



Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

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Msgr. Fernando Ocariz is a theologian and is also the Vicar General of Opus Dei. This Zenit interview was held on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Opus Dei as a personal prelature.

In this Zenit interview held on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Opus Dei as a personal prelature (the only one in existence at present), Opus Dei's Vicar General explains the relation between this institution and the dioceses, and says that the alleged "power" of "the Work" is simply the power that comes from the Gospel.

Msgr. Ocariz was interviewed by Zenit in Rome at Villa Tevere, which contains the remains of Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei.

Msgr. Ocariz holds doctorates in physics and in theology. He has authored numerous philosophical and theological publications, especially in the areas of the philosophy of history and Christology. Since 1986 he has been a consultant to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He is also a member of the Pontifical Theological Academy and since 23 April 1994 he has been Vicar General of Opus Dei.

Opus Dei was born to help lay people in their ordinary life. Are lay people truly a part of the prelature of Opus Dei, or is the prelature only for the (relatively few) priests of Opus Dei?

Monsignor Ocariz: Opus Dei was born precisely to remind everyone, both priests and lay persons, of the universal call to holiness. As Saint Josemaría taught from 1928, the fact that this call is universal and that God calls each person, means that all upright human realities—professional work, family and social relations—can and should be a sanctified and sanctifying reality.

As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said when the founder of Opus Dei was canonised, the message of Saint Josemaría Escrivá has helped to correct an erroneous idea of sanctity, as though it were reserved only for the "great." Sanctity means

becoming a friend of God, letting the Other act, the only One who can make this world good and joyful.

The lay people of Opus Dei, both women and men, married or single, are an integral part of the Prelature, just as much as the priests who constitute its clergy. The relation between these sacred ministers and the lay faithful is that proper to the Church.

At the same time, each lay person also belongs to the diocese where he or she lives, just like any other Catholic. As John Paul II said on a number of occasions, referring specifically to Opus Dei, the ministerial priesthood of the clergy and the common priesthood of the lay faithful are united and linked in a unity of vocation and governance to fulfil the Prelature's mission of evangelization under the guidance of its Prelate.

At this time Opus Dei is the only personal prelature. Do you receive inquiries from other ecclesiastical institutions that would like to become personal prelatures?

Monsignor Ocariz: Yes, at the moment it's the only personal prelature. However, there are other ecclesiastical circumscriptions in the Church which are delimited on a personal (and not territorial) basis, for various pastoral needs. For instance, there are the apostolic exarchates that exist in some countries to care for faithful of Oriental Rites, the military ordinariates, and a personal apostolic administration erected a few years ago in Brazil.

Only the Holy See can establish a personal prelature. Furthermore, Canon Law lays down that the episcopal conferences that are involved also have to be consulted. Establishing a personal prelature is a pastoral decision, aimed at furthering the Church's mission in a world characterised by a constant movement of people. For example, in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortations *Ecclesia in America* and *Ecclesia in Europa*, John Paul II refers to personal prelatures as a possible solution for people in need of special pastoral attention, mentioning groups of immigrants in particular.

It is also possible, as happened with Opus Dei, that the action of the Holy Spirit inspires particular apostolic tasks, which give rise to pastoral needs that require the structure of a personal prelature.

I am not aware that Opus Dei has received any consultations from other institutions regarding the possibility of becoming a personal prelature. However, in the context of congresses, pastoral gatherings, etc., people of Opus Dei have sometimes been asked to pass on the experience the Prelature has gathered over the years.

What truth is there to Opus Dei's alleged independence—autonomy, if you

prefer— stemming from the fact that juridically it is a personal prelature?

Monsignor Ocariz: The reality is exactly the opposite. Erecting a prelature means precisely "dependence." It means placing a part of the Christian people in pastoral dependence under a member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It doesn't make sense to speak of independence or autonomy, since, on the contrary, Opus Dei depends on a prelate appointed by the Roman Pontiff.

The prelate and his vicars exercise ecclesiastical power in common with the other pastors, under the supreme authority of the Pope, in accord with the universal law of the Church and the particular law contained in the Statutes which the Holy See has established for the Prelature.

I think that the experience of the presence of Opus Dei in so many dioceses all over the world should contribute to an understanding, even from a practical point of view, that the personal prelatures introduced by the Second Vatican Council do not harm the unity of the particular churches. On the contrary, their purpose is to serve these churches in the general evangelizing mission of the Church.

As Benedict XVI wrote to the present Prelate, Bishop Echevarría, on the fiftieth anniversary of his priestly ordination, "when you foster the eagerness for personal sanctity and the apostolic zeal of your priests and lay people, not only do you see the flock that has been entrusted to you grow, but you provide an effective help to the Church in her urgent evangelization of present-day society."

Is it correct to say that there are "Opus Dei bishops"?

Monsignor Ocariz: It depends what you mean by that phrase. When, as occurs at times, a priest of the Prelature's clergy is called by the Holy Father to the episcopate, the same thing happens as with any diocesan priest: he ceases to be incardinated in the ecclesiastical circumscription from which he comes, although he continues to receive spiritual assistance from the prelature. He has the same canonical status as any other bishop.

Obviously, the Prelate of Opus Dei has no power whatsoever over the episcopal mission of these bishops.

I imagine that you don't see any "before and after" in Opus Dei as a result of the Da Vinci Code phenomenon.

Monsignor Ocariz: Clearly not. It makes no sense to think that such a novel could have an historical impact great enough to result in a "before and after" in Opus Dei.

On the other hand, it may very well have influenced some people. Without ignoring the disorientation that this type of literature could give rise to in some readers, I know that many people have decided to make contact with the Prelature and its activities of Christian formation precisely as a consequence of the information that it gave about the Work, in order calmly to counteract the book's

errors.

There have also been very many examples of solidarity with Opus Dei on the part of journalists, writers, and other people who have followed this topic more closely. It has occasioned a marvelous ecclesial solidarity; in times like these one truly senses that the Church is a family.

At times one hears people speak of the "power" of Opus Dei. Why do you think this image has arisen?

Monsignor Ocariz: Despite our personal limitations (we neither are nor see ourselves as "the head of the class"), God has blessed Opus Dei's work for souls with abundant apostolic fruit. Seen from a human point of view, some might see this as an expression of "strength" or "power."

In reality, the Work is a small part of the Church, and its "power" comes from its source: from the Gospel, which, as St. Paul writes, is "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith." The fruitfulness of the work of Opus Dei's faithful is caused by the Holy Spirit in the Church and through the Church.

Anyone who comes to an apostolic activity organized by the Prelature—its doors are open to everyone—is offered a broad vista of Christian life. Anyone who comes to the Work seeking human influence or anything other than a spiritual goal would not last very long. He would hear people speaking about love for Jesus Christ and the Church, about Christian commitment, about spiritual life and generous service to others.

Interview by Miriam Díez i Bosch