

## **OPUS DEI: A WAY OF SANCTITY**

**Rolf Thomas**

It was August 1958. Mons. Escrivá was walking through the City of London. All around him were the offices of famous banks, stockbrokers, and newspapers, with a constant bustle of people going about their business. This was the epitome of London, a great world metropolis, yet a world that seemed far

removed from Christ and indifferent to him. As he walked he was thinking. 'Our Lord wants Christians to sanctify all this . . . it is vital to bring this idea home to everyone. But how? . . . There is nothing I can do'. All of a sudden his train of thought was interrupted by an idea which struck him with great force. 'It is not possible for me to do it, but He can'.

This event links up perfectly with the divine message which Mons. Escrivá had received thirty years previously: a way of sanctity was opened in the midst

of the world for all men. And he—a priest with no more means at his disposal than the grace of God and a good sense of humour—had to found an institution which would bring this message to the furthest corners of the world, providing also the specific ascetical means so that every man and woman might be able to live up to the demands of the gospels. This institution was to receive the name *Opus Dei*, the Work of God.

*Opus Dei* came to birth in the maternal womb of the Church and its concern is to serve the Church, following its own specific charism, encouraging the desire amongst priests and lay people to live the full demands of the Christian vocation. In order that this aspiration for sanctity might not remain sterile, *Opus Dei* provides a continuous spiritual, theological and apostolic formation for its members and for all who request it.

It is no mere emotional impulse that inspires the men and women of *Opus Dei*, but a deep and abiding vocation of service to the Church and to mankind. This is evidenced by thousands of souls who, despite their natural human short-comings, strive to spread peace and understanding to all those around them. They work to sanctify the family and civil society, and help the growth and development of activities carried out by other institutions in the Church: seminaries, parishes, charitable organizations, etc.

#### *How does Opus Dei work?*

But how does *Opus Dei* work? In a clear and simple way: by providing the spiritual support for the apostolate of its members; each of them in his or her own position in society and in the family, cooperating

with other Christians in the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ, and in full union with the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities. Each person acts on his own responsibility and with the full freedom of the sons of God (cf. St. Paul, Gal 1:4), without forming a group apart, deciding personally whom they wish to associate with, and thus promoting union among Catholics, and also among non-Catholics, and above all drawing souls closer to Christ. All this, obviously, within the moral and doctrinal teaching of the Church, and in keeping with the laws of the country.

Anybody who is even moderately well informed about the institutions in the Church knows that this, and not anything else, is *Opus Dei*. Hence it is hard to explain how anyone can write about *Opus Dei* attributing to it aims and machinations which are clearly contrary to its nature and its foundational charism. In such circumstances one can only recall what Theresa of Avila, a holy foundress who met with more than her share of misunderstanding and calumnies, used to say: 'If they have to tell lies, let them at least be big lies, and then no one will believe them'.

From Pius XII to John Paul II, *Opus Dei* has always counted on the constant encouragement and blessing of the Popes. Relying on the prayers of very many souls, and under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, *Opus Dei*, now and in the future, wishes only to correspond loyally to these blessings and encouragement, very united to the successor of Peter, and to the successors of the other Apostles who govern the Church throughout the world.