

**FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE**

**IN OPUS DEI**

# Freedom of Conscience in Opus Dei\*

*dedicated to all the faithful of the personal Prelature*

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with a Translator's Postscript

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## 1 The Cancer of Opus Dei

1. From its beginnings, Opus Dei has prompted a wide variety of opinions and controversy, due not just to sympathetic or adverse feelings, but particularly over its true identity. In an institution legitimately approved by the Church, whose **Statutes** have been made public in its various Canon Law formulations over the years, this fact is by itself quite strange. What reasons motivate such controversy? In what follows, the reader will be able to find enough reasons to answer this question.

Nowadays, the Personal Prelature of Opus Dei defends itself in an official manner from the criticism leveled against it by many Christians by pointing to the canonical approvals granted by the authorities of the Church. This is used as a seal of its goodness and its alleged transparency. In many ecclesiastical environments, Opus Dei is even regarded as an exemplary institution, distinguished by its fidelity to the doctrine of the Church, an abundance of vocations, and a praxis without scandals. In this study, however, I intend to show that the *inner reality* of Opus Dei does not agree with this external image, constructed to a large extent by a clever public relations policy, sometimes through the use of lies; because its inner praxis is not in accordance with the regulations approved by the Church.

It is important to say this in these times in order to point out important facts that can help the discerning judgment of the authorities in the central government of the Catholic Church, where the pastoral practices of Opus Dei have already raised deep concern. This is because their drift from the moral doctrine of the Church, or their grave deviations from what is universally prescribed by Canon Law, have been increasingly noticed. It is a certain fact that this "phenomenon" has begun to be perceived. The ultimate roots of the controversies and suspicion raised by Opus Dei in many environments can be traced back to these dysfunctional pastoral practices. Those of us who know in depth—from the inside—this "ecclesiastical reality" know that such dysfunctional practices go back to

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\*Translator's Note: Since its appearance in the [opuslibros.org](http://opuslibros.org) website, the present study is required reading for anybody interested in understanding in depth the spirituality and praxis of Opus Dei; particularly, for understanding the way in which its Founder's spirituality has shaped the praxis of spiritual direction in the institution he created. Originally published in Spanish as *La Libertad de las Conciencias en el Opus Dei*, presented to Pope Benedict XVI to document the abuses perpetrated against the consciences of the faithful of Opus Dei, and subsequently translated into Italian, French and German, it is available for the first time to English speaking readers in this authorized translation.

Opus Dei's foundational period. This makes particularly difficult their clarification, through a sincere and honest dialogue, and, above all, their rectification.

2. Since I started **my collaborations** in this web site, I have tried to show unfortunate aspects of this reality. If there is a real desire to obtain God's approval, a better knowledge of it should encourage a humble rectification and an acknowledgment of responsibility for the harm done to souls, because nobody can make a fool of God. From my first collaborations I have spoken of an *ugly matter* at the core of it all, which I now call the true "cancer of Opus Dei." This is not at all the "treason" of those within—as described by some—nor the persecution by "external enemies," among whom this web site is branded because of its impact. None of us are part of such wars: on the contrary, we seek peace with everybody and, specially, a true communion with all our brothers and sisters in the Faith.

This cancer is the systematic violation of the freedom of conscience of the faithful of Opus Dei, through the obligatory practice of the *manifestation of conscience*, which has been institutionalized, with its subsequent relevance in the external forum. None of this is in accordance with Catholic morality. It is something condemned in the most absolute terms for all faithful, not just for "religious families," by the tradition and the canons of the Church. However, the authorities of Opus Dei—including its Founder—have tried, and still try, to justify a "pastoral practice" like this one—described in other terms as a "means of spiritual formation"—as if it were part of a "divine revelation" (charism or spirit). This in fact places Opus Dei outside the Catholic Church or, if within, make it a "parallel church" on fundamental aspects of Christian faith and anthropology.

The matter is indeed most grave. For this reason, any effort to focus and clarify the issues involved should be welcomed by all those who truly love the Church of Jesus Christ. In this contribution I will restrict myself to describe the facts, with the exclusive purpose of facilitating the study of experts advising the Holy See. Since these lines are written from the charity of ecclesial communion, they are dedicated in a special way to all faithful of the Personal Prelature, whose desire to be faithful to the Apostolic See I do not question: I only wish that it will be translated into deeds. *Filioli, non diligamus verbo nec lingua, sed in opere et veritate* (I Joh 3:18).

## 2 Institutional Opacity

3. Although the Prelature of Opus Dei has its own *Statutes* approved by the Holy See, which are its own *Codex iuris particularis*, its own institutional practices are not transparent to either its own faithful or the Church hierarchy. This is due to the fact that the Prelature is actually governed by a body of *internal secret regulations*, which have never been examined or approved by the Church. They are not public, nor have they ever been made public and, generally speaking, they have practically never been articulated as canonical norms in a formal sense. In this way, the pastoral practice of the Prelature has generated, in matters of serious ecclesial moment, true customs *contra legem*. The adherence to this pastoral practice is inculcated on the Prelature's faithful as the expression of a "divine will."

In this way, Opus Dei plays a double game, keeping a "double normative face." On the one hand, its internal "norms" and "criteria"—gathered in a wide range of "secret writings"—shape the actual life of its faithful with prescriptions that sometimes gravely violate the universal Canon Law of the Church and the fundamental rights of all baptized faithful. On the other hand, this unique "discipline" is imposed in a totalitarian way, giving the institution cult-like features alien to ecclesiastical communion, because these abuses are perpetrated by the institution as if they were "divine commands" belonging to the foundational charism.

For a long time, many persons within the institution have protested against these internal practices before the authorities of the Prelature insisting on them being corrected. However, the Prelate and his Directors have proved to be impervious to any change; because they understand that their actions agree with the "foundational spirit." Thus, the faithful who disagree are forced to abandon the Prelature, in spite of having dedicated to it their financial resources and their lives for many years; and in spite of being left in some cases in utter poverty. These situations are particularly scandalous in the case of numerary priests, whose reduction to the lay state is encouraged without any qualms.

During the last few decades this "internal malaise" has forced many faithful to leave the Prelature; faithful whose integrity and sincere desire to give their lives to God cannot be questioned without injuring them gravely. However, the authorities of the Prelature continue promoting an external image of constant growth and development which is at odds with its actual reality. For example, at various

times and places the number of members has been reported as if it were continually rising. But these reports contradict each other and do not agree with the truth: they satisfy circumstantial needs to “project an image” to the outside world. This strongly suggests that the Prelature of Opus Dei has for years been following a policy of “systematic deceit” about its internal data, and not just about the number of its faithful.

These days, the authorities of the Prelature are extremely careful of projecting before the Holy See and the bishops the “image” of a “solid” institution, whose high reliability can hardly be questioned given its abundant fruits, which should be viewed as proof of a divine blessing. But the profound crisis in which the institution is immersed is a fact. To preserve its good “image,” no method is spared to cleverly hide this crisis. The institution’s seeming unity and iron discipline are like the clay feet of a giant: they hide a totalitarian style and modus operandi under the camouflage of collegiate government manners. But the government and pastoral practices of the Prelature disagree with the norms of universal Canon Law in grave and important ways.

4. Some months ago I published a **collection of internal “documents”** of the Prelature unknown to the hierarchy of the Church —now *ab intra* they prefer to call them “writings”— which collect its “specific norms” of action. These norms are never divulged to those who approach the institution trusting on the approvals granted to it by the Holy See. These writings generate the **un-canonical norms** of the institution, which operate entirely outside the norms of universal Canon Law.

As a confirmation of this fact, just a few months ago a rush effort was initiated to correct so many “printed errors,” because there was a great need to camouflage and hide the institution’s true face after those writings were published in this web site. For example, the **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) edited in 2002 has just been replaced by the **Experiencias de los Consejos Locales** (Local Council’s Experiences), which have been given an absolutely false, fictitious date of 19 March 2005. Is it perhaps because this is the “new image” to be projected in order to satisfy the demands of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith?

The reality is that, *ad intra*, the institution behaves as if it had complete freedom to act, disregarding the common norms of Canon Law and without any control from the ordinary Hierarchy. Appearances can be added or removed —to suit the convenience of those in command— in order to maintain “lo de siempre” (the way things have always been lived). In Opus Dei, it is thought and said that the Work will never need to be “brought up to date.” One can understand how dangerous this is for the Christian faithful, because the legal norms granted to the Prelature by Rome are used to hide an authoritarian government outside any control and capable of controlling consciences. It is even more dangerous for the faithful of Opus Dei, because they are governed and formed —or rather “indoctrinated” and “disinformed”— by their Directors in such a way that their “institutional bond” leaves them defenseless before such abuses.

For example, if one compares the **Codex iuris particularis** with the **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei), the sharp contrast is remarkable in important matters such as spiritual direction or the way of doing proselytism. The opacity of the government of the Prelature before its own faithful and the ecclesial community becomes then hard to deny. Since this cancer has metastasized and can hardly be described in all its consequences, I will focus on describing its core, even repeating at times ideas or facts already covered in other collaborations for this web site.

### 3 Abuses in Spiritual Direction

5. To begin with, in spite of being one of the most basic matters in the life of the Church, Opus Dei does not respect the necessary separation between the “external forum” and the “internal forum,” that is, between matters of government and the legitimate autonomy of each conscience. To verify this fact it is enough to examine how the personal spiritual direction of the faithful of the Prelature is understood and practiced. In practice, it is exercised through the so-called *confidencia* (confidence) or “fraternal chat,” in which both priests and lay people are asked to open their intimacy with the Directors of Opus Dei.

What do the **Statutes** of Opus Dei say about this matter? They are remarkably unforthcoming, since they only mention this subject explicitly in Number 83 §2:<sup>1</sup> *The asceticism and spirit of penance*

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<sup>1</sup>Translator’s Note: The authorities of the Prelature have intentionally left the Latin text of the **Statutes** untranslated. The only plausible purpose is to make the text of the **Statutes** unavailable in practice to Opus Dei members, or to anybody

*practiced by the faithful of Opus Dei entail other requirements for the faithful of the Prelature: mainly the practice of a daily examination of conscience, of spiritual direction and weekly sacramental confession.*

The total absence of any other references about this matter in this **Codex iuris particularis** forces an exegesis of the “spiritual direction” notion according to its most common understanding in the spiritual tradition of the Church. This was the only concept available to the ecclesiastical legislator who approved such a norm. Therefore, it should be a spiritual direction practiced with outmost respect for the precepts of universal Canon Law regulating this matter. Above all, among others, by the *Quemadmodum* Decree of December 17, 1890, which is utterly clear in its expression, and unequivocal about the moral doctrine being protected and the will of the Roman Pontiff. Because of its enormous importance, I have added an *Appendix* at the end of this study with a translation of this Decree and the original Latin text, so that the faithful of the personal Prelature will be able to become fully acquainted with its contents.

Are the permanent and universal prescriptions contained in the *Quemadmodum* Decree of Leo XIII respected in Opus Dei? Certainly not. Numbers 209 and 222 of the **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei) (7th edition of 2003) show a “way of understanding” *personal spiritual direction* completely different from the understanding of it that has always existed in the Church. Thus, it is for example stated without any shame that the competence for personal spiritual direction *belongs to the institution*, not to the persons who spiritually accompany those under their guidance. Furthermore, it is often said that this task is one of the most proper governmental functions practiced by the Directors, because such personal direction is just one more aspect of the “spiritual formation” provided by the institution. For this same reason, no freedom is given to the faithful to choose their spiritual counselors, since such a choice automatically belongs to the persons holding positions of government.

It seems unbelievable, but that is the way spiritual direction is practiced. There is no way around it. For Opus Dei, the only way out is to intone a *mea culpa* and, above all, to rectify. So that nobody will be able to blame my statements as a mistaken or twisted interpretation of reality, I will describe this core of the cancer in another way, that is, through its consequences using explanations that can be found in the “**internal writings**” where Opus Dei describes its own spiritual praxis. One can verify in those writings at least five grave abuses violating the current Code of Canon Law and, above all, negating fundamental teachings about the human person of Vatican Council II.

### 3.1 The confusion between government and spiritual direction

6. In the praxis of Opus Dei, personal spiritual direction is one of the proper functions of its governmental action, or, more precisely, it identifies the second with the first as if they were homogeneous matters, wiping out the distinction between internal forum and external forum. There are “secret writings” of the Prelature that clearly show this.

For example, the **Vademécum de sacerdotes** (Vademecum for priests) of 1987 states the matter in these terms<sup>2</sup> *In Opus Dei, spiritual direction belongs, in the first place, to the local lay Directors, with whom the priests also make their fraternal chat; then, to the priests of the Work, through sacramental confession. The priests know that, to cooperate efficaciously in the personal spiritual direction of the faithful of the Prelature, they should ordinarily back in everything the directives that the other members*

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else except Latin experts. The Prelature’s faithful are systematically told that this translation is unnecessary, because the **Statutes** are faithfully summarized in Opus Dei’s **Catecismo** (Catechism). This study presents irrefutable proof that the **Statutes** are *grossly distorted and perverted* in the **Catecismo** in all matters pertaining to spiritual direction. But this is by no means the only such perversion and falsity. For example, the consciences of numerary members of Opus Dei are systematically oppressed—since they are told that otherwise they would commit a mortal sin—with the alleged grave moral duty of handing *all their earnings*, once they cover their most basic expenses, to Opus Dei. Furthermore, they are not allowed to help their family members, make any decisions about their finances, or about any nontrivial purchases, without an explicit permission from the Directors. But no reference whatsoever to all these “duties” can be found in the **Statutes**; only the statement that *all faithful of the Prelature should “help, to the extent possible to them, the apostolates of the Prelature”* (**Statutes**, 94, §2). Spanish, Italian, English and German translations of the **Statutes** are available in the [opuslibros.org](http://opuslibros.org) website. The Latin text of Number 83 §2 of the **Statutes** reads as follows: *Hic asceticismus et spiritus paenitentiae alias quoque exigentias in vita fidelium Praelaturae secum fert, praesertim quotidianam conscientiae discussionem, directionem spiritualem et praxim hebdomadarianam confessionis sacramentalis.*

<sup>2</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *En el Opus Dei, la dirección espiritual corresponde, en primer lugar, a los directores locales, laicos, con los que también los sacerdotes tienen su charla fraterna; después a los sacerdotes de la Obra, a través de la confesión sacramental. Los sacerdotes saben que, para colaborar eficazmente en la dirección espiritual personal de los fieles de la Prelatura, han de confirmar en todo, ordinariamente, las directrices que los demás reciban en la charla fraterna: sólo una completa armonía entre ambos consejos asegura la adecuada dirección de las personas de la Obra* (p. 41)

receive in the fraternal chat: only a complete harmony between both kinds of advice ensures the adequate spiritual direction of the persons of the Work (pg. 41). Isn't it shocking that, in matters of sanctification, the exercise of the ministerial priesthood should be subjected to the directives of "lay Directors" who, according to the norms of **Canon Law**, can never hold the *sacra potestas* of the Prelate or his Vicars and, at most, can only collaborate with it (*cooperari possunt*: see CIC-83 c. 129)?

Another text confirms that things are done this way. Regarding economic issues, the **Experiencias de las labores apostólicas** (Experiences about apostolic works) of 2003 say:<sup>3</sup> *The local Councils handle these issues with particular diligence, and are vigilant —through the fraternal chat— to ensure that the persons involved behave at all times as fathers of a large and poor family: in the remuneration for their professional activities and in their detachment, care, and moderation in the use of the material means that they need to carry out their work: offices, cars, trips, etc. Specifically, they make all understand that freedom in professional activities should always be closely united to a full and effective detachment from material goods, and to an unconditional dedication without any reservations.* (pg. 68). Note that the good purpose of government is sought through the fraternal chat (personal spiritual direction), as if spiritual direction were a tool to achieve institutional objectives with greater effectiveness.

Is it ecclesiastically acceptable that the most delicate means of spiritual direction is regarded as an "instrument" to ensure the efficacy of governmental directives, no matter how good these might be? Is this perhaps the way the Church understands how its *sacra potestas* is placed to the service of each person? Obviously not. It is also obvious that if spiritual direction in Opus Dei were to be separated from government —as it should be— the confusion that facilitates this instrumental "manipulation" would become impossible.

### 3.2 The government of spiritual direction over the immediate subjects

7. In full agreement with all the above, according to the praxis of Opus Dei, personal spiritual direction always belongs to the Director over his/her own immediate subjects. The 7th edition of 2003 of the **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei) says literally:<sup>4</sup> *Personal spiritual direction as regards interior dispositions is exercised by the Directors and the priests of the Work* (number 215). And in the **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) of 2002, for example, the following is specified:<sup>5</sup> *Generally speaking, the fraternal chats of the members of the local Council are taken care of —as those of the other persons attached to the Center— in the Center itself. In each case the local Council ponders and decides the most suitable distribution of fraternal chats* (pg. 98). The principle of freedom in matters of spiritual direction and sacramental confession, protected by canon 630 of the current Latin Code, is seriously harmed by this peculiar "self-reserving" by the Directors of the task of spiritual direction over their immediate subjects and, even more, because the reserving of this task is based on the government position.

For this reason, the new **Experiencias de los Consejos Locales** (Local Council's Experiences) dated as of 2005 (pages 84–89) have been swift in *camouflaging* the real behavior of the Prelature, by rewriting entirely the wording of 2002, so that, read literally, it does not reveal so clearly the habitual abuses perpetrated by its usual pastoral practices. However, all the faithful of the Prelature —or all those who have belonged to it for a long time— know that the true *internal reality* is the one here described.

### 3.3 The institutional bureaucratization of spiritual direction

8. "Spiritual direction" then becomes another "bureaucratic" task, that is, a matter and task of the "institutional organization" of Opus Dei. This is shamelessly acknowledged when it is taught

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<sup>3</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Los Consejos locales tramitan estos asuntos con especial diligencia, y velan —a través de la charla fraterna— para que los interesados actúen en todo momento como padres de familia numerosa y pobre: en el rendimiento económico de su actividad profesional y en el desprendimiento; cuidado y sobriedad en el uso de los medios materiales que necesitan para el desempeño de su trabajo: oficinas, automóviles, viajes, etc. Concretamente, hacen comprender a todos que la libertad en la actividad profesional va siempre muy unida al pleno y efectivo desprendimiento de los bienes materiales, a una entrega sin reservas ni condiciones* (p. 68).

<sup>4</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Ejercen la dirección espiritual personal en cuanto a las disposiciones interiores, los Directores y los sacerdotes de la Obra* (número 215).

<sup>5</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *En general, las charlas fraternas de las personas del consejo local se atienden —como las de las demás personas adscritas al Centro— en el propio Centro; en cada caso el Consejo local pondera y decide la distribución que considere más conveniente* (p. 98).

and practiced that the directors —when dealing with their superiors— are exempted from the sacred natural duty of confidentiality about anything discussed inside the “fraternal chats” they receive. This violation of intimacy perverts what should be a “personal” spiritual direction. This is perhaps one of the gravest and strongest issues, one generating the gravest abuses and damaging most gravely the most basic respect due to consciences, as proclaimed by the teachings of the Church and protected by her canonical praxis.

The **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) of 2002 is quite eloquent:<sup>6</sup> *Those matters known because of one’s government position are only communicated or discussed, as it is logical, with those who —also because of their government position— should know about them. If a medical doctor or a lawyer keep a natural professional secret —professional silence<sup>7</sup>— about those matters they get to know because of their work, those dedicated to tasks of direction or spiritual formation of souls should live this silence for a much greater reason* (pg. 14). That is to say, reasoning *a sensu contrario*, it is stated that they can discuss all these confidential matters “with those who should know them because of their government position.” And who are they? The higher directors.

Indeed, it is thus explained in the book on **Experiencias sobre el modo de llevar charlas fraternas** (Experiences on how to receive fraternal chats) of 2001, where we read:<sup>8</sup> *Therefore, according to the nature of the fraternal chat, professional silence forbids dealing with these matters with any persons other than those who can and should intervene in spiritual direction, in a line of command that goes from the local directors to the Father. Within this line, in ascending order (from below up), professional silence is not harmed when the consultation is necessary or advisable* (pg. 110). These texts speak for themselves and do not require any comment.

In case the matter had not been made clear enough, the just-quoted paragraph includes a clarifying footnote stating:<sup>9</sup> *If one understands that Opus Dei is the one giving spiritual direction, it is easy to realize that it would make no sense, for example, that when making the fraternal chat somebody were to place as a condition to discuss a specific matter, that the person receiving it would promise “not to tell anybody” about what the person making it was going to divulge; or that the person receiving it, thinking that in this way he/she would facilitate the other’s sincerity, were to mistakenly tell him/her: “do not worry and tell me everything, because I will not tell anybody.” In these hypothetical situations, the person receiving the chat would cease to be an instrument to bring the help of the Work: that conversation would no longer be a fraternal chat of spiritual direction.* Is it clear enough? Is it possible to conceive a greater distortion of what spiritual direction has always been in the Church?

9. This approach, presented with an appearance of goodness, is radically opposed to the Catholic teaching about the respect owed to the consciences of people; and it is also opposed to the current norms of universal Canon Law, which should be applied and respected in the personal Prelature. It is enough to think of canons 220 and 240 §2 in the context of canon 984, to realize that no exceptions or exemptions are possible.

It is perhaps for this reason that, in this matter of confidentiality, number 222 of the **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei) states the correct doctrine of the Church. But, as we have seen, other documents “reserved” to a few promote and justify an entirely unacceptable praxis, such as that

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<sup>6</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Las materias conocidas por razón del cargo, sólo se comunican o comentan, como es lógico, con aquellas personas que —también por razón de su cargo— deben conocerlas. Si un médico o un abogado guardan un natural secreto profesional —secreto de oficio— sobre los asuntos que conocen con motivo de su trabajo, con mucha mayor razón han de vivir ese silencio quienes se ocupan de las tareas de dirección o de formación espiritual de las almas* (p. 14).

<sup>7</sup>Translator’s Note: Opus Dei’s Founder coined a bizarre terminology, saying that —since he found any secrecy abhorrent— he preferred to call *silencio de oficio* —which I render in English as *professional silence*, to make it barely understandable to English speaking readers— what is usually called the keeping of a *secreto profesional*, that is, of a *professional secret*. The interpretation of this studied avoidance of the word “secret” by the Founder of an institution systematically based on secrecy must be left as a future task for deep psychology.

<sup>8</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Por tanto, de acuerdo con la naturaleza de la charla fraterna, el silencio de oficio prohíbe tratar esos asuntos con cualquier persona fuera de aquéllas que puedan y deban intervenir en la dirección espiritual, en la línea que va desde los Directores locales hasta el Padre. Dentro de esa línea, y en sentido ascendente (de abajo hacia arriba), no se lesiona el silencio de oficio cuando la consulta es necesaria o conveniente* (p. 110).

<sup>9</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Si se entiende bien que quien imparte la dirección espiritual es el Opus Dei, fácilmente se comprende que no tendría sentido, por ejemplo, que al hacer la charla fraterna alguien pusiera como condición, para tratar un tema determinado, que quien la reciba se comprometiera a “no contar a nadie” lo que va a decirle; o que este último, pensando facilitarle la sinceridad, equivocadamente dijera al que hace la charla: “Cuéntame todo y no te preocupes, porque no se lo voy a decir a nadie más”. En esos casos hipotéticos, la persona que recibiera la charla dejaría de ser instrumento para hacer llegar la ayuda de la Obra: esa conversación no sería una charla fraterna de dirección espiritual.*

of turning conversations of personal spiritual direction into information “tools” for government actions —also for control— upon the faithful; and for a peculiar kind of “remote control” spiritual direction. Isn’t all this a manipulation of the individual and a violation of his/her deepest intimacy? With such mentality, what respect is afforded to the forum of one’s conscience? How and where has the Church approved this praxis of the Prelate and Directors of Opus Dei?

But again, like an admission of guilt, the new **Experiencias de los Consejos Locales** (Local Council’s Experiences) dated as from 2005 have tried to hide such a grave abuse. On the one hand, the entire section previously dedicated to the “fraternal chat” has been rewritten from scratch, *ex novo* —as I pointed out above in Section 3.2— and all references to the **Experiencias sobre el modo de llevar charlas fraternas** (Experiences on how to receive fraternal chats) of 2001 have been removed. On the other hand, the separate section dedicated to *professional silence* in the **Vademécum** of 2002 (pages 14-15) has now been removed, so that its contents are diluted in a new generic discussion about the prudence required in the behavior of the members of local Councils (pages 15–17), but without showing nakedly the institutionalized practices about violation of confidentiality. As it is well-known, the **opuslibros.org** web site has furnished irrefutable proofs of this fact through the **writings and internal documents of the institution** which help understand the methodology behind the praxis.

The deceitful attitude shown by the behavior on this matter of the Prelate and the other Directors in their relation with the Holy See can be easily inferred from an inspection of the **Ratio institutionis** presented by the *Prelatura Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (Romae 1997) and approved by the Roman Curia. Besides the **Statutes** of the Prelature, this is practically the only other document that has been examined by Rome. For example, in number 100 of the **Ratio institutionis** one reads:<sup>10</sup> *In each Inter-regional Center of Studies there should also be a Spiritual Director, appointed by the Prelate for five years. Furthermore, there will be a sufficient number of other competent priests, designated by the Prelate, who will be available for the task of spiritual direction.* See also what is said in numbers 47–53 for Centers of Studies in general. That is, they are fully aware of the doctrine and the universal canonical discipline; and they try to induce the Holy See to believe that this is the internal way of acting in the Prelature. However, as one can see, the “secret” internal documents —now called writings on *Christian formation for the apostolate*— violate in a frontal way this other public document, because they describe and teach an entirely opposite praxis (the actual reality). They are internal “customs” of an obligatory nature which are considered the “spirit” of Opus Dei transmitted by its Founder.

The importance of these (internal) *secret writings* used by all those holding government positions within the institution should not be minimized. As well as the **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) of 2002, the new **Experiencias de Consejos Locales** (Local Council’s Experiences) of 2005 —in reality of 2006 distributed to Opus Dei centers during the last quarter of that year— continue saying the following:<sup>11</sup> *The documents and writings on Christian formation are not only meant to help the Directors themselves: they are living, clear doctrine for everybody. Therefore, the local Council members do not just read and meditate them in depth: they also consider how to convey their contents in classes of formation, personal chats, etc.; and the priests do likewise in their preaching. Their permanent study —a grave responsibility for Directors at any level— facilitates keeping in mind the basic criteria and experiences to carry out one’s task with diligence, avoiding omissions, improvisations, or waste of time* (pg. 19). Thank God, a good part of these writings have been leaked by faithful of the Prelature for their publication in the **opuslibros.org** web site; because they have not found any other way of countering these abuses than that of making such writings widely known.

### 3.4 The explicit prohibition of communicating one’s intimacy

10. The matter does not end here. Opus Dei’s praxis on spiritual direction *explicitly forbids* the faithful to manifest their own intimacy to anybody other than the immediate Director or higher Directors.

<sup>10</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Debe haber también en cada Centro de Estudios Interregional un Director Espiritual, que es nombrado por el Prelado para un quinquenio. Además habrá otros sacerdotes idóneos y en número suficiente, disponibles para la labor de dirección espiritual, designados por el Prelado. Todos guardarán con el mayor cuidado el debido silencio en todo lo referente al fuero interno.*

<sup>11</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Los documentos y escritos referentes a la formación cristiana, no tienen como único fin la ayuda a los propios Directores: son doctrina viva y clara para todos. Por eso, los miembros del Consejo local no se limitan a leerlos y meditarlos a fondo, sino que consideran también cómo transmitir su contenido en clases de formación, charlas personales, etc.; y lo mismo hacen los sacerdotes en su predicación. Con el estudio permanente —responsabilidad grave para los Directores a cualquier nivel—, se facilita conservar en la memoria los criterios básicos y las experiencias para desempeñar la propia tarea con esmero, evitando omisiones, improvisaciones, o pérdidas de tiempo* (p. 19).

The **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei) says in fact:<sup>12</sup> *It will never be appropriate for the faithful of Opus Dei to confide to each other matters of their interior life or personal concerns, because those who count on a special grace to assist and help the members of the Work are the male or female Director —or the person determined by the Directors— and the designated priest (number 221).* Therefore, this praxis of the Prelature includes even the prohibition of any free communication among the members about any kind of “personal” issues or concerns, not just those pertaining to the government of the Work or the intimacy of one’s soul. What friendship could then exist between such “brothers” (respectively “sisters”)? Or what kind of fraternity is one where the most natural inter-personal relations seem to be forbidden?

It is not hard to realize that this way of acting is directly against the freedom of communication recognized as a personal right of the faithful by canon 212 §3 of the current Latin Code. Furthermore, in this way a person becomes completely isolated and “subjugated” to those constituted in authority, so that he/she can be despoiled of that which is most personal: the autonomy of one’s conscience. The classic text recalling that *souls belong only to God* seems to have been forgotten.<sup>13</sup>

In Opus Dei, one’s thoughts about the institution can only be discussed with the Directors. Anybody expressing his/her personal opinion, publicly or in private, will be immediately censured and corrected for “murmuring,” even though such manifestations may be in perfect agreement with moral law. If this natural right is exercised out of love for truth, the negative consequences will be quite immediate. Abundant testimonies have already been published about this way of acting.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, a totalitarian control is exercised over opinions, carefully choosing for imparting means of formation people who are just the voice of the official position. And this control is then extended to all books. Many authors of high theological standing, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, are forbidden or under suspicion. And quite a few books from Joseph Ratzinger were judged “highly inadvisable,” although this ranking was later changed when he was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

11. In this context of control and prohibitions, number 215 of the **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei) asks:<sup>15</sup> *Who exercises personal spiritual direction about interior dispositions?* And answers: *Personal spiritual direction about interior dispositions is exercised by the Directors and the priests of the Work,* as we already know. Who can now remember the freedom for choosing one’s own confessor and spiritual director carefully defended by the universal canons of the Church?

To avoid a direct criticism of this obvious restriction it adds:<sup>16</sup> *Safeguarding the freedom of the consciences of the faithful of the Work, their good spirit moves them to have spiritual direction with the local male or female Director, and with the priest designated to take care of each Center. They can also receive spiritual direction from other priests of the Prelature.* Therefore, not with priests not belonging to the Prelature. And the following clarification is added:<sup>17</sup> *To understand the aforementioned, one should keep in mind that it is Opus Dei itself that gives spiritual direction, so that nobody can claim the exclusive right to exercise it. Therefore, those who have not received from the Father or the Regional Directors such mission cannot be good shepherds.* And then the following conclusion from all these

<sup>12</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Nunca será conveniente que los fieles del Opus Dei tengan entre sí estas confidencias de vida interior o de preocupaciones personales, porque quienes cuentan con la gracia especial, para atender y ayudar a los miembros de la Obra, son el Director o la Directora —o la persona que los Directores determinen— y el sacerdote designado (número 221).*

<sup>13</sup>Translator’s Note: An allusion to Pedro Crespo’s words:

*al rey, la hacienda y la vida  
se ha de dar; pero el honor  
es patrimonio del alma,  
y el alma sólo es de Dios*

in Calderón de la Barca’s play *El Alcalde de Zalamea*.

<sup>14</sup>Translator’s Note: Such as, for example, the recent testimony of a Regional Director who, having complained in conscience to the Prelate about moral abuses, was asked to fly to Rome and, without having been told about their nature, was there prescribed mind-altering drugs by a priest-doctor of Opus Dei: [http://www.opuslibros.org/libros/MI\\_VIDA.htm](http://www.opuslibros.org/libros/MI_VIDA.htm).

<sup>15</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *¿Quiénes ejercen la dirección espiritual personal, en cuanto a las disposiciones interiores?* Answered with: *Ejercen la dirección espiritual personal, en cuanto a las disposiciones interiores, los Directores y los sacerdotes de la Obra,* as we already know.

<sup>16</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Dejando completamente a salvo la libertad de las conciencias de los fieles de la Obra, su buen espíritu les mueve a tener la dirección espiritual personal con el Director o con la Directora local, y con el sacerdote designado para atender cada Centro. Pueden siempre dirigirse, además, a otro sacerdote de la Prelatura.*

<sup>17</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Para comprender lo anterior, ha de tenerse presente que es el mismo Opus Dei el que imparte la dirección espiritual, y nadie puede atribuirse el derecho exclusivo de ejercerla. Por tanto, quienes no han recibido esa misión del Padre o de los Directores Regionales, no pueden ser buenos pastores.*

arguments is presented:<sup>18</sup> *For this reason, personal spiritual direction in the Work only exists in actu: when the Director listens to the Confidence, or when the priest receives a confession or chats of spiritual direction.* The literal nature of these paragraphs is priceless. It is shamelessly stated that personal “spiritual direction” belongs to the institution and not to the specific persons who provide spiritual assistance. We also find the keyword “good spirit” to specify the proper behavior expected of the faithful of the Prelature. Therefore, *a sensu contrario* one should understand that whoever does not behave as described in number 215 would have “bad spirit” when exercising his/her freedom of conscience according to the universal laws of the Church—which apply to the Prelature—and in conformity with the **Estatutos** (Statutes) of Opus Dei, where none of the concrete specifications made in the **Catecismo** (Catechism of Opus Dei) can be found.

12. In addition, when enumerating the means recommended to ensure the perseverance of recent vocations, Number 309 of the **Catecismo** advises as follows:<sup>19</sup> *(1) abandon oneself in the Lord, through the Directors; (2) have great sincerity in spiritual direction with the Directors and priests of the Work,* and then other common sense recommendations are added. Is it then impossible to abandon oneself in the Lord, except through the Directors? Is the virtue of sincerity not practiced unless exercised with the Directors and priests of Opus Dei? This “intended monopoly” over the souls that turns any priest of the Church not belonging to Opus Dei into a *bad shepherd* is shocking: is this what ecclesial *communio* is about? The Prelate and the Directors declare themselves to be the exclusive spokespersons of the Most High, bypassing God and His Church.

What difference is there between this way of acting and the annihilation of personal conscience? Isn’t God replaced by the “will of the Directors”? This is in fact the case, since it is often repeated that one should receive everything they say as the “will of God.” For this reason only they are the **good shepherd** and nobody else can be so. This is a true “divinization” of the governmental structure, to which the faithful of the Prelature must “submit” the personal judgment of their own consciences, as if they were listening to a divine oracle. This is called docility and “delicacy” in living obedience.

Conscience must yield before obedience. “What the Directors say,” their indications, are placed above personal conscience, because what they say or command cannot be questioned, since it has the seal of something divine. It is in fact a form of obedience—mistakenly understood as ascetical “submission”: a subjection of one’s intellect and, afterwards, one’s will—very much like the one practiced in integrist or fundamentalist societies. A “blind faith”—in the Founder and also in his institution—that leads to not having any thoughts of one’s own, to yield constantly on personal ideas, and to swallow anything against what one understands is demanded by charity or by the *secular spirituality* lived with the awareness of one’s own vocation.

### 3.5 The obligatory manifestation of conscience

13. Complementing all that has already been said, members of Opus Dei are required to perform the old “manifestation of conscience,” which was condemned in the strongest possible terms by the authority of the Church. That is to say, an “obligation” is claimed to exist—because of the vocation—to render a periodic and complete communication of one’s intimacy to the Directors, who, in turn, self-appoint themselves as exclusive counselors of the faithful’s consciences and only channel through which the will and the grace of God can reach their souls. All this is usually asserted in a most definite way which is frightening, bringing God into the matter. In fact, what those assertions—never subjected to theological criticism—seek to obtain is an iron-fisted control of the person through “personal spiritual direction.”

This can be illustrated by some passages from the **Experiencias sobre el modo de llevar charlas fraternas** (Experiences on how to receive fraternal chats), where there seems to barely be any room for personal spontaneity, because everything is planned in advance, even in the mode of acting. We read, for example,<sup>20</sup> *Punctuality, in the established day and time, should be carefully observed (...) Another*

<sup>18</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Por eso, en la Obra la dirección espiritual personal existe sólo in actu: cuando el Director escucha la Confidencia, y cuando el sacerdote confiesa o atiende charlas de dirección espiritual.*

<sup>19</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *(1) abandonarse en el Señor, a través de los Directores; (2) tener gran sinceridad en la dirección espiritual con los Directores y los sacerdotes de la Obra.*

<sup>20</sup>The original Spanish text—about the “fraternal chat”—reads as follows: *Ha de cuidarse mucho la puntualidad en el día fijado y a la hora establecida (...) Otra característica importante es la brevedad. Aunque la duración concreta dependerá de muchos factores, de ordinario, si se prepara bien, bastarán diez o quince minutos para comentar con sinceridad y hondura todos los puntos necesarios. Sólo en casos excepcionales será precisa una mayor dedicación (p.23).*

important feature is brevity. Although the concrete duration will depend on many factors, usually, if it is well prepared, ten or fifteen minutes will suffice to cover sincerely and in depth the necessary points. Only in exceptional cases will a longer attention be necessary (pg. 23). And further along it is added:<sup>21</sup> *The Catechism of Opus Dei states in its number 208 that the faithful of the Work “can” open their soul in the Confidence, because it is a right they have. And, at the same time, that they “should take care” most faithfully of this Custom, because it is one of the means to identify themselves with the spirit of the Work, which they have committed themselves to put into practice when formally joining the Prelature* (pg. 16).

What matters in these considerations, the individual person or the directives of the institution one has joined because of a vocation? Where has it been “approved” by the Church that formally joining the Prelature of Opus Dei involves accepting the “manifestation of conscience” to the Directors as something obligatory?

The same mentality is reflected by the recommendations of the **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) of 2002, when somebody shows signs of autonomous behavior or manifests doubts about keeping his/her ties with the Prelature, where the advice is to increase the control over the person through spiritual direction:<sup>22</sup> *Specifically, it will be good to prudently find out what kinds of friendships he/she cultivates; if he/she is in intimate terms with a person, if he/she seeks spiritual advice outside the Work instead of going to his brothers/sisters, what mail he/she sends and receives, since he/she writes perhaps to relatives, friends or other persons who do not guide him/her well, and what books does he/she read* (pg. 63). These recommendations, as well as other significant passages from the 2002 version, have now been removed from the **Experiencias de los Consejos Locales** (Local Council’s Experiences) of 2005 (pgs. 55–57). A comparison of the changes made shows clearly the “camouflage operation” of the Prelature in case its texts were to be examined; because nothing has changed in the Prelature —neither within nor without— leading to new patterns of behavior, and indicating that errors have been rectified.

## 4 Government as Dominion Over Consciences

14. Having reached this point, one may ask: Can the entire way of acting just described be regarded as legitimated by the scant mention made about the notion of “spiritual direction” in the Prelature’s **Estatutos** (Statutes)? Obviously not, because nothing in this way of acting agrees with the moral doctrine and the canonical praxis of the Church. Furthermore, it is hardly possible to assert that such methods have anything to do with a true personal spiritual direction, because the pastoral care of the faithful is always used as a means to further the “interests” —not necessarily perverse— of the institution.

No matter how noble the ends of an ecclesiastical institution may be, it is never legitimate to invert the terms of the relation: any such institution exists to serve the individual, not the other way around. In the case of canonical structures, this principle applies in the strongest possible terms. A person can never be treated as a “means” or tool, and even less for religious ends, placing the institution above the legitimate moral autonomy of the conscience. How far this praxis is from the anthropology and the moral teaching of John Paul II, beginning with his first encyclical **Redemptoris Hominis!**

Then, what kind of “spiritual direction” is the one practiced in Opus Dei? The one traditionally understood by the Church as “spiritual direction”? It seems not. One needs only consider a few facts. The Decree **Perfectae caritatis** of Vatican Council II advises superiors to *govern their subjects as children of God, with respect for the human person, fostering their voluntary submission. Therefore, they should allow them due freedom regarding the sacrament of penance and spiritual direction* (number 14). Canon 630 of the **Codex iuris canonici** of 1983 is without a doubt a direct canonical expression of these recommendations from the Council. Its mere existence is a strong proof that the Church will never give up protecting the freedom in manifesting the intimacy of one’s conscience.

<sup>21</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Se dice (en el Catecismo de la Obra no. 208) que los fieles de la Obra pueden abrir su alma en la Confidencia, porque es un derecho que tienen. Y, a la vez, que han de cuidar fidelísimamente esta Costumbre, porque es uno de los medios para identificarnos con el espíritu de la Obra, que nos hemos comprometido a poner en práctica al incorporarnos a la Prelatura* (p.16).

<sup>22</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *En concreto, convendrá enterarse con prudencia de qué clase de amistades cultiva; si tiene intimidación con alguna persona, si busca consejo espiritual fuera de la Obra, en lugar de dirigirse a sus hermanos; qué correspondencia envía y recibe, pues quizá escriba a parientes, a amigos o a otras personas que no le orientan bien; qué libros lee* (p.63).

Many other current canons go in the exact same direction, such as c. 220, c. 642, c. 239 §2 and c. 985 about the freedom of spiritual direction in seminaries, and c. 1548 §2-2nd or c. 1550 §2-2nd. Therefore, the attempt to justify what cannot be justified or bring agreement between issues in complete disagreement—for example by claiming that these are norms “for the religious” and not for ordinary Christians—is doomed to failure. The point is that the confusion between *government* and *spiritual direction* is a practice irrational and abominable from the canonical point of view: it will never have on its side the mark of *rationabilitas* to consolidate a canonically legal custom. The doctrine about the separation between the internal forum and external one is traditional in the life of the Church. Its confusion, involving as a consequence the invasion of the private realm of the conscience, was condemned in unequivocal terms by Leo XIII in his Decree *Quemadmodum* of December 17 1890. Any opposite custom, even from time immemorial, is condemned and forbidden forever by this Decree; and any disposition to the contrary at any time is also likewise condemned.

This pontifical Decree deserves a careful reading to appreciate its perennial moral value. It is the direct source that inspired canon 530 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, from which, in turn, canon 630 of the 1983 **Code of Canon Law** originates. The explicitness of the Decree *Quemadmodum* is as strong as possible: *His Holiness cancels, abrogates, and from now on declares null and void any dispositions in the Constitutions of Pious Unions, of Institutes (...) and even of lay persons of any kind, even if they were to have received the approval of the Holy See in any form, even that usually called most special, on this matter, namely, in whatever regulates, calling it by this name or in any other way, the intimate manifestation of the conscience and the heart. Therefore, for this reason, the male or female Directors of these Institutes, Congregations and Societies, are imposed the grave charge of suppressing absolutely the above-mentioned dispositions, suppressing them entirely from their own Constitutions, Directories or Manuals. He likewise cancels and suppresses any uses or customs on this matter even those from time immemorial* (number I).

The Decree is furthermore very practical, because it adds: *the above-mentioned male or female Superiors of any rank or preeminence are rigorously forbidden to directly or indirectly induce their subjects, by precept, advice, fear, threats, or praise, to render to them a manifestation of conscience of this kind. Correspondingly, subjects are commanded to report to their higher Superiors the abuses of any lower Superiors who would dare to induce them to such behavior. And if those responsible for such inducement were to be the male or female General Director, [they are then commanded] to report such abuses to this Sacred Congregation [of Bishops]* (number II).

The regulations contained in the subsequent numbers of this Decree are all aimed at ensuring the effective application, without relaxing its rigor, of this pontifical norm. No margin is allowed to the possibility of a *desuetudo* in such grave matters.

15. How is it then possible for Opus Dei to remain without any rebuke in spite of its practices? Simply because its Founder and successors have very much taken care, and continue to take care, of hiding their true *internal reality* from the Apostolic See and the Bishops. The most recent proof of how these methods are practiced can be found in the rushed preparation of the last **Experiencias de los Consejos Locales** (Local Council’s Experiences), dated as of 2005, but written in 2006 and distributed to Opus Dei Centers during the last quarter of the year. In this version, all the incriminating paragraphs from the **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) of 2002 that clearly showed the abuses that the Prelature practiced and continues to practice have been eliminated. Using a crafty, sometimes equivocal terminology, new versions of paragraphs and sections have been developed to “camouflage” the true reality, so that it cannot be detected as it really is by reading those texts, thus avoiding an explicit rebuke.

Unfortunately, no means have been left unused to unjustly disqualify all those who have opposed, or currently oppose, these situations. There is ample documentation about all this in the thousands of writings published in the **opuslibros.org** web site.

To all this is added a clever and efficient “ecclesiastical policy” aimed at obtaining and consolidating a canonical approval form—the famous *special intention* of the Founder—that would guarantee the independence of action before everybody, including the ordinary Bishops. This has been helped, and continues to be helped, by the personal dossiers gathered about each of the world’s Bishops. They are prepared based on the visits periodically made to them and the reports received from any member of the Prelature having a relation with them. It is a true “espionage service” that has nothing to envy from the Soviet secret police or the communist regimes now disappeared. This is not at all the behavior of the Congregations of the Roman Curia.

In these individual reports, regularly updated from the different regions, everything, even the most trivial detail, is registered, including the personal likes and dislikes and the specific idiosyncrasies or peculiar features of each Bishop. But the most telling about such reports are the judgment made about each person, evaluating even their Catholic “orthodoxy.” These opinions are then circulated in closed circuits around the world. Everything is expressed using a special code, some of whose expressions are gathered in the ultra-secret volume called **Augustinus**. There, it is specified, for example, that in such reports a member of the Hierarchy of the Church should be referred to as a *colleague of Leo*, that is, as a “colleague” of “Leo(poldo) Eijo y Garay.”<sup>23</sup> The reading of other volumes like the **Vademécum del Gobierno Regional** of November 28, 2000, reserved for the Delegations and Commissions, is not just shameful but actually scandalous, because of the immoral behavior it promotes, entirely contrary to the doctrine and canonical praxis of the Church.

Therefore, in the goal of acquiring the “personal Prelature” status, they knew and they know what they were seeking and wanted. Was it to guarantee the *secularity* of the charism? Nowadays this is hard to believe: it was rather to obtain guarantees of “independence” within the fold of the Church. In this way, nobody would be able to monitor “their customs” from the inside, requesting an account, nor question the “divinization” of such customs as a way of subjugating the consciences. This is the reason behind their current efforts to interpret the granted “personal Prelature” status as something analogous to Particular Churches, ignoring the **last modifications** introduced by John Paul II about this canonical formula when he approved the *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1983. It is also the reason behind their interest in theologically conflating the “natures” of Opus Dei and the Church by defining their Prelature as a “hierarchical structure.”

16. The universal canonical discipline is clear and known to all. It is impossible to entertain any doubts about its clear purpose of safeguarding the most fundamental rights of the faithful regarding their freedom and their legitimate moral autonomy (see **Veritatis Splendor**, numbers 38-41). In spite of all this, Opus Dei has violated these canonical norms: from its beginnings, when canon 530 of the Code of 1917 was in force; now with the current canon 630; and always by violating the permanent binding force of the Decree *Quemadmodum* of Leo XIII.

In Opus Dei, the faithful are not allowed to freely choose their own spiritual director or counselor, since that person is always appointed from above: the Director of a Center for his own subjects — precisely because of his position as “Director” in the government of the institution— or the person designated by the Director. The reason given nowadays to follow this praxis, so contrary to the canons of the Church, is that it is a way to preserve the “good spirit” received from the Founder, who established it. According to the already-mentioned number 215 of the **Catecismo de la Obra** (Catechism of Opus Dei) *their good spirit moves them to have spiritual direction with the local male or female Director, and with the priest designated to take care of each Center*. That is, the “foundational charism” is invoked as an excuse to violate a canonical precept and an ecclesiastical practice of the deepest importance, since it is rooted in the demands of natural law.

This praxis is justified in the book **Experiencias sobre el modo de llevar charlas fraternas** in the following terms:<sup>24</sup> *The first members of Opus Dei adopted with complete freedom the custom of*

<sup>23</sup>Translator’s Note: Eijo y Garay was Archbishop of Madrid in the 1940s and a great benefactor of Opus Dei. He granted the first approval of Opus Dei as Pious Union in 1941. At Escriva’s request he decreed that the Foundational Statutes should be kept *secret*, locked in the Secret Archive of the Madrid Archdiocese, where they still remain. The text of these secret Statutes has been recently published in the **opuslibros.org** web site. It contains disturbing statements such as the following: (1) Opus Dei members “*ejercitan ordinariamente el apostolado desde los cargos oficiales de la administración pública*” (usually carry out their apostolates from official positions in the Government’s Administration) (Article 1.2), the Government of the dictator Generalísimo Francisco Franco, in which some members of Opus Dei occupied top ministerial positions in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, (2) “*no podrán ser recibidos en la Obra quienes no tengan en su ascendencia inmediata tres generaciones de católicos, siquiera por una de las ramas paterna o materna*” (those not having at least three generations of Catholic ancestors in their father’s or mother’s line cannot be admitted in Opus Dei) (Article 5.2) and (3) “*tampoco podrán ser admitidos quienes hayan recibido el bautismo siendo adultos*” (those baptized as adults cannot be admitted either) (Article 5.3). Note that these are the first Statutes of an institution that the Founder insistently claimed was of *divine inspiration* from its inception.

<sup>24</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Los primeros tomaron voluntariamente —libérrimamente— la costumbre de contar a nuestro Padre todas sus cosas, de abrir la conciencia de par en par. Después, cuando el desarrollo de la labor apostólica hizo que resultase físicamente imposible que pudiera escucharles personalmente, comenzaron a abrir su alma al Director, con la misma visión sobrenatural, con la misma sencillez y confianza con que hablaban a nuestro Fundador*. And continues: *Desde entonces, todos los fieles del Opus Dei somos conscientes de que la charla fraterna es un medio sobrenatural, dispuesto por el Señor para nuestra santificación en el mundo: los Directores son instrumentos de Dios, y cuentan con las gracias convenientes para ayudarnos; por tanto, acudimos siempre con disposiciones de completa sinceridad, con el deseo de que sea cada vez más claro, más pleno, más íntimo el conocimiento que tienen de nuestra*

telling Our Father all their intimate things, opening their conscience completely to him. Afterwards, when the development of the apostolic works made it physically impossible for him to receive their confidences in person, they began to open their souls with the Director, with the same supernatural vision and the same trust with which they had done it with our Founder. And continues as follows: Since then, we are all conscious as faithful of Opus Dei that the fraternal chat is a supernatural means, disposed by the Lord for our sanctification in the world: the Directors are instruments of God; and they count on the suitable graces to help us. Therefore, we always go to them with dispositions of complete sincerity; wanting to give them an ever clearer, fuller, and more intimate knowledge of our ascetical struggles. (pgs. 3–4).

It is therefore necessary to ask: Is it possible for a “good spirit” to violate a severe prohibition of the Church? Is that alleged aspect of the charism authentic? The responsibility of properly answering this question belongs to the authority of the Church; because the discernment of charisms and their regulation is a matter of its exclusive competence: see *CIC*, canon 576. The claim of being a “divine charism” is precisely what we always find at the root of the irregular canonical behavior and the opacity of Opus Dei. Its authorities, quite aware of what they do, know that their government subjugates and annihilates the consciences of the faithful. In fact, all priests or lay members who exercise their conscience with autonomy are first ostracized; and sooner or later forced to leave the Prelature.

## 5 A Real Breakdown of Ecclesial Communion

17. Using the excuse of Opus Dei’s charism, the authorities of the Work have always done what they wanted, deceiving —there is no other word— their own people and those outside. They have invested the Founder, already during his life, with such an aura of sanctity, prophecy and inspiration, that this has later made it possible to justify all his actions outside any norm. What the Founder said and prescribed is considered “word of God,” immune to any rational discussion. This truly “fundamentalist” way of acting —based on the fanatical exaltation of the figure of Escrivá, allowed and fostered by the Founder himself— has resulted in the already discussed confusion between the internal forum and the external one. It has also resulted in anomalous governmental directives, presented as the expressed will of God.

This error is fertilized by the personal ideas about authority and government of José María Escrivá. Ideas that he applied to Opus Dei and that are radically different from those we can find in the Conciliar Constitution **Lumen Gentium**. With an anti-modernist ecclesiology in his head —typical of his seminary days—, and being remarkably close-minded to the advances of the best XXth-century theology, he presented authority as something indefectible and divinized. Therefore, the commands from such an authority cannot be questioned: Opus Dei and the Church are *societates perfectae* in the fashion of sacralized monarchies. It then follows that, when spiritual direction —it is *the institution* that directs— and all the means of formation are regarded as governmental tasks, the advice received through it should be considered as coming from Jesus Christ Himself.

Following this way of thinking one ends up with a praxis where personal conscience is replaced by regimental obedience: an unrestricted and universal obedience that embraces all actions and every kind of action. Thus, for example, the **Vademécum del Gobierno Local** (Local Government Vademecum) of 2002 specifies:<sup>25</sup> *So that they will be useful as a pattern —to always have a very clear conscience that one should respond to the sublime gift of the vocation to the Work with an equally great and full exigency, which is applied to all aspects of one’s dedication. Some of these obligations are indicated in what follows: (1) the duty of obeying the Father —and the Directors who represent him— with delicacy, supernatural sense and promptness in everything pertaining to one’s interior life and apostolate, and (2) the availability of each one, according to one’s state in life and circumstances, to dedicate himself/herself to the apostolic tasks of the Work* (pg. 53). In the new **Experiencias de los Consejos Locales** (Local Council’s Experiences) of 2005, the wording of the very eloquent item (1) has been camouflaged

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*lucha ascética* (pp. 3-4).

<sup>25</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: *Se indican a continuación algunas de estas obligaciones, con el fin de que sirvan de pauta para tener siempre conciencia muy clara de que, al don excelso de la vocación a la Obra, se ha de responder con una exigencia igualmente grande, plena, que se aplica a todos los aspectos de la entrega: (1) el deber de obedecer con finura, sentido sobrenatural y prontitud al Padre —y a los Directores que le representan—, en todo lo referente a la vida interior y al apostolado; (2) la disponibilidad, cada uno según su estado y circunstancias, para dedicarse a las tareas apostólicas de la Obra* (p. 53).

by writing:<sup>26</sup> (1) *a delicate docility, with supernatural sense and promptness, to the Prelate and those who represent him in everything pertaining to the ends of the Prelature (the search for personal sanctity and the apostolate)* (pg. 48). The letter has changed but not the “spirit” or the praxis (the habits) of the institution, which continues acting as always.

If these texts are examined carefully, in the context of the other internal writings, one perceives shades of meaning that might seem a subtle matter when considered abstractly, but that have far-reaching practical consequences in real life. What can be said with certainty is that no faithful can be asked to render a “regimental obedience” in matters pertaining to one’s *interior life*; because everything in life is related to “interior life;” and the “totality” of one’s life is not under —cannot be under— the external forum regime. One’s soul, one’s conscience, belong only to God; and there are intimate areas where only God can enter.

Instead, when approaching the “vocational demands,” the mentality of the Prelate and the Directors of Opus Dei is usually very different. They consider that everything in the lives of their faithful belongs “to the spirit,” and can be regulated. All in their behavior can be “evaluated” to define the “spirit.” Therefore, the following of any indication can be demanded out of obedience. To back this *modus operandi*, they usually repeat phrases attributed to the Founder:<sup>27</sup> *In Opus Dei everything can be commanded, or we do not have any rights, or, more poetically, I have the right of not having any rights.* This confusion of levels and realms becomes extremely dangerous; because it lends itself to all kind of abuses over souls; particularly when they are carried out “with good will,” presenting them as a good and as a sign of giving oneself to God. A person should never be *totally* subjected to an institution or its leadership structure.

18. Everything I have described is part of the **basic formation** received by anybody joining Opus Dei, often at a tender age: it is an “indoctrination” in complete disagreement with the **Estatutos** (Statutes) of Opus Dei (number 27 §4 1st), because such Statutes restrict the Prelate’s jurisdiction to the specific ends of the Prelature. Summing up, we find an organization that places itself above the individuals, replacing the most intimate core of their autonomy and despoiling them of inalienable rights. The individual does not count. Only the “will of God” —manifested in the Directors, who appear as direct agents for the sanctification of the faithful— counts.

Faithfulness to truth is conditioned to the interests of the institution; because the institution itself, its ends and its actions are an “explicit will of God,” thus the *Opus Dei* name. In this way, we arrive at an authority which does not accept any barriers or rights limiting its exercise: a true “totalitarian” system, highly hierarchical, where the gravest sin is the *lack of unity*, specified as any manifestation of having one’s own criteria or showing any lack of submission. The practice of an obligatory “manifestation of conscience” is a most effective means for controlling the “internal opinion,” and also the external one as far as possible.

“Criticism suppression” systems ensure discipline: for example, comments about the matters presented in the means of formation are forbidden; nobody should go to confession or seek spiritual direction outside Opus Dei; no vocations are admitted from people who have been members of other institutions, and so on. Personal “isolation” is achieved by channeling expressions of fraternity through a “fraternal correction” based first and foremost on reporting another’s faults to the Director, although of course it is not described that way. The real result ends up being an effective control over consciences.

19. All this shows that this *indefectible* institution, apparently “blessed by God with so many vocations,” does not have as good a doctrine as it claims to have; because it does not accept *all* the doctrines of the Church, nor a substantial part of Vatican Council II, nor does it respect fundamental rights of the faithful, nor is its behavior in *full communion* with the universal Church. From all that has been presented, we can draw a clear conclusion: nowadays Opus Dei is not in fact what it claims to be.

Certainly, it presents itself as an institution with a secular spirituality, a path for sanctification in the middle of the world, a way of dedication to God for ordinary Christians that does not take people out of their normal place. It is thus presented to those approaching its apostolates. However, once

<sup>26</sup>The original Spanish text reads as follows: (1) *una delicada docilidad, con sentido sobrenatural y prontitud, al Prelado y a los que le representan, en todo lo referente a los fines de la Prelatura (la búsqueda de la santificación personal y el apostolado)* (p.48).

<sup>27</sup>The original Spanish texts read as follows: “*en Casa se puede mandar todo,*” “*no tenemos derechos,*” and “*tengo el derecho de no tener ningún derecho.*” The last phrase was rhapsodized as a verse of a song entitled *Una Rosa me Diste* (You Gave me a Rose), which was approved by the Founder during his lifetime as an official song of Opus Dei. This and other such songs are learned by heart by young Opus Dei members and are sung in internal meetings to boost morale.

inside, the faithful find themselves gradually burdened with obligations and a way of life which have little or nothing to do with the charism approved by the Church. *The end of the Prelature* is the vague and ethereal formula always invoked to violate the rights of the person. Furthermore, it is hammered on the faithful that, if they were to abandon this ecclesial path, they would run the risk of eternal damnation.

Many soon feel themselves cheated because, sincerely seeking to serve God according to an entirely lay spirituality, they are then forced into a completely different lifestyle in the name of the will of God. To this must be added their being indoctrinated —as a grave moral duty— into the lie of an unbounded obedience which lacks any clear and stable canonical legal framework. Both men and women have to suffer grave abuses of their fundamental rights, rights protected by the universal canons of the Church.

Since they do not respect a stable legal framework, the “internal norms” of the Prelature, never approved by the Holy See, demand from its members many obligations not envisioned in the **Estatutos** (Statutes). Obligations which enlarge —“at the whim” of the Directors— the substantial content and the ways of one’s dedication. In many cases this does not directly violate universal Canon Law, but it amounts to a “fraud” with respect to the vocational ideal initially proposed to and wanted by the faithful.

The constant emanation of “norms” or criteria, through internal writings and notes, keeps permanently changing the contents of one’s “commitment” at the whim of the Directors. And this long list of “obligations,” presented as a direct demand of the Divine Will, or as a concrete manifestation of the fidelity to that Will, oppresses the hearts of the faithful and ends up warping their perception of reality. There are too many contradictions and too many lies in the pastoral activities of the Work: from the formation received —limited on purpose, partial, unilateral, and even cult-like— to the information given about the true historical reality, vital and juridical, of the institution.

All this is done by an organization that persuades itself of fulfilling the *will of God*, in a secure and unquestioned union with Him. A union that informs all its actions with the seal of goodness and orthodoxy. It believes to have within itself the solution to the terrible problems of the Church. It also believes to have in its bosom fidelity to the true doctrine, questioned by a new generation of restless theologians not sufficiently repressed by weak, disoriented Pontiffs. She *omnia bene fecit* and, “holier” than the Church herself, has no need to ask for any pardon.

Opus Dei needs to improve the moral uprightness of its actions and its transparency. This will require a task of historical clarification about the person of its Founder, its charism, and the practical application of its particular Law in agreement with the universal Law of the Church. As long as all this remains unfulfilled, it will continue to be an *institution without effective communion* with the pastoral action and the Hierarchy of the Church. It will remain a group of people that go their own way, a “cancer” that spreads “inside” the Church, carrying the seeds of scandals, tensions, and divisions.

The Divine Teacher came to witness to the truth (*Ioh* 18:37). It is deeply inconsistent for an institution of the Church to live with lies and opacity. It is disastrous for the institution and a time bomb for the Church. Any society seeking to grow in real goodness must be capable of constant reform, of purification. And this cannot be achieved without a holy self-criticism. Commitment to the truth is always the mark of authentic faith distinguishing it from human fanaticisms.

## 6 The Needed Intervention of the Holy See

20. There is a whole “official literature” about the Founder and the history of Opus Dei that admits no criticism and that, little by little, has been shown false in many aspects. This is not the place to present the existing proofs. But it is worth pointing out that the historical sources about the Founder and Opus Dei have been sequestered by its Directors, with a total control over that information, and even over any literary production, which requires the explicit authorization of the Directors.

Most of the Foundational **Cartas** (Letters) have been removed from internal use and circulation. The “official” biographies of the Founder and his Work contain unacceptable gaps about highly contested aspects of his life or provide facts and interpretations that have later been shown to be false. Generally speaking, a free and independent historical research at the service of truth is not promoted or facilitated. All this is a tangle of half truths and false appearances, clearly institutionally promoted propaganda. These lies to the Holy See and to the faithful, justified as a defense of the charism, tend to originate in an incoherent expression of such a charism in the praxis and law of Opus Dei.

As it has already been shown, the internal pastoral action of Opus Dei contains grave moral errors

that, to bring the institution in full communion with the doctrine and the discipline of the Church, will require an in-depth revision. This must begin with an internal and external debate at the service of truth, overcoming the terror —shown in fact by some— of finding theological, canonical, and anthropological flaws, or plain errors and inconsistencies, in the writings of the Founder.

It is ecclesiastically inadmissible that the “sequestration” of the historical sources of the institution, with the purpose of protecting its image at any price, should be allowed to go on any longer. This appropriation of the foundational writings by the Directors puts in evidence the shaky foundations on which the current praxis of Opus Dei is based. No criticism is allowed, because it could easily bring down the entire edifice. By not acknowledging or facing its deep crisis, the Prelature is kept from collapse by means of a fanatical indoctrination and a totalitarian control over consciences, which are perpetrated in the name of God and His Church. Such indoctrination and control are accepted in a “brainless” way, due to the naive and ignorant trust and good will of many of the members.

The Prelate and his team of collaborators do not seem to be capable of carrying out this self-criticism; because they have directly caused the current situation, and there is data supporting the claim that they act in this way with full awareness. A serious discussion of the deeper issues is replaced by appropriate “image” or public relations campaigns. Thus, Opus Dei spends enormous efforts to maintain its external image. For example, just in the Region of Spain there are more than 50 people dedicated full-time to media relations. This is in addition to the Directors —who also work on such tasks— and the faithful of Opus Dei who work in the *mass media*.

The effect of all this on persons is an issue whose confrontation cannot be delayed. Abuses of the kind here exposed cannot be tolerated. Even less when they are perpetrated in the name of God. This displeases the Holy Spirit, who *guides* the Church, but only when there is communion with Christ, which is communion with the Church. The following questions must be faced: is what has been described something *really approved* by the Holy See as part of the *charism* of Opus Dei? Has the Personal Prelature been erected to provide an “independent cover” to this way of acting outside the scope of the Bishops and the universal canons of the Church?

These questions must be answered in the negative. However, many persons in Opus Dei are doing good and acting in an upright way; and the organization itself could yield excellent apostolic fruits if they were not thwarted by the current deviations, which deeply harm its pastoral action. This is more than enough reason for the Holy See to intervene to help rectify those ways of acting that are opposed to the gift of God. And it is certainly true that such an intervention, if it were to take place, should be public and well-known; otherwise it could be watered down in the “sequestered consciences” of many faithful of the Prelature.

## A The “Quemadmodum” Decree of December 17 1890

### A.1 English translation of the “Quemadmodum” Decree

#### DECREE

*by which some norms are dictated pertaining to the intimate manifestation of conscience and the heart to the Superiors in monasteries of women or men*

In the same way that it is a condition in human things —no matter how upright and holy— that men will use them to end up in what is foreign and improper to them, and this will result in abuses, it also happens with wisely formulated laws. When this happens, the end sought by the legislator is not reached, and sometimes even results in the contrary effect.

It is most painful that this would happen with respect to the laws of many Congregations, Societies, or Institutes of women who make simple or solemn vows, or of men who have professed vows, or even in the government of lay people. Sometimes the manifestation of conscience was permitted in their Constitutions, with the purpose that beginners would more easily learn from their expert Superiors the arduous path of perfection when they had doubts. It now happens, on the contrary, that some of these Superiors have imposed on their subjects this intimate scrutiny of conscience which is solely reserved to the Sacrament of Penance.

Likewise, in agreement with the sacred Canons, it was established in Constitutions that, in Communities of this kind, sacramental Confessions would be heard by the respective ordinary or extraordinary Confessors. As a result, the whim of the Superiors reached the extreme of denying to their subjects

the possibility of having some extraordinary Confessor even when they were in great need of such a Confessor to receive counsel about their own conscience. Finally, it was introduced as a norm of good judgment and prudence that Superiors would properly guide their subjects according to rule about specific penances and other acts of piety. But this norm was abusively extended to the extreme that Superiors at their whim were the ones allowing, or sometimes absolutely forbidding, the reception of Holy Communion.

From this it resulted that [506] these types of dispositions, which were wisely established at the time with the purpose of promoting in a healthy way the spiritual advancement of beginners and of safeguarding the peace and harmony in the unity of Communities, often ended up becoming a cause of discriminating against souls, creating anguish in consciences, and even upsetting the external peace, as it is most clearly shown by the appeals and protests presented at various times before the Holy See.

Therefore, Our Most Holy Lord Leo, Pope XIII by divine providence, with solicitude for what is most suitable for this most beloved part of his fold, in the Audience held the 14 of December of 1890 to deal with consultations and issues with me, the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, after examining all of them with extreme care and diligence, decided, commanded and decreed with special solicitude the following:

I. His Holiness cancels, abrogates, and from now on declares null and void any dispositions in the Constitutions of Pious Unions, of Institutes of women, of either simple or solemn vows, and even of lay persons of any kind,<sup>28</sup> even if they were to have received the approval of the Holy See in any form, even that usually called most special, on this matter, namely, in whatever regulates, calling it by this name or in any other way, the intimate manifestation of the conscience and the heart. Therefore, for this reason, the male or female Directors of these Institutes, Congregations and Societies, are imposed the grave charge of suppressing absolutely the above-mentioned dispositions, suppressing them entirely from their own Constitutions, Directories or Manuals. He likewise cancels and suppresses any uses or customs on this matter even those from time immemorial.

II. Furthermore, the above-mentioned male or female Superiors of any rank or preeminence are rigorously forbidden to directly or indirectly induce their subjects, by precept, advice, fear, threats, or praise, [507] to render to them a manifestation of conscience of this kind. Correspondingly, subjects are commanded to report to their higher Superiors the abuses of any lower Superiors who would dare to induce them to such behavior. And if those responsible for such inducement were to be the male or female General Director, [they are then commanded] to report such abuses to this Sacred Congregation.

III. This in no way precludes the possibility for subjects to freely and spontaneously open their souls to their Superiors to receive prudent guidance and advice, in their doubts and anxieties, to acquire virtues and to advance in the path of perfection.

IV. In addition, while upholding —as regards ordinary and extraordinary Confessors of Communities— what was prescribed by the Holy Council of Trent in its *Session 25, Chapter 10, “de Regularibus,”* and everything established by the great Master Benedict XIV in the Constitution “*Pastoralis curae,*” His Holiness admonishes Prelates and Superiors not to deny their subjects an extraordinary Confessor whenever they were to request it, to seek advice for their conscience. But in such a way that these superiors will in no way inquire about the reason for this petition, nor will it be explained to them the reason why the petition is made. And to avoid that this prudent disposition would be frustrated, he exhorts the Ordinaries to designate competent priests having licenses in those places of their Diocese where there are Communities of Women, so that they will easily be able to go to receive the Sacrament of Penance.

V. As regards the authorization or prohibition of receiving Holy Communion, His Holiness decides that permissions or prohibitions of this kind should be the exclusive competence of the ordinary or

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<sup>28</sup>Translator’s Note: Note that the Decree includes the spiritual direction of lay people. The *CIC-83* has canons forbidding the manifestation of conscience to Superiors in the two cases that the legislator could envision: Superiors of religious, and Superiors of seminaries. That the same problem could arise for lay people was unimaginable. In Opus Dei this has been used as a loophole to give verbal assurances that canon 630 does not apply to the Prelature, since it is only for religious. The canons forbidding the manifestation of conscience in seminaries do directly apply to the Superiors of Centers of Studies of the Prelature. And the Quemadmodum decree itself does indeed apply to lay people as its text makes clear. The objection is absurd, since all these canons, as well as the Quemadmodum decree, are all based on the same universal moral principle: the absolute respect due to the conscience of every human being. In connection with this whole matter it is worth pointing out that —in Number 1 of the Section on *Espíritu* (Spirit) of the secret 1941 **Statutes** of Opus Dei mentioned in footnote 23— Escrivá mentions as a perpetual and irreformable feature that: “*los socios del Opus Dei no son religiosos, pero tienen un modo de vivir —entregados a Jesús Cristo— que, en lo esencial, no es distinto de la vida religiosa*” (Opus Dei members are not religious, but they have a way of life —dedicated to Jesus Christ— that, in what is essential, does not differ from the religious life).

extraordinary Confessor, so that Superiors will have no authority whatsoever to meddle in this matter, except in the case when one of their subjects were to cause scandal to the Community after his/her last Confession, or were to commit a grave external fault, and until such a person again receives the Sacrament of Penance.

VI. Therefore, all are exhorted [508] to take care of diligently preparing themselves to receive Holy Communion, and to receive it in the days determined by their own rules. And when sometimes the Confessor were to consider that a more frequent reception is advisable for the spiritual progress of someone, because of spiritual fervor, the same Confessor can allow this. Certainly, whoever were to obtain permission from the Confessor to receive Holy Communion with greater frequency, even for daily Communion, is obliged to communicate this to the Superior so that he/she will know about it with full certainty. If the Superior were to think that there are grave and just reasons against this frequency of receiving Holy Communion, he/she is obliged to communicate this to the Confessor, to whose definitive judgment should entirely leave the matter.

VII. In addition, His Holiness commands that, on these matters, all and each one of the General, Provincial, and Local Superiors of the aforementioned Institutes —be they of men or women— should scrupulously and carefully fulfill the dispositions contained in this Decree, under the threat of falling *ipso facto* under the penalties foreseen for Superiors who violate Commands of the Apostolic See.

VIII. Finally, he commands that copies of this Decree, translated into the vernacular languages, should be inserted in the Constitutions of the aforementioned pious Institutions and that, at least once a year, at the time established by each House, they should be read in a loud and intelligible voice in the public dining room or in a Chapter specially convened for this purpose.

Thus did His Holiness command and decree, without any cause of any kind being able to allow any objection to the contrary, even if it were to be mentioned in a singular and special way.

Given in Rome the 17th day of December of 1890, transcribed by the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. I. Cardinal VERGA *Prefect.* † FR. Louis Bishop of *Callinicum dei Maroniti. Secretary.*

## A.2 Original text in Acta Sanctae Sedis 23 (1890-1891) 505-508

### DECRETUM

*quo nonnullae praecipiuntur normae quoad cordis et conscientiae intimam manifestationem Superioribus faciendam in coenobiis mulierum aut virorum*

Quemadmodum omnium rerum humanarum, quantumvis honestae sanctaeque in se sint; ita et legum, sapienter conditarum, ea conditio est, ut ab hominibus ad impropria et aliena ex abusu traduci ac pertrahi valeant; ac propterea quandoque fit, ut intentum a legislatoribus finem haud amplius assequantur; imo et aliquando, ut contrarium sortiantur effectum.

Idque dolendum vel maxime est obtigisse quoad leges plurium Congregationum, Societatum aut Institutorum sive mulierum quae vota simplicia aut solemnia nuncupant, sive virorum professione ac regimine penitus laicorum; quandoquidem aliquoties in illorum Constitutionibus conscientiae manifestatio permissa fuerat, ut facilius alumni arduam perfectionis viam ab expertis Superioribus in dubiis addicerent; e contra a nonnullis ex his intima conscientiae scrutatio, quae unice Sacramento Poenitentiae reservata est, inducta fuit. Itidem in Constitutionibus ad tramitem ss. Canonum praescriptum fuit, ut sacramentalis Confessio in huiusmodi Communitatibus fieret respectivis Confessariis ordinariis et extraordinariis; aliunde Superiorum arbitrium eo usque devenit, ut subditis aliquem extraordinarium Confessarium denegaverint, etiam in casu quo, ut propriae conscientiae consulere, eo valde indigebant. Indita denique eis fuit discretionis ac prudentiae norma, ut suos subditos rite recteque quoad peculiare poenitentias ac alias pietatis opera dirigerent; sed et haec per abusionem extensa in id etiam extitit, ut eis ad Sacram Synaxim accedere vel pro lubitu permiserint, vel omnino interdum prohibuerint. Hinc factum est, ut [506] huiusmodi dispositiones, quae ad spiritualem alumnorum profectum et ad unitatis pacem et concordiam in Communitatibus servandam fovendamque salutariter ac sapienter constitutae iam fuerat, haud raro in animarum discrimen, in conscientiarum anxietatem, ac insuper in externae pacis turbationem versae fuerint, ceu subditorum recursus et querimoniae passim ad S. Sedem interiectae evidentissime comprobant.

Quare SSmus. D. N. Leo divina providentia Papa XIII, pro ea, quae praestat erga lectissimam hanc sui gregis portionem peculiari sollicitudine, in Audientia habita a me Cardinali Praefecto S. Congrega-

tionis Episcoporum et Regularium negotiis et consultationibus praepositae die decimaquarta Decembris 1890 omnibus sedulo diligenterque perpensis, haec quae sequuntur voluit, constituit atque decrevit.

I. Sanctitas Sua irritat, abrogat, et nullius in posterum roboris declarat quascumque dispositiones Constitutionum, piarum Societatum, Institutorum mulierum sive votorum simplicium sive solemnium, nec non virorum omnimode laicorum, etsi dictae Constitutiones approbationem ab Apostolica Sede retulerint in forma quacumque, etiam quam aiunt specialissimam, in eo scilicet, quod cordis et conscientiae intimam manifestationem quovis modo ac nomine respiciunt. Ita propterea serio iniungi Moderatoribus ac Moderatricibus huiusmodi Institutorum, Congregationum ac Societatum ut ex propriis Constitutionibus, Directoriis ac Manualibus praefatae dispositiones omnino deleantur penitusque expungantur. Irritat pariter ac delet quoslibet ea de re usus et consuetudines etiam immemorabiles.

II. Districte insuper prohibet memoratis Superioribus ac Superiorissis cuiuscumque gradus et praeeminentiae sint ne personas sibi subditas inducere pertentent directe aut indirecte, praecepto, consilio, timore, minis, aut blanditiis [507] ad huiusmodi manifestationem conscientiae sibi peragendam; subditisque e converso praecipit, ut Superioribus maioribus denuncient Superiores minores, qui eos ad id inducere audeant; et si agatur de Moderatore vel Moderatrice Generali denunciatio huic S. Congregationi ab iis fieri debeat.

III. Hoc autem minime impedit quominus subditi libere ac ultro aperire suum animum Superioribus valeant ad effectum ab illorum prudentia in dubiis ac anxietatibus consilium et directionem obtinendi pro virtutum acquisitione ac perfectionis progressu.

IV. Praeterea firmo remanente quoad Confessarios ordinarios et extraordinarios Communitatum quod a Sacrosancto Concilio Tridentino praecribitur in *Sess. 25 Cap. 10 de Regul. et a S. M. Benedicti XIV* statuitur in Constitutione quae incipit *Pastoralis curae Sanctitas Sua Praesules Superioresque* admonet ne extraordinarium denegent subditis Confessarium quoties, ut propriae conscientiae consulant, ad id subditi adigantur, quin iidem superiores ullo modo petitionis rationem inquirent, aut agere id ferre demonstrant. Ac ne evanida tam provida dispositio fiat, Ordinarios exhortatur, ut in locis propriae Dioeceseos, in quibus Mulierum Communitates existunt, idoneos Sacerdotes facultatibus instructos designent, ad quos pro Sacramento poenitentiae recurrere eae facile queant.

V. Quod vero attinet ad permissionem vel prohibitionem ad sacram Synaxim accedendi Eadem Sanctitas Sua decernit, huiusmodi permissiones vel prohibitiones dumtaxat ad Confessarium ordinarium vel extraordinarium spectare, quin Superiores ullam habeant auctoritatem hac in re sese ingerendi, excepto casu quo aliquis ex eorum subditis post ultimam Sacramentalem Confessionem Communitati scandalo fuerit, aut gravem externam culpam pataverit, donec ad Poenitentiae sacramentum denuo accesserit.

VI. Monentur hinc omnes, ut ad Sacram Synaxim [508] curent diligenter se praeparare et accedere diebus in propriis regulis statutis; et quoties ob fervorem et spiritualem alicuius profectum Confessarius expedire iudicaverit ut frequentius accedat, id ei ab ipso Confessario permitti poterit. Verum qui licentiam a Confessario obtinuerit frequentioris ac etiam quotidianae Communionis, de hoc certiores reddere Superiorem teneantur; quod si hic iustas gravesque causas se habere reputet contra frequentiores huiusmodi Communiones, eas Confessario manifestare teneatur, cuius iudicio acquiescendum omnino erit.

VII. Eadem Sanctitas Sua insuper mandat omnibus et singulis Superioribus Generalibus, Provincialibus et Localibus Institutionum de quibus supra, sive virorum, sive mulierum ut studiose accurateque huius Decreti dispositiones observent sub poenis contra Superiores Apostolicae Sedis Mandata violantes ipso facto incurrendis.

VIII. Denique mandat, ut praesentis Decreti exemplaria in vernaculum sermonem versa inserantur Constitutionibus praedictorum piorum Institutorum, et saltem semel in anno, stato tempore in unaquaque Domo, sive in publica mensa, sive in Capitulo ad hoc specialiter convocato alta et intelligibili voce legantur.

Et ita Sanctitas Sua constituit atque decrevit, contrariis quibuscumque, etiam speciali et individua mentione dignis, minime obstantibus.

Datum Romae ex Secretaria S(acrae) Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium die 17 Decembris 1890. I. Cardinalis VERGA Praefectus. † FR. ALOISIUS Episcopus Callinicen(sis) Secretarius.

## Translator’s Postscript

The present study was published by Oráculo in 2006. I have undertaken this English translation in 2013. A lot has happened in the intervening years. Therefore, it may be appropriate for me to put *Freedom of Conscience in Opus Dei* in perspective for three reasons: (1) because of its essential role —together with the secret documents of Opus Dei published in the **opuslibros.org** website— in provoking a strong *damage control* reaction by the authorities of the Opus Dei Prelature, (2) because it provides the key for interpreting such a reaction and (3) because it is now more crucial and important than ever.

I will focus my, necessarily brief, comments around two key questions, to which the reader may not know —or may only partially know— the answer:

1. What happened in the aftermath of the publication of *La Libertad de las Conciencias en el Opus Dei* and of Opus Dei’s secret documents?
2. Have the abuses documented in this study been corrected?

1. *What happened?* As already mentioned, this study was presented to Pope Benedict XVI. And formal complaints on the abuses were also presented before the Holy See. Furthermore, the evidence about these abuses, contained in the secret documents of the Prelature, became publicly available in the Internet. The authorities of the Prelature felt strongly pressured by the public uncovering of their abuses and, in all likelihood, by the Holy See. An energetic *damage control* reaction was then undertaken.

As this study has already pointed out, the purpose of such reactions is always the same: to **preserve the (soi-disant) Divine Spirit of Opus Dei** by hiding and denying the offending evidence and using deception and propaganda to muddy the waters as much as possible in public relations campaigns. In this case a two-pronged approach was taken, namely: (i) to expunge the offending evidence and try to remove it from public view; and (ii) to try to give an appearance of compliance to the Holy See and introduce new forms of *newspeak* for Opus Dei members, so that they would be kept in the dark as much as possible.

As documented in this study, to achieve their first objective the Opus Dei authorities, in a truly Orwellian, yet highly predictable way, *rewrote History*; that is, they removed the incriminating secret documents from all Opus Dei Centers —never to be seen again— and replaced them by new, sanitized versions. For future members of Opus Dei —and for the majority of current members who, not being directors, did not have access to them— *these documents have never existed*.

This, however, left the problem of their still being accessible in the Internet; particularly in **opuslibros.org**, a website highly visited by quite a few members and ex-members of the Prelature and by many other people. For any father or mother of a young boy or girl concerned about one of their children getting involved with Opus Dei, the evidence contained in these documents is so irrefutable and explosive as to pose a most severe challenge to the proselytizing activities of the Prelature. Therefore, the Prelature’s authorities tried to enforce the secrecy of the published documents by *legally acknowledging their authenticity and claiming to own their copyright*. On this basis, a law suit was filed in Madrid against Agustina López de los Mozos, the coordinator of the **opuslibros.org** website, demanding the removal of the said documents. In Spain, as in many other countries under the rule of Law, it is illegal for any organization to keep its internal regulations secret: anybody joining an organization must be able to know exactly what he or she is getting into. This basic right was in essence the argument given by the defense of **opuslibros.org** to keep those secret documents publicly available. The Prelature’s legal representatives presented a most mendacious counter-argument: they claimed that the (still untranslated) Latin text of the **Statutes** is the *only* regulation in Opus Dei; and that all those secret documents *were not internal regulations at all*. In the light of the evidence furnished by the present study and of the documents themselves, which were the issue under litigation, the decision by the Madrid Judge hearing the case of forcing the removal of all those secret documents from **opuslibros.org** has been a very shameful event for human rights and for the Spanish Justice system. The secret documents, however, remain easily accessible on other Internet websites outside Spain.

To achieve the second objective, the Opus Dei Prelate, Javier Echevarría, *published a pastoral letter*, dated October 2, 2011, accessible in the Opus Dei website,<sup>29</sup> which is very much worth reading in conjunction with this study and the secret documents cited in it. Overtly, the letter is addressed to Opus Dei members; but covertly —particularly the crucial part on spiritual direction, to which the

<sup>29</sup>At <http://www.opusdei.es/art.php?p=45670>, and in English at <http://www.opusdei.us/arc.php?s=22&p=1-2011>.

remaining Opus Dei *boilerplate* provides a fig leaf cover— is written primarily for the Vatican authorities, and only secondarily to confuse unwary Opus Dei members. I will be brief and will focus on a few key passages. A more detailed analysis of this masterpiece must be left for others.

The unbelievable feat that Echevarría tries to pull off with amazing *chutzpah* is to: (1) keep Opus Dei's praxis on spiritual direction essentially unchanged, while (2) trying to convince the Vatican authorities and the faithful of the Prelature that *no manifestation of conscience to the Directors exists or has ever existed in Opus Dei*. This is an Orwellian operation in which a new form of *newspeak* from the *Ministry of Truth* has to be deployed. Thus we learn that:<sup>30</sup> *We, faithful of the Prelature ... do not ordinarily have any objection to speak with those whom the Directors indicate* (pg. 11). That is, the Local Directors, or those designated by them, remain the ones receiving the confidences of the members. The interpolation of the word *ordinarily* is rather cute. *A sensu contrario* it implicitly grants that it would be quite *extraordinary* for a member of Opus Dei to refuse to open his/her conscience with the Local Director or the person by him/her designated: all alarms would go off. Indeed, as this study has made clear, the standard operating procedure for such *refuseniks* who, **with bad spirit**, insist on freely choosing their spiritual director is to first ostracize them, and then force them out of the Prelature: they cannot be tolerated, because they are **harming the (soi-disant) Divine Spirit of Opus Dei**.

Further on, Echevarría's letter states:<sup>31</sup> *In the Work we always have known and have expressly accepted that the person with whom we speak fraternally can consult the relevant Director, when he/she may deem it appropriate to help the interested person.* (pg. 13). On the contrary. With the knowledge of someone who has been for many decades in Opus Dei, I can state in the strongest possible terms that *never* in my entire, very long experience in Opus Dei has anyone been told in the means of formation that what he speaks about in the confidential chat is later discussed in Local Council meetings and with the higher Directors. Indeed, only those who hear confidential chats —often members of Local Councils— and higher Directors learn about this *ex officio*, and engage in writing secret **informes de conciencia** (conscience reports) reporting on the intimacy of their subject's spiritual life to the higher directors, or sending back directives for each subject from the top.<sup>32</sup> Again, nothing has changed; although a new escape clause saying that the person involved will supposedly be asked whether he/she wants to tell the Director directly or will allow the person hearing the chat to broach the matter with the Director has been conveniently added by Echevarría in a followup sentence.

The most daring *triple salto mortale* is the task of convincing the Holy See and the faithful of the Prelature that *the manifestation of conscience to the Directors does not exist and has never existed in Opus Dei*. Echevarría's argument is so ludicrous as to seem unbelievable. In essence it can be summarized as follows:

The Local Directors *are not Directors* when they receive confidential chats. **Ergo**, no manifestation of conscience to the Directors is possible, or has ever been possible, in Opus Dei.

Since it actually seems unbelievable, the reader may reasonably feel that Echevarría could not possibly have given such a laughable argument and the translator must somehow have been unfair to him. To show that I am not exaggerating or distorting Echevarría's argument, let me quote his own words:<sup>33</sup> *In the Work, the separation between the exercise of jurisdiction and spiritual direction is ensured in practice, among other things, by the fact that precisely those who receive chats of spiritual direction —the local Directors and some specially prepared faithful, and the priests when administering*

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<sup>30</sup>The original Spanish texts read as follows: *Los fieles de la Prelatura ... no tenemos inconveniente, de ordinario, en hablar con quienes nos indican los Directores* (p. 11).

<sup>31</sup>The original Spanish texts read as follows: *En la Obra, desde siempre, conocíamos y aceptábamos expresamente que la persona con quien se habla fraternalmente pueda consultar al Director pertinente, cuando lo considere oportuno para ayudar mejor al interesado.* (p. 13)

<sup>32</sup>The deeply disturbing text of several of these conscience reports —with the person's name and the place omitted to protect their privacy— can be found in the **opuslibros.org** website by clicking on **INFORMES DE CONCIENCIA** at [http://www.opuslibros.org/documentos\\_internos.htm](http://www.opuslibros.org/documentos_internos.htm).

<sup>33</sup>The original Spanish texts read as follows: *En la Obra, la separación entre el ejercicio de la jurisdicción y la dirección espiritual se asegura en la práctica, entre otras cosas, por el hecho de que precisamente quienes reciben charlas de dirección espiritual —los Directores locales y algunos otros fieles especialmente preparados, y los sacerdotes al celebrar el sacramento de la Penitencia— no tienen ninguna potestad de gobierno sobre las personas que atienden. El Régimen local, en lo que comporta de capacidad de gobierno, no se refiere a las personas, sino sólo a la organización de los Centros y de las actividades apostólicas;* (p. 11). Echevarría then triumphantly states that: *No coinciden en un mismo sujeto, por lo tanto, las funciones de jurisdicción y de ayuda espiritual.* (p. 11); and reaches the **quod erat demonstrandum**: *La charla fraterna no es una cuenta de conciencia.* (p. 11).

*the sacrament of Penance— have no governmental capacity over the persons they take care of. The local Governance, in what pertains to governmental capacity, does not refer to persons, but only to the organization of the Centers and the apostolic activities;* (pg. 11). Echevarría then triumphantly states that: *Therefore, the functions of jurisdiction and of spiritual help never coincide in the same person.* (pg. 11); and reaches the **quod erat demonstrandum**: *The fraternal chat is not a manifestation of conscience.* (pg. 11). Of course, the faithful of the Prelature do not have access in practice to their own untranslated **Statutes**, where Local Directors and their Local Councils are *only discussed*, as is obvious, in Chapter III on **Regional and Local Governance**, specifically in Number 161. As this study has incisively pointed out, the **Statutes** *only mention spiritual direction* in their highly opaque and unforthcoming Number 83 §3, quoted and discussed at the beginning of Section 3 of this study. They make *no mention whatsoever* of the Local Directors having *any involvement at all* in spiritual direction; for the obvious reason that such an involvement, by being a blatant violation of the internal forum, would have never been allowed by the Holy See in the **Statutes** it granted to the Prelature. That is why it was so essential to consciously hide from the Holy See this involvement in the **Statutes**, and to simultaneously use the secret documents to enforce Escriva's praxis of spiritual direction —thus gravely violating natural law and the laws of the Church, as this study has demonstrated *ad nauseam*.

2. *Have the abuses been corrected?* Not at all. In fact, the *cancer* so precisely described in this study has become more malignant, because it is now more hidden. A rewriting of History, together with higher levels of secrecy and hypocrisy, make it now much harder for members of Opus Dei and other persons of good faith to discover the abuses now buried under deeper and deeper levels of *newspeak* and deception.

Countless Catholics have abandoned the practice of their Faith, or have fallen into unbelief, disgusted and scandalized, not so much by the seemingly endless pederasty crimes perpetrated by some priests and religious, as by the culpable negligence of many Bishops and of the Holy See who, *knowingly*, have covered up and allowed these crimes to go on for so many years, leaving the victims defenseless.

The crimes we are dealing with here are crimes of *spiritual pederasty*: the systematic rape, not of the bodies, but of the consciences of many thousands of innocent souls. It remains to be seen for how much longer will the victims be left defenseless.

Anders Thordsen  
September 7, 2013

