon the memorial of our Lord's Pasch, we flatly reject this deformed vision of Christianity. (...)

## CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup> It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind.

<sup>2</sup> I have taught this constantly using words from holy Scripture. The world is not evil, because it has come from God's hands, because it is His creation, because 'Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good' (cf Gen 1:7 ff). <sup>3</sup> We ourselves, mankind, make it evil and ugly with our sins and infidelities.

<sup>4</sup> Have no doubt: any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God.

<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, you must understand now, more clearly, that God is calling you to serve Him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work.

<sup>6</sup> Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it. <sup>7</sup> I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the thirties that they had to know how to 'materialise' their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side, an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and

distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities. <sup>8</sup> No, my children! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot have a split personality if we want to be Christians. There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. <sup>9</sup> And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God: we discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things. (...).

<sup>10</sup> There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him.

## CHAPTER 3

<sup>1</sup> That is why I can tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the Kingdom of God, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Authentic Christianity, which professes the resurrection of all flesh, has always quite logically opposed 'dis-incarnation', without fear of being judged materialistic. <sup>3</sup> We can, therefore, rightfully speak of a 'Christian materialism', which is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit. <sup>4</sup> What are the Sacraments, which early Christians described as the foot-prints of the Incarnate Word, if not the clearest manifestation of this way which God has chosen in order to sanctify us and to lead us to heaven? Don't you see that each Sacrament is the Love of God, with all its creative and redemptive power, giving itself to us by way of material means? <sup>5</sup> What is this Eucharist which we are about to celebrate, if not the adorable Body and Blood of our Redeemer, which is offered to us through

the lowly matter of this world (wine and bread), through the 'elements of nature, cultivated by man,' as the recent Ecumenical Council has reminded us (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 38).<sup>6</sup> It is understandable that the Apostle should write: 'All things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's' (1 Cor 3:22-23). We have here an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord.<sup>7</sup> And to make it clear that in that movement everything is included, even what seems most commonplace, St. Paul also wrote: 'in eating, in drinking, do everything as for God's glory' (cf 1 Cor 10:32).

#### CHAPTER 4

<sup>1</sup> This doctrine of holy Scripture, as you know, is to be found in the very nucleus of the spirit of *Opus Dei*. It leads you to do your work perfectly, to love God and mankind by putting love in the little things of everyday life, and discovering that divine something which is hidden in small details.<sup>2</sup> The lines of a Castilian poet are especially appropriate here: 'Write slowly and with a careful hand, for doing things well is more important than doing them.'<sup>3</sup> I assure you, my sons and daughters, that when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God.<sup>4</sup> That is why I have told you repeatedly, and hammered away once and again on the idea that the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day.<sup>5</sup> Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when

you sanctify your everyday lives.<sup>6</sup> I have just said, sanctify your everyday lives. And with these words I refer to the whole program of your task as Christians.<sup>7</sup> Stop dreaming. Leave behind false idealism, fantasies, and what I usually call mystical wishful thinking; if only I hadn't married, if only I hadn't this profession, if only I were healthier, if only I were young, if only I were old...<sup>8</sup> Instead turn seriously to the most material and immediate reality, which is where Our Lord is: 'Look at My hands, and My feet,' said the risen Jesus, 'be assured that it is Myself, touch Me and see, a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see that I have' (Luke 24:29).

#### CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Light is shed upon many aspects of the world in which you live, when we start from these truths. Think, for example, of your activity as citizens. A man who knows that the world, and not just the church, is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world.<sup>2</sup> He endeavours to become properly formed, intellectually and professionally.<sup>3</sup> He makes up his own mind with complete freedom about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and then he makes his own decisions. Being the decisions of a Christian, they result from personal reflection, in which he endeavours, in all humility, to grasp the Will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life.<sup>4</sup> But it would never occur to such a Christian to think or to say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are 'the Catholic solutions' to problems.<sup>5</sup> That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism,

'official Catholicism', or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things. <sup>6</sup> You must foster everywhere a genuine 'lay outlook', which will lead to three conclusions: be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one's own personal responsibility; be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains; and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions. <sup>7</sup> It is obvious that, in this field as in all others, you would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God and which the Church freely recognises. Personal freedom is essential to the Christian life. <sup>8</sup> But do not forget, my children, that I always speak of a responsible freedom. Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency. A call to fulfil honourably your commitments as citizens, in all fields — in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in your job — accepting with courage all

the consequences of your free decisions and the personal independence which corresponds to each one of you. <sup>9</sup> A Christian 'lay outlook' of this sort will enable you to flee from all intolerance, from all fanaticism. To put it in a positive way, it will help you to live in peace with all your fellow citizens, and to promote this understanding and harmony in all spheres of social life.

## CHAPTER 6

<sup>1</sup> Contemplative prayer will rise within you whenever you meditate on this impressive reality: something as material as my body has been chosen by the Holy Spirit as His dwelling place... I no longer belong to myself... my body and soul, my whole being, belongs to God... <sup>2</sup> And this prayer will be rich in practical consequences, drawn from the great consequence which the Apostle himself proposed: 'glorify God in your bodies' (1 Cor 6:20). (...) <sup>3</sup> Let us take up the Shield of Faith (...), my beloved daughters and sons, to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and of holy Mary.

## Commentary

### Chapter 1:

Saint Josemaría starts his homily by reminding the audience why they are gathered here – *we are celebrating the holy Eucharist* (1:1). It is a sacred Christian ceremony and a sacrament of God’s presence in the world which has been celebrated in more or less the same form since the very beginning. Saint Justin Martyr describes it in one of his letters written around the year 155:

On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . . and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss. Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: ‘Amen.’ When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent. (Saint Justin the Martyr, *Apologiae*, cited in CCC, 1345)

Escrivá’s task here, as a priest – “he who presides”, is then to admonish and challenge his audience “to imitate these beautiful things”, meaning “the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets” (CCC, 1345). On this particular occasion though, his words are only loosely related to the readings of the day. He addressed a large but familiar crowd consisting of staff and students of the University of Navarra – an institution which he

founded himself only fifteen years before, an institution officially “linked to Opus Dei” (www.unav.es) – he chose this occasion to synthesize his teachings.

Already the first few introductory sentences of his homily say a lot about the message of Opus Dei. This short text firmly roots it in the entire Magisterium of the Catholic Church (via a reference to the sacrament of Eucharist) and positions Escrivá’s teachings in contrast with, or even against a particular *deformed vision of Christianity* (1:8). This, obviously, makes it almost as important as all the details given in later stages, because by saying what the message is aimed (defined) against, it dialectically adds meaning to and justifies what the message actually says.

The homily starts with a reference to the Eucharist, the sacrament which *links all the mysteries of Christianity* (1:1). It “is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life” (LG, 11) and “shows itself as the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel” (PO, 5), in other words – it is the radical, final consequence of the idea of Incarnation (as “the apex”):

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)  
While they were eating, he [“the Father’s only Son”] took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body”. (Mark 14:22)

But it is also at the same time “the source” of the life of the Church:

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. (John 6:53-56)

So the end is the beginning, Christ is therefore “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13). Millions of pages have been written on the subject over the past two thousand years. The purpose of this going back to basics (or stating the obvious) is far from trying to make a theological argument of any sort, but rather simply to set the stage for what follows in Saint Josemaría’s homily – the description (1:5) of a particular misunderstanding of this *profound and consoling truth, which theologians call the eschatological significance of the Eucharist* (1:4) and its consequences (1:6-7) for what is called the Christian life.

It is mistaken to think of Christianity as *something exclusively ‘spiritual’, proper to pure, extraordinary people*, who consider matter as merely *attached to the spirit* (1:5), says Escrivá. If it was a theological text, it would be just stating what has been considered obvious for hundreds of years. The description here presented brings to mind dualism of ancient Gnostic sects (widely defined), like Docetism perhaps, or some later heresies inspired by Neo-Platonism, in any case – lines of thought largely absent from today’s theological discourse. But since it is a homily (the audience consists of Catholic faithful), it is clear that these words are just a rhetorical trick and have to be placed in a historical context, they point to certain tendencies rather than giving an accurate account of an actual problem.

It could be said that Escrivá’s speech is simply aimed against “disembodied” Christianity, something which he later in the homily calls *dis-incarnation* (3:2); “simply”, because as a theological category it is very wide and as ancient as Christianity itself. In fact, the philosophical sources of this type of thinking are much older, and it can be safely said this

is the ever-present enemy of Christianity, which keeps haunting it throughout the ages. Here, however, it appears in the particular form of rejecting the Incarnation rather than denying Jesus' divinity, which would be the other extreme on the continuum. It may sound fairly insignificant at the moment, but it seems that, in some sense, this is the key to reading the remaining part of the homily and, since this homily captures the essence, "encapsulates his teachings", the key to reading the entire message of Opus Dei. Perhaps not yet the key to interpreting and understanding it, but at least here lies Saint Josemaría's fundamental diagnosis, and what follows is aimed against and tries to solve the given problem.

The immediate consequences of following *this deformed vision* (1:8) are easy to predict: overemphasis on the sacred spaces and times, conscious or sub-conscious condemnation of "the world" with all its profane realities, quasi-magical attitude to the sacred ceremonies and sacraments, and a naïve belief in the infallible institution which consists of pure, chosen people and therefore is *the ante-chamber of heaven* (1:6). If it was true, *the life of grace* would hardly ever *meet the turbulent march of human history* (1:7). All these, the mistaken vision and its consequences, are *flatly* rejected (1:8) at the very beginning of the homily, and therefore also at the defining core of the message of Opus Dei.

## **Chapter 2:**

*It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves* (2:1), says Saint Josemaría; one is immediately tempted to add provokingly: and not in churches. To sanctify is to purify from sin, but also (or rather at the same time) it means to make holy by setting apart as sacred, to consecrate, and it seems that Escrivá is closer

to the latter understanding. The logic here is: there is no point in sanctifying ourselves in places that are already set apart as sacred, because the only reason they were set apart in the first place was precisely to sanctify those inside:

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.” Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? (Matthew 23:16-17)

In other words, when in a church a person is already sanctified by virtue of being inside a sacred space and by taking part in a sacred ceremony, which is a celebration of *being* consecrated. Looking from this perspective, there is no room for sanctifying *yourself* here; in a way it would mean setting yourself apart from what is already set apart – what is the gain? “[What] is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same” (Matthew 5:47)? Saint Josemaría says then that you need to be *in the midst of the most material things of the earth* (2:1), in “the world”, if you want your personal sanctification to be meaningful.

In the following two verses (2:2-3) there is a short summary of the Church’s teaching on the original goodness of the created world and the origin of evil. Again, huge theological issues but as in the case against dualism in the previous chapter, here also Escrivá states the obvious in terms of the Magisterium. To quote the Catechism:

Because creation comes forth from God’s goodness, it shares in that goodness – “And God saw that it was good . . . very good” – for God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him. On many occasions the Church has had to defend the goodness of creation, including that of the physical world. (CCC, 299)

As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the domination of death; and inclined to sin. (CCC, 418)

So, again, it is a rhetorical “positioning device”, to add meaning and partly justify the message. What is interesting then is what for Josemaría immediately follows from these premises; not the assumptions, but the immediate conclusions: *any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God (2:4), who waits for us every day (...) in all the immense panorama of work (2:5), as there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it (2:6)*. There are many interesting issues here, some tackled for centuries and definitely beyond the scope of this modest commentary, but a few thoughts seem to be in place.

Since the world is good by nature and evil comes from our personal *sins and infidelities (2:3)*, then trying to avoid facing any earthly reality is obviously morally irresponsible. It would be *‘false spiritualism’ (Conversations, 121)* caused by either mistaken assumption about the nature of the created world or simply lack of courage to face reality and take responsibility for one’s life, also by over-identification with membership in the Church, with *‘official Catholicism’ (5:5)* which Escrivá touches upon later in the homily. All this is, however, fairly unproblematic. What is striking is the way in which this natural goodness of creation is extended to the social. Evil comes from personal sin, here the line is drawn, and on *‘the good side’* there is the creation, nature in the narrower sense, and, interestingly, all *honest realities of daily life (2:4)* which include *the immense panorama of work (2:5)*. The word “honest” is surely crucial here and a separate study on what it means in the teachings of Saint Josemaría could and perhaps should be carried out, but it is beyond the scope of this work. What is important, as the concept of work is at the very centre of the message of Opus Dei, is the status of the “panorama of work”, the world of

work, as something belonging almost to the God-created nature. So not only work as a task, fundamental duty and privilege of man is given to him by God, but also the reality that flows from and surrounds work as a process falls almost automatically into the “given-by-God” category.

One cannot forget here that the homily was delivered 1967, so only shortly after the II Vatican Council, and the majority of the Catholic social teaching was still to be developed. The current Catechism, first published in 1994, perhaps to a larger extent recognizes the existence of “dishonest” realities (to paraphrase Josemaría Escrivá) – social structures which do not come “from nature” but are a consequence of the proliferation of personal sins:

Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root. (CCC, 1865)

The consequences of original sin and of all men's personal sins put the world as a whole in the sinful condition aptly described in St. John's expression, “the sin of the world.” This expression can also refer to the negative influence exerted on people by communal situations and social structures that are the fruit of men's sins. (CCC, 408)

The idea of “communal situations and social structures” (CCC, 408) in the latter quotation from the Catechism refers to the post-synodal apostolic exhortation signed by Pope John Paul II and entitled *Reconciliation and Penance* (1984) which, among many other things, states:

[One] can speak of a communion of sin, whereby a soul that lowers itself through sin drags down with itself the church and, in some way, the whole world. In other words, there is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, the most strictly

individual one, that exclusively concerns the person committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family. According to this first meaning of the term, every sin can undoubtedly be considered as social sin. (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16)

Escrivá's homily cannot be treated as a theological text, he himself was not a theologian, the author of this thesis is not one either, but it would nevertheless be tempting to explore the beautiful idea of "discovering something divine in ordinary situations" (2:6) in the light of the quotations from the official Church documents above. In other words, since the social reality of everyday work and ordinary life is not always filled with natural goodness, how is one supposed to go about finding something divine in *dishonest* realities? How is it possible to distinguish between *honest* and *dishonest* ones?

After explaining the necessity to sanctify oneself in the midst of the ordinary life, Saint Josemaría moves to another key feature of the message of Opus Dei, the idea called by his followers "the unity of life". Again, these few sentences are clearly aimed against dualism, but this time (unlike at the end of Chapter 1 when it was approached from the perspective of the whole Church) Escrivá attacks it on the level of an individual, what he calls a *split personality* (2:8). To avoid *living a kind of double life* (2:7) he consequently advises first to '*materialize*' spiritual life (2:7) rather than '*spiritualize*' material life – a move very characteristic of his teachings, and perhaps counterintuitive in today's times – an idea that is further developed a bit later in the homily and called "*Christian materialism*" (3:3). *There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit* (2:8) says Saint Josemaría, *it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God* (2:9). Then again he adds where God is to be found by us, *men and women of the*

*world* (2:4), precisely *in* the world. How different (at least in vocabulary and not necessarily in theology) from Saint Augustine, who famously wrote in his *Confessions*:

Behold, you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. (Saint Augustine, *Confessions* X, 27, 38)

It all seems a bit confusing. There are, however, two kinds of “in” at play here, and two kinds of “world” as well. According to Escrivá *either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him* (2:10), but “in” means here simply *being* in – we have to find God while being in the world. This is easy to accept, in this sense Christians can be addressed as *men and women of the world* (2:4), for example along the lines of the following quote from the Gospel of John:

I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. (John 17:15-16)

But Saint Josemaría goes a step further and says that *the invisible God* is in fact to be found *in the most visible and material things* (2:9), and here perhaps lies the difference in vocabulary and emphasis. While for Augustine, and he is just an example, material things and creatures only pointed to God, but He himself was not there (“We are not your God! Seek you higher than us!” – *Confessions* X, 6, 9), for Escrivá there is no “high” or “low” in this particular sense. The context of using the term “the world” is also radically different from the way it was done even in the New Testament (especially in the Gospel and letters by Saint John the Apostle):

Do you not know that to be a lover of the world means enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a lover of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

At the same time *the things of this world* (1:5) have a very positive connotation in the message of Opus Dei; in fact this homily is entitled *Passionately Loving the World*. It is interesting and important, even though the two usages cannot be so easily compared and contrasted as, clearly, not only the context is different, but also the meaning – in biblical terms “the world” often means all that is hostile toward God and alienated from him, while Escrivá uses the common understanding of the term.

### **Chapter 3:**

While in the previous chapter Saint Josemaría talked about the need to materialize the spiritual (religious) life, already in the first sentence of this chapter the opposite movement is introduced – the need to “spiritualize” *the matter and the most trivial occurrences and situations* (3:1). It follows directly from the assertion that God is to be found in ordinary material things (2:9), one can clearly see the founder of Opus Dei did not mean it in a literal sense – the *noble and original meaning* of material world is to lead to God, is *a means and an occasion* (3:1) for meeting Him. Among many others, there are two absolutely crucial effects of the two movements mentioned above working together: firstly, it ensures *a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ* (3:1), therefore a continuous prayer; secondly it leads to a synthesis which Escrivá calls “*Christian materialism*” (3:3).

In the Christian tradition everyday life is inseparable from prayer. Luke's introduction to *The Parable of the Persistent Widow* says: "Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to *pray always* without becoming weary" (Luke 18:1). Saint Paul later adds "Rejoice always. *Pray without ceasing*. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes. 5:16-18). It can be safely said that these passages have had an enormous influence on the whole project called "the Christian life". The commandment to *pray always*, when taken literally, is however an obvious impossibility – "can we unceasingly bend our knees, bow down our bodies or uplift our hands, that he should tell us: *Pray without ceasing?*" asks Saint Augustine (1961, 344). These two biblical passages demand interpretation: either there has to be a second, symbolic, "higher" meaning or the definition of prayer had to be somehow widened. (Piątkowski 2007b:419)

What we have here is then the beginning of Escrivá's solution to this problem. To continue with the comparison to Saint Augustine (who serves as a rhetorical point of reference in this commentary, a role analogical to the one played by radical dualism is Saint Josemaría's homily):

One of the most prominent solutions to the problem of the call to continual prayer was given by Saint Augustine. Commenting on the Psalm 37(38) he provided the faithful with an explanation of how to *pray without ceasing*, or rather what the Scriptures meant by it. He said that there was another way of praying – *the way of desire*. "Whatever else you are doing, if you long for that sabbath, you are not ceasing to pray. If you do not want to cease praying, do not cease longing. Your unceasing desire is your unceasing prayer. You will lapse into silence if you loose your longing" (1961, 344). For him psalms were songs of longing. He quotes the psalmist: "My Lord, my deepest yearning is before you; my groaning is not hidden from you" (Psalm 38:9) and argues that prayer is nothing else than precisely this groaning of the soul. It *is not hidden from Him*, and is always there: "if the desire is always within, so too is the groaning: it does not always come to ears of men, but it is never absent from the ears of God" (1961, 345). (Piątkowski 2007b:420)

While both Escrivá and Augustine naturally start from the same premises – that the material world is good and/because it points to its Creator, and they are not contradictory in their conclusions, the message of Opus Dei emphasizes simply the "positive" side (*a*

*means and an occasion* for meeting Christ – 3:1), while in Augustine the crucial thing is the lack. To him the creation says “He made us” but “We are *not* your God!” (*Confessions* X, 6, 9), it directs to God precisely through the fact of not being Him, through creating and supporting the longing, the desire for God, which, in turn, sustains the unceasing prayer. This desire requires from a believer a kind of a “positive rejection” of the world – positive, because it is a rejection of something good for the sake of something far better, the ultimate, highest good.

Saint Josemaría proposes “Christian materialism” instead and, as can be seen in the following verses, he develops this idea in a truly dialectical fashion. First, there is “authentic Christianity” which opposes “dis-incarnation” (dualism) *without fear of being judged materialistic* (3:2), then follows “Christian materialism” (from the positive approach to the material world), which, in turn, *is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit* (3:3). In some sense Escrivá’s materialism, by being strongly against “*false spiritualism*” (*Conversations*, 121), tries to be the Catholic equivalent of these other “blind” materialisms, aims to compete with them. Like almost all other Christian thinkers, including Escrivá of course, Saint Augustine also started with anti-“dis-incarnation”, so to speak, but arrives at a form of anti-materialism. Again, this is just to paint the background and put the message of Opus Dei in some perspective – Augustine is an easy target here: he wrote in a completely different historical context and, because of his personal life-story (a fairly late convert from Manichaeism), he had strong Neo-Platonic inclinations. All this makes him in many ways, but all of them within the Catholic orthodoxy, a pretty good “anti-Escrivá” for the purposes of this commentary. Also one has to bear in mind that Escrivá himself is certainly not the first one to come up

with many of the ideas and arguments ascribed to him above. Both of them are just small parts of a huge interconnected Tradition.

To illustrate his line of thought, Saint Josemaría invokes an analogy with the sacraments. They are *the clearest manifestation of this way which God has chosen in order to sanctify us and to lead us to heaven* (3:4) that is: through material means.

Often Jesus asks the sick to believe. He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands, mud and washing. The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all." And so in the sacraments Christ continues to "touch" us in order to heal us. (CCC, 1504)

The Eucharist is truly the Holy Spirit at work (*the Love of God* – 3:4, through His gifts called the sacramental graces, see CCC, 2003) and truly *the adorable Body and Blood of our Redeemer* (...), but *offered to us through the lowly matter of this world* (3:5). Escrivá quotes the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) here, which says:

To those, therefore, who believe in divine love, He gives assurance that the way of love lies open to men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one. He cautions them at the same time that this charity is not something to be reserved for important matters, but must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life. (...) Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse: while He calls some to give clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family, He summons others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs. Yet He frees all of them so that by putting aside love of self and bringing all earthly resources into the service of human life they can devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God. The Lord left behind a pledge of this hope and strength for life's journey in that sacrament of faith where natural elements refined [cultivated] by man are gloriously changed into His Body and Blood, providing a meal of brotherly solidarity and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. (GS, 38)

What effectively Escrivá does then, at least in his rhetoric through analogy and not necessarily in theology, is that he somehow extends the logic behind the concept of a sacrament (Greek *mysterion* – CCC, 774) to all material realities. It is an interesting move; he refers to *Gaudium et Spes* to back it up, but this document does not really say the same thing, its emphasis is on the future, not necessarily on immediate material reality:

Pope Paul VI added: “Considered from a Christian point of view, work has an even loftier connotation. It is directed to the establishment of a supernatural order here on earth” (1967, s.28). Daily work, “which in most cases is of temporal character” (John XXIII 1961, s.256), is then *directed at the future*, and it is the whole of humanity that is to *become* an acceptable offering to God. This is not to say that there is a theological shift between the official papal teaching and that of Opus Dei; my aim is just to point out the important differences in vocabulary, and how the accents and priorities are placed. (Piątkowski 2007b:429)

So the “immediate reality / future” distinction is, in a way, abolished. Another thing worth acknowledging, however, is the extension of the logic to *all* material realities by virtue of them being God’s creation. There are only seven sacraments and they constitute very particular ways of meeting God (just as Christ, the Messiah, was a particular man), and this particularity is obviously crucial, as it is rooted in tradition:

The Chosen People [Israel] received from God distinctive signs and symbols that marked its liturgical life. These are no longer solely celebrations of cosmic cycles and social gestures, but signs of the covenant, symbols of God's mighty deeds for his people. (...) The Church sees in these signs a prefiguring of the sacraments of the New Covenant. (CCC, 1150)

In Saint Josemaría’s homily, then, “all material realities” means “every single one” rather than the whole of it generally, but ‘metaphysically’, one has to add – “every single *honest* one”. In any case, only when these two distinctions collapse the analogy to the sacraments

stands. So first the spiritual life became ‘materialized’ and now the material realities become ‘spiritualized’. It happens through *an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord* (3:6) in which *everything is included, even what seems most commonplace* (3:7).

#### **Chapter 4:**

By the *doctrine of holy Scripture which is to be found in the very nucleus of the spirit of Opus Dei* (4:1), Saint Josemaría means this *ascending movement* (3:6), the offering of every single little thing of everyday life (4:1). He quoted two passages from Saint Paul as the basis of this idea:

[The] world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God. (1 Corinthians 3:22-23)

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

It is the first and only time in this homily when Escrivá uses the crucial concept of *the spirit of Opus Dei* (4:1), something very difficult to define and describe (in this case it has a doctrine in its nucleus). It can probably only be understood through an analogy with the Holy Spirit, as something (someone) that “builds, animates and sanctifies” (CCC, 747) Opus Dei. Escrivá was then simply the first person to live according to this spirit which revealed itself in the founding vision and had led him ever since, and now it leads many others, to do *work perfectly, to love God and mankind by putting love in the little things of everyday life, and discovering that divine something which is hidden in small details* (4:1). This is perhaps one of the most important sentences of this homily referring directly

to Opus Dei – it says simply that Opus Dei is driven by a spirit, which makes/allows its followers to find God in everyday life through *perfect* work.

Work is absolutely central to the message – it seems obvious since it is a God-given duty and privilege of mankind, and since it occupies most of our time on earth. It has to be perfect because it is an offering (as there is *an ascending movement* – 3:6). First there comes the discovery of *that divine something in small details* (4:1), then the transformation of it through work into an acceptable offering, then the very act of offering. In the context of the analogy between everyday reality and the celebration of the Eucharist, work acquires a very special status. As it was said earlier, *matter and the most trivial occurrences and situations* are to be turned into *a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ* (3:1), at the same time *each Sacrament is the Love of God giving itself to us by way of material means* (3:4). Every ordinary situation is to become a sort of a sacred ceremony, the matter that is involved in it is to be transformed into “bread and wine” through work, and then into the equivalent of Body and Blood (an occasion to meet Christ) through offering it to God. After all, every Christian through baptism is a priest sent to the world:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. (LG, 10)

*Doing things well* (4:2), then, is more important than the fact of doing them, because only in this way every place and situation will be sacred, set outside “the world”; carrying out one’s work *with love* (4:3) allows it to transcend the immediate material reality and

makes it acceptable as an offering. Work which is not perfect and done without love is worthless. Going beyond oneself in every situation is *making heroic verse out of the prose of each day* (4:4). Escrivá, basing on the teachings of the Church, paints a picture of a lay Christian who, while in the “profane” world, is both a priest and a temple at the same time; Heaven and earth merge in his heart (on “the altar”, 4:5), and the whole program of his life is to sanctify himself and the immediate reality around him (4:6). It is as if he was to celebrate his whole life as a sacred ceremony, transforming and offering as much of the material reality he encounters as he can.

For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)

Since the sacred is here already, or rather the baptized are consecrated precisely to bring about the sacred to the world, Escrivá calls them to *stop dreaming* and to *leave behind false idealism, fantasies, and mystical wishful thinking* (4:7). But not escaping, not evading the realities of daily life (2:4) is not enough: turning *seriously to the most material and immediate reality* (4:8) becomes the ultimate duty and personal responsibility, an inexhaustible source of motivation – the whole creation awaits the baptized (see Romans 8:19). There is then an immense amount of work to do.

## **Chapter 5:**

The latter parts of Saint Josemaría’s homily are dominated by the description of some of the consequences, the main ones perhaps and largely connected with the social sphere, of living fully one’s baptismal vocation in accordance with the message of Opus Dei. The

key theme of this chapter is personal freedom. For Escrivá *it is obvious that (...) you would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God (5:7)*. Saint Josemaría is, therefore, consequent in emphasizing the personal – since the evil of the world comes from the proliferation of the individual *sins and infidelities (2:3)*, true goodness also springs from individual acts (the sanctifying ones, of going beyond oneself). Freedom is primal, comes from creation, only on this basis it is possible to be a ‘priest’ and a ‘temple’ in the world at the same time, a self-contained producer of sanctified reality.

The consequences of *starting from these truths (5:1)* are numerous. One begins to love the world, as it is *where he finds Christ (5:1)*, more precisely – where one finds the means and occasions (3:1) to meet Him. The world is a church and a workplace in one, provider of endless raw material for making “bread and wine”, waiting to be redeemed. The faithful to the message have to *become properly formed, intellectually and professionally (5:2)* – because of this distinction one is tempted to call them (ironically) “worker-priests”. Being in the world, however, in this case in the social sphere, is firmly linked to acting in it, one almost equals the other; one is in the world by virtue of acting in its various spheres. From here the next leap in the logic becomes easy – being a good professional worker becomes a moral issue, because acting and being in are almost the same. To *become properly formed (...) professionally (5:2)* is a comparable obligation to learning prayers, the Catechism, reading the Scriptures, and so on.

*In matters of free discussion (5:6)*, that is in everything outside the official teaching of the Catholic Church, one *makes up [one’s] own mind with complete freedom about the*

*problems of the environment in which [one] moves* (5:3). The environment here is everything from the most trivial situations and encounters with people to grand political problems. Only the Church's Magisterium – the deposit of faith – is held in common, as the Church is a community; for an opinion in every other field the responsibility is strictly personal. The social is a *sphere* in which a large group of completely free individuals act, nothing more and nothing less. It is interesting to see the only difference between a Christian and a non-Christian here – the former tries humbly *to grasp the Will of God* (5:3) even in the most trivial situations, as opposed to just following his/her own inclinations. Both are free, capable of personal reflection (taking a step back from the *environment in which [they] move* – 5:3), because this freedom comes with creation.

The attack on what Saint Josemaría calls 'clericalism' or 'official Catholicism' that follows (5:5) stems directly from his views on personal freedom. Since freedom and individualism occupy such a prominent place in his teachings, there is no *stepping down from the temple into the world*, that is from a place of meeting Christ to the profane where he is supposed to be absent, *to represent the Church* (5:4). That would be 'dis-incarnation' (3:2), lack of faith in the fact that he is present in both places. The Will of God has to be searched for in every situation separately, therefore it is even simply impossible to have ready-made *Catholic solutions to problems* (5:4). Since God is in every little detail of ordinary life, decisions have to be made individually – there is practically no other way, but they nevertheless have to be informed by the teachings of the Church, as well as the individual conscience according to which the decision is made has to be formed by the same teachings. If all this is expected from God's people, then they have to be able to freely transcend the given situation, take a step back and reflect, interpret rather than directly apply. Otherwise they would not be able to sanctify

themselves (5:7). To summarize then, ‘the temple’ and ‘the world’ (5:4), although still differentiated objectively, are equal by virtue of being places of meeting Christ. This idea and its consequences – personal freedom, the unity of life – belong to *the very nature of things* (5:5); thinking and acting otherwise (clericalism in this case) is to do violence to nature.

In dialectical opposition to the clerical attitude described in the previous verses, Escrivá presents an alternative – *a genuine 'lay outlook'* (5:6). Over the years it has become one of the catch phrases in the language of Opus Dei. This idea leads to *three conclusions* (5:6), or rather ‘fostering’ it has a threefold effect – one will accept full responsibility for one’s actions (being *sufficiently honest*) without blaming the environment, the world, claiming to have been determined by something, etc.; one will respect opinions contrary to one’s own, unless they contradict the Magisterium of course, through accepting that other *brothers in the Faith* (5:6) also seek to grasp the same Will of God and to follow the same Christ (being *sufficiently Christian*); and finally one will not involve *our Mother the Church* (5:6) in politics, broadly-defined, because it would deny its universality (being *sufficiently Catholic*).

As the reader has been repeatedly shown, ‘the programme’ (5:7), the message of Opus Dei is entirely based on a certain understanding of the notion of freedom. Only absolutely independent individuals are able to be faithful to it; the communal and social aspect of the Church and the world is almost absent from the homily. True, these individuals are dependent on the Church, but understood more as a body of knowledge, the teachings, rather than a simple community of ordinary people. In spite of all the talk against ‘dis-incarnation’ (3:2), the Church in Escrivá’s homily comes across as a fairly abstract,

supernatural institution, which teaches and guards the boundaries of *matters of free discussion* (5:6), secures the space and conditions for personal encounter with Christ. This freedom, however, has to be responsible (5:8), says Saint Josemaría. It is very interesting to see what he means by that – *a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency* (5:8). As with his approach to work and many other issues, the logic stays the same – for freedom to be responsible means that exercising rights and privileges becomes a duty. Again, the two become inseparable: if you can, then you have to! If one is able to find an opportunity to make up one's mind, take a certain responsibility, one should do it *accepting with courage all the consequences of [one's] free decisions and the personal independence* (5:8). This radical attitude to life, a *Christian 'lay outlook' of this sort* (5:9), will inevitably and repeatedly put the faithful in a very vulnerable position, but the aims of it are clearly defined – it is supposed to teach humility and awareness of one's own shortcomings. Only with that comes tolerance in the true sense of the word, *life in peace with all (...) fellow citizens* (5:9), and, last but far from least, only in this way is the 'lay outlook' (but consequently the whole 'program', the message of Opus Dei in general, and finally the Catholic faith) to be promoted. Here Escrivá gives a hint about how the apostolate (proselytism and finding new members for the organization) should look like.

## **Chapter 6:**

The conclusion of Saint Josemaría's homily, at first sight a fairly standard summary and a general admonition "to imitate these beautiful things" (CCC, 1345), is in fact quite interesting – it contains certain promises (*contemplative prayer will rise within you whenever you meditate on this* – 6:1, and: *this prayer will be rich in practical consequences* – 6:2), and as a result it advocates an interesting theology of prayer, more

precisely, of the relation between meditation, contemplation and action. The author of this thesis commented on a similar topic in another text:

Although Saint Josemaría on another occasion said: “first, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place, very much 'in the third place', action” (1987c, s.82), he seems to suggest here that when in the spiritual life one reaches a point in which fervour is insufficient and words are too poor, one should turn to action, to work in particular (carrying out duties), as a form of contemplation. Then he adds a very peculiar phrase about loving Jesus in a more effective way. The application of the adjective “effective” (with all its economical and managerial connotations) to loving Jesus could itself be easily a topic of a separate article on Opus Dei’s teachings on work in relation to the wider field of management spirituality. What is, however, of key importance to this argument is the relation between words (lectio?, vocal prayer) and action (work). The question is which one is poor when compared to the other? Or rather: which one reaches its limit first on the way of spiritual development? The founder of Opus Dei said that its “weapon is not work; it is prayer. That is why we turn work into prayer, and why we have a contemplative soul” (Escrivá, quoted in Illanes 2003, 195). If work can replace words in contemplation, then truly it must be possible to convert it into prayer. (Piątkowski 2007b:424-425)

Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative” (CCC, 2699). Escrivá invites his *beloved daughters and sons* (6:3) to *meditate on this impressive reality* (6:1), the reality on which his entire message is built: “your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19). To meditate is, in effect, to “make [what we read] our own by confronting it with ourselves” (CCC, 2706). Without pausing in his homily, Escrivá starts immediately to meditate in his habitual way, as if trying to take the attendants of the mass with him a few steps towards contemplation: *something as material as my body has been chosen by the Holy Spirit as His dwelling place... I no longer belong to myself... my body and soul, my whole being, belongs to God* (6:1)... This is supposed to lead one surely into contemplative prayer, that is, to allow one to “recollect [one’s] whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of

the Lord which we are, awaken [one's] faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us" (CCC, 2711). In other words, in the light of this particular truth, but also, by extension, in the light of the entire message of Opus Dei, one should be able to "recollect" bits and pieces of oneself completely, so to speak, and put it all in a fully coherent whole under the gaze of God. Living according to "the spirit of Opus Dei" (4:1) is then a true vocational path, as it potentially encompasses one's entire life and being. However, as has been said before, that is not all, as *this contemplative prayer will be rich in practical consequences* (6:2):

The mystery of Christ is celebrated by the Church in the Eucharist, and the Holy Spirit makes it come alive in contemplative prayer so that our charity will manifest it in our acts. (CCC, 2718)

"Therefore, glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20) says Escrivá quoting Saint Paul, the spirit of Opus Dei will create a contemplative soul in you; converting work into prayer you will love Jesus more effectively – an interesting and somehow paradoxical logic at the heart of the message of Opus Dei. He goes on: *let us take up the Shield of Faith* (6:3), a shield understood, however, not as something "to quench all (the) flaming arrows of the evil one" (original context, Ephesians 6:16), but more as something *to show* (6:3), like a painted coat of arms rather than a protection from the 'evil one', to prove *that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy* (6:3).

## Introduction to the Psalm

*The title of this Book may be misleading, as “psalm”, according to the original Greek meaning of the word, is a song accompanied by stringed instruments, while the text below is simply a prayer of intercession to be recited. The term is used here, however, more as an analogy and allusion to the Liturgy of the Hours, a practice of regular chanting or reciting psalms as a form of prayer. The psalm in this thesis is then a Prayer for Saint Josemaría’s Intercession taken from the official Prayer Card, widely distributed by the Prelature and easily available in many languages, also from Opus Dei website. It is a prayer of crucial importance in Opus Dei, not only because it is frequently recited by the members, but also because many of the*

*miracles attributed to Escrivá before (and also after) his beatification (1992) and canonization (2002) had happened through this prayer.*

*Together with the Genesis and the Message, this book completes the dogmatic part of the thesis, a part in which the ideological framework is presented and analyzed. The theological concept of intercessory prayer serves almost as an excuse to comment on the role of the founder in Opus Dei, the crucial relation between Saint Josemaría and the organization. Another and final attempt to paint in abstract terms an image of the Work as an institution is made; again, very little attention is given to its structural, visible side.*

## PSALM

1. God,
2. through the mediation of Mary our Mother,
3. you granted your priest St. Josemaría countless graces,
4. choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei,
5. a way of sanctification in daily work
6. and in the fulfilment of the Christian's ordinary duties.
  
7. Grant that I too may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life
  
8. into occasions of loving You and serving the Church, the Pope and all souls
9. with joy and simplicity,
10. lighting up the pathways of this earth with faith and love.
11. Deign to grant me,
12. through the intercession of St. Josemaría,
13. the favour of ... (make your request).
14. Amen

## Commentary

### 1-4

By the end of his life Escrivá would often say “I am not necessary, I will help you more from heaven”, bringing to mind famous words of Saint Dominic on his deathbed:

“Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life.” (CCC, 956)

They were both referring to the service of intercessory prayer. Having left this world in the ‘odour of sanctity’ in 1975, Saint Josemaría has been flooded with petitions of the members and sympathizers of Opus Dei ever since. Miraculous events soon followed and, in effect, his canonization was one of the quickest in the Church’s history. The ‘official’ prayer card with the prayer for Saint Josemaría’s intercession has been widely distributed spreading the devotion to him; it is recited frequently by the members of Opus Dei.

“Prayer of intercession consists in asking on behalf of another” (CCC, 2647) and it is “fulfilled in the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (CCC, 2574):

In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks “not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others,” even to the point of praying for those who do him harm. (CCC, 2635)

The prayer, for some perhaps surprisingly, is then addressed directly to the Triune God (1:1): the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But before Saint Josemaría comes into play, another *mediation* has to be mentioned, that of *Mary our Mother* (1:2). Mary has a very special place in the Catholic order of faith:

Mary gave her consent in faith at the Annunciation and maintained it without hesitation at the foot of the Cross. Ever since, her motherhood has extended to the brothers and sisters of her Son “who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties.” Jesus, the only mediator, is the way of our prayer; Mary, his mother and ours, is wholly transparent to him: she “shows the way” (*hodigitria*), and is herself “the Sign” of the way, according to the traditional iconography of East and West. (CCC, 2674)

Jesus “is the only mediator” then, but his constant mediation is in a way assumed through the belief in God as a Trinity of persons. In other words, in Christianity addressing God equals asking for Christ’s mediation, as there is no other way (“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” – John 14:6), and therefore it often goes without saying. With Mary the situation is, obviously, very different. For Catholics (and the Orthodox) she is the *Mediatrix*, but only through her Son, that is, by being the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). Her mediation “rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it” (*LG*, 60). Her role is to point to him, but at the same time she “is wholly transparent to him” (CCC, 2674; “the favoured one” or “full of grace” – see Luke 1:28), prayers flow through her freely, and her own intercessory prayers are perfect. She is *our Mother* (1:2) – the Mother of the Church:

As St. Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ. For in the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother. (*LG*, 63)

So already at the very beginning of the prayer for Escrivá’s intercession (1:1-2) the key mediations are included – that of the “one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God” and that of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (Nicene Creed), the Mystical Body

of Christ, of which Mary is a type; both absolutely necessary, in this commentary particularly for understanding the role of Saint Josemaría's intercession.

The first four verses of this prayer add up to a little story, which sounds as if it tried to remind God what he had done for Escrivá and through him. *Through the mediation of Mary* (1:2, that is, because of Josemaría's devotion to her and/or through the Church) he granted Escrivá *countless graces* (1:3) and chose him as *a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei* (1:4), God's own creation – the Work of God. This is something very characteristic of intercessory prayer in the Judeo-Christian tradition, exactly in this way Moses interceded for Israel:

The arguments of his prayer – for intercession is also a mysterious battle – will inspire the boldness of the great intercessors among the Jewish people and in the Church: God is love; he is therefore righteous and faithful; he cannot contradict himself; he must remember his marvellous deeds, since his glory is at stake, and he cannot forsake this people that bears his name. (CCC, 2577)

God's marvellous deeds, in this case, are Escrivá's holy life and the organization, Opus Dei – both deeply interconnected and dependent on each other, as the mission to found Opus Dei was his personal calling. At the same time only thanks to the act of his free will, or rather the numerous (*countless* – 1:3) acts of faithfully opening up to God's will, the founding was at all possible. Josemaría was chosen to be an *instrument* (1:4), so for the particular grace of founding he was best suited, that is, the most porous for grace to flow through. The reality much bigger than him had been created through him and thanks to him. He had been prepared for the task since the day he was born, so his whole life, down to the smallest details, is meaningful in the light of this event, including the socio-cultural

and historical environment, his character traits, etc., because through all these little details the new institutional reality within the Church was manifested ‘most faithfully’.

## 5-6

The following two verses (1:5-6) give a very short but valuable definition of Opus Dei. Although it is repeated many times in other texts about the Work, it is worth taking a closer look now. It says that Opus Dei, as an organization, an institution, is *a way of sanctification* (1:5) of one’s life. Of course, essentially sanctification in the Catholic order of faith can only be achieved through God’s grace, faith in Christ and the sacraments, this is binding for everyone. On another level there are, however, different spiritualities or traditions: established ways to holiness of which a good example could be the monastic tradition. For a monk:

Chanting psalms seven times a day was to serve as an inspiration, strengthen the continual prayer of life. Each of the seven offices was meant to sanctify the time that followed: work, *lectio divina*, or rest. The Liturgy of the Hours, the *opus Dei* (work of God), became the main occupation of Benedictine monks, provided structure and was the central point of their lives. (Piątkowski 2007b:420)

It all provides another revealing insight into the fundamental difference between Opus Dei and religious orders, and therefore almost directly into what Opus Dei in fact is, as it often defines itself as *not* being a religious order. The Work is not a group of people united by a commitment to certain ways of sanctification which then add up to a particular way of life, like monasticism, often summarized in a rule; rather it is itself *a way of sanctification* (1:5). So if, for example, Catholic communities of monks living under the Rule of Saint Benedict and committed to reciting the Liturgy of the Hours form the Order of Saint Benedict, then it would seem that Opus Dei is, in this order of things,

the equivalent of the Liturgy, and not of the Order; as strange as it may sound – of a prayer, not of an institution. Obviously this is not to say that liturgy and prayer do not feature in the ‘sanctifying’ sense in the lives of Opus Dei members: they do, but more as a part of *fulfilment of the Christian’s ordinary duties* (1:6) – like *daily work* (1:5), which seems to be elevated to an almost comparable status. Opus Dei is not a religious order then, nor a religious community of any sort for that matter, because it organizes reality on a different level, or, to be more precise, because the relation between sanctification and organization occurs in a different place. All this serves to create and maintain the ‘lay outlook’, a fundamentally secular character, without compromising the radicalism of following Christ. It also has its inherent problems, but consequently very unlike ones already encountered by religious organizations within the Catholic Church.

What is striking from this perspective is the insistence on the word ‘way’ when describing Opus Dei (1:5), but later also ‘pathway’ (1:10, originally in Spanish the same word is used in both cases: ‘camino’), when the prayer presents the desirable effects of such a ‘way’ of life – the *lighting up the pathways of this earth with faith and love* (1:10). A strange image comes out of it, that of a way (of sanctification) which lights up other (earthly) ways. There are, then, two realities – the earthly one and that of faith and love – but both of them are in constant movement alongside each other. Nothing is fixed here and there is no apparent conflict between these realities; on the contrary, faith and love ‘merely’ light up the already good earthly reality, add more meaning to it without changing it in any way. Through metaphors like this the message of Opus Dei defends itself from the constant pressure to narrow down its scope, so that Opus Dei itself becomes easier to define and categorize by the ‘outside world’, including the rest of the Church.

## 7-14

So far God has been reminded of his ‘marvellous deeds’, the sanctity of Josemaría Escrivá confirmed by the Church and of his own ‘opus’. Now it is time for the petition. The next four verses are, however, still something in-between, or rather a bit of both. What follows is the description of how Escrivá had striven to live his life (after all, that struggle helped him into heaven) on one hand, and the beginning of petition on the other. One asks that one *too may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into occasions of loving You and serving the Church, the Pope and all souls with joy and simplicity, lighting up the pathways of this earth with faith and love* (1:7-10). This ‘too’ is obviously crucial here, it means: as Escrivá himself had done throughout his life and as the message of Opus Dei teaches (indistinguishable matters), in other words, in the spirit of Opus Dei, of which Saint Josemaría is the embodiment, the incarnation.

Escrivá’s intercession already starts here, although he himself at this moment has a passive role to play, serves as a sort of a filter for grace, *casus* in the dialogue of prayer. God is reminded that he had done it once already and is simply asked to do it again. After all, *he cannot contradict himself and his glory is at stake* (CCC, 2577). He is the ever living, unchanging God – he grants something once and the whole channel, the whole *way of sanctification* (1:5) is opened. What is more, there is no reason for privileging Escrivá over other people in this matter. He may be a saint, an exceptional person, the first one to receive this spirit, but it was still a gift; by definition he could not possibly deserve it. Even if it was somehow possible and Saint Josemaría did, in fact, do something extraordinary or prayed in some special way, one can always ask him, through the communion of saints, to pray in the same way in his name. And that is part of the

essence of intercession in Catholicism – from an ‘earthly’ perspective God, out of love and boundless generosity, allows himself to be trapped by a simple logical trick. However, there is yet another dimension, a communal, horizontal one. “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:4):

Within the communion of the Church, the Holy Spirit "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank" for the building up of the Church. Now, "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (CCC, 951)

The graces are distributed for building up the Church. It is impossible to deserve them, therefore they do not belong to particular people like possessions, they cannot be kept privately, and it is one’s duty to fully ‘redistribute’ them. Some, however, seem to be more religiously ‘gifted’ than others:

“Must there not then necessarily be “equality of opportunity”, and must not the same certainty be available to everyone? But it will perhaps be evident from our line of argument that this question is misdirected: God’s dialogue with men operates only through men’s dialogue with each other. The difference in religious gifts that divides men into “prophets” and hearers forces them into speaking to and for one another. (...) Ultimately religion is not to be found along the solitary path of the mystic but only in the community of proclaiming and hearing.” (Ratzinger 2000:94-5)

It seems that this time it is the people, the Church, who are tricked into something. In this game Escriva is the ‘proclaiming’ one, a ‘prophet’ who had a more direct contact with God when on earth, and even more so now, as a saint, as all the above mentioned extends to the dead brothers in faith:

"Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. . . . [They] do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the

one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. . . . So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped." (CCC, 956)

To summarize, what does one really mean when praying to God: *deign to grant me, through the intercession of St. Josemaria, the favour of...* (1:11-13)? On a very basic level, in a simple, direct conversation with God, the life of a saint serves as an almost legal *casus*. There is the ‘*grant that I too*’ (1:7) plea which is followed by a description of a particular grace given to Escrivá in his lifetime, so a humble admission that he, thanks to his faith, received more from this point of view. But it does not end on a simple voice of admiration, the will to imitate Escrivá is declared, or rather the will to imitate the way he imitated Christ – his *way of sanctification* (1:5), but at the same time that of Opus Dei, it would seem. For all that Escrivá, himself is to pray without ceasing and “proffer the merits which [he] acquired on earth” (CCC, 956).

## ANALYSIS OF THE DOGMA

The Work was born with the same naturalness with which a spring flows with water; because the water is there, it has to come forth. It is a supernatural phenomenon which we can't explain humanly. The Lord chose me, a disproportionate instrument so that from the beginning it was clear that the Work is His. Some people ask about the theology which explains the birth and development of Opus Dei. They don't realize that, when the Life-giving Spirit wants to raise up in the Church something new which breaks with the traditional – never totally because there is a chain from the apostolic period – the first thing He does is establish the pastoral phenomenon, which can be full of a theology. In the case of the Work, it is a most delicate theology, an asceticism that is mystical because we unite action with contemplation in such a way that it's possible to say that we are totally active and totally contemplative. Before provoking one of these pastoral phenomena, the Hierarchy of the Church and the person whom God has wanted to use to raise it up, must examine to see if the life and norm of this new phenomenon are in agreement with the Ecclesiastical Magisterium. Besides, it's necessary to keep in mind that the repetition of acts produces the custom, and from there the juridical norm is born: the law has to proceed from the custom, from the lived pastoral phenomenon. The theory comes afterwards. You will write it after the years go by. You will be able to write magnificent treatises on the theology of Opus Dei, the asceticism of Opus Dei, the Mysticism of Opus Dei, the pastoral phenomenon of Opus Dei... You yourselves will write all of this. However, it is up to me to do it. To think differently is to be mistaken, to not understand how the works of God are born. To found any human society, cultural, sporting... a number of persons must come together, define the ends, look for plans... God acts in another way: first, He raises up the pastoral phenomenon, which leads one to live in a particular way. And when this life has the proper characteristics – because at times it does not have them because they are general – from there comes forth the theory, the theological reflection.

Saint Josemaría Escrivá (1964),  
translation taken from *The Truth Will Make You Free*, a blog by Fr Robert A. Connor.

## **The supernatural birth**

The quotation from Saint Josemaría, even though it is taken from an informal gathering of Opus Dei members, is of crucial importance and should, perhaps, be made a subject of another commentary, treated as ‘evidence’, empirical data. Yet it serves a different role in this thesis – an intermediate step between the empirical data and its conceptual analysis. In Escrivá’s own words, it partly summarizes what has been said in the *Genesis* about the birth of Opus Dei, talks about the fundamental order of things, and, crucially, about the difference between an ordinary organization and something divinely inspired. In this way the definition of “a work of God” is established, a religious organization in the strictest sense. This is the way God acts, says Escrivá, and in this way sets ground rules for how to approach Opus Dei, rules that form what one is tempted to call a paradigm. The fundamental organizing process, that is, the links and the dynamics between key concepts, is presented as “the way God acts”. Therefore, in spite of what Escrivá himself says, it is already a first step into a theology, a crucial step as it forms the fundamental theology of Opus Dei, so to speak, creates a framework that has God’s authority behind it. The pastoral phenomenon is given precedence, the process of consolidation and “routinization” (Weber 1968) should follow immediately, as it is not Saint Josemaría who is the founder, but God himself.

The Work “is a supernatural phenomenon which we can’t explain humanly” (Escrivá 1964). What is most striking in the *Genesis* of Opus Dei, however, and also fairly obvious by now, is that Opus Dei is already there, so to speak, immediately in the vision. Josemaría was just to become the first member and spread God’s work. First came the depth, an idea full of meaning which promised life full of meaning. Opus Dei was born

into the abstract sphere straight away, immediately. This is what makes it different from any “human society”, where:

[t]his search for objectivity is accomplished via objectification in the sense that the concrete, i.e. people and work enterprises, have to be turned into abstracts which then again have to be concretized: individuals behave in organizations... (Sievers 1994:5)

Opus Dei from the very beginning claims to be what other, “human”, organizations come to be in the course of years. This is the value of the claim to supernatural birth. From the very beginning Escrivá had claimed to merely “behave in” the organization founded from above, he was the first to behave in it as objective reality. From here, so from the divinely inspired vision, stem the claims of the Work to immortality and to a truly universal character. And yet it is not that simple.

### **Spirit the first mover, Escrivá the first moved**

Since “whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another (...), it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God” (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 2, 3). The divine push, in the case of Opus Dei, culminated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1928 in the visionary experience. However:

Escrivá’s reluctance to talk in detail about what happened on October 2, 1928, make it impossible to know for certain which aspects of his foundational task emerged clearly from the initial vision and which remained to be defined. Therefore an analysis of that vision and its earliest development, which largely involved Escrivá’s effort to apply the message he had received to his own life, has to be based on what he subsequently said and did. (Coverdale 2002:58)

The reality of Opus Dei comes back to the human level then, having gone through one cycle of objectification (Sievers 1994:5), it is now ready for the second cycle. The result is extraordinary, as through the whole process Escrivá lost his claim to authorship, and yet, as the only “carrier” of the “first movement” of the spirit of Opus Dei, he fully kept the position of the founder on the human level. So the situation after the first cycle of objectification is very much like the situation of a charismatic person who is about to found a purely “human” institution, and yet the difference is crucial, as God became involved as the true author. Since then Opus Dei sort of “happens” between the two poles: the divine and the human. That is why Josemaría talked about “doing Opus Dei”, in spite of the fact that at the same time and from the very beginning he had thought of it as of objective reality.

Opus Dei’s entire claim to originality, as a breakthrough institution within the Catholic Church, its struggle for a satisfactory legal form, should be viewed in the light of the special position that Escrivá assumed. He repeatedly taught that all “Christians can and should be not just other Christs, *alter Christus*, but Christ himself: *ipse Christus*” (*In Love with the Church*, 38). Among his “sons and daughters” in Opus Dei he held and still holds a place perhaps analogical that of Saint Paul, who wrote: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). To imitate Escrivá, especially now that he is no longer physically present, is to study his life. He himself became “objectified” (while still alive) as the incarnation of the spirit of Opus Dei and became an object of quasi-ethnographical studies. This, in a way, makes all the members, especially those who write “the theory [that] comes afterwards” (theologians – Escrivá 1964) amateur ethnographers of their founder’s life, so to speak. This quasi-academic attitude allowed for the process of

“routinization” of the Work of God (Weber 1968) to begin while the founder was still alive.

That would be the internal explanation, with faith in the Work of God in the background. On the other hand, to consequently follow the argument of Burkard Sievers, the first cycle of objectification could be understood in completely different way:

[Man] wants to be a cosmic hero, contributing with his energies to nothing less than the greatness and pleasure of gods themselves. At the same time, this risk inflates him to proportions he cannot stand; he becomes too much like the gods themselves, and he must renounce this dangerous power.” (Becker 1975, cited in Sievers 1994:170)

Whereas Sievers, in the context of work enterprises and with an entirely different agenda in mind, sees “this human tendency to achieve legitimation and objectivity by converting men into gods” as possibly coming from “a fundamental societal splitting, dividing managers from workers” (1994:170), the corresponding split within the Church occurs in a different place. It could be the one between the religiously “talented” and “untalented” as seen by Ratzinger (2004:94), and not necessarily the more obvious one between priesthood and laity. Escrivá, having had a direct experience of the divine, was clearly “talented”, therefore he became an objective “channel” for all his followers who belong to the “untalented” majority. Once this fact is firmly established, Opus Dei functions very much like a “human institution”, although still quite an extraordinary one, as it necessarily depends on studies of Saint Josemaría’s life.

Gideon Kunda in his *Engineering Culture* (1992) described an organization in some ways similar to the Work, a company which he called Tech. His book, among other things,

exposed the usage of quasi-religious practices under the guise of managing corporate culture (see also: Pratt 2000b, for example for a similar, but smaller-scale project). What is interesting, however, is that a crucial role in this company was played by “a large group of internal ideologists, acting as lay ethnographers (...), [who] have created a systematic and full-blown theory of Tech culture” (Kunda 1992:218). Their aim was “to marry [the workers] to the company” (1992:7), so that they “feel freedom to seize the opportunity presented to them and develop their own personal goals within the parameters of the company goals” (1992:64). Of course these two cases cannot be treated equally, in a business environment such practices are morally dubious, to say the least, they are merely a more sophisticated way of providing motivation (“a surrogate of meaning” – Sievers 1994:26). The point of this comparison lies somewhere else, in pointing at a very specific character of “the Opus Dei theory” that follows the pastoral phenomenon, its role and natural restrictions.

### **Opus Dei as a perpetuum mobile**

The cycle of self-actualization began. The spirit gave rise to Opus Dei as a “reality today”, while, in turn, this reality is an indirect proof of the existence of the spirit, as “by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:16). Now that the cycle runs, “spirit the first mover” withdraws, becomes secondary, although it “at every moment upholds and sustains [the cycle] in being” (CCC, 301), what is left is the Work of God as a culture. Following the words of Saint Josemaría from the beginning of this chapter, three interacting elements need to be recognized within the organization: the pastoral phenomenon, the message entrusted from above, and the institution dedicated to

spreading this message (see also: Rodriguez 2003). But the pastoral phenomenon, in its “pure” form, existed only in the person of Saint Josemaría, while:

The Work, we could say, is the message itself understood and structured in terms of its ability to change people. (...) Consequently, Opus Dei as an institution is both an implementation of, and a permanent service to, the message. Thus by analyzing the October 2, 1928, event, we have seen how its two elements are necessarily linked and how that linkage implies an immanent order, an internal structure. The message is the first thing God is concerned about; the institution is something he desires insofar as it can spread it. (Rodriguez 2003:29-30)

This “immanent order” and “internal structure” is the focus of attention here. The message may have the priority in the objective (or objectified) order of things, but chronologically the pastoral phenomenon came first in the person of Josemaría Escrivá. It is only through him, through studying “what he subsequently said and did” (Coverdale 2002:58), that the “religiously untalented” majority can learn about the message from God. Consequently following the logic, it is only through meeting and talking to the actual members, and so by becoming involved oneself at some level, that the outsider can understand Opus Dei. Hence in this thesis, even though “the message”, for example, has already been commented on, the analysis and “translation” of it is postponed until after those who “incarnate” it have spoken, so after the *Empiria*.

The reason behind this whole argument is simple – to further justify the methodology used in this thesis, and point to the unique position of the fieldworker, by showing that Opus Dei, the subject of enquiry, is in a way an ethnographical organization par excellence. In other words, that the whole theory that it internally produces, even the most dry theology or internal laws and regulations, is more or less directly related to the pastoral phenomenon, and ultimately to Saint Josemaría. The internal research is done on

“his” terms, “within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action” (Burrell and Morgan 1993:28). As the only pure native, he is clearly “morally privileged”, but also – since he “never had any other aim than that of fulfilling the Will of God” (Gns 1:1) and had always been His “most faithful instrument” (Psl 1:4) – “epistemologically privileged” (Rorty 1982, cited in Czarniawska 1998:21). So, even though the message came in an embodied way, it quickly assumes a textual form. The Work of God regains immortality and universality:

[As] long as there are men on earth, there will be Opus Dei... it is holy, unchangeable, and everlasting (Walsh 1989:171), [it] will never need to be reformed in order to adapt itself to a changing world (Escrivá, cited in Echevarría 2008), [as in] each place it is the same theological and pastoral phenomenon which takes root in the souls of the people of that country. It is not anchored to one particular culture nor to one specific historical period (*Conversations*, 42).

All this makes the following, more general observation by Heather Höpfl fully applicable to Opus Dei, when “judged” from the outside:

In privileging constructions over experiences, organizations loose contact with their physicality. Consequently, the organization comes to reproduce itself as text and understand itself in metaphysical terms as the product of its own reproduction. (Höpfl, Heather 2003a:5)

The Work as a symbolic construction that takes root directly in souls, the everlasting immanent order, must be internally fully coherent, at the same time fully independent of external conditions. Apparently the idea of “the unity of life” applies to the “mother-organization” as much as to the individuals (“children”) receiving formation from it. It seems that it is already from this point that all the problems and controversies surrounding Opus Dei stem; that is, from this fundamental split between the “inside” and the “outside” of the symbolic construction. It is not, of course, a split between members and

sympathizers versus all the rest, believers versus non-believers, Catholics versus non-Catholics, or even conservative Catholics versus the liberal ones, although sometimes it is presented in this way. It is more the case of Opus Dei arriving as a message, but with the key to reading it at the same time, as a phenomenon, but with a compulsory “paradigm” from which “a study” must begin. This paradigm is not identical with Catholic orthodoxy (although, again, it is sometimes presented in this way), it is narrower, specific. And yet, if one fails to adopt it, it is often immediately translated into a refusal “to believe in the good faith of the members of the Work who affirm it” (*Conversations*, 30) and therefore automatically means a failure to understand the organization and what it does. Contrary to the above view, this thesis suggests that the problem should rather be traced back to the way the Work understands itself, so to speak, that the problem is inherent to it.

In the master’s dissertation (Piątkowski 2004), which finalized the first stage of data collection, two concepts had been tried to describe Opus Dei from this perspective: “greedy institution” (Coser 1974) and “ideological fortress” (Pratt 2000a). The results were only partially convincing. “Greedy institutions”, as opposed to “total” ones (like prisons) as described by Goffman (1961, cited in Coser 1974:6), “tend to rely mainly on non-physical mechanisms to separate the insider from the outsider and to erect symbolic boundaries between them” (Coser 1974:6). The Catholic Church itself, according to Coser, is “greedy” because of the obligatory celibacy for its “priestly servants”, but thanks to that it managed to avoid the fate of the Protestant and Orthodox Churches, who “have typically been servants and appendages of secular authority”, in other words, avoided becoming just “another denomination” (1974:162). Coser also devoted some attention specifically to the Society of Jesus (1974:119-126), describing mechanisms in many ways strikingly similar to the ones that can be observed in Opus Dei (see also:

Höpfl, Harro 2000a). And yet, even though the book provides a lot of interesting insights, it is set in the framework of competition for scarce resources on the market, “loyalty and commitment” (Coser 1974:1) being just one of these. This framework seems insufficient for analyzing the phenomenon of the Work, as this thesis hopes to show later, in the analysis of the empirical part.

Nevertheless Opus Dei still seems to be contained within a set of ideological walls (Pratt 2000a); the stress on assuming the internal coherence on the abstract, “everlasting” level requires that. Whatever must be left outside, either because it cannot be or refuses to be integrated, is suppressed. Focusing “almost exclusively on the people who stayed the course and contributed to Opus Dei’s growth and development” (Coverdale 2002:11) when writing books on the history of the Work is a good example of such suppression. The Organization Shadow is born (Bowles 1991); arguably this is precisely the source of the so-called “black legend” (Messori 1998:15-38) surrounding Opus Dei (the “black legend” is a set of rumours and accusations directed against the Work: these include accusations of secrecy, elitism, radical political and social conservatism, sectarian practices, and many more). The concept of the Shadow comes originally from Jung (1966, cited in Bowles 1991:388) “and describes the attempt by an individual to repress those characteristics and aspects which do not fit with self-image” (Bowles 1991:388). Martin Bowles translated it into organization theory and argued that the organizational self-image is usually based on “a logic of efficiency and rational design [that] often denies meaning for human experience” (1991:394). The Shadow may be integrated, but it is almost impossible to do it on the organizational level, as the proposed solutions are usually “legislative”, abstract (1991:401). The process of integration involves withdrawing one’s own projections and becoming conscious of the Shadow, it will result

in being no longer able “to say that *they* do this, or that *they* are wrong” etc., but rather becoming “a serious problem” to oneself (Jung 1969, cited in Bowles 1991:401).

### **The burden of authorship and the methodology revisited**

Since Opus Dei as a whole exists only in perpetual relationship between the pastoral phenomenon, the message and the institution, it seems that both the researcher and someone personally interested in joining the Work should jump in, so to speak, to get to know it on its own terms. The element of faith is the key prerequisite for someone personally interested, while the fieldworker comes with a method. The case of this ethnography is perhaps extraordinary because, as has been repeatedly stressed, apart from the method, faith was also present in various ways. The author, at times, could consider himself a member of the Work “by desire”. Potential authority that comes from this fact, however, “rests fundamentally on a reader’s good faith and willingness to trust the fieldworker’s experience as valid” (Van Maanen 1988:66). It is, however, important to remind the reader, that chronologically the author first came as a “pure”, naive fieldworker, armed with a method. “Membership by desire” repeatedly appeared and later disappeared.

The data gathered during fieldwork, the interview transcripts and notes (the ‘text’), are used by the author to respond to the field and to tell his own story. The mere words, product of an ongoing process of organizational reproduction (Höpfl, Heather 2003a:5), have been loaded with meaning (provided with an “emplotment” [Czarniawska 2004:23]) coming from much broader personal experience – “without a story, without an unfolding,

there is no meaning” (Berger and Mohr 1982, cited in Sievers 1994:41-42). In John Van Maanen’s (1988) classification this ethnography is then a confessional tale, but paradoxically with certain elements of a realist tale. The realist, objectivist elements are to be found mainly in the style (the seemingly detached manner of narrating), the claimed source of authority (which “rests largely on the unexplicated experience of the author in the setting and the “feel” he has apparently developed for the time place, and people” – 1988:64), but also, in a way, in trying implicitly to portray a model Opus Dei member. This model member, however, “an entity to serve as a kind of cultural prototype” (1988:65), “is a product of an active meeting (emergence) of a subject (self) and an object (world)” (Letiche and Boje 2001:16). In this case, it is a merger of the author’s personal experience with the empirical data coming from the fieldwork.

There are two major dangers of such an approach. One is the paradoxical obsession with methodology (coming from “phantom pain”, no doubt) that many authors of “confessional” ethnographies display. The other has been already discussed, it is the particular problem present in this thesis, of having and keeping faith and yet trying to distance oneself from it when writing, or, as in this case, to be able to write. The two are interconnected. Again, inspirations coming from the work of Paul Ricoeur were of much help here, especially *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (1981), and the idea reaching a “second naïveté”, which Ricoeur developed earlier:

For the second immediacy that we seek and the second naïveté that we await are no longer accessible to us anywhere else than in a hermeneutics; we can believe only by interpreting. It is the “modern” mode of belief in symbols, an expression of the distress of modernity and a remedy for that distress. (Ricoeur 1976, cited in Mudge 1981:6)

Second immediacy is needed when the original, “unquestioned dwelling in the world of symbol” (Mudge 1981:6) is no longer possible. Of course, the problem of this thesis is opposite to the one that Ricoeur tried to solve; nevertheless the solution seems valid. On the methodological level, the researcher’s “first naïveté” was lost in the time between the first and the second stage of data collection, to push the analogy further, now the researcher can write “only by interpreting” (Ricoeur 1976, cited in Mudge 1981:6) the material as text, and in this way “reconvert” it, bring it back to life on a different level, so to speak (Ricoeur 1981:50). The obvious analogies with the Christian Scripture appear again:

[The] Christ-event is hermeneutically related to all of Judaic Scripture in the sense that it interprets this Scripture (...); there is a hermeneutic problem because this novelty [of the Christ-event] is not purely and simply substituted for the ancient letter; rather it remains ambiguously related to it. The novelty abolishes Scripture and fulfils it. It changes its letter into spirit like water into wine. (Ricoeur 1981:50)

Of course, this is pushing the parallel much too far, not only because it may be offensive to the reader, but also because it simply does not fully work in the case of this thesis. The author by no means tries vaingloriously to present himself as the faithful “incarnation” of the results of the first, “naive” stage of data collection (and the “gospel-writer” at the same time!), but rather to point at a certain dynamics to further justify the form and the structure of the thesis.

## **PART II: EMPIRIA**

### **Introduction to the Book of Persis**

*The name Persis comes, as all other names of ‘the prophets’, from the last chapter of the Letter to Romans, where Saint Paul greets his sisters and brothers in faith from Rome. The “beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” (16:12) is one of them. In this thesis she is first among ‘the prophets’, as she was the first to be interviewed in the initial stage of collecting the data. The conversation took place at her house and lasted for nearly an hour; the atmosphere was generally very pleasant though a certain distance, dryness, lack of trust could also be felt at times. Persis is a young woman, probably in her early thirties, a supernumerary of Opus Dei and a mother to three children. One of them, a little girl less than two years old, kept trying to break or spill something behind her mother’s back in the kitchen during the interview; tropical birds sung loudly in the background, probably from somewhere in the living room. The entire conversation, since the factual knowledge on Opus Dei of the interviewer was very limited at that time, focused on basic and general issues.*

*The text chosen for this Book is obviously just a very small piece of the transcript.*

*First part (verses 1-9) is an answer to the question about the consequences of changing one’s attitude towards work in line with the spirit of Opus Dei, the second (verses 10-12) comes from much later in the interview, where Persis states that since she had joined Opus Dei she managed to pray much more. These three verses contain her reaction to the suggestion that perhaps the change had something to do with better time management and motivation. The text chosen for this Book, even though it comes from two different places in the transcript, has not been divided into two small chapters since it essentially evolves around the same idea: a comparison between ‘before’ and ‘after’ joining Opus Dei in Persis life. In the context of the whole thesis, this Book is an introduction to the idea of ‘a plan of life’. More generally to the interesting relation between work, sacrifice and sanctification.*

### **BOOK OF PERSIS**

<sup>1</sup> Now I can see, even being at home, how much one can do! <sup>2</sup> To be honest, every day I do the same things and I

realized that before I’d do it because these were the things to be done, right? <sup>3</sup> I have this and this and that to do and

I'm happy when it's all done. <sup>4</sup> Now it's a bit different, because I know that first of all I have to do this work well and that I have a set time for it, I have a day plan, <sup>5</sup> I have a lot of things to do and I sort of sanctify all this. <sup>6</sup> For example: "Lord God, I don't feel like washing up tonight, because I'm really tired, but I'll try to offer it [as a sacrifice], I do this for You". <sup>7</sup> It's not for my own satisfaction, [but at the same time] I don't feel like 'a woman-martyr' who sits at home and takes care of the kids, <sup>8</sup> because I know

that the work I do is important and that I have to do it as best I can, always offering it [to God]. <sup>9</sup> The awareness that God is with me all day, in ordinary things. (...) <sup>10</sup> So it's a duty, but also a habit. <sup>11</sup> There is a plan and I know that at this time I have the [spiritual] reading or the Rosary, or some other norm like reading and meditating on the Sacred Scriptures. <sup>12</sup> For these the best time is reserved, when, for example, the kids are in the kindergarten.

## Commentary

### 1-4

The main feature of this short text is clearly its dualistic structure. It is based on a comparison between two ways of being in, crucially, the same situation. *Now* (1.4) that Persis is in Opus Dei is opposed to the time '*before*' (2) joining and receiving formation; this is, however, largely to do with the question that she was asked: about the changes in attitude towards daily work. Consequently, this commentary will also focus on explaining these two 'ways of being in the world' presented by Persis.

Her first, intuitive answer (*how much one can do!* – 1) seems to be about productivity – simple, measurable, or at least comparable with the previous state of affairs, effects of her work. But soon after she admits having to do the same things every day (2), one is then tempted to ask: what does the 'much' refer to? It cannot mean more in terms of tasks done and it is tied to the same life-situation, *being at home* (1); the difference seems to exist in herself and for herself, it is personal. From the 'now' she 'realizes' the truth about the 'before': she was not happy in the process of doing her work, but only when it was *all*

*done* (3), so this happiness was the state achieved by getting rid off *the things to be done* (2).

*Now it's a bit different* (4) – ‘a bit’ because the tasks and her position in life remain the same, and yet it is ‘different’ because she *knows* something. In the same sense this ‘knowledge’ appears again later (8); she does not use the expression ‘I believe’. Interestingly it looks as if she was talking about some kind of spiritual *gnosis*, despite all the efforts of Saint Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei, to fight against dualisms, especially “dis-incarnation”. The reader (listener) soon finds out, however, that on the basic level this *gnosis* is far from being spiritual. Rather it could be considered as a good example of what Escrivá called ‘Christian materialism’ (Msg 3:4), as it consists of ‘knowing’ that work should be done well and in having a set time for every task, *a day plan* (4). Trivial as it sounds, it is obviously crucial to Persis, to the way she perceives not only her work at home with kids, but her entire life. One important question remains to be answered: where does this knowledge, the plan together with the motivation that must accompany it for it to be of any use at all, come from? It could be argued that Persis’ usage of the verb ‘to know’ is a side-effect of the way in which Opus Dei’s formation is delivered, but this theme will be more developed in another commentary.

## **5-9**

The above mentioned *gnosis* is the awareness of a particular duty (10), she has to work as best she can, *always offering it* to God (8). So by working *well* and according to the plan (4) *she sanctifies all this* (5). One of the Opus Dei theologians used a phrase that seems particularly fitting here: “to produce work well-done” (Illanes 2003:186), because only ‘work well done’, perfect work can be offered to God as a sacrifice. As a consequence,

another layer of work, so to speak, appears on top of the literal layer, another dimension – production of work, production of production, in the end: production of offerings, sacrifices. What one actually does becomes almost irrelevant. And on this second, higher level Persis' work makes a lot more sense; she manages to jump from just enjoying the final effect to enjoying the process itself. This is obviously crucial for her, as now she is able to be happy almost all the time, not just in rare moments of relaxation after a day of work, and that even only when everything went well. It all brings to mind Hannah Arendt's famous "labour-work-action" triad (1958:7), as this case is a perfect example of turning labour on one level into work on another.

Persis lives in the presence of God; this is a basic truth of almost every religion, definitely true for Christians as God "is not far from any one of us; in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28). However, the *awareness* that she talks about (*that God is with me all day, in ordinary things* – 9) seems to be, again, something more than it was in the 'before'. After all, this verse looks like the climax of the whole text so far, the summary, the main difference. It seems almost safe to say then, that analogically to the way in which 'the sacrificial dimension' materializes in the every-day tasks, God is 'more' present for Persis once she has 'the plan'. The plan is agreed on in the course of spiritual direction, so it is not completely impersonal, and it is something that organizes her day, controls the final effects. But at the same time is a sign that someone cares for what she is doing and values the fruits of her work.

She gives one example of how 'it works' in practice. In this case it is a conscious action against her own inclination: *Lord God, even though I don't feel like washing up tonight, because I'm really tired but I do this for you* (6). Consisted and deliberate acting against

one's own 'feeling-like' and according to the will of God develops a virtue. For Persis precisely this going beyond her egoism in a given situation is what sanctifies work. At the same time though she does not feel like a 'martyr' (7); she would do if it was just the negative 'acting against' in every situation that made the difference. It is not, it is the fulfilling the will of God – *it's not for [her] own satisfaction* (7), it is all for him; and in most cases it may come without effort, yet in the crucial few one needs to struggle. Clearly all this rests on faith that her situation – sitting at home and taking care of kids – and her work are important (8), if not for anyone else, then surely for God. She is pleasing to him where she is and in what she does, and it is having faith (for her – knowing!) in this and love for him put in every action that make the 'sanctifying' difference. In other words, Persis' work is important precisely because it can be offered to God through her faith and love, he is always there with her with all the grace she needs to go beyond herself, but he is also the God awaiting the sacrifice. Transcendence is purely personal, or rather happens purely in the vertical relation with God; it seems that, without 'a push' from the outside, it could never involve changing the given situation.

## **10-12**

The plan serves another purpose in Persis' life, it helps turning duties into habits (10). Classical Catholic virtue ethics enters the picture: a morally good act performed out of a sense of duty is obviously more worthy of praise than the same act done spontaneously (when one 'feels like' doing something), and here 'the plan' has an important role to play. Furthermore, perseverance in fulfilling one's duties forms habits and that directly leads to developing virtues, since virtue is "a good habit bearing on activity" (*habitus operativus bonus*, Saint Thomas Aquinas). In any case, 'the plan' quickly seems to assume a very real, almost 'objective' presence in Persis' life. Even though she comes up with it herself

(in a conversation with her spiritual director) and there is nobody to control her faithfulness to it on daily basis, it looks as if it immediately belonged to the supernatural order – she draws ‘knowledge’ from it (11) about how her day should be organized.

The priority is clearly given to the spiritual activities, but definitely not to the point of neglecting her duties towards the family. It is not a fixed structure imposed ‘from above’, but rather a personal, subjective priority – *the best time is reserved* (12) for spiritual activities, time that in ‘the before’ she would probably spend relaxing, ‘give it to herself’. The objective structure is still determined by her role in life, that of a house-wife (kids in the kindergarten, etc.). What also draws attention is the vocabulary that Persis operates so fluently, for example the usage of the word ‘norm’ in the context of *meditating on the Sacred Scriptures* (11), but also the emphasis on the plan, work, etc.. It would seem that Escrivá’s ‘spiritual materialism’ is not just a one-off rhetorical catch phrase used a few times in various writings, but that it actually aims at ‘reclaiming’ certain vocabulary for its own use.

## Introduction to the Book of Julia

*“Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the holy ones who are with them” (Romans 16:15), wrote Saint Paul; Julia in this thesis, very much like Persis, is a young supernumerary and a housewife in her thirties; formerly an assistant professor at the university, now a full-time mother of three children aged from two to nine. The conversation with her is very long, personal, almost intimate. She seems authentically happy in her life, radiates joy, makes the interviewer feel very comfortable. Even though many of the questions were quite basic and almost technical in nature, Julia gravitates towards deeper issues. She uses the questions more as an opportunity to try and express the universal spirit of Opus Dei through her own particular experience of living it, rather than providing dry facts about the Work as an organization.*

*The text of this Book is divided into three chapters. The first two contain what can be easily called the climax of the whole interview. Julia had been asked about the importance of Saint Josemaría’s written works for the faithful of Opus Dei, for their daily spiritual lives. Instead of delivering a standard answer,*

*she gave her personal interpretation of the homily Passionately Loving the World (Chapter 1), which arrived swiftly at “the essence of life, the meaning of everything” (1:9). Almost immediately after that, prompted by the interviewer’s comment (“It seems tough to find meaning in everything, in everyday work...”), in a few sentences she unravelled her entire philosophy of life, it seems (Chapter 2), the key consequences of her faith. The last chapter comes from a different part of the transcript, where Julia talks about spiritual direction in Opus Dei, more specifically about the process of building trust between her and her spiritual director. It found its place in the final version of the Book, because it is ‘universal’ enough to be applied to the entire formation offered by the Work, both written works and interpersonal spiritual direction.*

*The Book of Julia is of enormous importance to this thesis, as the heroine, the narrator, presents herself and authentically comes across as a very accurate ‘incarnation’ of the message of Opus Dei, speaks from an extremely engaged position about the key aspects of the Work.*

## BOOK OF JULIA

### Chapter 1:

<sup>1</sup> When it comes to [Escrivá's] texts, the one I've been most impressed by (...) was the homily *Passionately Loving the World* delivered to the students of the University of Navarra. <sup>2</sup> Back then I also worked at a university and I identified with it strongly. <sup>3</sup> This merger of Heaven and earth in the everyday reality, this continuous discovering of something divine in the everyday things... <sup>4</sup> This was the most powerful! This, I think, convinced me, it is the absolute... It's in me, it is my greatest... This is what's most important for me! <sup>5</sup> Simply discovering in what you do... not trying to search for something else, or imagining how great it would be if I did something else... <sup>6</sup> I am where I am, I do what I do! <sup>7</sup> I don't know how to say this, no words can describe it – widening one's horizons is not enough; it's simply the discovery of the meaning of life! <sup>8</sup> In ever-day material things, in what you do, there is something divine that one can find. <sup>9</sup> This is the essence of life and the meaning of everything.

### Chapter 2:

<sup>1</sup> I don't know how one can think that it doesn't make sense! It simply does. <sup>2</sup> You have to accept it, because this is the truth. <sup>3</sup> Even when I do the most down-

to-earth duties like taking care of kids, cooking dinner, or washing up, it isn't just stupid, hopeless labour. <sup>4</sup> It is tiring, but if I do it with the thought... then it is as if I prayed, right? <sup>5</sup> There's often toil in prayer too. <sup>6</sup> It's simply something that reaches God's hands, it's the same for a student who learns for an exam, for my husband who writes these complicated computer programmes, or for me in the kitchen, at home with the kids. <sup>7</sup> It's all for God, [but] being aware of the people around me, my family, those who are close. <sup>8</sup> I try to create this nice atmosphere, a climate of joy, optimism, rather than of complaining how terrible it is, that we lack this or that... <sup>9</sup> No! It'll be all right, we can work, and through work... <sup>10</sup> It's like with a growing child, its world keeps changing. <sup>11</sup> First it is hidden [in the womb] and cannot see anything, then it comes out and everything is different: dry and not wet, the air... <sup>12</sup> It's similar for us here, because later we are born to Heaven and live there forever with God.

### Chapter 3:

<sup>1</sup> I simply knew that what I heard was true and bore fruits; <sup>2</sup> and fruits in the sense of peace that comes, <sup>3</sup> a feeling that this is it, that this is how one ought to act.

## Commentary

### 1:1-3

The key to reading this chapter, perhaps even the whole book, is a very peculiar *discovery* (1:7) which Julia summarizes in one simple sentence – *I am what I am, I do what I do!* (1:6). If it is not paradoxical enough, she describes this discovery as *the essence of life and the meaning of everything* (1:9). Of course, there is much more to it than a one summarizing verse can tell, but still, something counterintuitive seems to be at play here.

The book must be read in the light of Escrivá's homily entitled "Passionately Loving the World" (*The Message* in this thesis), as Julia had *been most impressed by* it (1:1) and *identified with it strongly* (1:2). So what follows these statements is her personal commentary on what she had read. The homily was delivered to the students and staff of the University of Navarre, *back then [Julia] also worked at a university* (1:2), so she could almost imagine being there herself, not just as a willing recipient of a text by a much loved saint, but in a more 'real' way. And what makes the connection stronger is, interestingly and characteristically for Opus Dei, a common profession. Her thoughts are spontaneous and intimate, she often does not finish sentences, makes pauses, as if she wanted to hold on to a certain thought or feeling for a little while before moving on.

Julia starts with almost a word to word quote from the homily – *the merger of heaven and earth* (1:3), but for Saint Josemaría "where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday reality" (Msg 4:5), while she seems to be speaking from the heart already and instead just says: *in the everyday reality* (1:3). Similarly, in pointing to *this continuous discovering of something divine in the everyday things* (1:3) she omits a 'mediating step', namely the fact that for Escrivá the everyday life, "matter and to the

most trivial occurrences and situations” (Msg 3:1), are to be turned into “means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ” (Msg 3:1). For him “to spiritualize” reality means to give God a chance, so to speak, while Julia goes a step further. She, probably subconsciously, presents herself to a thorough reader as an incarnation of the message of the Work, that is, as if by now, after so many years of following the message of Opus Dei and imitating Escrivá himself, the ‘mediating steps’ were almost naturally built into her very self, like virtues.

With all the above mentioned in mind, the phrase ‘to discover’ gains a very interesting meaning. The fact of finding God and the act of producing occasions to meet him are the same thing for Julia. After all, it is in her heart where the two realities meet, and she speaks from her heart. It is no longer a teaching to be communicated, stated in abstract terms, it is a lived reality, she speaks from an engaged position, describes a lived experience. But as a consequence the thin line between finding and producing something divine is almost completely blurred. The discovering is *continuous* (1:3) not only because the horizons of searching are limitless, but also because ‘the finding’ happens every time, it would seem. It is literally ‘dis-covering’: merely removing the cover, what is underneath is always ‘in waiting’. Julia is a living example of the new synthesis of matter and the Spirit, ‘the spiritual materialism’, proposed by Escrivá.

#### **1:4-9**

*This was the most powerful! This (...) convinced me* (1:4), says Julia. The immediate question to ask would be: what exactly, the teaching itself or the experience of living it, of ‘dis-covering’ God all the time? Of course, in the light of what has been said in the previous section the question is almost irrelevant – both are true. It is only through God’s

grace that one is able to transcend the given situation in the first place. If he is already present in the act of ‘searching’, then no wonder that he is found, one is tempted to say. His grace is everywhere and for everyone – “for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). In the teaching Julia found a confirmation of what had already been *in* her (1:4) by nature, so to speak (or rather through baptism), and then she had been convinced by putting it into practice. It all sounds slightly confusing; the remaining part of the quote from Matthew’s Gospel sheds some light on the matter:

For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:46-48)

Precisely this call to ‘be perfect’ is at the very core of the universal call to holiness, as understood by Saint Josemaría and his Opus Dei. The key difference between Julia, as a member of Opus Dei, the incarnated message, and some other (baptised) person is the awareness of what is ‘in waiting’ for everyone in every situation (see later 2:4), not only in the good, suitable ones, however defined. Loving, greeting – examples used by Jesus to illustrate his thought, are replaced by everyday work.

It is hard not to notice the relief with which Julia describes the consequences of living the message – *not trying to search for something else, or imagining how great it would be if I did something else* (1:5). Read: the divine reality is here, one does not have to be ‘otherworldly’ to be a believer, a Catholic serious about her faith. It is a striking paradox – the relief comes not from the fact that there is this better world waiting for her ‘out there’, although she would still believe in that, but from the opposite direction, from the

fact that she does not have to search any more. She can settle and be at peace with her situation; she is allowed to settle, Opus Dei reminds her of that and gives an institutional opportunity to live it, without moving places, changing states. *I am what I am, I do what I do!* (1:6) – the climax of her short speech. Of course, her conclusion is not surprising at all, it is rather where she comes from that could be counterintuitive for most readers.

This *'not trying (...) or imagining' how great it would be* (1:5) requires probably some effort on Julia's side, does not bring an immediate relief, but its aim is to bring a lasting peace of mind. After all, there is no point in fantasizing, one can 'produce' occasions to meet Christ everywhere. It does not mean a complete, monastic-like stability of course, far from it, she is free to move, and change jobs etc., but led by ordinary, 'worldly' motivation. Spiritually she is fine almost everywhere, always pleasing to God.

Julia cannot find the right words to describe the change she experienced in viewing her life, it seems as if it was a complete reversal, although of that one cannot be sure just looking at this text. In any case, *widening one's horizons is not enough* (1:7) for her. The reality of God's presence in the world is not only 'widened' to encompass the everyday, trivial life, but the everyday becomes the essence of life and God's presence in it, a starting point, not something added on. For her it clearly became *the meaning of everything* (1:9).

## **2:1-6**

*[How] one can think that it doesn't make sense! It simply does* (2:1) – the reversal of the ways of thinking about and perceiving the world is complete. Of course, this is a reversal from an ideal anti-type, which Julia herself seems to have assumed and spoke against so

far; this is not to say then that she personally had held that position and then changed her own life so radically. On the contrary, it was more like finding a confirmation and proofs of something already existing within her (1:4). In any case, everything from where she stands now *simply does* make sense (2:1). She cannot imagine a different approach, it would seem, *you have to accept it, because this is the truth* (2:2)! It sounds like an invitation – ‘come and you will see, I may not *know how to say this*, as *no words can describe it* (1:7), and therefore I cannot convince you through an argument, but mine is ‘the truth position, all can be explained from here.’ So what happens in the following verses is more of an encouragement that accompanies her invitation, rather than an argument. Julia tries to give a sense of how it feels like being in her shoes; she speaks from an ‘engaged position’.

The next four verses (2:3-6) are a good summary of what has already been said in the Book of Persis and other books, but with a few very important additions. Like Persis, Julia is a housewife at this moment in her life, but before that she had been an assistant professor. Set against a background like this, the examples of her present *down-to-earth duties – cooking dinner, or washing up* – may really sound like *stupid, hopeless labour* (2:3). As opposed to the “proper” work that she had been doing in academia, all she is doing now has no or very little lasting effects, her efforts are quickly consumed and therefore must be perpetually renewed – typical labour (Arendt 1958:7), very tiring too (2:4). What happens next in her speech is crucial for understanding how the jump from labour to work is made. In a nutshell, the key difference is ‘the thought’ which turns her labour into prayer (*then it is as if I prayed, right?* – 2:4), and a prayer is an almost tangible *something that reaches God’s hands* (2:6). And one cannot imagine a more lasting thing than this ‘some-thing’ in the almighty and everlasting God’s hand. That is

why, and only from this perspective, Julia can say that *it's the same for a student (...), for my husband who writes these complicated computer programmes, or for me in the kitchen* (2:6).

It seems that there are two kinds of prayer here, neither of which uses the term in the common understanding of it. One is 'the thought' and the other is work itself (2:4). About the latter a fair amount has already been written in one of the previous commentaries. It is only the connection Julia tries to make between prayer and work that is worth paying closer attention to - *there's often toil in prayer too* (2:5). Toil as a common factor is unquestionable, but while it seems quite plausible to therefore consider prayer as a kind of work, it is rather strange to go in the opposite direction.

[For] if we look at prayer in the narrowest sense (following Matthew 6:6) as something done *in secret*, then work undermines it, because work is done for a reward. Work cannot be prayer, but both *lectio divina* and prayer are hard work in terms of effort that they require (Kardong, 1995). (Piatkowski 2007b:423)

'The thought' seems the more important of the two, as it makes praying with work possible in the first place. It is a lot closer to what one would normally understand as prayer; it maybe even takes a form of a few words 'thought towards' God. In any case, precisely this 'thought' is capable of turning any given situation into an occasion of meeting Christ. In turn, the very possibility of having 'the thought' rests on the awareness ('the knowledge' as Persis would probably put it) that God's grace is always there for her, and simultaneously the divine is 'underneath' every situation too, in waiting to be uncovered. Of course, this conscious act of offering cannot and does not happen in Julia's mind every second, but in one way or another should do before every distinguishable

‘situation’ (activity, task, etc.). It has to, if she wants to “be perfect, just as [her] heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

## **2:7-12**

*It's all for God* (2:7), the most important things happen in the vertical relation with the divine, the ‘horizontal’ awareness of the presence of other people comes second, the order is clear. Julia’s ‘earthly’ responsibility is also well-defined: *my family, those who are close* (2:7), more specifically, creating *this nice atmosphere, a climate of joy, optimism* (2:8) for them. Saint Josemaría in his teachings on the subject uses a metaphor of “the stone fallen into the lake” (*The Way*, 831). In this case Julia is the stone, the lake is the multiplicity of other people, and it would seem then that the one who had thrown her down is God. Her earthly mission and influence on others is compared to ‘producing circles’ on the surface of this lake, she is immediately responsible only for *those who are close* (2:7), her good influence then ‘lives’ in them and produces circles “wider each time” (Escrivá, *The Way*, 831, see also *Furrow*, 953). *Nice atmosphere* (2:8) is the key feature of it, as it helps these others to maintain their relations with the divine, supports them in their own personal struggle. It is a noble task, but at the same time it is all Julia can do for them. After all, in God’s eyes we are all children here on earth, and *later we are born to heaven and live forever with him* (2:12). ‘The vertical’ comes first and it is more real for Julia, the ties between people down here are important, but in the end it is all about every single person’s individual relation with God.

*It'll be all right, [because] we can work* (2:9), says Julia, this is the positive message. In the words of Saint Paul:

[Let] rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2).

After all, Jesus famously said “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6) and “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:8), so the goal is to stay ‘on the Way’, as a movement towards God is as much as one can do here on earth, but at the same time “keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2) almost equals already reaching the destination. Interestingly then, for what Saint Paul uses the metaphor of ‘running’, for Julia is simply work! The potential consequences of thinking in these terms are vast. She uses the metaphor of a child growing in the womb to illustrate her thought, which is a good basis for a summary of what has been said about work so far. *We are hidden in the womb and cannot see anything* (2:10), that is, the ultimate effects of our work, the products, things that *reach God’s hands* (2:6). On earth it is all merely a labour of growth for all of us, it only turns out to be true work in heaven. So *it’s the same for [Julia’s] husband who writes (...) computer programmes* and for [her] *in the kitchen, at home with the kids* (2:6) on both levels.

### **3:1-3**

Although the last, very short chapter of the Book of Julia refers specifically to the effects of spiritual direction provided by Opus Dei, it can also serve a good conclusion for this text. Perhaps it even should be left with no comment. This one sentence, in very simple terms, illustrates the main logic behind the whole book. *Julia knew that what [she] heard was true* (3:1), because it felt as if it had already been in her (1:4), a mere confirmation of her deepest intuitions about the nature of the world. At the same time, of course, it was coming to her from ‘the outside’, from Escrivá’s teachings and Opus Dei’s formation, as knowledge (almost) about *how one ought to act* (3:3). The fruits of all that is internal

peace; and it simply *comes* (3:2) in its due time. This is why one has to be where she is to find proofs for himself; *no words can describe it* (1:7). Peace is what one gets here on earth, the lasting effects of the struggle are held by God in his own hand (2:6)...

## Introduction to the Book of Tryphaena

*Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Romans 16:12)! Tryphaena here is a middle-aged woman, some ten years older than both Persis and Julia, also a supernumerary, formerly a physics teacher in high school, currently raising her youngest child. The conversation was long, pleasant and very informal, often fell into digressions completely unrelated to Opus Dei. Only from time to time Tryphaena would get serious, or a bit suspicious about a question or a comment. The interview focused on two main themes: personal vocation story and the practice of spiritual direction in the Work, the former became the subject of this Book.*

*The text chosen for the Book of Tryphaena was an answer to a simple and innocent comment which merely stated that “spiritual guidance in Opus Dei is an interesting topic”. At this point Tryphaena clearly felt comfortable in the interview situation and ‘let go’, so to speak. The end result is amazing from an ethnographer’s point of view, at times it reads, especially towards the end, like a fairly accurate account of her thoughts in a given moment. In the context of the whole thesis, this text is invaluable, provides deep psychological insights about spiritual guidance, provokes interesting questions and hypothesis about the nature of the relations between that faithful and the Prelature, more specifically, the formation provided by it.*

## BOOK OF TRYPHAENA

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the spiritual guidance mainly concerns the soul, but it’s commonly known that what we do affects our souls and God isn’t indifferent towards that. <sup>2</sup> It’s about setting directions and aims in apostolate, family matters, if there are problems... everything, the whole life! <sup>3</sup> But it’s not about what job I should do or what things I should buy... <sup>4</sup> Unless I’d come up with something really strange, then they advise against it. <sup>5</sup> It’s not a demand

(order), there are no orders, these are pieces of advice. <sup>6</sup> Something that’s very important though is reading the right books; I have a moral obligation to ask. <sup>7</sup> So for example, when I had heard about Harry Potter, before my daughter learnt about it and read it, I phoned and asked to have a certainty. <sup>8</sup> I waited for the answer for quite a while, because these were the very beginnings of the Work in Poland, but they told me that there’s nothing wrong about the book. <sup>9</sup> I myself

read the first three volumes, to stop her if necessary, to prevent a catastrophe of some sort.<sup>10</sup> The book isn't very deep, like an action movie, everything happens so quickly and some scenes are... I don't know how a child can go through this!<sup>11</sup> Anyway, in case of books the piece of advice you get has a certain authority behind it.<sup>12</sup> It's like in a family: when the mother forbids something, it does not necessarily mean that the daughter will not do it.<sup>13</sup> It's up to her free choice, she can rebel and read, but it'd most likely be harmful.<sup>14</sup> It's the same here – as an adult I am aware that I can read [against their advice], but it will be harmful for me.<sup>15</sup> I had a problem like that recently with a philosophy book which my neighbour, a philosophy professor, wrote and presented me with.<sup>16</sup> And I did not know: can I or can't I...<sup>17</sup> I asked a priest and he said: you can read it, but be aware and note down everything that you don't like about the book.<sup>18</sup> So it's not like I cannot.<sup>19</sup> But some time ago I read

Coelho without asking, because I was on a holiday at my friend's. It was the most popular one – *The Alchemist*.<sup>20</sup> She was like: “read this one, it's very good, you have to read it”!<sup>21</sup> So I started and when I was halfway through and told her: “listen, I cannot do it anymore, I'm starting to get...<sup>22</sup> I don't know if it's a fairy tale, a film, if it's the real thing...<sup>23</sup> I think that the author is a madman!”<sup>24</sup> And I stopped. And later I was told that he was a dangerous author who promotes New Age.<sup>25</sup> It's a proof that I should have asked in the first place.<sup>26</sup> But halfway through I already knew...<sup>27</sup> Most likely the formation I receive [in *Opus Dei*] is so good that it [automatically] rejects [such books].<sup>28</sup> It's a story of a man... mixing all religions together... and when the desert started telling him stories I knew what it was.<sup>29</sup> How one is supposed to approach that, is this a book for adults or a fairytale for children?

## Commentary

### 1-6

The theme of the Book of Tryphaena is clearly spiritual guidance in *Opus Dei*. Tryphaena herself is responding here to a loose throw-away comment, which simply stated “spiritual guidance in *Opus Dei* is an interesting topic”; it is then even more interesting to observe how her fairly elaborate answer develops. In the first few verses she very generally introduces the idea (1-5), but then quickly moves on to a particular detail of it – *reading the right books* (6). It is almost as if the dialogue happened inside her mind and with someone else, she responded to questions that had not been asked, she felt somehow

internally obliged to defend positions that had not been attacked. It is safe to assume then, that either Tryphaena herself found this particular part of spiritual guidance tough to accept, or, more likely, she tended to assume that it would be the most difficult thing for ‘an outsider’ to understand. In any case, without further ado she told three illuminating stories from her own personal experience, illustrating not only how it works from a practical, organizational point of view, but also, and more importantly, how it works for her.

She starts with a simple thought: *spiritual guidance mainly concerns the soul, but it's commonly known that* (1) the body-soul distinction is not just a simple dualism, since *what we do affects our souls* (1), what is seen affects the unseen, to paraphrase the Nicene Creed. Considering these two spheres as completely separate would be a form of ‘dis-incarnation’, to use Escrivá’s expression, and thus “religion cannot be separated from life, either in theory or in daily reality” (*Furrow*, 308). It is interesting to notice that in Tryphaena’s words every earthly, bodily, material side of reality is identified with ‘*what we do*’ (1), with a form of work. It does affect the soul, as it can potentially bring one closer to God. After all, in the words of Saint Paul, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31) – a quote so often used by Escrivá in his writings.

Spiritual guidance cannot then be separated from everyday life and everyday work, and certainly not because it *concerns the soul* (1), since the spiritual is not set in opposition to the material. On the contrary, one needs to “get accustomed to referring everything to God” (*Furrow*, 675). Consequently the spiritual guidance in Opus Dei too encompasses *everything, the whole life* (2). *It's about setting directions and aims* and solving problems

(2), and so even not necessarily about what is commonly understood under the term ‘spirituality’, but closer to ‘strategy’. A famous and controversial quote from Saint Josemaría comes to mind here, although it does not refer to spiritual guidance directly:

Marriage is for the soldiers and not for the General Staff of Christ's army. For, whereas food is a necessity for each individual, procreation is a necessity for the species only, not for the individual. Longing for children? Children, many children, and a lasting trail of light we shall leave behind us if we sacrifice the selfishness of the flesh. (*The Way*, 28)

In Opus Dei spiritual direction is given by priests (confession of sins) and lay celibate members (everything else). It is very interesting to see how the spiritual and the strategic come to mean almost the same thing; the army metaphor used by Escrivá becomes almost the literal reality. The line between the spiritual and the non-spiritual is not only more of a relation rather than division, it also translates better to ‘strategy and the operational level’ than for example to ‘the private sphere and the public sphere’ or even ‘soul and body’, ‘the spirit and the letter’ – “for the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6), etc.. So *it's not about what job [Tryphaena] should do, or what things [she] should buy*, not because these things are not spiritual enough, but because they are not ‘strategic’ enough. Everything is spiritual, so if Tryphaena would *come up with something really strange* (4) while shopping, something that would indicate a bigger problem, then this little thing would be discussed in spiritual direction and *they [would] advise against it* (4). Tryphaena stresses twice that the outcome of a conversation with the spiritual director would take a form of a piece of advice rather than a direct order (5), but advice with various degrees of authority behind it.

And here comes the problem of *reading the right books* (6), something *very important* (6). So important in fact that Tryphaena, without any encouragement from ‘the outside’, focuses her entire speech on this particular aspect of spiritual direction, as if explaining it was more valuable than giving a general overview of the whole process. Surely one of the main reasons is that the piece of advice regarding *reading the right books* (6) has one of the highest degrees of authority behind it – one has *a moral obligation to ask* (6), but why books? The three stories that follow this verse give a very interesting answer, two quotes from Saint Josemaría provide with a good introduction:

Books. I put out my hand, like one of Christ's beggars, and I asked for books. Books, – that are nourishment for the Catholic, apostolic and Roman minds of many young students. I put out my hand, like one of Christ's beggars, and each time had it brushed heedlessly aside! Why, Jesus, can people not understand the profound Christian charity of this alms, more effective than a gift of the finest bread. (*The Way*, 467)

Books: don't buy them without advice from a Christian who is learned and prudent. It's so easy to buy something useless or harmful. How often a man thinks he is carrying a book under his arm, and it turns out to be a load of rubbish! (*The Way*, 339)

## 7-14

First Tryphaena tells a story of how she dealt with the Harry Potter books entering the Polish market and her family life. She was the first to learn about it, before her daughter, so she *phoned and asked to have a certainty* (7). Even though she has *a moral obligation to ask* (6), she sounds as if she did not do it automatically, to learn about the verdict so to speak, but just to make sure. She must have had her own pre-judgement beforehand, based on her motherly instinct no doubt, but also on the formation she receives in Opus Dei (27), perhaps even on some general guidelines provided by the Prelature. And it seems that this pre-judgement was negative, otherwise she would not have called just *to have a certainty* (7), but out of a moral duty. It must have been a border-line case, she

*waited for the answer for quite a while, but* (8) the verdict was positive. Still, *she read the first three volumes (...) to prevent a catastrophe of some sort* (9). The first reason for which books occupy such a prominent place in spiritual direction as seen by Tryphaena is obvious – they potentially can cause *a catastrophe of some sort* (9), even those seemingly harmless and pleasant ones. Books “are nourishment for the Catholic, apostolic and Roman minds”, better than “the finest bread” (*The Way*, 467); and like food for body they are a necessity for minds. Some are simply useless, give no energy, but some are harmful, poisonous. In other words, Tryphaena has a *moral obligation to ask* (6) if there is something *wrong about the book* (8). In this particular case she was forced to wait *because these were the very beginnings of the Work in Poland* (8), which would only confirm that answering queries in this matter is a significant part of Opus Dei’s dealings with its faithful.

The degree of authority behind the advice on ‘*reading the right books*’ (6) matters is explained using a comparison to family life. A recommendation not to read a certain book is like *when the mother forbids something* (12) to her daughter – it does not automatically mean that *the daughter will not do it* (12), it is still *up to her free choice* (13), but it is a choice between obedience and open rebellion. Mother knows better, loves her child and has her best interest in mind. Acting against her advice would most likely be *harmful* (13) for the daughter, end up in *a catastrophe of some sort* (9). But even if it would not, there is something intrinsically wrong about disobeying one’s parent, after all: “honour your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). So even though this piece of advice is still not an order, but certainly getting very close to it; something a step lower, just on the other side of the border line – you can do it, but it would be wrong!

## 15-18

Tryphaena says that she has *had a problem like that recently with a philosophy book* (15), but after reading the whole story it is still not clear in what way it is supposed to be similar to the previous account. She is presented with a book by her neighbour, a professor of philosophy, who had written it himself. Tryphaena feels therefore obliged to read on one hand, and yet she does not know what to do: *'can I or can't I...'* (16); she is clearly worried that the book might be harmful for her. It is a fascinating attitude; Tryphaena seems to be determined to protect something (probably her own soul, her faith) she considers somewhat fragile and vulnerable. A simple and honest life, peace of mind – it is all built on what is secretly hidden inside and needs to be cared for and defended from the 'outside world'.

She *asked a priest* and was allowed to read it, but carefully, *noting down everything that [she doesn't] like about the book* (17), and the moral of the story is: *'so it's not like I cannot'* (18). One can only guess what the decisive factors were, surely one of the main ones stems from the Opus Dei's 'lay outlook', the strife to live a by all means ordinary life in the midst of the world. When one is presented with a book by a friend, it would be rather rude not to read it, and certainly not 'normal' to refuse quoting one's faith as the reason for doing so. Tryphaena reads the book then, but very consciously and carefully – she is like a pioneer among her fellow faithful now, the *'noting down'* (17) of all the suspicious statements simply helps her to stay focused no doubt, but the results of that could also be of use for the Prelature when someone else asks about this particular book later. *So it's not like [she] cannot* (18) read random books from time to time, that is, there

is nothing wrong per se about it. She cannot read only when her own good is at stake, her faith.

### 19-29

The third story is the longest and the most interesting of them all. It is about Tryphaena's encounter with Paulo Coelho's worldwide bestseller *The Alchemist: A Fable About Following Your Dream*. Tryphaena seems, post factum, a bit ashamed of what she has done, as she starts the story explaining herself: the book was very popular at that time (19), her close friend had read it and was very strongly recommending it ('*it's very good, you have to read it!*' – 20), but most importantly the only reason why Tryphaena *read Coelho without asking* (19) was that she was away on holiday, so presumably she simply could not ask. In other words, she should have known better. It is a story of another border-line case, but only because of her friend's strong persuasion, in ordinary conditions, Tryphaena seems to suggest, she would have never read the book.

The fact is that she started reading *The Alchemist*, but, and here the fascinating part of the story begins, *halfway through [she] already knew* (26), *and [she] stopped* (24). Tryphaena came to know what the verdict would be if she had asked: '*he [is] a dangerous author who promotes New Age*' (24). The judgement is hardly surprising, what is very interesting though is her vivid description of how she arrived at it. At some point she simply felt that she could not *do it anymore* – '*I'm starting to get...*' (21). One can only try to fill the gap in the text, 'confused' is probably the best word to put there, although when placed in a larger context it seems almost not strong enough. In any case, it is still amazing to observe how vulnerable Tryphaena is when facing the text. She is obviously very uncertain about *how one is supposed to approach* (29) the book – is it a

*fairy tale, a film(?) or the real thing* (22) – and this uncertainty is the source of the whole ‘confusion’. She seems absolutely unable to bear, sidestep or hold it in suspension for a longer while. She simply has to know, to define, put into a category – to have something like a key to reading the text. Otherwise the words just attack her, they seem to have the power to harm her in some way, to take away her peace of mind. So while in the case of Harry Potter books the situation is clear, it is *a fairy tale for children* (29), and probably precisely because of this clarity more than anything else *there’s nothing wrong about the book* (8), Coelho does not fall into any category. Tryphaena’s friend had read and recommended his book, which would suggest that this is something for grownups (29), so Tryphaena most likely started reading it as if it was *the real thing* (22), that is literally, as speaking about the true reality in one way or another. And so *when the desert started telling stories* (28) she had to decide *that the author [was] a madman* (23) – either that, or she would have to start doubting her own sanity, such intimate was her relation to what she read. Apparently Coelho must have mixed the order of things in his prose, so that it illudes clear classification.

In the last verses Tryphaena tries to calmly make sense of the whole ‘Coelho experience’. It was partly a success in the end, since, after all, she stopped *halfway through* (21). It was a learning experience too – she learnt to avoid this particular author, but more importantly it also confirmed the need for spiritual guidance in this matter (by providing *a proof that [she] should have asked in the first place* – 25). Verse 27 appears to be the climax of the entire Book of Tryphaena, as it is her own reading, her own interpretation of the last story, which also sheds light on everything else. Without the editing it simply says: ‘*Most likely the formation I receive is so good that it rejects*’ (27). ‘Most likely’ as if she was not sure herself, even though it was her own personal experience. And no wonder, ‘the

formation she receives' is anthropomorphised, as if it lived inside her, it is able to act independently ('reject'). The whole picture of spiritual direction that Tryphaena paints is then highly curious and potentially symptomatic of the way she perceives reality in general. Maybe it is all far removed from how the majority of the faithful of Opus Dei experience it, not to mention the majority of Catholics, nevertheless it is definitely worth paying closer attention. It would seem that there are two entities 'living' inside Tryphaena: the one which needs constant care and protection from the outside world, as peace of mind depends on it; and the one which helps defending the former one by 'automatically rejecting' evil influences, like an intelligent filter detecting poison. Both are at the same time very much a part of Tryphaena's being.

Perhaps the best way to capture the meaning of the first one is by a comparison with what Saint Paul means by 'the temple of God' in the following passage:

Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

While probably the best way to read what 'formation' means for Tryphaena in this particular text, is to read it as a shorthand for what could be called 'her second nature', the final effect of receiving formation and her own efforts enforce a set of (virtuous) behaviours and reactions. When these become habitual, they begin to shape the way she perceives reality in general, creating something that could possibly called 'a virtue of Opus Dei' or 'a virtue of Catholicism', combining many 'smaller' virtues. In this way the constant interplay between Tryphaena, her vulnerable, silent soul, and 'formation' becomes an interplay of identities: Tryphaena who speaks, Tryphaena the temple of God, Tryphaena a member of Opus Dei.

## Introduction to the Book of Epaenetus

*“Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first fruits in Asia for Christ” (Romans 16:5)! The conversation with the first male ‘prophet’ was very different from the previous ones in its content, but also in the general atmosphere and the context in which it happened. The meeting took place on a neutral ground, in a noisy bar, during a lunch break, over a cup of coffee. It was fairly short, both sides were somewhat nervous. Epaenetus, a supernumerary in his thirties, an economist by profession, answered questions often using short and precise sentences that were aimed more at transferring knowledge (dry facts about Opus Dei) than communicating feelings or personal experiences. What was supposed to be an open-ended interview, turned into a quick exchange of statements and questions, and only towards the end the atmosphere loosened a little. The conversation circled around issues like the divine filiation in everyday life and*

*work, individualism, the Work’s attitude towards mystical experiences.*

*As in the case of the Book of Tryphaena, the text chosen for this Book also deals with spiritual direction in Opus Dei (chapter 3 in particular), but even though it is a bit shorter, its scope is much broader. Epaenetus touches here upon an entire range of subjects. All of them, however, have something to do with the direct relations between the Prelature and its faithful, points of physical contact. Chapters 2 and 3 come from the same place in the transcript, it has been divided only according to the subject matter, as Epaenetus naturally moved from talking about how calling is understood in Opus Dei to describing spiritual guidance, almost without an interruption. Chapter 1 contains his digression about the place of mystical experiences in the spirituality of the Work.*

## BOOK OF EPAENETUS

Chapter 1:

<sup>1</sup> You have to realize that in the Work it’s not... Not through the heart, but through the head, sort of. <sup>2</sup> It’s not focused on... True, there is the community [dimension], but more family-like. <sup>3</sup> The reason we meet is not

to feel better [afterwards]. <sup>4</sup> We come... There is no discussion in our meetings, I mean, we do talk, but about unrelated matters. <sup>5</sup> But for formation purposes one person speaks, he is prepared, the rest simply listen and then go back to their own lives and act accordingly. <sup>6</sup> Like the

early Christians – everyone is an individual in his life, family. (...) <sup>7</sup> It's like a leaven, it has to be concentrated, strong – this is the formation we receive – and then it needs to dissolve.

<sup>8</sup> Otherwise it would not fulfil its function. <sup>9</sup> So we concentrate, receive the formation, and then dissolve in 'the soup', give taste to it.

#### Chapter 2:

<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking it is a calling or rather – it is the general calling of every Christian, but made more particular.

<sup>2</sup> Everyone is called to be holy, but here this universal calling is made particular in the midst of the specific conditions of one's life. <sup>3</sup> We are to seek holiness within our families, at work, in ordinary life. <sup>4</sup> There is nothing original about this idea, everyone should do it, but what is interesting in Opus Dei is that they precisely say how to do it; they help to put that into practice.

#### Chapter 3:

<sup>1</sup> This is what attracted me to Opus Dei, the fact that Josemaría does not 'discover America', but applies measures well known and accepted in the Church:

Rosary, spiritual guidance... <sup>2</sup> There is nothing new about it. <sup>3</sup> Spiritual guidance is very valuable, precisely this is where we are shown how to put [formation] into practice, what measures to use, at which point to struggle more.

<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, confession sort of supplements it on the spiritual level, so to speak. <sup>5</sup> Maybe not spiritual, but the subject matter is different; it is a conversation about sin, not about my everyday problems. (...) <sup>6</sup> With my confessor I talk about my sins, sometimes I get some advice. <sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the matter of conversation with a lay spiritual director is not sin, but simply my everyday life: how is my pursuit of holiness going at this moment in life, in the struggle I began. <sup>8</sup> So very practical things, not connected to my sins, but rather to problems: this goes well, that goes well... <sup>9</sup> Out of a conversation like that I come out with a set of defined "points of struggle" for my everyday life, very down-to-earth. <sup>10</sup> The conversation is held fortnightly and this person represents, sort of, the prelate of Opus Dei, the father. <sup>11</sup> It is then, sort of, a conversation with him; this is at least the way I read it.

## Commentary

### 1:1-6

It would seem that there is not much to add and very little to comment on in this case, however the contrary is true, because by making definitive statements, precise distinctions and comparisons Epänetus sets Opus Dei against many interesting points of reference. The choices he makes, the way he makes sense of the Work and his membership in it,

provide with an abundant source of material to comment on. The first chapter originally was a response to a question about the place of ‘mystical experiences’ in Opus Dei’s lay spirituality, or rather about the conscious and complete lack of emphasis on these matters in their formation. Epaenetus tries to answer the question, but then his explanation ‘expands’ rapidly as he moves on; he also immediately translates the problem into, it would seem, a different issue, that of the tension between community and an individual in the life of the Church. In effect the reader gets an interesting description of the relations between the Prelature, its member, and the world around.

First, according to Epaenetus, one has to *realize that in the Work it’s not through the heart, but through the head* (1:1) and, with a tiny reservation which is then developed, *it’s not focused on* (1:2) the community dimension. As the reader will soon find out, both are closely connected and are fundamental for how the ‘lay outlook’ works in practice. *In the Work it’s ‘through the head’* (1:1), but it is just a small part of a larger picture because, for example, Opus Dei itself also comes, as a ‘vocation path’, through the same ‘channel’:

You made up your mind after reflection, rather than with any burning enthusiasm. Although you would have very much liked to feel it, there was no room for sentiment: you gave yourself to God when you were convinced that that is what He wanted. And, since then, you have *felt* no serious doubts; rather you experience a calm and peaceful joy, which sometimes overflows. It is thus that God rewards the daring feats of Love. (*Furrow*, 98)

This primacy of reflection that leads to ‘being convinced’ over feeling, enthusiasm, sentiment, in the words of Saint Josemaría, is the backbone and the fundament of Epaenetus’ argument. He starts by saying, that before discussing particular details and aspects of life in Opus Dei, one has to understand this one thing first. From there he steers

towards discussing the idea of community, with a silent assumption that the link is self-evident. And it truly is, but only if one accepts some additional assumptions and definitions that Epaenetus takes for granted. The Work is not a faith community in ordinary sense then, he suggests, *as the reason that [they] meet is not to feel better* (1:3), *it is more family-like* (1:2). A very strange combination at a first glance, but what he is trying to say is quite simple – such meeting is not to be enjoyed as an end in itself, it serves an external purpose. Epaenetus probably alludes here to youth movements, he himself had been a part of one as a student, and their gatherings which possibly were largely about sharing feelings, praying together, singing, etc.. As opposed to that Opus Dei is, strangely, *more family-like* (1:2). Even though members of the Work have a common faith, they do not meet to share it with each other, they do not come as brothers in faith, as equals to discuss their faith (*there is no discussion!* – 1:4), but more as children, almost as if the ties between them were natural, ‘family-like’. They are brothers in faith in the wider Church, the Body of Christ, in a more abstract sense; down here they are ‘related’ to each other only through having a personal, individual, and purely vertical relation with the same spiritual father – Escrivá, and the same mother-organization, the Prelature of Opus Dei. So they *do talk* with each other, *but only about unrelated matters* (1:4). Two quotations from Saint Josemaría illustrate this well:

Don't look for consolations apart from God. — See what that priest wrote: There should be no unburdening of your heart to any other friend when there is no need to do so. (*The Forge*, 428)

Alone! You are not alone. We are keeping you close company from afar. Besides..., the holy Spirit, living in your soul in grace — God with you, — is giving a supernatural tone to all your thoughts, desires and actions. (*The Way*, 273)

So the ‘related matters’ are reserved for God, communicated in prayer, but also in the process of formation and spiritual guidance, so through the Prelature. It may create a feeling that in everyday life one is alone with one’s struggles to put one’s faith into practice, as there is no place for ‘horizontal’ sharing, and, indeed, this seems to be the case. True, one is accompanied by fellow faithful, but “from afar” through their prayers, and, of course, by the Holy Spirit himself. *Like early Christians then, everyone is an individual in his life, family* (1:6) in the words of Epaphroditus, meaning: everyone is singled out by his individual relation with God. There is nothing new about this idea, but strongly emphasized and placed at the very core, it has a huge bearing on everything else, including, of course, on how the Prelature works as an organization. *So for formation purposes one person speaks, he is prepared, the rest simply listen and then go back to their own lives and act accordingly* (1:5).

### **1:7-9**

The comparison to early Christians (1:6) is not surprising. Every institution, movement, or order in the Church must in some way aspire to this ideal and has to explain its existence in terms of a very short passage from the Acts of the Apostles:

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. (...) All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.” (Acts 2:42.44-45)

Epaphroditus explains it using another two biblical metaphors, that of leaven (1:8):

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast (or “leaven”) that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened” (Matthew 13:33).

And that of salt (probably, since in *‘the soup’* – 1:9):

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot” (Matthew 5:13).

So they *come* to an Opus Dei house, but *there is no discussion* (1:4), only *one person speaks*, the one who *is prepared*, the rest *simply listen* (1:5), *concentrate*, *receive formation*, and then *dissolve in ‘the soup’* (1:9) to *act accordingly* (1:5). One is tempted to say that on the organizational level the devotion “to the teaching of the apostles” is given priority over communal life, “the breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42). What Opus Dei does then, is bringing closer to everyday life the hierarchical “apostle – faithful” relation, while leaving the communal life on the supernatural level of the universal Church, and on the natural level: family, friends, work. That is why the Work comes *through the head* (1:1), its charism is passed down as if it was knowledge to learn, by the one who *is prepared* (1:5), instructed in the teachings. To then share this received charism with the fellow faithful just to *feel better* (1:3) would be a waste, like when “salt loses its taste” (Matthew 5:13). If things are ordered in this way, it all logically makes sense, but the authority behind the formation must be unquestionable, as the distinctions are sharp – *everyone is an individual* (1:6), “there should be no unburdening of your heart to any other friend” apart from God himself (*The Forge*, 428). Come, concentrate, dissolve!

**2:1-3:2**

Many theological studies have been written on the subject of vocation to Opus Dei, as it is a very complicated issue to theorize about. The four sentences of explanation provided by Epaenetus by no means exhaust the problem; they can serve as a mere indication of a few main characteristics of this calling, and perhaps provoke a few further questions. One is forced then not to pay too much attention to the factual content of Epaenetus' explanation, but to the way he goes about it, the way he tries to summarize the issue in simple terms, and, most importantly, from a personal perspective.

In this short text Epaenetus tries to come down from the most abstract explanation, the universal call to holiness of all the baptized, to what Opus Dei is really and practically about to him. This 'descent' is interesting and symptomatic of the way vocation to the Work is usually explained 'officially' – the same logic is applied (only in a more sophisticated manner), and it is often equally confusing. Following Epaenetus is like climbing down the stairs: *it is the general calling of every Christian (2:1)*, but *made particular in the midst of the specific conditions of one's life (2:2)*. So it is this general vocation received in baptism, but since every Christian has it, does it automatically mean that it would be good for him or her to join Opus Dei? No, because *it is made particular (2:2) in the Work, they (specifically the faithful of the Prelature) are to seek holiness within [their] families, at work, in ordinary life (2:3)*. This, in turn, and purely because family life was included, should be true for every lay Catholic, so still for the vast majority of the faithful, millions and millions of people. Epaenetus has to keep descending, as truly *there is nothing original about this idea (2:4)*, so it cannot serve as an affirmative reason for joining. His final conclusion: in Opus Dei *they precisely say how to do it, and they help to put that into practice (2:4)*.

It is safe to assert then, that what is particular about the Work must be this ‘precisely saying’ and ‘helping’, in other words, the specific ‘know-how’ and the specific way in which it is delivered. It is very important to have said this, as this is the only way out of the confusion. To translate it into more accessible language, borrowing from the first chapter of this Book: the ‘know-how’ is the content of the formation (the teachings in the form of knowledge), and the way of receiving it is the “come-concentrate-dissolve” schema. The former is specific, because, however complete and orthodox, it still yields just one of many possible ways of responding fully to one’s baptismal vocation as a lay person. This response draws heavily on the teachings of Saint Josemaría Escrivá himself, inevitably at the expense of numerous other authorities. The ‘schema’ is specific, in that it assumes a certain, clearly defined understanding of concepts like community, obedience, freedom, etc., which in the end amounts to a whole way of life. This, together with the ‘know-how’, more than anything else, constitute the two distinctive features of Opus Dei as an organization within the Catholic Church.

There is nothing strange about either of the two; in fact, it is a rather common practice for institutions within the Catholic Church that offer specific vocational paths to the faithful. The problem is the way of explaining the calling to Opus Dei and its charism, the reversal of the usual situation. Since it is presented as the universal calling to holiness *made particular in the midst of the specific conditions of one’s life* (2:2), one can easily imagine many young, devout lay Catholics struggling with the ‘why not’ question, instead of the normal ‘why yes’ question. In other words, one could be forced into a defensive position by having to give reasons for ‘not joining’, instead of looking for affirmative reasons to join. In this case the Escrivá’s words about making up one’s “mind after *reflection*, rather

than with any burning enthusiasm” and giving oneself “to God when [one was] *convinced* that that is what He wanted” (Furrow, 98) would sound rather dispiriting.

This is not to say, that the above mentioned logic is deliberately designed to confuse people and put them under pressure, as a ‘recruitment’ strategy. The Work is the only ‘vocational option’ of this sort in the Church from many perspectives – this may be one of the clues. The pressure can be very real, but it may simply be that it comes ‘from the inside’ and it is only projected, ‘blamed’ on Opus Dei. In any case, this text is not a place to speculate about these issues, as the empirical material does not provide with sufficient evidence. The important thing to notice is the simple fact, that when Epaenetus finally says what the vocation to Opus Dei is really about for him, he does not mention the very special devotion to Saint Josemaría for example (a huge reliance on his teachings in the process of formation), something that has to be affirmatively chosen when making the decision. Nor does he mention the key prerequisites emphasized in Opus Dei’s own theological studies on the matter, like the need for a professional vocation or the commitment to spreading the message that must necessarily accompany the obvious commitment to living it, and so on (see: Ocariz 2003).

A similar logic can be observed at the very beginning of the third chapter of the Book of Epaenetus, where he says that what attracted him was *the fact that Josemaría does not ‘discover America’, but applies measures well known and accepted in the Church* (3:1), and soon after he adds: *there is nothing new about it* (3:2). Again, one is tempted to disagree immediately, because, on the contrary, lots of things are new about the Work of God. True, the *measures* are *well known and accepted in the Church* (3:1), but as Epaenetus himself noticed, the key thing is by whom (Saint Josemaría), which ones and

how they are applied – *they precisely say how to do it; they help put that into practice* (2:4). What attracted Epaenetus was the fact that Escrivá was not a revolutionary, but instead worked firmly within the Catholic tradition. But this is true for countless great people in the history of the Church, a vast majority, if not every one. It has always been the careful balance in ‘the application of old measures’ that made a difference and thus, paradoxically, brought something ‘new’ to the Church. In other words, the very fact that Saint Josemaría was not ‘a revolutionary’ could be a prerequisite for considering a vocation in Opus Dei, but not a reason. When it is treated as a reason, it immediately implies that some of the other founders did try to ‘*discover America*’ (3:1), whereas Opus Dei is simply the essence of Catholicism, comes naturally, etc., and this would be very misleading.

### **3:3-11**

The most vital ‘measure’ for the functioning of the Prelature as an organization is the spiritual guidance. For Epaenetus it is as if it represented a half of what Opus Dei (its formation) is really about for him, the ‘helping’ side (to put the instruction ‘how to do it’ into practice) – *precisely this is where we are shown how to put [formation] into practice, what measures to use, at which point to struggle more* (3:3). Now within this half, there lies yet another distinction, as spiritual guidance consist of the weekly confession of sins and the conversation with a lay spiritual director, which happens on the fortnightly basis. And it is around this distinction that Epaenetus builds his explanation of the whole process.

It is interesting to notice that Epaenetus mistakenly identifies the whole spiritual guidance with the latter of the two; that is with the conversation with a lay, celibate Opus Dei

member, and says that the confession of sins merely *supplements it* (3:4). He corrects himself later, but still places much heavier emphasis on the conversation; he summarizes confession very quickly: *I talk about my sins, sometimes I get some advice* (3:6), almost in passing, as a background for the following description of the conversation (3:7-11). Perhaps it is partly because he is talking to a fellow Catholic, so he can safely assume some things as obvious, and focus on what is potentially new and interesting for the interviewer, but there seems to be more to it.

On the one hand the usage of a specific language is noticeable (“points of struggle”, “pursuit of holiness”), on the other Epaenetus quickly corrects himself on the word ‘spiritual’ spoken in reference to the confession of sins: *‘confession sort of supplements [the conversation] on the spiritual level, so to speak. Maybe not spiritual, but the subject matter is different’* (3:4-5). Escrivá’s ‘spiritual materialism’ immediately comes to mind here, one can almost reconstruct Epaenetus’ line of thought – if the confession of sins, as opposed to the conversation with a lay director, concerns the spiritual level (3:4), then it automatically relegates the everyday life to the ‘non-spiritual’, worldly, profane sphere. Now this cannot stand in the light of Saint Josemaría’s teachings, who wanted his followers to materialize their spiritual lives, while on the other hand stressing that all one does affects his soul. The division between confession and conversation must not be along the ‘soul/body’ line, but rather it is quite practical – *the subject matter is different; it is a conversation about sin, not about my everyday problems* (3:5); two different subject matters, but both are spiritual.

The rest of the text is dedicated to explaining this ‘subject matter’ difference. It is conducted in a truly dualist manner, in spite of the fact that the dualism at its core has to

be avoided at all cost. On one side there is sin, on the other *simply everyday life, the struggle [he] began (3:7), practical things connected rather to problems (3:8)*. And it is at this other side where the real *struggle* of his *pursuit of holiness (3:7)* takes place, it seems! So while from a priest he just sometimes gets *some advice (3:6), out of a conversation like that [he comes] out with a set of defined “points of struggle” for [his] everyday life, very down-to-earth (3:9), very practical things (3:8)*. So holiness has little to do with being free from (mortal) sin for Epaphroditus, or rather, being free from sin is far from enough, it is just a prerequisite. Holiness is perfection (within reason, but nevertheless), something you achieve through struggle, by slowly getting better at very precisely *defined “points of struggle” (3:8)*. Sin is unusual like breaking the law. When it happens, it stops ‘the pursuit’ completely; however, it does happen very rarely. What really matters then are the obstacles, problems, and growing in virtues through the constant struggle, becoming perfect. For that someone more like a supervisor is needed, someone who would listen to the regular progress reports (*‘this goes well, that goes well...’ – 3:8*), and not necessary someone like a doctor, who is really interested only when something is wrong.

In the last two verses Epaphroditus points to the ultimate difference between these two forms of spiritual guidance – the final recipient, the one who is merely represented by either a priest, or a lay celibate director. And so in the case of the conversation, the lay director *represents, sort of, the prelate of Opus Dei, the father. It is then, sort of, a conversation with him (3:10-11)*. Epaphroditus does not have to say anything about confession (the Sacrament of Penance), as it is common knowledge among the Catholics that the priest represents the entire Church, the Body of Christ, and ultimately, since it is a sacrament, it is Christ himself who listens. This leaves no doubt which one is more important in the

objective order of things. However, as has been said before, it is in the ‘subjective’ order, down on earth, where the actual, practical *pursuit of holiness* (3:7) happens. This striving for human perfection comes from the desire to be like God the Father (“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” – Matthew 5:48, a quote used so often by Escrivá), and hence is linked directly to Him. One is then tempted to say that both of these two strands of spiritual guidance go all the way (1: lay director – father Prelate – father founder Josemaría – God the Father; 2: priest – the Church – Jesus Christ, God the Son), and that, without challenging the objective order of things, the practical and rhetorical priority is given to the ‘father’ side.

### **Introduction to the Book of Prisca and Aquila**

*“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church at their house” (Romans 16:3-5). It had been very difficult to arrange a meeting with Prisca and Aquila, it had been postponed a few times before it finally happened – they had just moved into a new house, Aquila worked for long hours (as a journalist), Prisca took care of their three small children. When the interview eventually began, it took quite some time before the guilt about taking up their precious time was gone. It was meant to be conducted with each one of them separately, and Aquila had not been at home when the conversation with his wife started, but he came back in the middle of it and from then on they responded to questions together. They both came across as very intelligent and independent in their thinking, they even*

*had one or two heated arguments about theological issues concerning the teachings of Saint Josemaría Escrivá during the interview. To observe the interactions between them was surely as interesting as the content of what they said itself, unfortunately it was almost impossible to express the context in the transcript. After the recorded part was over, they asked many questions concerning the methodological side of the research, they also, jokingly, ‘morally obliged’ the interviewer to present Opus Dei in a positive light.*

*The choice of texts for this Book has been difficult, almost the entire transcript is theologically and intellectually rich, but most of all it provides many interesting insights and examples of the experience of being a member of the Work. The Book of Prisca and Aquila in its final form consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 is Prisca’s*

vocation story, which had been told before her husband came back from work, so in more intimate circumstances. Prisca began talking about her calling to Opus Dei by distinguishing between how it happened “technically” and how it turned out to be “for her”; only the latter part has been kept for the purpose of this thesis. Aquila appears already in Chapter 2. The text used in it is preceded in the transcript by a heated debate whether it is possible to sanctify the act of giving birth; it offers a summary of the relations between work and sanctification, suffering and mortification, key concepts in Opus Dei’s spirituality. In Chapter 3 Prisca relates to the ideal of being, as a member of the Work, “totally active and totally contemplative”, in the words of

Escrivá himself (1964), and responds to the interviewer’s doubts in this matter, also by giving an interesting example from her own life. Chapter 4 explains and clarifies, in the words of Aquila, the concepts of freedom and authority in spiritual guidance offered by the Prelature to its members.

A result of a very worthwhile interview, this Book is a fertile source of knowledge and inspiration for this thesis. It is particularly important, because it further develops and clarifies Opus Dei’s metaphysics of work (Aquila’s idea of a success “in a supernatural sense” – 2:10) and sacrifice, as well as many other interesting themes.

## BOOK OF PRISCA AND AQUILA

Chapter 1:  
Prisca said:

<sup>1</sup> Among other things, there was this heroine in the book I read, who said something like: “Lord God, if he wants someone for himself, then he does not necessarily call him to the religious life. But the lives of all the people he calls aren’t easy.” <sup>2</sup> And this heroine got married, had kids and led an ordinary, tough life. <sup>3</sup> She’d say that God called her, but not to religious life. <sup>4</sup> So when reading, I noted down this citation. I did not know of Opus Dei back then. <sup>5</sup> And I wondered: is it really possible to offer oneself to God fully and not to become a religious, because I wanted to have a

family. <sup>6</sup> And I lived with this thought for many years: how to do it and still have a husband and kids. <sup>7</sup> And when I got to know Opus Dei closer – I started attending meetings, reading books – I learned that there is this saint, Josemaría (although back then he wasn’t a saint yet, but a “servant of God”), and that he preached about the possibility of becoming a saint in the everyday, ordinary life. <sup>8</sup> Whatever you do, you ought to do it so that it leads you to become a saint. <sup>9</sup> There are no boundaries in terms of state of life; you don’t have to be a religious, a priest, to achieve perfection, sanctity, or at least to be able to search for it. <sup>10</sup> That was a

discovery for me, what I was searching for.<sup>11</sup> So when I learned that Opus Dei is precisely the place for people who do not change their state, lifestyle, who, I don't know, do not quit their jobs and leave their family, but just simply live the life they have...<sup>12</sup> Maybe slightly differently, with certain demands and obligations to fulfil, as they want to become holy in the place they are.<sup>13</sup> ...then I knew that it was for me and started to get more and more involved.

#### Chapter 2:

Prisca said:

<sup>1</sup> Suffering adds value to work. <sup>2</sup> It's not like everything all of a sudden becomes easy. <sup>3</sup> One can react to toil in different ways, if we react with anger, rejection, then we waste an opportunity for it to sanctify us. <sup>4</sup> But if we accept it as mortification, not with a resignation, but with acceptance and being grateful to God, with a certain intention in mind, then it sanctifies us.

Aquila said:

<sup>5</sup> I think that the difference in one's attitude is most clearly manifested in a situation of suffering. <sup>6</sup> When someone offers this suffering – he sanctifies it and himself – then, in spite of this suffering, there is joy. <sup>7</sup> And it surprises other people, as most of them see a strong link between suffering and despair. (...) <sup>8</sup> Mortification is a very important characteristic of the Work, all the members have to always remember that when undertaking any action, either work or apostolate, this action has to be preceded by prayer and mortification. <sup>9</sup> These are the necessary conditions for the given undertaking to be successful. <sup>10</sup> Successful in a supernatural sense, because success may mean a personal

failure, but in a supernatural sense God may have a certain plan which we cannot recognize.

#### Chapter 3:

Prisca said:

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to merge these realities. <sup>2</sup> Our life is meaningless without God, but it does not mean that we can forget about our duties, our life on earth. <sup>3</sup> Our private, personal prayer is a conversation with God, but largely about our everyday things, it's not some kind of flying away, nothing's spontaneous! (...) <sup>4</sup> I remember a meditation given by an [Opus Dei] priest, in which he said that for wives a wonderful topic for prayer is what to cook their husbands for dinner. <sup>5</sup> It was a discovery for me. <sup>6</sup> So in my prayer I also talk about my husband, that I want to make him happy and that, among other things, includes cooking something good for dinner. <sup>7</sup> And this also can be a theme of prayer, the whole everyday life. <sup>8</sup> So prayer isn't something disconnected from reality.

#### Chapter 4:

Aquila said:

<sup>1</sup> When it comes to moral issues, one cannot have freedom. <sup>2</sup> It doesn't make sense: to be in Opus Dei and demand for oneself freedom in these matters. <sup>3</sup> We either agree to be led or not. <sup>4</sup> So in the course of spiritual guidance we are recommended to read books which develop us as people and serve a certain purpose. <sup>5</sup> It is a sign of obedience, when we have doubts about certain books, then... <sup>6</sup> We all know very well that some books are harmful from the point of view of our faith, and we, having various backgrounds and professions, cannot make the right judgement by

ourselves. <sup>7</sup> That's why we need to be obedient, this is what authority is all

about, either we accept it or not! <sup>8</sup> And in Opus Dei we have this kind of authority.

## Commentary

### 1:1-7

In chapter 1 of the Book the reader is presented with a very well structured and coherent vocation story. Everything is there: the introduction that nicely establishes the background, the heroine's (Prisca's) existential dilemma – the main theme, problem that needed a solution, then the climax, and finally the happy ending, which in turn can serve as a beginning for another story. Prisca had clearly thought the subject through beforehand, the narrative flows naturally, all events are meaningful. The story revolves around a certain tension, two seemingly conflicting desires: in the language of Saint Josemaría's sermons, Prisca had led 'a double life' before meeting Opus Dei, afterwards came 'the unity of life'. In other words, this is a story about how, thanks to Escrivá's preaching (1:7), instead of making a difficult existential decision, Prisca was somehow unexpectedly relieved from this task and presented with what appeared to be a true synthesis, a third 'place' in which the tension no longer exists.

The conflict is clearly spelled out halfway through the story; it is between the desire *to offer oneself to God fully* (1:5) which was somewhat identified with the need to enter a religious order and become a nun, and the desire *to have a family* (1:5), to *have a husband and kids* (1:6). Hope for reconciliation had been with Prisca for years before she met Opus Dei thanks to a book – *this heroine got married, had kids and led an ordinary,*

*tough life*, and *she'd say that God called her, but not to the religious life* (1:1-3). However, this was only fiction, it did not come from a position of authority, and therefore all Prisca could do with it was to note *down this [key] citation* (1:4) and keep wondering: *is it really possible* (1:5)? But, of course, the trace of the solution can already be seen in the way the problem is depicted, and here comes the first interesting thing about Prisca's story. *This heroine* (1:1) was individually chosen by God, elected, *but not to the religious life* (1:3) – this is then not the necessary 'sign' of His favour (leaving the world and leading a celibate life). Instead, the emphasis is placed elsewhere – *lives of all the people he calls aren't easy* (1:1), so it is not the state of life that is an external sign of God's favour, but somehow the fact that life becomes *tough* (1:2). One could almost come to an extraordinary conclusion that as long as the life is tough, it can be considered as fully committed to God, as if 'the toughness' of leaving the world could be abstracted from the religious life, lifted and then applied to married life. Of course, it does not stand theologically, but it is nevertheless symptomatic of a certain way of thinking, a way that potentially has enormous social and political consequences.

In any event, according to Prisca at this stage of her life all that was nothing more than a thought at the back of her mind. She *did not know of Opus Dei back then* (1:4), so she just *lived with this thought for many years: how to do it and still have a husband and kids* (1:6). And then the breakthrough comes. Prisca *got to know Opus Dei and learned that there is this saint, Josemaría who preached about the possibility of becoming a saint in the everyday, ordinary life* (1:7). In her narrative *this heroine* (1:1) was 'a type of' Saint Josemaría, who was to come. The meta-plot is clear; the heroine merely announced the idea, while he came with the authority of the Church. He preached and embodied the message which Prisca had always wanted to hear coming from the position of authority (a

priest, servant of God, and now a saint, but also a certain authority coming from *attending meetings, reading books* – 1:7).

### **1:8-13**

What follows in Prisca's narrative is a short description of the essence of Escrivá's message: *whatever you do, you ought to do it so that it leads you to become a saint* (1:8), and shortly after that the explanation of what it means in this particular story: *there are no boundaries in terms of state of life; you don't have to be a religious, a priest, to achieve perfection, sanctity, or at least to be able to search for it* (1:9). It is interesting to notice two things, even if they seem obvious. Firstly, the emphasis on the fact that *you don't have to (become a religious* – 1:9), rather than on 'you can' (join Opus Dei and be a fully committed, but lay Catholic). Secondly, and that happened in previous Books as well, the identification of sanctity with perfection. Surely it would not be legitimate to draw theological conclusions from common speech like that, but a certain tendency is easily observable. The desire to follow Christ radically comes first in Prisca's life and it is accompanied by the idea that it must be life-changing to pursue it. If it was necessary to choose between this desire and having a family (*how to do it and still have a husband and kids?* – 1:6), she would possibly have joined a religious order. She clearly postponed making the decision, waiting and hoping for a legitimate *possibility* (1:7) not to.

Opus Dei *was a discovery for [her] and what [she] was searching for* (1:10) at the same time, so not a complete surprise, more like something she intuitively hoped to be there to fill the gap, but intellectually doubted the very possibility of such a synthesis. The origins of the gap, this empty space that Prisca wanted to fill in her life, could also be traced back to the specific socio-historical context of the Catholic Church in Poland in the 1980's and

1990's, or rather pre- and post-1989. On one hand, the Church offered very little to young adults who were serious about their faith, focusing mainly on the youth. But on the other, and here is a twist to the story, certain aspects of the message of Opus Dei were very much in line with what the Communist government would want Polish Catholicism to look like. In fact, the author of the book that Prisca refers to was Jan Dobraczyński, a controversial figure – a Catholic cooperating with the Communist regime in the 1980's. There is a political dimension to Prisca's story then, which unfortunately cannot be developed here due to a lack of data. However, it still points to a very complicated issue of the position of Saint Josemaría Escrivá's teachings in the political sphere, not in the sense of its relation to particular political agendas and ideologies, but more in the sense of its potential usefulness for almost any form of political establishment.

The last three verses provide the reader with a happy ending. Prisca *learned that Opus Dei is precisely the place for her* (1:11); she *knew that it was for [her] and started to get more and more involved* (1:13). The usage of verbs like 'to learn' and 'to know' (earlier: *attending meetings, reading books* – 1:7) together with stressing the source of authority (*there is this saint* – 1:7), but also the absence of expressions of feelings and the emphasis on reflection (*and I wondered* – 1:5, *and I lived with this thought for many years* – 1:6), make Prisca's vocation story look very consistent with the Opus Dei's 'lay outlook'. The primacy of reflection over feeling and sentiment was already mentioned in the commentary to the *Book of Epaphroditus*. What these two texts have also strikingly in common is the indirect suggestion that in some sense Opus Dei is the only place for people who *want to offer [themselves] to God fully and not to become a religious* (1:5), *precisely the place for people who do not change their state* (1:11). Another very interesting thing about the last verses of Prisca's story is the way in which she describes

the crucial difference between a lay person ‘fully offered to God’ in Opus Dei and ordinary lay person. Both *do not change their state (...)* and *just simply live their lives* (1:11), but the former does it *with certain demands and obligations to fulfil, as [he or she wants] to become holy* (1:12). These ‘demands and obligations’ seem to correspond with the idea *that lives of all the people [God] calls aren’t easy* (1:1), that is, they are the means by which ‘the toughness’ (as a sign of God’s favour in Prisca’s account) travels from the religious state back into the world.

## **2:1-4**

The key words of the second chapter seem to be: suffering, work, mortification, sanctification. Both Prisca and Aquila are trying to explain the dynamics between these concepts, and they are clear and to the point when doing so, the sentences are often short and full of definitive statements. Again, like in the *Book of Julia*, the reader has a chance to observe a revealing interplay between the everyday, ‘earthly’ reality and the meta level, the same reality but seen from the God’s perspective.

*Suffering adds value to work* (2:1). Work has value in itself: this is obvious and has been repeatedly mentioned in the previous commentaries – it is a very basic teaching of the Catholic Church and the very core of the message of Opus Dei. The necessity to work, as Saint Josemaría himself stressed on numerous occasions, is not a consequence of the original sin, of the Fall. On the contrary, it is “man’s original vocation”, “a blessing from God”, man was placed in “Paradise *ut operaretur*, so that he would work” (*The Way*, 482). Suffering, however, came after the Fall and is directly linked to it, perhaps especially to the toil which accompanies man’s labour:

“Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; for you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return.” (Genesis 3:17-19)

“This toil connected with work marks the way of human life on earth and constitutes *an announcement of death*”, as Pope John Paul II put it (*Laborem Exercens*, 27), precisely to this toil the Son of God was “obedient to death”:

[Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:7-8)

In other words, the redemptive death of Christ on the cross was just a climax; the whole suffering that he humbly endured while here on earth is redemptive, therefore:

By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ. (CCC, 2427)

Prisca and Aquila show how it all works “in practice” in their daily lives. The logic remains the same, or rather this is a particular application of the general idea of turning everything into “a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ” (Msg 3:1) – suffering can be turned into mortification. Again, it is difficult not to notice that the mechanism resembles a small sacred ceremony, a little mass that happens over and over again, tens and hundreds of times a day. First, one needs to *accept [the*

*suffering] as mortification, being grateful to God (2:4)*, that is accept it as a gift ('bread and wine'), an occasion to meet Him. Already for 'being grateful' grace is needed, for one to be able to transcend the situation of suffering. It is the Holy Spirit who transforms, like during an actual mass:

Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness. Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. (Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer II)

Then it can all be offered back to God *with a certain intention in mind*, and only then *it sanctifies us (2:4)*. The intention, 'the thought' as Julia put it (Jul 2:4), seems to be vital, as, in a way, it guarantees that the previous 'stages' have taken place – the acceptance of the way things are and the gratefulness for an opportunity to transcend it, to encounter God. For the 'ceremony' to be valid, it obviously has to be fully conscious. This makes the life of an Opus Dei member potentially very intense, there is no space for *waste (2:3)*, which consequently becomes another interesting concept to examine. As has been said before, since everything can be turned into a meeting with Christ, there are no reasons for not doing so on every occasion. A negative reaction to toil is natural, but *if we react [to suffering] with anger, rejection, then we waste an opportunity for it to sanctify us (2:3)*, that is, an opportunity for letting the supernatural enter our world is wasted. Those through whom the supernatural enters ('us') are priests and prophets of the New Covenant, "the chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). Once again, the distinction between an opportunity and a duty hardly stands in members' everyday reality.

**2:5-10**

Aquila's contribution to his wife's explanation is twofold. Firstly, he clearly shows that turning suffering into mortification is just a consequence of a more general *attitude* (2:5), the 'sanctifying disposition' towards the world, so to speak. In doing so he also admits that it is precisely *in a situation of suffering* where the difference between 'a priest at work' in the world and 'a non-practising priest' (or simply 'a non-priest') *is most clearly manifested* (2:5). Secondly, Aquila points at this key manifestation – *in spite of this suffering, there is joy* (2:6). While most people naturally see *a strong link between suffering and despair* (2:7), because they see it as hopeless and meaningless, here something extraordinary happens. On a very small scale, it is something analogically supernatural to Abraham's faith who "believed, hoping against hope" (Romans 4:22), and therefore *it surprises other people* (2:7). It does so because it is counterintuitive in a very 'redemptive' sense, and therefore has a huge potential use in apostolate, for spreading the Good News. After all, "the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Most importantly then, for Aquila joy seems to be a sign of being sanctified, set aside from the rest of the people. In some sense being joyful also becomes a duty, precisely as one of the external signs of 'being good', in the words of Escrivá: "It's not enough to be good; you need to show it" (*Furrow*, 735).

There seem to be two kinds of mortification and so far Prisca and Aquila have been talking only about one of them, that is mortification as something that suffering, which naturally accompanies our existence here on earth, can be turned into. However, mortification in common understanding of the term, as suffering actively and willingly inflicted upon oneself, is *also a very important characteristic of the Work* (2:8). It has never been denied or played down by the officials of the Prelature, even in the midst of

various controversies, scandals and accusations that surrounded the organization almost from the very beginning of its existence. It seems that the key characteristic of mortification then, similarly to sacrifice, is that it needs to be conscious. The idea being: whether it is the natural suffering or self-inflicted, it is still a matter of free choice. In the first case the choice between *acceptance and being grateful to God* (2:4) and rejection, in the second the choice between preceding an undertaking with mortification or not.

The explanation that Aquila offers is very short, but fascinating, as it introduces a very interesting concept of ‘*success in a supernatural sense*’ (2:10). *For the given undertaking to be successful* (2:9) *it has to be preceded by prayer and mortification* (2:8) – *these are the necessary conditions* (2:9) and *all the members have to always remember that* (2:8). In the light of what has been previously written it is relatively easy to develop an idea about what it all means. As in the case of seemingly *hopeless labour* (Jul 2:3) which is turned into meaningful work through being offered to God as prayer, as described in the Book of Julia, here the same thing, although through a different conceptual apparatus, happens to suffering and failure. *All the members* (2:8) of Opus Dei are workers, but their ‘employer’ is God and, as a part of the “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9), they toil for the Kingdom of Heaven, so that “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). In vast majority of cases their work is indistinguishable from other people’s work, that is because *every honest human reality* (Msg 2:4) comes from the Creator anyway, and “he makes his sun rise on the bad and on the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). However, *God may have a certain plan which we cannot recognize* (2:10) due to our natural limitations and shortcomings, and only then one can spot the difference. First of all, in spite of (inevitable in this case) *personal failure* (2:10), *there is joy* (2:6). As in the case of suffering, where meaning is

secured through an act of conscious offering it to God (*with a certain intention in mind* – 2:4), here the conscious act (*prayer and mortification* – 2:8) which precedes an action secures a ‘*success in a supernatural sense*’ (2:10). Through an action performed in this manner the supernatural enters ‘the earthly reality’, the Kingdom comes nearer. In Augustinian terms they could be perhaps viewed as practical expressions of the desire to please God and, as Thomas Merton famously put it in one of his prayers, “the desire to please you does in fact please you” (1956, 82). So, in Aquila’s terms in turn, prayer and mortification serve as ‘material’ confirmations of this desire, and therefore automatically guarantee success.

### **3:1-8**

*It is possible to merge* (3:1) contemplation with everyday reality, says Prisca. In the words of Saint Josemaría, this place of meeting is one’s heart, a personal altar, a place where lawful sacrifices can be offered:

“Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”  
(Msg 4:5)

How do these two ‘realities’ work together? First and foremost, *our life is meaningless without God* (3:2), he is the source of meaning and the underlying unity. Nevertheless the distinction between these two realities still stands, as it all *does not mean that we can forget about our duties, our life on earth* (3:2). In spite of undoubted primacy of heaven, Prisca’s life is still divided then, she has ‘earthly duties’ to fulfil, only now they make more sense. It would almost seem that these duties stand regardless of God, that is, he neither relieves her of them, nor does he bind her more closely to them. At least not directly, but only by making these duties somehow more appealing and, in effect, freely

chosen. He sustains all meaning in Prisca's life, she, in turn, gives it all back to him in prayer – *our private, personal prayer is a conversation with God, but largely about our everyday things* (3:3). So 'the matter' of Prisca's *conversation with God* (3:3) is 'earth' and not 'heaven' – *it's not some kind of flying away, nothing's spontaneous!* (3:3). What would the word 'spontaneous' mean here? It seems that nothing is outside 'the ordinary order' of things; thanks to God, Prisca's reality is meaningful to the tiniest detail, that is, it is ordered to the tiniest detail – spheres of life, distinctions, categories, compartments go all the way down. "Priority, order. Everything in its place" (*The Way*, 624), as Saint Josemaría put it, meaning equals order! *Nothing's spontaneous* (3:3) because nothing escapes it. It is interesting to see what contemplating the mysteries of faith, practices of meditation should mean for an Opus Dei member according to Escrivá:

It is possible that you might be frightened by this word: meditation. It makes you think of books with old black covers, the sound of sighs and the irksome repetition of routine prayers... But that is not meditation. To meditate is to consider, to contemplate God as your Father, and yourself as his son in need of help. And then to give him thanks for all that he has given you and for all that he will give you. (*Furrow*, 661)

He somewhat assumes that his children in the Work "might be frightened" by the idea of meditation. In the end all that he 'leaves behind' as possible subject of it is precisely the very relation between oneself and God as his Father, the provider of meaning. It makes sense, as this is by definition the only thing that stands outside 'the system', the order of things. If anything else stood outside, it would be irrational and therefore frightening perhaps. Mortification has an interesting role to play here:

Practise meditation for a fixed period and at a fixed time. – Otherwise we would be putting our own convenience first; that would be a lack of mortification. And prayer without mortification is not at all effective. (*Furrow*, s.446)

The 'lack of mortification' is avoided through 'fixing' prayer in time. This fixing is then a voluntary expression of order, a witness to meaning; it proclaims it, so to speak, and in doing so it secures the effectiveness of prayer, and therefore a 'success *in a supernatural sense*' (2:10) of the action that follows.

To illustrate these few general statements with which Prisca has started her argument, she then quickly gives an example: *I remember a meditation given by an [Opus Dei] priest, in which he said that for wives a wonderful topic for prayer is what to cook their husbands for dinner* (3:4). The only difference between ordinary thinking and meditation in this case is the fact that the latter is done in the presence of God, in dialogue with him. Instead of 'talking to herself' in her mind, Prisca communicates everything to God. *The whole everyday life can be a theme of prayer* (3:7), *prayer isn't something disconnected from reality* (3:8). Reality is strongly identified with her everyday life, the material things. All the 'otherworldliness' is reduced to having the Father to talk to at all times. *So in my prayer I also talk about my husband, that I want to make him happy and that, among other things, includes cooking something good for dinner* (3:6), says Prisca. She makes sense of her situation in life and her work in the form of a dialogue with God, and this dialogue absolutely dominates her spiritual life. As one of the leading Opus Dei theologians put it:

“What the teaching of St. Josemaría Escrivá and the spirituality of Opus Dei propose is (to sum up) a prayer which, by encouraging a person to ground his life more on faith, incorporates into the dynamic of the experience of faith the totality of life, including (...) the full range of earthly experiences and realities.” (Illanes 2003: 197)

“In the Christian who lives in the world, the Christian whom God wants to live in the world, this action of prayer implies recognizing that through the world God is

speaking to man and that it is through the world, using the world, that man should respond. (...). In no sense does this mean a flight from the world; rather, it means delving into the world, to grasp its meaning better and to understand better what God wants one as a concrete individual to be doing there” (Illanes 2003: 199).

In another text the issue was summarized, also relating to the quotes above, in the following way:

Josemaría Escrivá could almost agree with the statement taken from Kardong’s article that “an ordinary occupation of human beings to fabricate a false ego-self” (1995), except that, crucially, this “ego-self” does not have to be false. In the spirituality of Opus Dei prayer in the widest, “continual” sense is an *action* that happens *through* and *using* the world. Spiritual reading and formation in Church’s teachings are in some sense externally inserted in this cycle of reading God through the world and responding to Him using the world. The obvious side effect of this is the conservative reputation of the organization (outside the socio-political context in which it was born and grew), as there is no position from which formation could be contested. By relying on the authority of the Church’s official teachings and that of the founder – Josemaría Escrivá, it serves as a tool to read *the world* rather than being *lectio divina*. From this perspective man truly “fabricates his ego-self”, but if it is “work well done” (Illanes 2003, 186), then it can be offered to God constantly, “without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17). (Piatkowski 2007b:429-430)

#### **4:1-8**

In the last part of the Book Aquila deals with issues around authority, freedom and obedience in Opus Dei. The text is very short and simple, nevertheless it still provides lots of interesting material to comment on, especially in the light of Escrivá’s teaching on personal freedom. Aquila starts from an interesting statement: *When it comes to moral issues, one cannot have freedom* (4:1), he then quickly moves to describing how it works in Opus Dei. It seems that for Aquila this statement is universally true – he builds his short argument on it and, in the end, arrives at the concept of authority. It seems that for him all the freedom in *moral issues* (4:1) comes down to a choice of authority to follow -

*this is what authority is all about, either we accept it or not! And in Opus Dei we have this kind of authority (4:7-8).* Even though Aquila is probably well aware of the importance of personal conscience in Catholic moral theology, the simplifications he makes for the sake of giving an accessible answer are still symptomatic. As a side effect of all this almost, he addresses an even more interesting question, about the role that the Work plays in his life, about the very nature of Opus Dei as an organization.

*It doesn't make sense: to be in Opus Dei and demand for oneself freedom in these matters. We either agree to be led or not (4:2-3),* says Aquila, an 'either or' that leads to the notion of obedience:

Obedience, the sure way. Unreserved obedience to whoever is in charge, the way of sanctity. Obedience in your apostolate, the only way: for, in a work of God, the spirit must be to obey or to leave. (*The Way*, 941)

The move from 'a work of God' to the Work of God is obvious by now. In Opus Dei one either obeys or leaves, and obedience to God equals obedience to the recommendations given *in the course of spiritual guidance (4:4)*. Although one is not directly identified with the other, rather obedience to the spiritual director *is a sign of obedience (4:5)* to God, but practically they are the same. Once one is within the organization the move: 'the Work – the Spirit that drives it – God himself' happens automatically and inevitably. One is free to enter and (hopefully) free to leave, no third way is possible – *this is what authority is all about (4:7)*.

Like in the case of the Book of Tryphaena, the theme of *reading the right books (Trp 1:6)* comes back uninvited, so to speak. For both Tryphaena and Aquila it is clearly the key feature of spiritual direction, books seem to have an enormous significance attached to

them – they *develop us as people and serve a certain purpose* (4:4), on the other hand we *all know very well that some books are harmful from the point of view of our faith* (4:6). They have the power to shape human beings, *serve a certain purpose* (4:4) in their lives. There seems to be a silent assumption that both of these functions (shaping and deciding on the purpose) have to be performed from the outside, from the position of authority, the reason being that ‘we’ lack the expertise – *having various backgrounds and professions, cannot make the right judgement by ourselves* (4:6). So it is not shaping through, for instance, the ancient process of *lectio divina* – very much present in the religious life, especially the monastic tradition, that is through slow, reflective, repetitive and prayerful reading of the Scriptures and the works of the Church Fathers. Rather it is the simple, ‘secular’ reading for gaining information, knowledge on the way things are. One is developed and shaped not so much through a prolonged exposure to a set of sacred texts, but, again, in a more ‘secular’, practical way. Therefore the authority behind the latter ‘developing’ must be also different to that behind the Scriptures for example, and Aquila is clear here – it is more about *backgrounds and professions* (4:6). After all, the etymological root of the term ‘profession’ comes from medieval Latin and has mainly religious connotations; later the three ‘learned professions’ were medicine, law and theology.

From all that has been mentioned a few conclusions about the nature of Opus Dei as an organization in Aquila’s life suggest themselves. For him to become a member of the Work is to *agree to be led* (4:3), he finds himself in the need of authority, as he does not feel competent(!) to *make the right judgement* (4:6) by himself in *moral issues* (4:1), spiritual and theological matters. Opus Dei, very much like the hierarchical Church, is an organized and formalized ‘authority’. It may sound like a contradiction in itself, as true

authority is personal (see: Höpfl, Harro 1999) and can only be gained in the course of time. What we have here, however, at least according to Saint Josemaría, is an authority of the work of God, which implies that here “the spirit must be to obey or to leave” (*The Way*, 941). So one is free to either personally recognize the authority behind Opus Dei (its ‘spirit’) or not, but once within then it truly *doesn’t make sense to be in Opus Dei and demand for oneself freedom in these matters* (4:2), as it would contradict the very nature of what the Work aims to be in its members’ lives.

## Introduction to the Book of Phoebe

*“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is (also) a minister of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well” (Romans 16:1-2). The last two of ‘the prophets’ are different from the previous five in many ways; first of all, both Phoebe and Gaius are numeraries, celibate members of the Work; they are also both Spanish, a country in which Opus Dei was born and, even though now it is an ‘universal’ organization based in Rome, still half of the faithful come from it.*

*The meeting with Phoebe took place in one of the Opus Dei houses for women in Warsaw; an attractive woman who had just turned forty, she came across as assertive, self-confident, in spite of her worries that her Polish was not good enough for such a conversation. The interview itself lasted well over an hour and it was dominated by her personal*

*life story – family, education, everyday life as a numerary – although a few more general themes had also been touched upon, like gender issues, or the formation process and hierarchy in the Prelature. By the end of the conversation Phoebe, probably surprised by the outcome of it, asked for her name not to be disclosed. She said that even though she had nothing to hide, too many personal matters had been mentioned in it.*

*The text chosen for this Book could be called a vocation testimony, it is probably the most intimate part of the whole interview, as Phoebe did not stop at merely stating the facts, but tried hard to express the role and place of the supernatural element in her calling and also did not hesitate to talk about the tough times and doubts. This is precisely the greatest contribution of this text to the whole thesis, it gives a surprising amount of insight into the process of vocation discernment, gaining new members for the organization.*

## BOOK OF PHOEBE

<sup>1</sup> I felt the calling from the very beginning. <sup>2</sup> Someone suggested that I should become a numerary, but I wanted to be in Opus Dei and at the same time have a family, raise children... <sup>3</sup> I kept attending all the formation meetings, because it had always helped me, but I felt too weak to become a numerary. <sup>4</sup> It's not that I didn't want to, I just couldn't. <sup>5</sup> The directors got to know us

better and better, looked at how we behaved... <sup>6</sup> And I said that I wanted to be a supernumerary, but I was told that God asked for more than this... <sup>7</sup> I mean more for me, not in general... but I just couldn't imagine it... <sup>8</sup> I guess I hadn't been given the grace yet. <sup>9</sup> I kept going there, kept bringing my friends with me... <sup>10</sup> And my second brother became a numerary, the third one too, and my

sister, who was born just after those two, became a nun...<sup>11</sup> But I continued my life with a thought that I will study, than I'll start my own family...<sup>12</sup> I had a boyfriend too; he was from another town, so we met each other mainly during the summer vacations. I had a very strong instinct towards family life...<sup>13</sup> I always keep saying that I couldn't be a numerary by myself;<sup>14</sup> so one day – it was the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, not only 'labour day' but also feast of the Mother of God – I went to this sanctuary near the place where the Founder had been healed when he was two years old.<sup>15</sup> It was a pilgrimage for students from all over Spain, I thought about my life there, I prayed...<sup>16</sup> And when I got back, I already knew that I was to become a numerary; not only was to be, I had the

grace for it as well.<sup>17</sup> I felt this internal strength in me, all doubts were gone, it was like... grace, I touched grace...<sup>18</sup> I remember that I went to my friend, she was a numerary, much older than me, and I said to her "listen, whenever you are ready I want to talk to you", because I knew that she was praying at that moment.<sup>19</sup> When she finished her prayers I told her that I wanted to become a numerary, except in a few days I had my A-level exams.<sup>20</sup> She answered, that I was to ask the director. I knew that, because once in the past I spoke to the director and told her that I wasn't able to become a numerary!<sup>21</sup> And the director said that yes, I should pass my A-level exams, but if you are decided then God should not wait.

## Commentary

### 1-13

Like in the case of the first chapter of the Book of Prisca and Aquila, this text is a vocation testimony. There are major differences between Phoebe's story and that of Prisca. However, there are also important, 'structural' similarities, both very interesting in their own ways. Unlike Prisca, Phoebe *felt the calling from the very beginning* (1), Opus Dei had been present in her life probably since she could remember (through her family), the attraction, the sense of God's calling had been there too. No existential lack, gap or void waiting to be filled with a new 'possibility' (*PaA* 1:7) in the Church, an almost idyllic state compared to Prisca's radical internal conflict of desires. It all lasted until *someone suggested that [Phoebe] should become a numerary* (2), from then on the internal struggle becomes the key theme of the story – she *wanted to be in Opus Dei and*

*at the same time have a family, raise children (2), she had a very strong instinct towards family life (12), but had been suggested to act against it and decide for a life in celibacy.*

At the meta-level, so to speak, both stories share the same structure, it is a way from ‘a double life’ to ‘the unity of life’ in Escrivá’s terms, a unity achieved through joining Opus Dei, living according to its spirit. In almost every other respect the stories are very different though, especially the key one – the relationship between the teller and (the membership in) the organization. For Prisca meeting the Work was like a dream come true, an unexpected synthesis between two seemingly opposing desires was made possible. In Phoebe’s account the situation is reversed, knowing Opus Dei she did not expect her sense of calling to clash with her *strong instinct towards family life (12)*. There was no original, internal existential conflict in this case – the suggestion to become a numerary came from the outside, from the directors, nothing in the story indicates that it was Phoebe’s deepest and subconscious desire, which she was merely helped to discover. The whole first part of the Book (1-13), then, is a fascinating account of how the suggestion to become a numerary gets internalized by Phoebe; consequently it says a lot about authority in the organization.

These are the facts: the calling was a given, an original state of affairs (assumed, it seems, not only by Phoebe herself, but also by *the directors – 5*), and then *someone suggested (2)*. She clearly did not want to follow the suggestion, it probably surprised and saddened her, but the desire to have something to do with Opus Dei stayed, she *kept attending all the formation meetings (3)* and *kept bringing [her] friends (9)*. It all lasted for a while, she gave the suggestion a thought and said that she *wanted to be a supernumerary (6)* instead. The reasons, given retrospectively – *I felt too weak to become a numerary, it’s not that I*

*didn't want to* (3-4), *I just couldn't imagine it* (7). Then the situation got worse, as 'the suggestion' given by 'someone' turns into a sort of an ultimatum posed by the directors: *I was told that God asked for more than this* (6). It looks as if Phoebe was denied a chance to join Opus Dei as a supernumerary, it was either celibacy membership or nothing, a calling unfulfilled. From then on she led a truly double life, so to speak, torn between conflicting desires – *I continued my life with a thought that I will study, than I'll start my own family* (11), even though to Opus Dei she *felt the calling from the very beginning* (1).

The way Phoebe makes sense of the whole situation, years after it had happened, is particularly interesting. She had been a numerary for a long time already when telling the story, something she *just couldn't imagine* (7) to be possible, something that had happened in many ways against her will and almost entirely according to an 'external' judgement of the directors. *The formation meetings had always helped me* (3), *the directors got to know us better and better, looked at how we behaved* (5), and *I was told that God asked for more* (6), but it was '*more for me*' (7) – these are the ways in which Phoebe alludes to the authority of the directors. They had provided the useful formation, the know-how about life. They were the experts, they looked at 'us' objectively, so to speak, so their judgement must have been superior, but, most importantly, they somehow knew what God wanted of her. While she only knew what she wanted for herself, their position is superior – more objective, closer to that of God. To quote Saint Josemaría on the subject:

Receive the advice you are given in spiritual guidance as though it came from Jesus Christ himself. (*Furrow*, 125)

And:

Obey, as an instrument obeys in the hands of an artist, not stopping to consider the reasons for what it is doing, being sure that you will never be directed to do anything that is not good and for the glory of God. (*The Way*, 617)

Phoebe had not been bound to Opus Dei by these words yet, one might notice. True, not on the surface level, as she had not officially joined the Work yet, but she surely must have felt bound ‘by desire’, that is, through the fact that she felt the calling – something that was obvious to her *from the very beginning* (1), and must have been known to the directors (spiritual guides) too. This serious internal contradiction had to be resolved; at least it could not be ignored. Interestingly, since Escrivá strongly stressed that there is only one calling to Opus Dei and so the celibate way is by no means superior, the suggestion to become a numerary (2) means *more for [Phoebe], not in general* (7). This is how it was presented and that is the reason why her ultimate, post factum justification is: *I guess I hadn’t been given the grace yet* (8) and *I always keep saying that I couldn’t be a numerary by myself* (13). There had been other factors, on one side examples from her own family (*my second brother became a numerary, the third one too, and my sister, who was born just after those two, became a nun – 10*), on the other she *had a boyfriend* (12), again, a fact that must have been known to the directors, which could also have served in her spiritual life prior to ‘the suggestion’ as a ‘providential’ confirmation of her deep desire to have a family.

## 14-21

Whatever had caused the internal conflict, it was solved during *a pilgrimage for students from all over Spain* (15) to the *sanctuary near the place where the Founder had been healed when he was two years old* (14). Phoebe *thought about [her] life there, [she]*

*prayed...*(15), and precisely in the “...” the breakthrough happened. At first this moment in her life is then signified by silence, a gap in her speech, an unfinished sentence, followed by a description of what came after: *when I got back I already knew that I was to become a numerary; not only was to be, I had the grace for it as well* (16). Later she would use theological and metaphorical language – *I felt this internal strength in me, all doubts were gone, it was like... grace, I touched grace...* (17). The literal is avoided, what Phoebe describes here is clearly supernatural, extraordinary, and about feeling, so on one hand surprisingly far from the ‘ordinary’ way described by Saint Josemaría:

You made up your mind after reflection, rather than with any burning enthusiasm. Although you would have very much liked to feel it, there was no room for sentiment: you gave yourself to God when you were convinced that that is what He wanted. (*Furrow*, 98)

On the other though, she describes the end result very much in terms of being ‘convinced’: *I knew* (16), *all doubts were gone* (17). It is worthwhile to remind oneself again that these doubts had not been originally there. Viewed from this perspective, the whole process resembles Kurt Lewin’s classic three-stage formula for understanding change: “unfreezing – change – crystallizing” (or “refreezing”, 1948), so often used in change management. Phoebe’s life had been transformed from one stable state into another. The suggestion to become a numerary, later strengthened by a categorical ‘God asks for more’ (6), disturbed the original mind set, then came a period of ‘melted’ uncertainty, while crystallizing happened in *this sanctuary near the place where the Founder had been healed when he was two years old* (14). Considering these facts, and the emphasis on planning and order in Escrivá’s philosophy, it is very tempting to suspect that the process had been consciously managed. A sort of a gamble was possible in Phoebe’s case, since she had freely and independently claimed to have a calling *from the*

*very beginning* (1). In Prisca's case the fundament was different – she had searched for a possibility to combine a full commitment to God with family life.

This is not to doubt the honesty with which Phoebe described her experience of 'touching grace' (17). On the contrary, perhaps precisely the coexistence of the two is one the most original and important characteristics of Opus Dei. As shocking as it may be to some, is it not just a natural consequence of 'producing sanctified work' ("producing work well-done" – Illanes 2003, 186), of trying to plan and do everything consciously and offering it to God? This is just a 'suggestion', but perhaps, within this framework, even an event of encountering grace can be produced? Of course, like everywhere else only to the extent of creating the necessary conditions, but here this creating seems to reach a lot further into the private zone than it is normally accepted. This commentary was to say something new about the authority in the Work. So far it has not done it explicitly and, in the end, it can only offer some speculations. But in this particular story about Phoebe's vocation journey it is enough just to point out the bare facts – God's grace removes *all doubts* (17) in favour of the judgement of the directors. They said that He had wanted more (6) and, in deed, the supernatural experience confirmed it. This must have had an immense influence on Phoebe and her relation with the organization, that is, her superiors, directors and spiritual guides; her loyalty had been supernaturally secured.

The ending of the story is slightly less dramatic. Phoebe could not wait to finally tell someone, she interrupted her friend (*I knew that she was praying at that moment* – 18) and said that she *wanted to become a numerary* (19); she had her A-level exams in a few days too. Her friend referred her to the director – *I knew that, because once in the past I spoke to the director and told her that I wasn't able to become a numerary* (20). The

director seemed hardly surprised, in spite of what Phoebe had told her ‘in the past’, she *said that yes, [Phoebe] should pass [her] A-level exams, but if [she was] decided then God should not wait* (21). Again, an unexpected and paradoxical recognition of Phoebe’s personal freedom, although very much in line with the teaching of Saint Josemaría on the subject, yet it came after a very turbulent period in which she had completely changed her mind about being a numerary.

## Introduction to the Book of Gaius

*“Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you” (Romans 16:23). In this thesis Gaius is a numerary and a priest of the Prelature. The quote from Saint Paul mentioning his name is perhaps particularly suitable here, as during the interview Fr Gaius often played the role of the host, not only in the sense of being a priest and talking to a fellow Catholic, he also often tried, albeit in a very nice way, to reverse the roles in the interview situation by asking personal questions. The conversation took place in an Opus Dei house in which he had been living at that time and lasted for exactly forty-five minutes, as it had been previously ‘booked’ over the phone. He concluded by offering to meet again, this time not in the context of fieldwork, with the roles, indeed, reversed.*

*In terms of its ethnographical value, this particular interview was perhaps one of*

*the worst. The interviewer asked too many general questions about the teachings of the founder – to clarify concepts like struggle, the spirit of Opus Dei, norms of piety, plan of life, etc. – and so too much space was left for ‘preaching’. Even though it was good, passionate and convincing, the content of it could easily be found in books or articles on Opus Dei. It was still very interesting to observe a priest struggling and failing to get out of his usual role; the transcript, however, cannot express that struggle fully. Nevertheless, two short texts have made it into the final version of this thesis. Chapter 1 is a short explanation of the ideas of the norms of piety and the plan of life, in Chapter 2 Fr Gaius gives his personal vocation testimony. Both seem relatively basic, but consist a few expressions and phrases that throw a new light on these issues.*

## BOOK OF GAIUS

Chapter 1:

<sup>1</sup> Norms of piety are important for us, but it’s the case not only in Opus Dei, it should be true for every Christian. <sup>2</sup> Classical things: half an hour of prayer in the morning, half an hour in the afternoon, daily Mass, spiritual reading (ten minutes), reading the Gospel (five), there is the Rosary, examination of conscience in the evening, adoration of

the Blessed Sacrament, but also waking up at a set time and so on... <sup>3</sup> You have a plan. <sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the Founder encourages to organize one’s day according to these norms of piety. <sup>5</sup> You go to work, but first Mass and personal prayer in the morning, you know you have a thirty minute break for lunch, so fifteen minutes for lunch, the remaining fifteen spiritual reading. <sup>6</sup> These norms

provide a structure at work, on holidays, while studying. <sup>7</sup> You just know that at this time and place you pray with this particular book. <sup>8</sup> Order, everything in order!

#### Chapter 2:

<sup>1</sup> I remember I was on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Founder had gone on his first ever pilgrimage to the same shrine, and I already sensed something... <sup>2</sup> One starts to be afraid. <sup>3</sup> Colleagues of mine would say: “Opus Dei messes with your head; your involvement with them is dangerous!” <sup>4</sup> And, indeed, soon after

someone from Opus Dei said to me: “listen, don’t you think that God is calling you?” <sup>5</sup> And then I realized that it is not a man who speaks these words, but God himself. <sup>6</sup> He showed me what Opus Dei is – a particular place in the Church – and gave me an invitation. <sup>7</sup> Then I started thinking it through, I prayed for a whole night, and at that time I was reading a very good book on Mary, her calling, on how she said “yes”. <sup>8</sup> And I thought that God had allowed this situation to happen. <sup>9</sup> Apart from that, Opus Dei and I fit well together, that it is for me, this lay outlook, that I had learned so much, and education had always been very important for me...

## Commentary

### 1:1-8

*Norms of piety are important for us* (1:1), says Gaius, a Spaniard living in Poland, an Opus Dei priest, and quickly adds: *but it’s the case not only in Opus Dei, it should be true for every Christian* (1:1). ‘Norms of piety’ is a concept, which, like many other things about the Work, does not belong exclusively to their language. Characteristically though, it is used to a much larger extent in their common speech. Around this concept, which then leads to the idea of a ‘plan of life’ (1:3), chapter 1 of the *Book of Gaius* evolves. The hidden theme however, or at least the less visible one, is the struggle to draw the line between what *should be true for every Christian* (1:1) – the naturally, universally

desirable for everyone, and what is specific to Opus Dei as *a particular place in the Church* (2:6) with a particular spirituality.

The latter issue has been already discussed at length in the commentary to the Book of Epaietus, but it is still interesting to see it appearing again. Fr Gaius lacks detailed information about his interviewer and therefore has to make certain assumptions to be able to communicate the message of Opus Dei effectively. He seeks to strike a balance in describing what *is important for us* (1:1); the trap he seems to be almost falling into is too much ‘apologetics’, justifying everything in terms of what is *classical* (1:2) and *should be true for every Christian* (1:1) and therefore failing to give an honest account of what is specific about the Work. The other extreme would be to strongly stress these bits, but then the unknown interviewer, and later the readers of his thesis, could find in them the confirmation of various prejudices he might have, coming from a largely hostile environment.

What can be extracted as solely ‘Opus Dei-like’ from his speech then? First and foremost thinking of piety in terms of ‘norms’ itself, thinking of *prayer, daily Mass, spiritual reading, reading the Gospel, the Rosary, examination of conscience, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament* (1:2) through the idea of ‘a norm’ – a philosophical and sociological term which, especially in Poland due to its history, has a cultural meaning almost exclusively connected to the sphere of production, with a close connection to central planning. One fulfils or fails to fulfil a norm, this very fact may have a moral or spiritual meaning attached to it (via the idea of being obedient to the plan, etc.), but on the very basic level it is a simple either-or situation. In other words, even though the above mentioned activities are truly *classical* (1:2) by firmly belonging to the wider Tradition,

the way of thinking of them is very specific to Opus Dei. Secondly, and this may sound very obvious, the choice of ‘norms’ (the absence of the Breviary for example), the proportions (only *five minutes* for reading *the Gospel* etc. – 1:2) and their content (the choice of books for spiritual reading, what fills the two half hour prayer slots, and so on). *But also* (1:2), thirdly and finally, there are the more practical things, perhaps the most ‘Opus Dei specific’, most interesting, but here just one example is given – the emphasis on *waking up at a set time* (1:2). All the rest (like corporal mortification etc.) remains unfortunately unsaid, it fell into the short spell of silence (*and so on...* – 1:2), one could only speculate why.

In any case, one ends up with *a plan* (1:3), *these norms of piety* (1:4) amount to it, but that is not all, because, crucially *the Founder encourages [one] to organize one’s day according to it* (1:4). The priority is supposed to be given to the norms, one should not fit them with one’s life, fulfilling them when one happens to have some time to spare, but the other way around – *these norms provide a structure at work, on holidays, while studying* (1:6). When read literally, it seems to be rather difficult, if not practically impossible to do in today’s world. What is, *interestingly* (1:4), advocated by Saint Josemaría through Fr Gaius, is then more of a change of mindset, an ‘ordinary revolution’, a whole new way of perceiving daily reality that makes one think around the norms of piety instead of thinking around work, meals, etc.. *You still go to work* (1:5), which is almost always fixed in time, *but first Mass and personal prayer in the morning, you know you have a thirty minute break for lunch, so fifteen minutes for lunch, the remaining fifteen spiritual reading* (1:5). In other words, one goes to work, eats and sleeps as always, but now thinks of these activities as something filling the gaps between the Mass, times for prayer and spiritual reading.

Professional work is not so much degraded here, of course, as it would be in contradiction with the very core of Escrivá's message, it is rather placed decisively in the realm of 'the nature of things' (Msg 5:5), as almost as natural as sleeping for example. Piety takes over its role. This invisible and ordinary, yet very radical change can easily be termed as conversion, its aim is simple and clear – to give a very practical manifestation of the primacy of the relationship with God in one's life. This manifestation serves apostolic purposes to some extent, but more as a side-effect, as it seems clear that it is much more 'needed' by the Opus Dei member himself. The fact that fulfilling the norms required by the membership in Opus Dei is very demanding, the stress on 'the toughness' of life of which Prisca talked about (PaA 1:1), makes much more sense in the light of what has just been said. It is simply practically helpful, when fulfilling the norms becomes the toughest task in one's daily life, to keep one's mind fixed firmly on God. In this way it is possible to achieve a similar 'effect' to the life in a monastery, for example, while remaining in the world and leading a life fundamentally lay in character. The walls, the enclosure of the monastery, The Liturgy of the Hours, are all replaced by the plan, which becomes almost just as 'objective' – *you have it (1:3), it provides a structure (1:6). You just know that at this time and place you pray with this particular book (1:7)*, the plan provides knowledge of the time and place, and therefore a certain kind of security, point of reference, peace of mind. *Order, everything in order (1:8)!*

## **2:1-9**

Chapter 2 of the Book of Gaius sounds like just another vocation story, in many ways similar to those of Persis and Phoebe, but perhaps precisely these similarities make it interesting enough to justify quoting it. Fr Gaius was a very lively speaker, in a relatively

short time he managed to give a lot of valuable information, compromising however the structure and the quality of the narrative. This chapter is a very good example of that, it would sound a lot clearer if the order of sentences was rearranged. If one wanted to retell the story chronologically, it would probably have to start from verse 3 – young Gaius got more and more involved with the Work, so his colleagues started voicing their concerns: “*Opus Dei messes with your head; your involvement with them is dangerous!*” And, indeed, soon after someone from *Opus Dei* said to [him]: “*listen, don’t you think that God is calling you*” (2:3-4)? *One starts to be afraid* (2:2), because the invitation from the Work in a way only confirmed what the colleagues had said before. Most likely it was some time later when Gaius went *on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Founder had gone on his first ever pilgrimage to the same shrine, and [Gaius] already sensed something* (2:1) coming, and probably either precisely then or sometime after that he *started thinking it through, prayed for a whole night, and at that time [he] was reading a very good book on Mary, her calling, on how she said “yes”* (2:7), and, as a result, *realized that it [wasn’t] a man who [spoke] these words, but God himself* (2:5), that is, realized that from the very beginning it had been a conflict between his calling and ‘the world’, to which his colleagues lent their voices. All other verses amount to a retrospective making sense of the whole situation: *God had allowed this situation to happen* (2:8), showed him *what Opus Dei is – a particular place in the Church – and gave [him] an invitation* (2:6), plus, and *apart from all that, Opus Dei and [he] fit well together* (2:9) on a human, natural level.

Two striking similarities to the Book of Phoebe immediately come to mind (both Gaius and Phoebe are Spanish and of similar age). Firstly, a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine connected to the biography of Saint Josemaría as the key spiritual event, where the climax

of the struggle most likely takes place. Secondly, *someone from Opus Dei* (2:4) suggests, invites, and since then the struggle circulates around one simple but potentially oppressive question – the question of authority in spiritual guidance. Was it really God who had spoken? One cannot help but notice the theme of the book which Gaius was reading at that time (*on Mary, her calling, on how she said “yes”* – 2:7) and, since *everything in order* (1:8) – ‘times and places’ as well as books (1:7), that is, subject to ‘the plan of life’ which, in turn, is agreed in the course of spiritual guidance – one wonders what is the theology, so to speak, behind Fr Gaius’s *thought that God had allowed this situation to happen* (2:8)? It seems clear that very little space had been left for something spontaneous to occur, for something ‘spiritual’ in the common understanding of the term. The account is so coherent, in spite of its slightly chaotic structure, that one is left with a feeling that it all has been ‘engineered’, either at the level of the event itself or at the level of constructing the story; or both. Perhaps, as it has been already hinted in one of the previous commentaries, this implicit theology that allows maximum of ‘engineering’, of interference, and yet mysteriously retains the fullness of authenticity(?), is at play here.

## **ANALYSIS OF EMPIRIA**

### **Either-or: a great escape or a true conversion**

In a very interesting book entitled *Escape attempts: the theory and practice of resistance to everyday life* (1976), Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor analyze ways in which people defy what they called “paramount reality”. They borrowed the concept from Berger and Luckmann (1971), it means simply the sum “of established constructions which allows us to see [reality] as stable, orderly, even ‘normal’” (Cohen and Taylor 1976:19).

[We] recognize that our activities, rituals and conventions are fastened firmly to a set of structured ideas. Of particular importance are the various timetables and careers within which we are located. (...) Taken together we may talk of them as our ‘life plans’. (Cohen and Taylor 1976:17-18)

This set of largely subconscious ideas is “the reality of everyday life (...), and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion” (Berger and Luckmann 1972, cited in Cohen and Taylor 1976:19). Additionally though, “we are presented with a massive array of symbolic resources out of which we may construct our identity” (1976:21) like clothes, books, ideologies, etc.. Both the paramount reality and the symbolic resources, however, constitute the structural order, they are given. Therefore, on top of all that, in spite of the limitless options provided by the market society for doing “the identity work”, there still exists a tension “between sense of paramount reality and our notion of what constitutes identity” (1976:21). The modern man has a persistent feeling that he “stands apart from reality, rather than within it”

(1976:23), he will never be satisfied with the options provided by society, he keeps trying to escape the social destiny.

Having gone through the various possible “escape attempts”, the authors end the book on a rather nihilistic, pessimistic note (something which they themselves admit):

Nothing in reality can help us cope with it. (...) There is nowhere to go, either in society or in the mind. (1976:222)

The connection to Opus Dei may not be entirely clear at this point. Especially that, as far as religion is concerned, the authors merely stated that now, for a modern man on a “hunt for *meaning*” (1976:207), “religion itself has become one more life-world, a segmented aspect of existence” (1976:208). Nothing replaced it, there is no “single symbolic vocabulary which binds together the elements of our different life-worlds, a vocabulary which would allow us to evaluate across the range of our activities, which would give moral priority to this or that part of our lives” (1976:207-208). Well, in spite of what the authors wrote, this is exactly what Opus Dei tries to achieve, at least according to the author of this thesis. It seeks to provide an individual with a single symbolic vocabulary, then offers to continuously teach and support him or her in applying it. This is the very reason of the Work’s existence, living and spreading the message, the universal call to holiness. It does it actively, as an organization, with all the consequences of this fact, and not by passively offering “religion” on the market of meaning. Whether it achieves it or not, whether it offers truth or merely a fairly sophisticated escape route, is another story, and the answer does not entirely depend on one’s faith. Either way, the vocabulary provided by Cohen and Taylor proves equally useful.

The dominant target of Opus Dei, in spite of what the official ideology sometimes claims, seems to be “the modern man”, a person from the middle class in the Western society or the equivalent, preferably with a Catholic background (see: Illanes 2003:149). Opus Dei seeks to persuade him or her that there truly exists a single symbolic vocabulary – fundamentally that which rests on Christ, so the Scripture, the Tradition and the teachings of the Holy Catholic Church – but since it lost universal acceptance or got perverted on the societal level, in the “natural” everyday existence, the Prelature promises to provide it on an organizational level. First it proposes a strange conversion for all the baptised who had fallen into treating their religion as a “spiritual” segment of their reality, a sort of a re-conversion, so to speak, which leads one to believe in the message of Opus Dei, “the universal call to holiness”. In other words, it leads one to personally accept the natural consequence of taking the Christian faith seriously (“baptismal vocation often lies dormant, ineffectual” – Rodriguez 2003:31). This thesis uses the word “conversion” here also because of the way in which the interviewees would justify (to a fellow Catholic) their decision to join, by referring to the subjective feeling of authentic peace, joy, happiness (Jul 3:2), rather than arguing rationally.

There is another crucial thing about Opus Dei’s proposal. Instead of finding some religious form of withdrawing, at least from time to time, from the society which no longer embraces the only true symbolic vocabulary, one is given an opportunity to fully stay in that society. The Prelature promises to substitute the physical withdrawing by the formation and guidance, something that one supposedly really needs if one is to take his or her religion seriously and stay in the world. This is why the faithful would often talk about a relief that comes with the realization that one does not “have to be a religious, a priest to achieve perfection, sanctity” (Prs 2:9) for example. Opus Dei potentially offers a

possibility of staying for those who thought of leaving for wrong reasons, and a possibility of a serious commitment to their faith for those who otherwise would not be able to treat it as something more than “a segmented aspect of existence” (Cohen and Taylor 1976:208). And yet a certain movement happens, of course. To use Berger and Luckmann’s (1971) concept again, the “paramount reality” changes. The Work provides and reinforces it artificially, so to speak, from the outside, as an organization. To join Opus Dei means “to agree to be led” (PaA 4:3); blind obedience is required, obedience to the organization is a *sign* of obedience to God. Only in this way, in an environment that is assumed to be hostile, it is possible to live the Christian life radically, to treat the truths coming from religion as truly “given”. Bearing in mind assumptions about the world, one is simply not “competent” enough to do it alone, one needs help from “an agency” (Messori 1998:180). The effects of the advice provided by the agency is emergence of a different kind of a ‘life plan’. This theme that run through almost the entire empirical part of this thesis: “the plan of life” consists of “norms of piety” and translates into practical knowledge, know-how. God is more present through it in the member’s life, He authorizes it, but He is also on the “receiving” end, awaiting its fulfilment. It seems that it is precisely the hardship involved in obeying the plan (mortification, sacrifice) that justifies not leaving the world, is supposed to be the proof of the Christian radicalism of the Work.

To summarize, on the surface level Opus Dei seems to be saying: “you do not have to leave the world, just stop implicitly treating Catholicism as a fantasy, escape route – re-convert”. Paradoxically, when that happens one will be able to “turn seriously to the most material and immediate reality, which is where Our Lord is” (Msg 4:8). A fundamental shift took place, the situation seems to be reversed – the immediate everyday reality from

which “the modern man” (for Saint Josemaría: “the anonymous masses – a mob, a herd, a flock” – *The Forge*, 901) pathetically tries and fails to escape, for a member of the Work becomes almost a friendly repository “of symbolic resources out of which [he] may construct [his] identity” (Cohen and Taylor 1976:21), including “the immense panorama of work” (Msg 2:5) of course. Hence the identity work can now be done peacefully and without controversy, in a “normal”, “ordinary” way. That is either due to this reversal, or because “the Opus Dei man” is truly undivided, the authentic “man the producer”, “infused” with the Spirit. In any case, it seems justified to state here, that the whole idea and stress on being normal, ordinary in terms of behaviour, wearing clothes. etc. is a major part of organizational identity work. Being “dressed normally” becomes paradoxically a uniform, because it is conceptualized as “naturalness” (see: Illanes 2003:175).

### **On spiritual materialism**

Indeed, we are increasingly surrounded by an ideology which tries to transform every activity into a potential escape. The mundane world is saturated with escape messages. (...) All around us – on advertisement hoardings, bookshelves, record covers, television screens – these miniature escape fantasies present themselves. This, it seems, is how we are destined to live, as split personalities... (Cohen and Taylor 1976:138-139).

This is where Cohen and Taylor’s argument has to be dropped, however useful it might have been so far for “translation” between cultures, because this thesis, as an ethnography, has a duty to remain faithful to the ideal of studying the field on its own terms. In this case it means assuming at least a possibility of a true “unity of life”, as Saint

Josemaría himself said to his “children”: “We cannot have a split personality if we want to be Christians” (Msg 2:8). The already mentioned book by Burkard Sievers illuminates the matter from a different perspective, one that assumes at least a possibility of a meaningful life (although “we are permanently subject to the seduction of surrogates for meaning” – 1994:46), has further challenges to pose, and therefore a further vocabulary to offer:

So far, this essay has primarily dealt with the external world in the following way: the process of social construction as it is created, sustained and permanently changed tends to invite a kind of amnesia as to its social process character, the social constructiveness of the external world. This means that the fundamental unity between the producer, i.e. individual human beings, and the product, i.e. the social world of society, slips from individual and from social consciousness. The process through which this unity is destroyed can be described as an objectification of the social world. (...) [While the] concept of homification refers to the individual as well as the social processes of re-establishing the previous unity between producer and product in order to reconstruct the formerly objectified reality, to call men, men, and things, things – maybe even to call gods, gods. (Sievers 1994:202-203)

It is this “amnesia” that Cohen and Taylor seem to leave unquestioned and build their argument on it, as an assumption about the nature of man’s relation to the social world. In the case of Opus Dei and its doctrine, it is rather difficult to talk about “amnesia” in this sense. The only question is what “the new synthesis”, the spiritual materialism, actually does. It clearly seeks to re-establish the lost unity, but in a dialectically opposite manner to the “homification” described by Sievers (1994:203), generally in a dialectically opposite manner to a widely defined Marxist tradition. As has been observed in the dogmatic part and in the previous section of this analysis, the social reality has an “objectified” status in the Opus Dei doctrine, it is treated as “given”, but it has also been argued that its status is not entirely that of “paramount reality” (Berger and Luckmann

1971). The social reality is certainly “ordinary” for Opus Dei members, but ordinary in the full meaning of the word, one that implies order. Heather Höpfl dealt with this concept when talking about the narratives of organization:

These are Ordinary narratives of organization. Ordinary in the sense that they are commonplace and taken-for-granted accounts of the normative functions of organization certainly, but they are Ordinary in the sense that they provide the jurisdiction of an ordering. They become the authorised versions of appropriate sequence, of proper relations. The Ordinary seeks to cast meanings, to offer definition, to construct categories, to offer a clear ordering and sequence. (Höpfl, Heather 2003b:79)

Since the message of Opus Dei is so general and “universal”, the organization itself at all costs avoids being defined in terms of charism, or anything “restricted or sectional” within the Church (Rodriguez 2003:31), the key to understanding it lies precisely in finding what “ordinary” (but also “natural” or “normal”) means in its language. “The Opus Dei man” arrives from above, so to speak, that is why the social reality is “Ordinary” for him. The symbolic language (narrative) with which he comes imposes an order (“it is the language of *pro-jection*” – Höpfl, Heather 2003a:80), one to which he already belongs (also by being “a professional”, so by being *professed*). Categories and distinctions have to go all the way down to the most mundane, everyday reality, thus making it abstract – this is the cost of maintaining the internal “unity of life” on the other side. The social reality remains “given”, but paradoxically the fact that the man is, in some way, alienated from it, does not stop him from being its master. For Sievers this is probably due to “sacred objectification” (1994:203); in the Saint Josemaría’s teachings it stems from divine filiation, “the basis of the spirit of Opus Dei” (*Christ is passing by*, 64). The “two movements” of spiritual materialism, as they have been called in the

commentaries, that is materializing the spiritual life and turning seriously to the everyday, mundane and material reality to spiritualize it, correspond to what has just been said.

### **Man the producer of sacrifices**

Naturally work has to occupy an absolutely central place in spiritual materialism. It is man's original vocation, for after all, God "placed the first man in Paradise *ut operaretur*, so that he would work" (*Furrow*, 482). Escrivá was not an exegete, his reading of Genesis (2:15) is far from scholarly. In fact, in the study on the use of Scripture in his teachings published in the *Romana*, Opus Dei's official bulletin, Scott Hahn openly states that:

[Saint Josemaría's] own reading of the Gospel and of Scripture in general, was illuminated by his particular foundational charism, which led him to develop ideas that had been passed over in previous theology. (Hahn 2002:383)

The foundational charism has the precedence then, its authority falls back on "the October 2 vision" and the fruits of it – the canonization of Escrivá himself and the growth of the institution. At the same time this particular, correct but narrow, reading of Genesis sits in the very core of Opus Dei's doctrine, with all its implications. To quote Hannah Arendt, for example, commenting on exactly the same verse: "nowhere is [man] made the lord and master of the earth; on the contrary, he was put into the garden of Eden to serve and preserve it" (1958:139), other verbs used in various English translations of the Bible include: to take care, to cultivate, to keep in order, to tend and guard, to watch over, to look after, etc.. In the teachings of Saint Josemaría, professional(!) work is a means of sanctification: through the metaphor of the garden the socially constructed "immense panorama of work" (Msg 2:5) achieves an almost natural status, man is placed in it by his

Creator. What is more, everything comes to be thought of in terms of work. Spiritual life gets materialized, hence one has “Christian duties” (“norms of piety”) along with professional duties and family duties, and therefore one never ceases to work. In this way the fictional division between work and leisure (Sievers 1994:22) is abolished (“to rest is not to do nothing: it is to relax in activities which demand less effort” – *The Way*, 357), but the everyday remains ordered and planned (managed?) to the tiniest detail.

A man who can keep the different segments of his life entirely separated, who can punch the clock every day at exactly the same moment, whose actions are always predictable, who is never troubled by urges or poetic visions, who indeed can manipulate himself the same way he would the machine whose levers he pulls, is the most profitable worker not only on the assembly line but even on many of the higher levels of production.” (May 1983, cited in Sievers 1994:13)

“The Opus Dei man” is a producer then, a very good worker, but, and here is the crucial point already mentioned a few times, he is “a producer of work well done” (Illanes 2003:186), “of pleasing offerings to God” (Piątkowski 2007b:428). There seems to be an implicit belief, since it is the very spirit of Opus Dei that leads one to do his work perfectly (Msg 4:1), that the quality of one’s work is the most ideal reflection of the state of one’s soul, of the spirit of sacrifice (see for example: Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 2:17), and therefore of how internally integrated, unified one is:

[It] has become clear that the meaning of work not only has to be seen in relation to the meaning of life, but that the search for the meaning of work can only be based on the goal of attaining the ability to overcome and transcend fragmentation. (Sievers 1994:33)

Perfect work is then a sign of holiness. It would sound almost Calvinist, except for the crucial fact that the fundamental motivation (meaning?) is positive, that is, one is not driven by “by the anxiety that they ultimately might be mortal and not selected for an

eternal life in the presence of God” (Sievers 1994:125), but rather feels as if already working for heaven, or even in heaven. The mechanism resembles a little Liturgy, one needs to consciously offer one’s work, which makes one’s life quite spiritually intense, but the end-result is always the same: “success in a supernatural sense” (PaA 2:10), because the final product in the form of an offering “reaches God’s hands” and lasts with Him. The theme of immortality comes back, as Gareth Morgan observed:

[We] can understand organizations and much of the behaviour within organizations in terms of a quest for immortality. (...) And in becoming identified with such organizations we ourselves find meaning and permanence (...), our roles become our realities (...), we objectify ourselves in the goods we produce or the money we make, we make ourselves visible and real to ourselves. No wonder that questions of survival are such a high priority in organizations, for there is much more than the survival of the organization at stake. (Morgan 1986:213)

Hannah Arendt, in turn, started her *The Human Condition* (1958) with a well-known distinction between labour, work and action. The distinction between the first two seems very relevant now. Labour “is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body”, it is connected to its “vital necessities”, while work “corresponds to unnaturalness of human existence”, creates the world of “artificial” things which “is meant to outlast and transcend” the individuals (1958:7). Labour is natural in an animal-like sense then, while work is truly human. In *Opus Dei* the “thought”, as it has been called in the commentaries, the conscious, repetitive, almost meditative offering, seems to be a means of turning labour into work, as understood by Arendt, and a means to overcome alienation. Work becomes prayer through the renewed awareness of God’s presence, God who is waiting for a pleasing offering. The unification, the synthesis is complete, because “earlier” prayer became work (fulfilling of norms, Christian duty), they share key common characteristics: toil involved and continuous awareness of God’s

presence. Hence “it’s possible to say that we are totally active and totally contemplative” (Escrivá 1964).

With that, however, comes a certain degree of pride, or at least a strong temptation to it, pride about being truly productive in the objective order of things, of discovering the true nature of what being useful means (“to understand work raises the question of the nature of a useful life” – Sievers 1994:33). To quote Escrivá again:

No son or daughter of Holy Church can lead a quiet life, without concern for the anonymous masses — a mob, a herd, a flock, as I once wrote. How many noble passions they have within their apparent listlessness! How much potential! We must serve all, laying our hands on each and every one, as Jesus did, *singulis manus imponens*, to bring them back to life, to enlighten their minds and strengthen their wills: so that they can become useful! (*The Forge*, 901)

Arendt argued, for example, that Aristotle famously denied the status of a human being to slaves not because he doubted their internal dignity; slaves were like animals because of what they did, they were usually preoccupied entirely with biological necessities. Hence:

The institution of slavery in antiquity, though not in later times, was not a device for cheap labor or an instrument of exploitation for profit but rather the attempt to exclude labor from the conditions of man’s life. (Arendt 1958:84)

Interestingly, when Heather Höpfl discussed “the Ordinary” narratives of organization, she set it against “the Vernacular”:

In contrast to the regulatory functions of the Ordinary, the Vernacular is concerned with native language and comes from the Latin “verna” meaning a home born slave or a slave born in the master’s house. (Höpfl, Heather 2003b:79)

In this way two strands of argument in this analysis come nicely together. In the light of the doctrine of Opus Dei any work that is not offered to the true God can be termed a mere “labour”, in this framework Opus Dei could be viewed as a symbolic attempt “to exclude labor from the conditions of man’s life” (Arendt 1958:84). Not “knowing” that one ought to consciously sacrifice one’s work, or simply forgetting about it, is a true and regrettable waste of an opportunity to sanctify oneself (PaA 2:3), to set apart as sacred, and therefore to change the everyday reality from vernacular to ordinary, cease being a slave and start working in “the Lord’s vineyard” (Matthew 20:1). Perhaps this is the way to explain Escrivá’s attitude, or at least the vocabulary he uses, towards those who remain “outside”, those who “do not understand” and a certain aura of elitism that surrounds the Work. Of course, both elitism and political conservatism are fiercely denied, and rightly so in a way, as there is nothing explicitly elitist about Opus Dei on the symbolic level. And yet, the social structure of membership is still far from reflecting that of society at large; tendencies towards upper classes and conservative politics are easily observable. Perhaps a quote from G.K. Chesterton, taken from his short biography of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1933), will throw some light on the matter:

St. Thomas, on the other hand, came out of a world where he might have enjoyed leisure, and he remained one of those men whose labour has something of the placidity of leisure. He was a hard worker, but nobody could possibly mistake him for a hustler. He had something indefinable about him, which marks those who work when they need not work. For he was by birth a gentleman of a great house, and such repose can remain as a habit, when it is no longer a motive. (Chesterton 1933)

## **From the spiritual to the strategic, from community to organization**

Saint Josemaría and his followers proclaim the Work to be a breakthrough within the Church, the new synthesis of action and contemplation (Piątkowski 2007b) that “breaks with the traditional” and allows the Opus Dei faithful to be “totally active and totally contemplative” (Escrivá 1964), to remain fully in the world and still “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is a massive claim, perhaps comparable to advertising one’s own product on the market as both the cheapest and by far the best out of all available. Of course, the analogy does not fully stand, as “the choice” of a life within the Church comes down to personal vocation, calling from God, but the message still says: “we have everything”. It paints the picture of “the traditional” options situated on the continuum between the active and the contemplative, and Opus Dei above, uniting the opposing poles within itself. This unification happens, as has been argued so far, around the concept of work, professional work in particular. In short, the on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1928 Escrivá...

...was being shown that the holiness originated in and founded on baptism to which God is calling Christians is *holiness in the midst of the world*. In other words, (...) [that the baptised] are called *in the midst of ordinary life*: they must seek holiness in and through the ordinary realities of life, among which everyday work plays a key part. In this way God causes them to experience that positive acceptance of human affairs as a road to salvation which the Incarnation implies. (Rodriguez 2003:22)

What Escrivá calls “a positive acceptance of human affairs” and backed with an immense authority coming from the Incarnation, has been approached earlier in this thesis from the opposite direction and called “objectification” of the social reality, a term borrowed from Sievers (1994:5). The latter view seems a lost cause in Christian terms then. Jose Luis

Illanes, a theologian and a member of the Work, when discussing the origin of the negative connotation of the word “secular”, concluded that it come from “a tendency to extend to human society the severe judgement that biblical texts reserve for “this world”, regarded as the kingdom of the devil” (2003:164), the roots of this tendency are supposed to be found in the patristic and medieval periods. He rightly, on the abstract level, backs his argument with a reference to Vatican Council II (*LG*, 31). This thesis is an ethnography, hence the theological debate is beyond its scope. However, the author would like to point at a certain example coming from the field material, namely the Work’s attitude to books, to explore the issue a little further.

The fact that such an emphasis is placed on “reading *the right* books” (Trp 1:6) seems symptomatic and arguably says a lot more about Opus Dei than appears at first glance. When compared with an almost uncritically affirmative attitude towards “the immense panorama of work” (Msg 2:5), it becomes obvious that a crucial distinction is missing. The key to understanding what “positive acceptance of human affairs” (Rodriguez 2003:22) means, lies, again, in discovering what is meant by human affairs (the social) in the first place. It falls back to what was said about “the Ordinary” (Höpfl, Heather 2003b) and seems to confirm the view of the organization as an internally coherent symbolic structure (“immanent order” – Rodriguez 2003:30), as presented in the analysis of *the Dogma*. Following this logic, the problems with books is that they are independent symbolic structures themselves, that is, they come with what Umberto Eco called the “intention of the text” (1992:820), and this intention may be in conflict with the “intention of Opus Dei”. Everyday reality, in turn, with all its complexity and chaos involved, can be provided with a key to reading it “correctly”.

“What we do affects our souls” (Trp 1:1) and “what we do” is everything, since everything can be conceptualized in terms of work, one way or another. Hence everything must be subject to spiritual guidance and planning, as the distinction between the spiritual and non-spiritual does not stand in practice, neither do the distinctions between privileges and duties, pieces of advice and orders (since it does not make sense to disobey – PaA 4:4-7), and so on. One could say that Opus Dei is an organized authority to follow (PaA 4:8), an agency consisting of experts (“consultants”) which translates doctrine and “spirituality” back into the “literal”, everyday, practical. So that the laity could peacefully stay at the “literal”. The spiritual/non-spiritual becomes strategic/operational, the movement is from the spirit towards the mind. What the spiritual guidance provides then is expert knowledge, know-how, a tool to read the everyday reality; to read the world like a book, one is tempted to say. Blind obedience and personal freedom coexist precisely in this sense: obey in receiving the formation, but you are absolutely on your own when using it. One becomes vulnerable in the world, radically responsible, that is, literally forced to respond personally in every situation and face the consequences. At the same time, however, what one responds to is the reality already affected by the formation provided by the Prelature, the quasi-exegetical method to reading the everyday. The “guess” about the whole (Taylor 1985:168) has been made for one, and now one faces the Ordinary reality (Höpfl, Heather 2003b), the reality that awaits one’s work (“For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God” – Romans 8:19) and is viewed in terms of duties and rights:

But do not forget, my children, that I always speak of a responsible freedom. Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency. (Msg 5:8)

Guidance received in the process of formation is to become the second nature; then it will be able to reject bad influences automatically (see: Trp 1:27), as it were. Unfortunately, the negative side-effect of this attitude is obvious: fellow human beings are likely to be treated in similar manner, that is, viewed in abstract terms. All the traumatic experiences described by former members or people badly treated by Opus Dei seem to circle precisely around this theme.

However broad, “the goal that God assigned to Opus Dei – to proclaim and practice the universal call to holiness” (Rodriguez 2003:56) – is an absolute priority. Everything comes to serve the message, from the first moment the Work was born (the Founder “immediately set to work” – Gns 3:8).

Opus Dei’s social arrangement as a “Christian community” stems from what we have called the “internal dimension of Church’s structure”. That is, it is born of mutual relations of *christifideles* and “sacred minister,” or, if you prefer, it derives from the two forms of participating in Christ’s priesthood. (Rodriguez 2003:56)

The Work “is an institution whose internal structure replicates the basic ecclesial articulation between” the common priesthood and ministerial priesthood (Rodriguez 2003:57), in other words, it is a community only in the sense of replicating the structure, at the abstract level, of the entire Church. The communication is vertical: “everyone is an individual in his life” (Epn 1:6), singled out by his relation to the mother-organization (replicating the mother Church). The Spirit works within that structure, within that vertical relation. In this way another distinction that works “in theory” hardly stands in practice, namely the one between the works of grace and what can be termed “engineering” (Kunda 1992), done by the organization. In this thesis it was observable in vocation stories, but as a more general tendency it appears in many places (for example a

book on human love, entitled precisely “Engineering of Love”, written in the form of a technical manual; no English translation, original: *Ingeniería del amor. Apuntes sobre el amor conyugal* – Carol 2002).

There seem to be a crucial link between organization and sanctification, between the organizational form and the key “sanctifying activity”. To use a simple example, in medieval monastic life, the essence of the idea of the “state of perfection”, the Liturgy (called *opus Dei*) sanctified, the timetable necessary for the Liturgy – organized. Monks were enclosed, but in terms of books they read everything. Books, especially the classics, were assumed to be good (Leclercq 1982:117) “by nature”, as through the use of allegory there is always a way to “Christianize” the text. In *Opus Dei*, since it cannot “in any way be considered a reality tied to the evolutionary process of the 'state of perfection' in the Church” (*Conversations*, 20), there seems to be no escape into allegory. That would be the evasion of what is “literally real”, hence the limitation imposed on reading books. Work sanctifies, the “plan of life” agreed in the course of spiritual guidance organizes. At the same time, however, the very meaning of work, or rather the way in which work is given meaning in the lives of the faithful, is also specific to *Opus Dei*, introduced and reinforced through the process of formation. The Work of God, in the words of Saint Josemaría himself, “is not a 'closed organisation' or one which in some way gathers its members to isolate them from the rest of men” (*Conversations*, 60). Nevertheless, it seems to be “enclosed” symbolically, a closed work.

## Concluding thoughts

Bearing in mind the methodological tradition in which this thesis is situated, as well as the way in which Opus Dei as an organization has been conceptualized in the analysis of *the Dogma*, this part of the text, while still remaining an analysis of *the Empiria*, at the same time happens to be a summary and a conclusion of the whole project. After all, the Work is the people who are driven by its spirit, who both live and spread the message. Here, within them, incarnated, the final synthesis takes place. What has been presented above paints a certain picture of Opus Dei, it is a result of an “abductive procedure” – a more abstract theory grounded in the field material was born. True, not entirely coherent and finalized, definitely “highly particular and hauntingly personal”, to quote John Van Maanen again, but its aims are rather humble, to serve “as the basis for grand comparison and understanding within and across a society” (1988:ix). Even though this “more abstract theory” may appear authoritative at times, it still remains a mere *basis*; “grand comparisons” are left for somebody else to do. It was supposed to be a translation between cultures, and in this way the use of theory in this thesis should be viewed – the theory was supposed to provide the language, useful concepts for analysis rather than models and ready-made solutions. The strength of the project lies in its empirical character and creativity. The author is well aware that many of the issues he merely touched upon, have been thoroughly researched, especially in the fields of theology and sociology. It has been a conscious decision to stick to the vocabulary provided by the field for as long as it is possible and understandable for the reader. Nigel Barley, himself an anthropologist, once wrote that “anthropology is not short of facts but simply of anything intelligent to do with them” (1986:9). In spite of these words, however true they may appear to the author of this thesis after six years of doing fieldwork, this piece of

work is a desperate attempt to do something both intelligent and interesting with the mass of gathered empirical material. It is up to the reader to judge it.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- a Kempis, T. (1952) *The Imitation of Christ*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Alighieri, Dante (2003) *Inferno*, (Translated by A. Esolen) New York: The Modern Library.
- Allen, J.L. (2005) *Opus Dei : Secrets and power inside the Catholic Church*, London: Allen Lane
- Anzenbacher, A. (2005) *Wprowadzenie do filozofii* (org.: *Einführung in die Philosophie*). Kraków: WAM
- Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Arendt, H. (2002) *Wola* (org. *The Life of the Mind: 2. Willing*), Warszawa: Czytelnik
- Asad, T. (1983) "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz", *Man, New Series* 18(2):237-259
- Augustine, St (1873a) "On Christian Doctrine" in: Dods, M. (ed.) *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Vol. 9*. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1-172.
- Augustine, St (1873b) "The Enchiridion of Augustine", in: Dods, M. (ed.) *The works of Aurelius Augustine, bishop of Hippo, volume 9*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 173-260.
- Augustine, St (1960) *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. London: Signet Classics
- Augustine, St (1961) *St. Augustine on the Psalms, Volume II, Psalms 30-37*. New York: Newman Press.
- Augustine, St (2002) *Państwo Boże* (eng. *The City of God*). Kęty: Antyk
- Barclay, W. (1976) *The Gospels and Acts*. London: SCM Press
- Barley, N. (1986) *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Barolini, T. (1992) *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Barthold, L.S. (2000) "Towards an ethics of love: Arendt on the will and Saint Augustine", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26(6):1-20
- Behar, R. (1996) *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press

Bell, E. and Taylor, S. (2003) "The Elevation of Work: Pastoral Power and the New Age Work Ethic", *Organization* 10(2):329-349

Bell, E. (2007) "Disruptive Religion: The Case of the Catholic Worker-Priests (1943-1954)", *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 4(4):432-442

Bell, E. (2008) "Towards a critical spirituality of organization", *Culture and Organization* 14(3):239-307

Benedict, R. (1999) *Wzory kultury* (eng. *Patterns of Culture*). Warsaw: Muza

Benedict of Nursia, St (2001) *Saint Benedict's Rule for Monasteries*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. (1971) *The social construction of reality : a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, Harmondsworth : Penguin Books

Bernal, S. (1991) *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: Szkic biografii Założyciela Opus Dei (org. Msgr Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer)*, Katowice: Św. Jacka

Boje, D. (1995) "Stories of the Storytelling Organization: a Postmodern Analysis of Disney as 'Tamara-Land'", *The Academy of Management Journal* 38(4):997-1035

Boje, D. (2001a) "Carnavalesque resistance to global spectacle: A critical postmodern theory of public administration", *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 23(3): 431-458.

Boje, D. (2001b) *Narrative methods for organisational and communication research*, London: Sage.

Boje, D., Rosile, G., Durant, R., Luhman, J. (2004) "Enron Spectacles: A Critical Dramaturgical Analysis", *Organisation Studies*, 25(5): 751-774.

Bonaventure, St (1978) *The Soul's Journey to God – The Tree of Life – The Life of St. Francis*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

Bowles, M.L. (1989) "Myth, Meaning and Work Organization", *Organization Studies* 10(3):405-421

Bowles, M.L. (1990) "Recognizing Deep Structures in Organizations", *Organization Studies* 11(3):395-412

Bowles, M.L. (1991) "The Organization Shadow", *Organization Studies* 12(3):387-404

Bowles, M.L. (1997) "The Myth of Management: Direction and Failure in Contemporary Organizations", *Human Relations* 50(7):779-803

Brown, D (2004) *The Da Vinci Code*, London: Corgi

- Brown, P. (1967) *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, London: Faber
- Browne, L. (1987) *The Wisdom of the Jewish people*. Northvale: Aronson.
- Bryant, J. (1993) "The sect-church dynamic and Christian expansion in the Roman Empire: persecution, penitential discipline, and schism in sociological perspective", *The British Journal of Sociology* 44(2):303-339
- Bryant, J. (1998) "Wavering Saints, Mass Religiosity, and the Crisis of Post-Baptismal Sin in Early Christianity", *Archives europeennes de sociologie* 39(1):49-77
- Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (1993) *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Burrell, G. (1996) "Normal science, paradigms, metaphors, discourses and genealogies of analysis", in: Clegg, S.R., C. Hardy, and W.R. Nord (eds) *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: Sage.
- Calas, M.B. and Smircich, L. (1999) "Past Postmodernism? Reflections and Tentative Directions", *The Academy of Management Review* 24(4):649-671
- Calas, M.B. and Smircich, L. (2003) "Introduction: Spirituality, Management and Organization", *Organization* 10(2):327-328
- Carol, A. (2002) *Inżynieria Miłości (org. Ingeniería del amor. Apuntes sobre el amor conyugal)*. Barcelona: Grafismar
- Carvajal, F.F. (1998) *Rozmowy z Bogiem, tom III (eng. In Conversation with God, volume III)*, Ząbki: Apostolicum
- Cassirer, E. (1953) *Language and myth*, New York : Dover Publications
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (1995) London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Cattaneo, A. (2002) "Priestly Soul and Lay Mentality", *Romana* 34(1):156-171
- Chadwick, H. (1968) *The Early Church*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Chesterton, G.K. (1933) *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Online at: <http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~mward/gkc/books/aquinas.html> Accessed 15 January 2009
- Chesterton, G.K. (1957) *Orthodoxy*. London: Bodley Head
- Clavell, L. (2001) "The Freedom Won by Christ on the Cross", *Romana* 33(2):234-258
- Cohen, S. and Taylor, L. (1976) *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*. London: Penguin

- Coser, L.A. (1974) *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*. New York: The Free Press.
- Coser, L.A. (1988) "Primitive Classification Revisited", *Sociological Theory* (6)1:85-90
- Coverdale, J.F. (2002) *Uncommon Faith: the early years of Opus Dei (1928-1943)*. Princeton: Scepter.
- Coverdale, J.F. (2007) *A book review "The Founder of Opus Dei. The Life of Josemaría Escrivá" by Andrés Vázquez de Prada*, Online at: <http://www.josemariaescriva.info/showdocuments.php?id=2061> Accessed 12 December 2008
- Craner, L. (2001) *Religious Freedom in Western Europe*. Online at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/rm/2001/4076.htm> Accessed 30 January 2004
- Czarniawska, B. (1998) *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Czarniawska, B. (2003) "Forbidden Knowledge: Organization Theory in Times of Transition", *Management Learning* 34(3):353-365
- Czarniawska, B. (2004) *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London: Sage
- De Groot, J. (2004) "Woman in the Divine Economy: From the Church Fathers to St. Josemaría", *Romana* 39(2):274-287
- de Mello, A. (1996) *Przebudzenie (eng. Awakening: Conversations with the Masters)*, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka.
- del Portillo, A. (2004) *O Założycielu Opus Dei (eng. Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, as seen by his successor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo)*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów
- Derrida, J. (1995) *The Gift of Death*. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press
- Derrida, J. (1998) "Resistances", in: *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1-38
- des Mazery, B. and des Mazery, P. (2006) *Śledztwo dziennikarskie w sprawie "Kościoła w tonie Kościoła": Opus Dei (org. L'Opus Dei: enquête sur une Eglise au coeur de l'Eglise)*, Warszawa: Amber
- Dictionary.com* (n.d.) Online at: <http://dictionary.reference.com/> Accessed 2 April 2008

- Dulles, Avery (1992) "Tradition and Creativity in Theology", *First Things* (November) Online at: [http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id\\_article=5286](http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=5286) Accessed 12 December 2006
- Dulles, A. (2003) "The Population of Hell", *First Things* (May), Online at: [http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id\\_article=488](http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=488) Accessed 12 December 2006
- Dummelow, J.R. (1915) *A commentary on the Holy Bible*. London: Macmillan.
- Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD: how to plan, draft, write and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Durkheim, E. (1995) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press
- Echevarria, J. (2006) *Wspomnienie o świętym Josemarii Escrivie, założycielu Opus Dei (Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá)*, Warszawa: MIC
- Echevarria, J. (2008) "Interview with the Prelate of Opus Dei", *La Repubblica* (3 October) Online at: <http://www.opusdei.org.uk/art.php?p=30146> Accessed 14 January 2009
- Eco, U. (1989) *Foucault's Pendulum*. London: Secker&Warburg
- Eco, U. (1992) *The limits of interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Eco, U. (1992) "Reading My Readers", *MLN* 107(5):819-827
- Eco, U. (2005) *On Literature*. London: Secker & Warburg
- Eliot, T.S. (1943) *The Four Quartets*, Online at: <http://www.tristan.icom43.net/quartets/> Accessed 20 January 2009
- Escrivá, J. (1964) Online at: [http://robertaconnor.blogspot.com/2007\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://robertaconnor.blogspot.com/2007_11_01_archive.html) Accessed 11 September 2008
- Escrivá, J. (1987) *Holy Rosary*, London: Scepter
- Escrivá, J. (1989) *In Love with the Church*, London: Scepter
- Escrivá, J. (1993) *Rozmowy z Prałatem Escrivá (eng. Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer)*, Katowice: Księgarnia Św. Jacka
- Escrivá, J. (1999) *The Way of the Cross*, London: Scepter
- Escrivá, J. (2001a) *Droga (eng. The Way)*, Katowice – Ząbki: Apostolicum.
- Escrivá, J. (2001b) *Bruzda (eng. Furrow)*, Katowice – Ząbki: Apostolicum.

- Escrivá, J. (2001c) *Kuźnia (eng. The Forge)*, Katowice – Zabki: Apostolicum.
- Escrivá, J. (2003) *To Chrystus Przechodzi (eng. Christ is Passing By)*, Katowice – Zabki: Apostolicum.
- Escrivá, J. (2005) *Przyjaciele Boga (eng. Friends of God)*, Katowice – Zabki: Apostolicum.
- Evagrius Ponticus (1980) *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*, Spencer: Cistercian Publications
- Fernandez Mostaza, E. (2001) “Characterization of the Opus Dei Family Model”, *Social Compass* 48(1):139-155
- Fernandez, J.W. (1986) *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Ferrante, J. (1984) *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Foote-Whyte, W. (1969) *Street Corner Society*. London: The University of Chicago Press
- Ford, J. and Harding, N. (2003) “Invoking Satan or the Ethics of the Employment Contract”, *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(5):1131-1150
- Frankfurt, H. (1971) “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 68(1):5-20
- Freccero, J. (1986) *Dante: the Poetics of Conversion*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Freccero, J. (1993) “Introduction to Inferno” in: Jacoff, R. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 172-191.
- Fulop, L. and Linstead, S. (1999) *Management: A Critical Text*. London: Macmillan
- Gabriel, Y. (2001) “The state of critique in organizational theory”, *Human Relations* 54(1):23-30
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1993) *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed & Ward
- Gadamer, H.-G. (2003) *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in conversation with Riccardo Dottori*. New York: Continuum
- Gaudium et Spes* (1965) Online at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) Accessed 30 September 2006
- Gilson, E. (2000) *Heloiza i Abelard (eng. Heloise and Abelard)*, Warszawa: PAX

- Gilson, E. (2003) *Tomizm (eng. Thomism)*, Warszawa: PAX
- Glaser B. and Strauss A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Gondrand, F. (2000) *Śladami Boga (eng. At God's Pace: Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei)*, Warszawa: Apostolicum.
- Griffiths, P.J. (2004) "Christ and Critical Theory", *First Things* (August / September) Online at: [http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id\\_article=372](http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=372) Accessed 24 April 2007
- Hahn, S. (2002) "Passionately Loving the World: The Use of Sacred Scripture in the Writings of Saint Josemaría", *Romana* 35(2):382-340
- Hatch, M.J. (1993) "The Dynamics of Organizational Culture", *The Academy of Management Review* 18(4):657-693
- Hatch, M.J. (2002) *Teoria organizacji (eng. Organization Theory)*, Warszawa: PWN.
- Hatch, M.J., Kosterka, M., Koźmiński, A.K. (2005) *The Three Faces of Leadership: Manager, Artist, Priest*, Malden: Blackwell
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1977) *Phenomenology of spirit*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Hesse, H. (1968) *Narciss and Goldmund*. London: Peter Owen – Vision Press
- Höpfl, Harro (1999) "Power, authority and legitimacy", *Human Resource Development International* 2(3):217-234
- Höpfl, Harro (2000a) "Ordered Passions: Commitment and Hierarchy in the Organizational Ideas of the Jesuit Founders", *Management Learning* 31(3):313-329
- Höpfl, Harro (2000b) "'Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re': Appearance, Reality and the Early Jesuits" in: Linstead, S. and Höpfl, Heather (eds) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage, 197-211
- Höpfl, Harro (2004) *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Höpfl, Harro (2007) "A Catholic Work Ethic?", *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 4(4):398-417
- Höpfl, Heather (1994) "Learning by the heart: the rules of rhetoric and the poetics of experience, *Management Learning*", 24(3): 463-474.
- Höpfl, Heather (1995) "Performance in customer service: the cultivation of contempt", *Studies in Cultures, Organisations and Societies*, 1: 47-62.

- Höpfl, Heather (1997) "The melancholy of the Black Widow" in: Hetherington, K. and Munro, R. (eds) *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour Division*. Oxford: Blackwell pp.228-242
- Höpfl Heather (2000) "On Being Moved", *Studies in Cultures, Organisations and Societies*, 6(1):15-34.
- Höpfl, Heather (2003a) "Maternal organization – deprivation and denial" in: Höpfl, Heather and Kostera, M. (eds.) *Interpreting the Maternal Organization*. London: Routledge, 1-12
- Höpfl, Heather (2003b) "The body of the text and the ordinary narratives of organization" in: Czarniawska, B. and Gagliardi, P. (eds.) *Narratives We Organize By*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 75-92
- Höpfl Heather (2003c) "Good Order: On the Administration of Goodness", *Tamara* 2(3):28-35
- Höpfl, Heather (2004) "Julia Kristeva" in: Linstead, S. (ed) *Organization Theory and Postmodern Thought*. London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi: Sage pp.88-104
- Höpfl, Heather (2005) "The Organisation and the Mouth of Hell", *Culture and Organisation*, 11(3):167-179.
- Höpfl, Heather and Piątkowski, P. (2007) "Catholics and Work: Guest Editors' Introduction", *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 4(4):395-397
- Höpfl, Heather (2008) "Sacred Heart: a comment on the heart of management", *Culture and Organisation*, 14(3):225-240
- Illanes, J.L. (2003) "The Church in the world: the secularity of members of Opus Dei", in: Rodriguez P., Ocariz, F. and Illanes, J.L. (eds.) *Opus Dei in the Church*. New York: Scepter, 147-220.
- Jackson, N. and Carter, P. (1993) "Paradigm Wars: A Response to Hugh Willmott", *Organization Studies* 14(5):721-725
- Johansson, M. (2008) *Engaging Resources for Cultural Events*. Stockholm: Stockholm School of Economics
- John Paul II (1981) *Laborem Exercens* Online at: [http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0217/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0217/_INDEX.HTM) Accessed: 30 September 2006
- John Paul II (1984) *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* Online at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia_en.html) Accessed 14 February 2008

John Paul II (1992) *Fidei Depositum*, Online at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_19921011\\_fidei-depositum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_19921011_fidei-depositum_en.html) Accessed 1 December 2008

John Paul II (1998) *Fides et Ratio*. Poznań: Pallotinum

John Paul II (2003) "Ut Sit", in: Rodriguez P., Ocariz, F. and Illanes, J.L. (eds.) *Opus Dei in the Church*. New York: Scepter, 223-225.

John XXIII (1961) *Mater et Magistra*, Online at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater_en.html). Accessed 30 September 2006

Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (n.d.) Online at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/2002/documents/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20021006\\_escriva\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/2002/documents/ns_lit_doc_20021006_escriva_en.html) Accessed 11 October 2008

Kardong, T. (1995) "Work Is Prayer: Not!" *Assumption Abbey Newsletter* 23(4), Online at: <http://www.osb.org/gen/topics/work/kard1.html> Accessed 12 December 2006

Kardong, T. (1996) "Work Is Prayer: Not! Part II", *Assumption Abbey Newsletter* 24(1), Online at: <http://www.osb.org/gen/topics/work/kard2.html> Accessed 12 December 2006

Kee, H., Meyers, E., Rogerson, J. and Saldarini, A. (eds.) (1997) *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Keenan, W. (2004) *St Josemaría Escrivá and the Origins of Opus Dei: The Day the Bells Rang Out*, Leominster: Gracewing

Kieser, A. (1994) "Why Organization Theory Needs Historical Analyses – And How This Should Be Performed", *Organization Science* 5(4):608-620

King, G., Keohane, R. and Verba, S. (1994) *Designing social inquiry: scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Kociatkiewicz, J. and Kostera, M. (1999) "The Anthropology of Empty Spaces", *Qualitative Sociology* 22(1):37-50

Kociatkiewicz, J. and Kostera, M. (2005) "The irony of identity: The story of Mostostal", In Johansson, U. and Woodilla, J. (eds), *Irony and Organizations: Epistemological Claims and Supporting Field Stories*, Liber: Copenhagen Business School Press.

Koppedrayner, K.I. (1993) "The Making of the First Iroquois Virgin: Early Jesuit Biographies of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha", *Ethnohistory* 40(2):277-306

Kostera, M. (1996) *Posmodernizm w zarządzaniu*. Warszawa: PWE

- Kostera, M. (1998) *Opowiesci o ludziach, zwyczajach i organizacjach*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WSPiZ
- Kostera, M. (2005) *The Quest for the self-actualizing organization*. Malmo: Liber
- Kostera, M. (2006) *Organizational ethnography: Methods and inspirations*. Lund: Studentlitteratur
- Kostera, M. (ed) (2007) *Kultura organizacji: badania etnograficzne polskich firm*. Gdansk: GWP
- Kostera, M. (ed.) (2008) *Mythical Inspirations for Organizational Realities*, Houndmills: Palgrave
- Kristeva, J. (1986) "Stabat Mater" in: Moi, T. (ed) *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 160-186
- Kristeva, J. (1987) *Tales of Love*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Kristeva, J. and Malcomson, S.L. (1993) "Foreign Body", *Transition* 59:172-183
- Kruczkowski, A. (1981) *Dzieło Boże w Hiszpanii*, Wrocław: Ossolineum
- Kuhn, T. (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Kunda, G. (1992) *Engineering Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980) "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language", *The Journal of Philosophy* 77(8):453-486
- Leclercq, J. (1982) *Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, New York: Fordham University Press
- Letiche, H. and Boje, D. (2001) "Phenomenal Complexity Theory and the Politics of Organization", *Emergence* 3(4), 5-31.
- Levinas, E. (2006) *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-other*. London – New York: Continuum
- Levi-Strauss, C. and Charbonnier, G. (2000) *Rozmowy z Claude Levi-Straussem (eng. Conversations with Claude Levi-Strauss)*, Warszawa: Czytelnik
- Lewin, K. (1948) "Group Decision and Social Change" in Maccoby, E., Newcomb, E. and Hartley, E. (eds) *Readings in Social Psychology*, New York: Holt, 265-284
- Llano Cifuentes, C. (2004) "Professional Ethics and Sanctification of Work", *Romana* 38(1):112-125

Lorda, J.L. (2005) *Być Chrześcijaninem (org. Para ser cristiano)*, Katowice – Zabki: Apostolicum

Luciani, A. (1978) “Seeking God through ordinary work”, *Il Gazzettino* 25 July. English translation online at: <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=12482> Accessed 12 December 2006

*Lumen Gentium* (1964) Online at:

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) Accessed 30 September 2006

Martin, J. (1995) “Opus Dei in the United States”, *The National Catholic Weekly* (February 25<sup>th</sup>) Online at: <http://www.rickross.com/reference/opus/opus47.html> Accessed 3 March 2007

McKinnon, A.M. (2005) “Reading ‘Opium of the People’: Expression, Protest and the Dialectics of Religion”, *Critical Sociology* 31(1-2):15-38

Mead, M. (1986) *Dojrzewanie na Samoa (eng. Coming of Age in Samoa)*, Warsaw: PIW

Merton, T. (1956) *Thoughts in Solitude*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Messori, V. (1998) *Śledztwo w sprawie Opus Dei (eng. Opus Dei: an Investigation)*, Warszawa: Fronda.

Mettner, M. (1995) *Katolicka mafia (org. Die Katolische Mafia)*, Warszawa: Interart

Miras, J. (2005) “Secularity of the Lay Faithful: Living Expression of Christian Hope”, *Romana* 41(2):353-378

Morgan, G. and Smircich, L. (1980) “The Case for Qualitative Research”, *The Academy of Management Review* 5(4):491-500

Morgan, G. (1983) *Beyond Method*, London: Sage.

Morgan, G. (1986) *Images of Organisation*, London: Sage.

Mudge, L.S. (1981) “Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation” in: Ricoeur, P. *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. London: SPCK, pp.1-40

*New American Bible* (2002) Online at: <http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/> Accessed 30 September 2006

Ocariz, F. (2003) Vocation to Opus Dei as a vocation in the Church, in P. Rodriguez, Ocariz, F. and Illanes, J.L. (eds.) *Opus Dei in the Church*. New York: Scepter, 99-146.

Ocariz, F. (2005) “Christ’s Church Subsists in the Catholic Church”, *Romana* 41(2):348-353

ODAN *Opus Dei Awareness Network* (n.d.) Online at: <http://www.odan.org/index.htm>  
Accessed 2 March 2005

*Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) Online at: <http://www.oed.com/> Accessed 2 April 2008

Pakaluk, M. (1994) *Opus Dei: In Everyday Life*. Online at: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/OPUSLIFE.TXT> Accessed 23 January 2007

Paul VI (1967) *Populorum Progressio*, Online at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_pvi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html) Accessed 30 September 2006

Pfeffer, J. (1993) "Barriers to the Advance of Organizational Science: Paradigm Development as a Dependant Variable", *Academy of Management Review* 18(4):599-620

Pfeffer, J. (1995) "Mortality, Reproducibility, and the Persistence of Styles of Theory", *Organization Science* 6(6):680-686

Piątkowski, P. (2004) *Na styku dwóch światów: Opus Dei – Etnografia organizacji (master's thesis)*, Warszawa: WZUW

Piątkowski, P. (2007a) "Filadelfia – organizowanie jako walka na murach oblężonej twierdzy" in: Kostera, M. (ed.) *Kultura Organizacji: badania etnograficzne polskich firm*. Gdańsk: GWP, 211-233

Piątkowski, P. (2007b) "The Spiritual Status of Work in Opus Dei", *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 4(4):418-431

Piątkowski, P. (2008) "Possessed by the Organization? Dante's Inferno on Earth" in: Kostera, M. (ed.) *Mythical Inspirations for Organizational Realities*, London: Palgrave

Pratt, M. (2000a) "Building an Ideological Fortress: the Role of Spirituality, Encapsulation, and Sensemaking", *Studies in Cultures, Organizations, and Societies* 6(1):35-69

Pratt, M. (2000b) "The Good, the Bad, and the Ambivalent: Managing Identification among Amway Distributors", *Administrative Science Quarterly* 45(3):456-493

*Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965) Online at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_presbyterorum-ordinis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html) Accessed 30 September 2006

Ramos-Lisson, D. (1999) "The Example of the Early Christians in Blessed Josemaría's Teachings", *Romana* 29(2):292-306

Ratzinger, J. (1997) *Salt of the Earth*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press

- Ratzinger, J. (2004) *Introduction to Christianity*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1971) "Meaningful Action As Text", *Social Research* 38:529-562.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976) *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*, Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press
- Ricoeur, P. (1981) *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. London: SPCK
- Ricoeur, P. (2005) *Refleksja dokonana: autobiografia intelektualna (org.: Reflexion faite: Autobiographie intellectuelle)*, Kety: Antyk
- Rodriguez Luno, A. (2006) "Relativism, Truth, and Faith", *Romana* 42(1):150-158
- Rodriguez, P. (2003) "The place of Opus Dei in the Church" in: Rodriguez, P., Ocariz, F. and Illanes, J.L. (eds.) *Opus Dei in the Church*. New York: Scepter, 17-98.
- Romano, G. (2002) *Opus Dei – posłannictwo, inicjatywy, ludzie (eng. Opus Dei: Who, How, Why.)*, Częstochowa: Święty Paweł
- Ryan, C. (1993) "The Theology of Dante" in: Jacoff, R. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 136-152.
- Schaefer, F. (2001) *The Unofficial Opus Dei FAQ*, Online at: <http://www.mond.at/opus.dei> Accessed 4 January 2004
- Scheffczyk, L. (2006) "Grace in the spirituality of St. Josemaría Escrivá", *Romana* 43(2):264-276
- Schein, E.H. (1996) "Culture: The Missing Concept in Organization Studies", *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41(2):229-240
- Siennicki, P. (2002) *Jezuici XXI wieku*, Online at: <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/?O=12512> Accessed 9 November 2003
- Sievers, B. (1994) *Work, Death, and Life Itself: Essays on Management and Organization*, Berlin : Walter de Gruyter
- Singleton, C. (1950) "Dante's Allegory", *Speculum*, 25(1):78-86.
- Smircich, L. (1983) "Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis", *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28(3):339-358
- Smircich, L. (1995) "Writing Organizational Tales: Reflections on Three Books on Organizational Culture", *Organization Science* 6(2):232-237
- Soria, J.L. (2002) *Mistrz dobrego humour: rzecz o bł. Josemarii Escrivie (org. Maestro de buen humor. El Beato Josemaría Escrivá)*, Zabki: Apostolicum

- Spiegel, G.M. (1990) "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages", *Speculum*, 65(1):59-86.
- Śliwa, M. (2007) "Is Poland a Country of Roman Catholic Work Ethics?", *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 4(4):486-504
- Tapia, M.C. del (1997) *Beyond the Threshold: A Life in Opus Dei*, New York: Continuum
- Tapia, M.C. del (2006) *Inside Opus Dei: A True Unfinished Story*, New York: Continuum
- Taylor, M.K. (1985) "Symbolic Dimensions in Cultural Anthropology", *Current Anthropology* 26(2):167-185
- Thomas Aquinas, St (1999) *Dziela Wybrane (Selected Works)*, Kęty: Antyk
- Thompson, J.B. (1983) *Critical hermeneutics: a study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Tourneau, D. le (2004) *Czym jest Opus Dei (org. L'Opus Dei)*, Warszawa: PAX
- Van Maanen, J. (1979) "The Fact and Fiction in Organizational Ethnography", *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(4):539-550
- Van Maanen, J. (1988) *Tales of the Field*. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press
- Van Maanen, J. (1995a) "Style as Theory", *Organization Science* 6(1):133-143
- Van Maanen, J. (1995b) "Fear and Loathing in Organization Studies", *Organization Science* 6(6):687-692
- Vazquez de Prada, A. (2002) *Założyciel Opus Dei. Tom I: Panie, żebym przejrzał! (eng. The Founder of Opus Dei: The Life of Josemaria Escriva : The Early Years)*, Kraków: Św. Jacka & M
- Vazquez de Prada, A. (2003) *The Founder of Opus Dei, Volume II: God and Daring*, New York: Scepter
- Vazquez de Prada, A. (2005) *The Founder of Opus Dei, Volume III: The Divine Ways on Earth*, New York: Scepter
- von Balthasar, H.U. (1963) Online at: [http://www.opus-info.org/index.php?title=Opus Dei %E2%80%93 Katolicki fundamentalizm](http://www.opus-info.org/index.php?title=Opus_Dei_%E2%80%93_Katolicki_fundamentalizm) (in Polish) Accessed 25 November 2008
- Walsh, M. (1989) *The Secret World of Opus Dei*, London: Grafton

Walter, T. and Davie, G. (1998) "The religiosity of Women in the Modern West", *The British Journal of Sociology* 49(4):640-660

Weber, M. 1968 "The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization" in: Eisenstadt, S.N. (ed.) *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 48-65

Weick, K. (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Willmott, H. (1993) "Breaking the Paradigm Mentality", *Organization Studies* 14(5):681-719