

# OPPOSITION NOTES

AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES ON THOSE WHO OPPOSE  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

## A Primer on Opus Dei in Latin America

### INTRODUCTION

Opus Dei (Latin for “the Work of God”) is one of the most conservative orders in the Catholic church. Founded in Spain, Opus Dei is especially influential in Latin America because of the relationships it has cultivated in political and business circles. Members and sympathizers of Opus Dei hold high-level positions in various governments and it is one of the main forces supporting conservative activities in the region. It vehemently opposes the promotion and provision of a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services.

In just the last decade, people tied to Opus Dei participated in two right-wing coups d'état in Latin America—in Venezuela in 2002 and in Honduras in 2009. In addition, some of the leading personalities on the Latin American right were educated in Opus Dei schools or have ties to it either as members or sympathizers.

Opus Dei's participation in the business world has also been significant. There, many of its members tend to display a degree of pragmatism that is not apparent in their approach to sexual and family relations, positions that have affected public policy in countries such as Mexico, Peru, Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina and others.

However, the public face of Opus Dei has perhaps been most affected not by its activities or ideas, many of which are questionable, but rather with the publication of the novel *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown which has sold about 100 million copies worldwide, and presents

Opus Dei as an evil and even murderous semi-secrective organization. However, the fictional events in the book do not touch on real-life events, such as the questionable businesses in which prominent members of Opus

**The fictional events in *The Da Vinci Code* do not touch on real-life events, such as the questionable businesses in which prominent members of Opus Dei have been involved, as well as the group's affinity for military regimes and extreme right-wing governments, not to mention its uncompromising opposition to sexual and reproductive rights.**

## KEY FINDINGS

- Since its founding in 1928, Opus Dei has sought to wield a conservative influence over governments and Catholic organizations around the world. Opus Dei is especially powerful in Latin America, but has members in many other countries.
- Opus Dei wields power through financial and political influence. Global assets were calculated to be about \$2.8 billion in 2008.
- Members of Opus Dei present a public face that emphasizes traits such as good works and the promotion of education.
- Opus Dei members have supported brutal military regimes, including those of Augusto Pinochet and General Juan Carlos Onganía. Opus Dei members are also said to have participated in the failed coup d'état against Hugo Chavez in 2002.
- Members of Opus Dei vehemently oppose legislation that allows divorce or civil marriages, as well as homosexuality and contraception.
- While 55 percent of Opus Dei's members are women, they have a subordinate role within the organization. Former members say there is a "clear contempt for women" within the organization's teachings.
- Opus Dei's leadership influences media coverage of Opus Dei by befriending media directors and owners, rather than responding to reporters or writers who might be critical of Opus Dei. In recent years it has engaged more in public relations efforts, going on video and courting select reporters.
- Many members of Opus Dei have had successful careers, apparently thanks to the order's selective recruitment of rising stars and its emphasis on hard work.
- Former members have called Opus Dei "the most conservative, retrograde and sectarian organization of the Roman Catholic church."
- Public awareness of Opus Dei has increased thanks to the fictional portrayal of its activities in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and the Spanish film *Camino*.

Dei have been involved, as well as the group's affinity for military regimes and extreme right-wing governments, not to mention its uncompromising opposition to sexual and reproductive rights.

More recently, in 2008, the Spanish movie *Camino* was released. It is based on a true story about Opus Dei's manipulation of its supporters, specifically, the case of Alexia González Barros—the youngest daughter in a family that belongs to Opus Dei. The girl died in 1985 at 14 years of age, and is in the process of being canonized.<sup>1</sup>

One of Opus Dei's priorities has been to oppose sexual freedoms and promote conservative morals. Its conservative crusade gathered momentum during the reign of Pope John Paul II and continues during that of Benedict XVI, even though the latter does not appear to have lent his personal support to the order in the manner that John Paul II did.

Many individual initiatives by Opus Dei members center on its fight against reproductive and sexual rights and are highlighted in *Romana*, the official bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, and in other Opus Dei publications.

This paper examines the work of Opus Dei and the impact it has had on politics and reproductive rights throughout Latin America.

## BACKGROUND

Opus Dei was founded in Madrid, Spain, on October 2, 1928,<sup>2</sup> by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás (1902-1975). He was canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 6, 2002.

The son of María Dolores Albás Blanc, who came from a family of landowners, and José Escrivá, a fabric merchant whose business went bankrupt around the outbreak of World War I,<sup>3</sup> Escrivá de Balaguer became a priest as had many of his ancestors on his mother's side.<sup>4</sup> In 1922, when he was a seminarian, his superiors named him *Inspector del*

*Seminario* (Inspector of the Seminary), making him responsible for maintaining discipline among his classmates both in the classroom and on excursions.<sup>5</sup>

He studied law at the Universidad de Zaragoza and taught in a high school in that city, where in 1927 he published his first work, titled “La forma del matrimonio en la actual legislación española”<sup>6</sup> (“Marriage under Current Spanish Law”), a critique of civil marriage.

Central to the enigma that surrounds Escrivá de Balaguer is the contradiction between the freedom he espoused in some areas of life (for example, in business practices) and his support for restrictions in people’s sexual lives, and his interest in maintaining “order” and “discipline” within society. To explain this, some note that his father José was too honest a businessman, which may have led, in part, to the bankruptcy of his business.<sup>7</sup>

According to official versions of Opus Dei’s history, the organization was founded on October 2, 1928, in Madrid when Escrivá de Balaguer had a “divine inspiration.” He described it as follows: “I was enlightened about all of the Work...I thanked the Lord...From that day this mangy ass realized the beautiful and heavy burden that the Lord, in His inexplicable goodness, had put upon his shoulders. That day the Lord founded the Work.”<sup>8</sup>

On February 14, 1930, almost two years after the founding of Opus Dei, Escrivá de Balaguer created a separate but connected organization for women.

Some analysts consider the founding of Opus Dei as one of the many attempts by conservative thinkers to “rechristianize” Spain in the face of the socialist, revolutionary and agnostic currents that prevailed in some sectors of that society at the time.<sup>9</sup>

Escrivá de Balaguer lived in Madrid from April 1927 to October 1937,<sup>10</sup> when he fled using false documents to the zone occupied by Franco’s forces during the Spanish civil war (1936-39).

During his stay in Madrid, he was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic. There are competing claims as to why this was so. Some argue that it was due to a real personality disorder; others that it was a trick to escape from the Republicans. He also took refuge in the Honduran consulate for six months.<sup>11</sup>

On April 28, 1939, he returned to Madrid in a military truck along with Franco’s troops, who occupied the city that same day.<sup>12</sup>

Two years later, in 1941, Opus Dei was recognized at the diocesan level by the bishop of Madrid.

Given its ideological affinity for Franco’s dictatorship, Opus Dei flourished in Spain. Today, Opus Dei supporters tend to skim over this fact. They say, for example, that Escrivá de Balaguer saw Franco as a “lesser evil” compared to the danger of a “communist

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government.”<sup>13</sup> However, the founder did not have that attitude, as evidenced, for example, by a congratulatory letter he sent from Rome to Franco on May 23, 1958. A copy was published in the magazine *Razón Española* in January-February 2001.<sup>14</sup>

In the letter, he sent his “most sincere congratulations” to the dictator because Franco (“the authorized voice of the Head of State”) had proclaimed that “the Spanish Nation considers it most honorable to observe the Law of God, in accordance with the doctrine of the one and only Holy Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church, with Faith inseparable from the national conscience that will inspire its legislation.”

Escrivá continued: “Being loyal to the Catholic tradition of our people one will always find, together with divine blessing

for our duly constituted authorities, the best guarantee of government acting correctly, and the security of a fair and lasting peace in the heart of the national community.”

He concluded: “I ask God our Father to fill Your Excellency with all manner of good fortune and to give you abundant grace as you carry out the high mission entrusted to you. Receive, Your Excellency, testimony of my most distinguished personal consideration with assurances of my prayers for all of your family.”

In 1946, Escrivá de Balaguer moved to Rome to share with the pope the “universal scope” of Opus Dei, which promoted the idea of cultivating “sanctity” through hard work. In 1952, Escrivá de Balaguer founded the Universidad de Navarra, the largest educational institution controlled by Opus Dei.<sup>15</sup> As of 2006, Opus Dei had 15 universities with about 80,000 students.<sup>16</sup>

**Under Pope John Paul II, Opus Dei’s influence expanded significantly, as evidenced, for example, by the naming of the doctor, journalist and Opus Dei member Joaquín Navarro-Valls as director of the Holy See’s press office. Under his management in the 1990s, the Vatican started using the media in a far more consistent and forceful manner to promote its conservative worldview.**

In Spain, between the mid-1960s to the beginning of the 1970s, General Franco chose a number of ministers from among the ranks of Opus Dei members.<sup>17</sup> Admiral Carrero Blanco is considered to have been one of the main protectors of Opus Dei in Francoist Spain.<sup>18</sup> He was killed in a terrorist attack in December 1973.

Opus Dei attracts businessmen to its ranks and members have been implicated in two large scandals. One, known as Matesa (short for Maquinaria Textil del Norte de Espana, SA) occurred in 1969, the other, known as Rumasa (short for Ruiz Mateos, Sociedad Anónima), in 1983.

The head of Matesa, Juan Vilá Reyes, who was convicted for his irregular business deals, “learned his business skills in the Escuela de Empresariales del Opus,”<sup>19</sup> while Mariano Navarro Rubio, a member of Opus Dei, aided him in his fraudulent activities.

The founder of Rumasa, a holding company involved in multimillion-dollar fraudulent dealings, and its president until the Spanish government sacked him, was José María Ruiz-Mateos, a supernumerary, or layman, who had been in Opus Dei for about 20 years.<sup>20</sup> Over a 23-year period, Ruiz-Mateos admitted to having given about 4 billion pesetas to Opus Dei. As it was a private company, it was not clear whether the money was his own, or if it came from the coffers of Rumasa.<sup>21</sup>

Opus Dei’s intervention to help the Vatican Bank in the bankruptcy of Banco Ambrosiano in 1982, in exchange for political and ideological concessions, has also been the subject of much discussion.

On August 5, 1982, Pope John Paul II, who very much sympathized with the conservative tendencies of Opus Dei, established it as a personal prelature, or group that carries out specific pastoral activities and is supervised by the Vatican’s Congregation for Bishops.

The prelate is elected by an executive congress called for that purpose and holds the office for life. The first prelate was Escrivá de Balaguer. Upon his death in 1975, he was succeeded by Alvaro del Portillo (1914-1994), whom Opus Dei wants to canonize.<sup>22</sup> He in turn was succeeded by Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, the current prelate. Born in Madrid in 1932, the latter has belonged to Opus Dei since 1948. He holds a JUD, meaning that he has a doctorate in both canon and civil law.<sup>23</sup> On April 9, 1997, during a visit to Sicily, he declared “A survey says that 90 percent of the physically and mentally handicapped are the children of parents who entered marriage in an impure state.”<sup>24</sup>

The expansion of Opus Dei outside of Spain happened after World War II: Portugal (1945), England and Italy (1946), France and Ireland (1947), United States (1949), Latin America (1949-69), Australia (1963), Nigeria and Belgium (1965).

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On March 31, 2010, in the middle of a worldwide scandal related to accusations against pedophile priests, young university students from Opus Dei centers delivered a letter to the pope in which they expressed their solidarity and their gratitude "for five years of papacy, for his example in the search for truth, for his untiring service, and for the example of openness to dialogue that he constantly offers us, to search for the truth of things."<sup>26</sup>

#### **Saintly Intransigence and Holy Ingenuity: A Summary of Escrivá's Thoughts and Writings**

Acting in lockstep with the Vatican, Opus Dei opposes, *inter alia*, abortion, contraception, divorce and gay marriage. In particular, Opus Dei authors take pride in their opposition to divorce and their contempt for civil matrimony, as well as their radical opposition to contraceptives and homosexuality.

Escrivá's writings tended towards describing and mandating an all-encompassing vision of how members of Opus Dei should lead their lives. It was later that the specifics emerged from other members as regards public policy mandates—especially around the family.

In his written works, including *The Way, Furrow* and *The Forge* (*Camino, Surco, Forja*),

Escrivá called on his followers to use "saintly intransigence" and "holy ingenuity" ("la santa intransigencia" and "la santa pillería") to promote and defend Opus Dei's religious principles.

He wrote:

"We cannot simply fold our arms when a subtle persecution condemns the church to die of starvation, putting it outside the sphere of public life, and above all obstructing its part in education, culture and family life. These are not our rights; they are God's rights. He has entrusted them to us Catholics so that we may exercise them!"<sup>27</sup>

"May such 'fanaticism' for the Faith as yours is become stronger every day, for it is the sole defense of the one Truth."<sup>28</sup>

"Pray that your holy ingenuity may achieve what your intelligence cannot attain, so that you may give more service of a better kind to everyone."<sup>29</sup>

"There can be no giving ground in dogma in the name of a naive 'breadth of belief,' for if anyone acted in this way he would risk putting himself out of the church. Instead of winning a benefit for others he would harm himself."<sup>30</sup>

He advised young members of Opus Dei to attain prestige in their professional careers in order to use it over time to benefit the political and religious plans of the group:

"This advice is for you, since you are still young and have just started along your way. As God deserves everything, try to be outstanding professionally, so that you will later be able to spread your ideas more effectively."<sup>31</sup>

In *The Forge*, Escrivá noted how members should participate in other institutions of which they were a part:

"Struggle to make sure that those human institutions and structures in which you work and move with

## **Timeline**

**January 9, 1902**—Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer is born in the town of Barbastro, Spain.

**October 2, 1928**—Escrivá de Balaguer founds Opus Dei.

**February 14, 1930**—Escrivá de Balaguer creates the women's branch of Opus Dei.

**February 14, 1943**—The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, the branch of Opus Dei for priests, is founded.

**October 17, 1952**—The Universidad de Navarra is founded by Escrivá de Balaguer.

**June 26, 1975**—Escrivá de Balaguer dies in Rome.

**February 2, 1978**—The process of canonizing Escrivá de Balaguer begins.

**August 5, 1982**—Pope John Paul II recognizes Opus Dei as a personal prelature.

**May 17, 1992**—Beatification of Escrivá de Balaguer.

**April 20, 1994**—Pope John Paul II names Javier Echevarría as Prelate of Opus Dei.

**October 6, 2002**—Escrivá de Balaguer is canonized in Rome.

the full rights of a citizen are in accordance with the principles which govern a Christian view of life.”<sup>32</sup>

He also prescribed that:

“We have to stand out boldly against those ‘damning freedoms’ – those daughters of license, granddaughters of evil passions, great granddaughters of original sin – which come down, as you can see, in a direct line from the devil.”<sup>33</sup>

**One of the distinctive traits of Opus Dei is that members, especially numeraries and supernumeraries, are subject to an ordered life plan, which has come to include bodily self-punishment and the constant guidance of a “spiritual director.”**

In *The Forge*, Escrivá also refers to the importance conferred within Opus Dei to “spiritual direction” and he advises complete sincerity and docility:

“Don’t object to someone poking at your soul with supernatural sense and holy shamelessness to check how true it is that you are able – *and willing* – to give glory to God.”<sup>34</sup>

In his book *El Matrimonio Cristiano*, published by Opus Dei’s publishing house Minos, the priest Julio Badui Dergal maintains that civil marriage is not valid for Catholics and that it is useful only because it protects the rights of spouses and their children, but “this civil marriage by itself is does not have any value before God. Catholics who are married in civil ceremonies or who live in free union should get married within the church, or if they don’t want to do so, they should separate.”<sup>35</sup>

On January 1, 2006, Javier Echavarría released a letter on the family aimed at Opus Dei members and supporters. In the letter he asks that “everywhere the true nature and dignity of the family institution be respected and defended.”

He continued:

“Faith teaches us that the rule governing our lives should not be the selfish search for pleasure, because only renunciation and sacrifice lead to true love...the various ways of dissolving marriage today, such as free unions and ‘trial marriages,’ and even pseudo-marriage between two people of the same sex, are expressions of anarchic freedom, which is wrongly presented as the true liberation of man.”

“As responsible citizens and Christians, we should do everything possible to defend and promote the undeniable values in this fundamental area for the life of the church and – let’s not forget – for civil society as well. This is one of the most urgent tasks of the new evangelization.

The duty to disseminate the correct doctrine on marriage and the family is a responsibility of everyone.”<sup>36</sup>

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Members of Opus Dei formally make several religious commitments when they join, including:

“(To attend) Mass and receive Communion each day and Confession each week, the habitual practice of mental prayer (up to one hour daily), reading the New Testament and reading from a spiritual book, praying the blessed rosary, examination of conscience, monthly retreat and a spiritual retreat once per year, the constant search for the presence of God, divine filiation as a fundamental part of one’s interior life, the frequent repetition of spiritual communions, acts of atonement, brief and fervent prayers, etc.

“The daily practice of the spirit of sacrifice and penitence, including corporal mortification, depending on the age, health and personal circumstances of each person...”

"Special importance is given to profession and work, the cornerstone of saintliness and of the mission, within which members of Opus Dei try to acquire a series of human and supernatural virtues (laboriousness, a spirit of service, integrity, loyalty, self denial, etc.)."<sup>37</sup>

As evidenced here, Opus Dei not only rejects the concept that sexual and reproductive rights are individual freedoms, but calls people to actively fight against these ideas, something which Opus Dei members do daily in many countries around the world.

## A PUBLIC FACE AND PRIVATE STRATEGIES

Opus Dei has developed a well-deserved reputation for recruiting and attracting people who are among the best and the brightest, those who are ambitious and have significant abilities and a penchant for hard work. This, in turn, enables its members to quickly advance in their chosen fields, where they use their influence to promote conservative ideas.

Unlike other conservative groups, Opus Dei tends to avoid participating in strident demonstrations as a means of promoting its worldview. It does not conduct protests in the streets or seek out media attention for its own activities. Instead, it prefers to act using its influence on political elites and in, the longer term, through education and ideological control over its members.

It should be noted that Opus Dei tends to emphasize in public that, within the doctrines of the church, there is a great variety of opinions among Opus Dei members regarding personal affairs. In that sense it would appear that members enjoy great personal liberty and do what they wish. In reality, members of Opus Dei receive daily guidance from a "spiritual director" who embodies the ideological orientations of the order, suggesting that the alleged freedom might not amount to much.

A typical trait of Opus Dei is the polished and educated appearance of its officials. Their image contrasts with the intransigence with which they and the other members of the organization are prepared to impose conservative ideas on the whole of society, over any opposition.

In keeping with its ideals, the women of Opus Dei avoid wearing revealing clothing, including sleeveless dresses and somewhat short skirts. Likewise, they do not stay alone with people of the opposite sex.<sup>38</sup>

In general, Opus Dei members prefer to influence the owners and directors of media, seeking to instill in them a favorable attitude toward Opus Dei rather than directly confronting reporters and writers who criticize the organization. Opus Dei spokespersons and media managers in various countries tend to be well informed about criticisms of the organization and have developed a well-oiled media machine that quickly moves to mitigate attacks by issuing immediate denials when they come under criticism. Prime examples of this include the work of Joaquín Navarro-Valls at the Vatican's press office where he operated in an exemplary manner and the well-funded and international campaign to repudiate some of the more extreme accusations in *The Da Vinci Code*.

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One of the areas in which Opus Dei has been most active is in the education of the elites and training high-level private business executives. To this end, Opus Dei has founded schools, universities and training centers, including 64 residences for members in 17 cities in the US. In keeping with

its worldview, traditionally, in schools founded by Opus Dei, at least at the elementary level, the sexes are separated. With respect to the good works that it seeks to promote, it has also created community support centers in less developed countries such as Mexico so as to build on a base of social support there.

## BY THE NUMBERS

Some 2,000 members of Opus Dei are priests who belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. In addition, more than 20 bishops around the world belong to Opus Dei, including Jose H. Gomez, coadjutor bishop of Los Angeles, California; John J. Myers of Newark, New Jersey; Robert W. Finn of Kansas City, Missouri; Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, New York; John O. Barres of Allentown, Pennsylvania; the archbishop of Lima, Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne; the bishop of Huancavelica, Peru, Isidro Barrio Barrio; the archbishop of Cuzco, Peru, Juan Antonio Ugarte Pérez;<sup>39</sup> as well as Gabino Miranda Melgarejo, auxiliary bishop of Ayacucho, Peru; and the prelate of Juli, also in Peru, José María Ortega Trinidad.

On May 28, 1989, *El Heraldo*, a conservative newspaper in Mexico, announced that 24 Opus Dei priests would be ordained by Pope John Paul II in Rome. The priests included Osvaldo Neves of Brazil, Greg Coyne of the US, the Mexican doctor Armando Vera from Silacayoapan from Oaxaca and Philip Goyret of Argentina. More than two decades later, they all continue to be members of Opus Dei and have held influential posts in different countries.

A lawyer by profession, Osvaldo Neves de Almeida is the son of an Argentine mother and Brazilian father. He is multilingual as he has mastered English, French and Italian in addition to the languages of his parents, Spanish and Portuguese. Since 1992 he has worked in the office of the Secretary of State of the Holy See.<sup>40</sup>

Gregory Joseph Coyne graduated in 1983 with a BS in Computer Science from the University of Maryland (1983)<sup>41</sup> and later studied at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Santa Croce) where he received an STD in Moral Theology. He currently works in Washington, DC, for the Opus Dei prelature.<sup>42</sup>

In 1993, Esteban Armando Vera Velasco was named a member of the presbyterial council of the Diocese of Querétaro in Mexico<sup>43</sup> and in 1997 he became Vicar Secretary (Vicario Secretario) of the Opus Dei Delegation in Kazakhstan,<sup>44</sup> where in 2003 he held the position of Vicar Judge of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal in the Diocese of Almaty.<sup>45</sup> That same year he was named Chaplain of His Holiness along with other Opus Dei priests.<sup>46</sup>

Philip Goyret has been a professor of theology at the Universidad de la Santa Cruz in Rome,<sup>47</sup> which in 2000 named him Director of Studies<sup>48</sup> and in 2007 Vice Dean for the School of Theology.<sup>49</sup>

The levels of lay membership in Opus Dei include:

- numeraries, who should have at least a civil academic degree or professional equivalent, are celibate and live in special centers run by Opus Dei;
- associates, who also are celibate, but live with their own families;
- supernumeraries, who comprise 75 to 80 percent of those who belong to Opus Dei, and only participate in it after their secular workday (many of them are married); and
- cooperators, who pray, provide financial support and work.<sup>50</sup>

A category called “numenary assistant,” reveals the subordinate nature of the role Escrivá attributed to women. Their professional lives are dedicated to looking after the domestic needs of Opus Dei centers.<sup>51</sup>

In 1993, there were about 79,000 lay members of the prelature in 54 countries on five continents.<sup>52</sup> In 2005 that figure was estimated to be about 90,000.<sup>53</sup>

According to the 2007 Pontifical Yearbook ("Anuario Pontificio"), Opus Dei had 1,956 priests worldwide and 84,349 lay members, for a total of 86,305 members. Fifty-five percent of all Opus Dei members are women and about 90 percent of them live in Europe and Latin America, while only about 3,000 live in the US.<sup>54</sup>

Its assets in the US are calculated to be about \$344.4 million and \$2.8 billion worldwide according to figures from a 2008 study by investigator and journalist John L. Allen Jr. of the *National Catholic Reporter*.<sup>55</sup>

Opus Dei owns 1,752 residencies worldwide and has properties such as Murray Hill in New York City, a 17-floor skyscraper completed in 2001, which is now the headquarters for the vicar of Opus Dei in the US, as well as 60 resident numeraries, various offices and a conference center. It cost \$70 million, half of which came from one donation and the rest from 5,000 small contributions.<sup>56</sup>

## SCHOOLS

Opus Dei promotes many activities—whether cooperatively or through its members, who act individually but with institutional consent—especially in providing schools for the elite. Many of the activists who are against reproductive rights and the secular state have graduated from these schools.

Among the schools that Opus Dei manages in Latin America are the Universidad de La Sabana, in Colombia; Instituto Panamericano de Alta Dirección de Empresas (IPADE) in Mexico; the Universidad Austral in Argentina; the Universidad de Piura in Peru; the Universidad de los Andes in Chile; and many other schools, from elementary schools to secondary schools, training centers, schools for hospitality, gastronomy and other areas, and centers for social assistance and community

development, in rural and urban areas.

One of the main Opus Dei business schools in Latin America is IPADE, founded in 1967 with support of leading businessmen: Manuel Senderos

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Iriguoyen,<sup>57</sup> Gastón Azcárraga Tamayo,<sup>58</sup> José María Basagoiti,<sup>59</sup> Baltasar Márquez, Alejandro Álvarez Guerrero,<sup>60</sup> Carlos Isoard, and Eneko Belausteguiotia.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to a business education based on case studies for high-level directors, the institution offers students classes "designed to give our participants and graduates a human and spiritual education based on the doctrine of the Catholic church."<sup>62</sup>

## OPUS DEI IN LATIN AMERICA

Opus Dei is active in almost all Latin American countries, where approximately one-third of its members live.<sup>63</sup>

It began its work in Mexico in 1949.<sup>64</sup> Today Mexico is the country with the most Opus Dei members outside of Spain.<sup>65</sup>

Opus Dei began activities in Chile and Argentina in 1950, followed by Colombia and Venezuela (1951), Guatemala and Peru (1953), Ecuador (1954), Uruguay (1956), Brazil (1957), El Salvador (1958), Costa Rica (1959), Paraguay (1962), Bolivia (1978), Honduras (1980), the Dominican Republic (1988), Nicaragua (1992) and Panama (1996).

**Opus Dei Bishops in Latin America**  
Almost all of the Opus Dei bishops are in Latin America with several especially in Peru, where in 1957, Pope

Pius XII commended to Opus Dei the new prelature of Yauyos, currently in the charge of Opus Dei priest Ricardo García García.

Other bishops in Peru are also members of Opus Dei: the archbishop of Lima, Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne; the bishop of Huancavelica, the Spaniard Isidro Barrio Barrio; the archbishop of Cuzco, Juan Antonio Ugarte Perez;<sup>66</sup> as well as Gabino Miranda Melgarejo, auxiliary bishop of Ayacucho; and the prelate of Juli, José María Ortega Trinidad, who in September 2008 expelled several members of the Maryknoll order, who work on behalf of the poorest communities in the area.<sup>67</sup>

As an example of the doctrinal pressure that Opus Dei bishops seek to impose, Archbishop Ugarte recommended that all priests, especially those from his archdiocese, "alert the faithful and avoid infiltration and dissemination of ideas contrary to the doctrine of our faith."<sup>68</sup>

Luis Sanchez-Moreno Lira, archbishop of Arequipa, who died in September 2009,<sup>69</sup> and the Spanish priest Enrique Pélach y Feliu (1917-2007), bishop emeritus of Abacay, were also members.<sup>70</sup>

The bishop of Chiclayo, the Spaniard Jesús Moliné Labarta, earned a doctorate in canon law from the Universidad de Navarra, and has shown his affinity for Opus Dei, but he also has publicly

biblical theology there in 1996, and who was named bishop of Ica on October 31, 2007.<sup>72</sup>

It is worth noting that Cardinal Cipriani Thorne, the main director of Opus Dei in the Peruvian clergy, has been much questioned for his support of the Fujimori regime and the disdain he has expressed for human rights. He has been called "a representative of Catholic totalitarianism that allied itself with the delinquent dictatorship of Fujimori. He kept quiet about massacres and massive crimes in Ayacucho and facilitated the massacre of members of the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, who in 1997 took over the Japanese Embassy, by informing on them electronically (according to people who were in the embassy).<sup>73</sup>

In Argentina: Antonio Delgado Evers, archbishop of the diocese of San Juan de Cuyo since March 29, 2000;<sup>74</sup> Hugo de Nicolás Barbaro bishop of the diocese of San Roque since July 26, 2008;<sup>75</sup> Francisco Polti Santillán, bishop of Santiago del Estero since July 22, 2006.<sup>76</sup>

In Brazil: Antonio Augusto Dias Duarte, auxiliary bishop of São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro since January 12, 2005;<sup>77</sup> Rafael Llano Cifuentes, the bishop emeritus of Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro.<sup>78</sup>

In Chile: Luis Gleisner Wobbe, auxiliary bishop of La Serena since July 10, 2001;<sup>79</sup> Juan Ignacio González Errázuriz, bishop of San Bernardo since November 22, 2003.<sup>80</sup>

In Ecuador: the archbishop of Guayaquil since May 7, 2003, is Antonio Arregui Yarza.<sup>81</sup> The deceased archbishop emeritus of Guayaquil, Ignacio Larrea Holguín (1927-2006) was the first member of the Opus Dei prelature in Ecuador.

In Paraguay: Rogelio Ricardo Livieres Plano, the Argentine priest born in Corrientes in 1945, and ordained in October 2004, is bishop of Ciudad del Este.<sup>82</sup>

## Critics have also said that Opus Dei "members were among the first and main administrators of the brutal and oppressive military regime of General Pinochet."

declared: "I am not a prominent member of Opus Dei. I am not even part of that prelature, which I hold in high esteem and value very much when I reflect on the marvelous work they are doing in my diocese, in Peru, and in the whole world in service to the church."<sup>71</sup>

Another graduate of the Universidad de Navarra is Héctor Eduardo Vera Colona, who obtained a doctorate in

In Venezuela: Fernando José Castro Aguayo, an Opus Dei priest, who at the end of June 2009 became auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Caracas;<sup>83</sup> Francisoco de Guruceaga Iturriza, bishop emeritus of La Guaira.<sup>84</sup>

In Colombia: Hugo Eugenio Puccini Banfi, bishop of Santa María since December 4, 1987.<sup>85</sup>

Fernando Sáenz Lacalle, who was the archbishop of San Salvador from 1995 to 2008, is also an Opus Dei clergy member. He was born in Cintruénigo, Spain, on November 16, 1932. He studied chemistry at the Universidad de Zaragoza and was ordained in 1959 within the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. In 1962 he was sent to El Salvador to the recently founded Opus Dei center in San Salvador. Like other Opus Dei prelates, Lacalle became known for his affinity to conservative interests and the military, to such a degree that he took charge of the military chaplaincy of El Salvador.

In addition, on February 15, 2005, José Horacio Gómez, a Mexican born in Monterrey, was named archbishop of San Antonio, Texas, and in April 2010 he was named coadjutor bishop of Los Angeles.

## OPUS DEI IN LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

Among the criticisms made of Opus Dei is that it has grown by i) gaining influence in business and politics and ii) utilizing the protection of military regimes, such as that of Augusto Pinochet in Chile.

In his work on Opus Dei, Michael Walsh presents an overview of these accusations, noting for example, that “in December 1985, a court in Munich granted Opus Dei an interdict to prevent the publication of a book which said that some members of the organization had worked with the death squads in Chile. Critics of Opus Dei regularly accuse it

of supporting military regimes in Latin America and Opus Dei vehemently denies this.”<sup>86</sup>

Critics have also said that Opus Dei “members were among the first and main administrators of the brutal and oppressive military regime of General Pinochet” and that “General Juan Carlos Onganía, the Argentine dictator from 1966 to 1970, seized power after completing a religious retreat sponsored by Opus Dei.”<sup>87</sup>

The official in charge of the brigade that killed the Colombian priest Camilo Torres in 1966 manages an Opus Dei magazine in Bogotá.<sup>88</sup>

In just the last decade, Opus Dei members are said to have participated in the failed coup d'état against Hugo Chávez in 2002 and in the defeat of Manuel Zelaya in Honduras in June 2009.

Below we provide a brief summary of just some of the political events in which members and supporters of Opus Dei have been involved.

### Honduras

Author Marcos Burgos has written the key critique of Opus Dei's influence in Honduras. He asserts that “In Honduras, Opus Dei is headed by Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga. Although he received the sacraments within the Salesian congregation, for the last two decades he is a cooperator and active member of Opus Dei.”<sup>89</sup>

In 2009, when Roberto Micheletti was granted power after a coup d'état, Cardinal Maradiaga not only supported its supposed “constitutionality,” but even compared Micheletti to eminent people from the time of the country’s independence.<sup>90</sup>

According to the same author, other people who support Opus Dei in Honduras include Elvin Santos; Marta Lorena Alvarado de Casco (antichoice activist, member of the Micheletti government and representative in the National Congress); the Villeda Bermúdez family, including Mauricio

Villeda, Leonardo Villeda, Ramón Villeda; the Villeda Toledo family (of the media Emisoras Unidos and Televicentro); Antonio Tavel Otero (aka “Tigo”); Ricardo Álvarez (Mayor of Tegucigalpa), Carlos López Contreras

**“Another example [of Opus Dei’s power] is the enormous number of obstacles that the Ministry of Education has faced in implementing sex education programs in a country in which thousands of adolescents and girls are raped and sexually abused.**

(participant in the coup d'état who became Chancellor) and his wife Armida de López Contreras (organizer of the “White Shirts” or Camisas Blancas), among others.<sup>91</sup>

Burgos also notes that “some civil society organizations denounced interference by Opus Dei in the Zelaya government as signifying a weakening of the secular state in Honduras. This should be understood as interference by the church and principally interference by Opus Dei in government decision-making.”<sup>92</sup>

After President Zelaya vetoed legislation that prohibited the use of emergency contraception, Opus Dei was accused of having a significant hand in overturning the veto in congress. (The World Health Organization states that emergency contraception is a contraceptive while Opus Dei claims that it is an abortifacient.)<sup>93</sup>

Burgos notes, “Another example is the enormous number of obstacles that the Ministry of Education has faced in implementing sex education programs in a country in which thousands of adolescents and girls are raped and sexually abused. Opus Dei advocates that this subject should not be treated in a scientific manner, but from a moral point of view. This confrontation has taken place in the Congress itself, which is strongly influenced by the fundamentalist vision of Marta Lorena Alvarado and her supporters as well as a group of

Catholics and Protestants. Together they are challenging sexual education in Honduras, demonstrating once again complete detachment from the reality of the country.”<sup>94</sup>

### Mexico

From its beginnings in Mexico, Opus Dei enjoyed the support of people who held economic and political power and its participation with conservative factions has been the subject of public discussion for decades.<sup>95</sup> While it is active throughout the country, its members’ activities have been more pronounced in some areas such as Querétaro, in the center of the country.<sup>96</sup> However, since 2000, with a more conservative government in place, Opus Dei and other conservative groups exist in a climate with which they have a complete ideological affiliation. This climate has led to the promotion of members and sympathizers of those groups to prominent political and legislative positions.

In Mexico, it is very common for politicians and bureaucrats from the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional, to have been educated in Opus Dei schools, as is the case with the national leader of that party, César Nava Vázquez. However, despite his education at Opus Dei’s Universidad Panamericana, Nava Vázquez divorced his wife and in April 2010 he appeared on the cover of some magazines as partner to a popular singer in Mexico.<sup>97</sup>

One leading public figure affiliated with Opus Dei was Carlos Llano Cifuentes, PhD, from the Universidad de Navarra and founder of the Instituto Panamericano de Alta Dirección de Empresas (IPADE Business School). He exercised influence on right-wing government officials such as Josefina Vásquez Mota, former Secretary for Social Development and Education.<sup>98</sup> Born in 1932, Carlos Llano died in May 2010 in Miami.<sup>99</sup>

Paz Gutiérrez Cortina de Fernández Cueto has also been publicly identified as an Opus Dei supernumerary. She is

well known as the national director of the Enlace organization, a collaborator of the antichoice organization Provida and other conservative groups such as Red Familia and A Favor de lo Mejor (founded in 1996 by the businessman Lorenzo Servitje to promote a restrictive moral code in the media). She is a syndicated columnist and a representative for the rightist National Action Party. She also served as a member of the Human Rights Commission of the Council on Citizen Participation in the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic.<sup>100</sup>

As a member of Opus Dei, researcher Virginia Ávila García noted, her work defending sexual abstinence began to gather strength in the mid-1990s.<sup>101</sup> In 1995, Opus Dei's *Romana* bulletin described with praise the type of activities led by "Mrs. Paz Gutiérrez Cortina Fernández Cueto, mother of 10 children and family counselor."<sup>102</sup> She has taught in Opus Dei institutions such as IPADE, despite having only a high school education.<sup>103</sup>

Paz Gutiérrez Cortina de Fernández Cueto's public life epitomizes Opus Dei's political and social reach: collaboration with conservative groups, ties with elite business people (in this case, Fernández Cueto's family owns businesses such as Constructora Gutiérrez), work in and with the media and affiliation with conservative parties and forces.

Mexico is also the center of some of Opus Dei's activity against reproductive rights. Fernández Cueto's group, Enlace en la Comunidad Encuentro, A.C., publishes books to promote abstinence in sex education. She also participates in the conservative coalition Red Familia (Family Network), which was created in 2000 to influence conservative policymakers and has formed part of the Human Rights Commission of the Counsel for Citizen Participation of the Procurator's Office of the Republic (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Consejo de Participación Ciudadana de la Procuraduría General de la República).

Fernández Cueto's activism has been visible daily, but in the context of the debate on the decriminalization of abortion, the commitment of Opus Dei members to restrict sexual and reproductive rights is very visible.

Apart from Fernández Cueto, various professors from IPADE and from the Universidad Panamericana are also active as well as right-wing politicians Carlos Abascal Carranza, former secretary of labor and government, and Héctor Jaime Larios Santillán, both of whom graduated from IPADE.<sup>104</sup>

Others who participated in that campaign and who studied in Opus Dei schools include Rocío Gálvez de Lara, president of Provida [Pro-Life] and a graduate in teacher education from the Universidad Panamericana; Gerardo Monroy Campero, a leader of conservative groups and a lawyer; Alvaro Clemente Carrillo Pretalia, also a lawyer for the Universidad

### **In the context of the debate on the decriminalization of abortion, the commitment of Opus Dei members to restrict sexual and reproductive rights is very visible.**

Panamericana and somebody who has held positions in the judiciary and in the House of Representatives of Mexico City; Andrés González Watty, another lawyer and a graduate of the Universidad Panamericana; Patricia Rivera Barrera, another lawyer and graduate of the Universidad Panamericana, among many others who opposed the legalization of abortion.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, one of the public figures whose ties to Opus Dei have been openly discussed is the lawyer José Soberanes Fernández, a professor at the Universidad Panamericana.<sup>106</sup> In 2007, as head of the National Commission for Human Rights he supported an appeal asking the Supreme Court of Justice to repeal the decriminalization of abortion in Mexico City. This appeal was rejected.

**Peru**

In Peru, where Opus Dei has significant influence, several leading politicians are affiliated with Opus Dei including the former president of the Congress, Martha Chávez; Rafael Rey and Luis Chang Ching, who have been members of Congress; Fernán Altuve and Cecilia Martínez del Solar.<sup>107</sup>

One of the main business people tied to Opus Dei in Peru is Dionisio Romero Seminario, who is from an established family of Spanish descent in Piura. “From the Romero family Opus Dei obtained the exclusive area of El Chipe, land on which to build the university campus, as well as a big rambling house in the urban center of Piura.”<sup>108</sup>

Leader of the Grupo Romero, one of the leading conglomerates in Peru, Dionisio Romero was one of the ten richest and most powerful men in the country since 1981. Currently he is director of the Banco de Crédito e Inversiones de Chile, Hochschild Mining Plc. Since 1995, he has also been president of Credicorp, the financial wing of the Grupo Romero. With an empire surpassing US\$1.3 billion, Credicorp comprises the Banco de Crédito, the leading bank in the country; Banco de Crédito de Bolivia, Pacífico Seguros, the holding company Grupo Crédito, Credicorp Securities, Credileasing and other businesses.<sup>109</sup>

Peruvian journalist Herbert Mújica reported, “Dionisio Romero is privileged because his money buys everything or almost everything.” He says that in about 2003 when he managed the newspaper *Pura Verdad*, the cover of which on five occasions “demanded several congressional investigations into Dionisio Romero’s activities and accused him of events that today seem rather likely to be certain. Without [Mújica’s] knowledge the banker contacted the principal shareholder of Raymi, publisher of *Pura Verdad*, and offered him publicity in exchange for [Mújica’s] head.”<sup>112</sup>

**Chile**

One of the main personalities tied to Opus Dei in Chile is the right-wing leader Joaquín Lavín Infante.<sup>113</sup>

In 1999, Lavín—an economist, former collaborator of the dictator Augusto Pinochet and the former mayor of Santiago—was a candidate for the presidency with the Independent Democratic Union (Unión Independiente Democrática-UDI). His campaign was littered with ultraconservative rhetoric in which he opposed, *inter alia*, legalizing divorce. Ricardo Lagos defeated him by a slim margin. If he had won that election, Lavín would have become the first president officially affiliated with Opus Dei.

Lavín Infante admits to being a supernumerary in Opus Dei and has been a member for 30 years. He joined in 1974 after having been part of Tradition, Family and Property (Tradición, Familia y Propiedad), the integrationist movement founded by the Brazilian Plinio Correa de Oliveira, who was known as “Fiducia” in Chile, for the name of the magazine that he edited.<sup>114</sup>

During the campaign, Lavín did not advertise that he belonged to Opus Dei. It only became public after President Ricardo Lagos won, when Lavín’s father, a farmer named Joaquín Lavín Pradenas, and a militant in the UDI, declared:

**In 2007, as head of the National Commission for Human Rights, Fernández supported an appeal asking the Supreme Court of Justice to repeal the decriminalization of abortion in Mexico City. This appeal was rejected.**

Dionisio Romero gave the inaugural lecture in the 2009 academic year at the Universidad de Piura, an event that he defined as “the greatest act of faith in Peru.”<sup>110</sup> He is close to the former head of Peru’s intelligence service, Vladimiro Montesinos, and has been accused of laundering drug money.<sup>111</sup>

"One of the unfair things people said about Joaquín is that because he is a member of Opus Dei, he had many limitations in different areas [which would make it difficult for him to perform his duties as] president. I had to counter that in a regional radio forum. I said 'Look, I think the best guarantee that he will be a good president is precisely that he is a member of Opus Dei.' Opus Dei is an institution of the church that tries to see that its members sanctify themselves through their work, that is, that they do their job to perfection."<sup>115</sup>

Two years later, on the centenary of the birth of the founder of Opus Dei, an international conference "The greatness of ordinary life" was held in Rome. It was organized by the Universidad de la Santa Cruz, also affiliated to Opus Dei. Joaquín Lavín Infante was invited and participated as an exhibitor in the panel on "Family and career, a daily challenge," in which he highlighted the role of Catholic politicians.<sup>116</sup>

In October 2002 Lavín and his wife María Estela León returned to Rome to attend the canonization of Escrivá. Before going, he openly mentioned his commitment to Opus Dei.

On February 9, 2010, he was named Minister of Education in the Coalition for Change administration (Coalición por el Cambio).

"The backbone of the movement against the moral liberalization of Chile is supported by the integrationist Catholic groups like Opus Dei (from Latin 'Work of God') and the Legionaries of Christ," argued analyst Merike H. Blofield, then at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, who studied Opus Dei's impact in Chile.<sup>117</sup>

### **Colombia**

Álvaro Uribe, a president with militaristic and conservative Catholic tendencies, has several links to Opus Dei—not least that he has named members to posts in the administration. At least two of his ministers belong to Opus Dei: César

Mauricio Velásquez and the commander of the Navy, Admiral Guillermo Barrera, according to the statement made to the magazine *Semana* in September 2009 by the regional vicar of Opus Dei, Hernán Salcedo.<sup>118</sup>

Marta Lucía Ramírez, Minister of Defense in 2002 and 2003, is said to be a sympathizer of Opus Dei and businessman José Roberto Arango, who is very close to Uribe, is said to be an Opus Dei collaborator. The leader of the National Federation of Businesses

### **"The backbone of the movement against the moral liberalization of Chile is supported by the integrationist Catholic groups like Opus Dei."**

(Federación Nacional de Comerciantes, or Fenalco), Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, is also an Opus Dei follower.<sup>119</sup>

It's worth noting that Opus Dei was started in Colombia by the Spanish priest and lawyer Teodoro Ruiz Jusué (1917-2001). Teodoro participated in the Spanish civil war, reaching the rank of corporal. In 1940 he met Escrivá de Balaguer in Valladolid and became an admirer. He was director of the Colegio Mayor Universitario Moncloa. Ordained in 1946, for years he was the only Opus Dei priest in Andalucía, which he left for Colombia "with no more luggage other than a crucifix and an image of the Virgin that the Founder gave to him and \$50 to his name."<sup>120</sup> He arrived in Colombia on October 13, 1951.<sup>121</sup> In 1964 he returned to Spain and worked for Opus Dei in Pamplona, Valencia and Palma de Mallorca, where he died.<sup>122</sup>

### **Costa Rica**

In Costa Rica, one of the private initiatives that sponsors the work of Opus Dei's members is the publishing house Promotora de Medios de Comunicación S.A.,<sup>123</sup> or PROMESA, founded in 1982 by Carlos Manuel Fonseca Quesada and Helena Ospina Garcés de Fonseca,

Professor in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Costa Rica. It publishes works by Opus Dei authors, including various professors from the Universidad de Navarra and works by its founder. PROMESA is one of the entities whose projects and news are described in *Romana*.<sup>124</sup>

## To the degree that she can, Ospina supports the conservative crusade against sexual rights, for example by publishing and distributing books like those of the Argentine lawyer and leader of antichoice groups, Jorge Scala

Born in Cali, Colombia, in 1944, Helena Ospina Garcés de Fonseca has lived in Costa Rica since 1970. She has also collaborated with other Catholic educational institutions such as the Universidad de La Sabana in Colombia, which in 1994 published the book *Mujer, valores permanentes (Woman, Permanent Values)*, on the occasion of the International Year of the Family. In Costa Rica Ospina had significant influence on the governments of the Unidad Social Cristiana (Christian Social Union). Among the personalities who collaborate with PROMESA in Costa Rica is Luis Baura, regional vicar of Opus Dei in northern Central America.<sup>125</sup>

To the degree that she can, Ospina supports the conservative crusade against sexual rights, for example by publishing and distributing books like those of the Argentine lawyer and leader of antichoice groups, Jorge Scala: *IPPF, La multinacional de la muerte, Recrear la cultura de la vida, Principios fundacionales de la bioética, (IPPF, The Deadly Multinational Organization, Recreating the Culture of Life, and Foundational Principles of Bioethics)* among others.

On October 16, 2009, PROMESA participated in an antiabortion demonstration alongside organizations such as the Instituto Dignitas (Dignity Institute), el Observatorio Ciudadano

por la Vida y la Familia (Life and Family Citizen Observatory), la Asociación Por la Vida (Prolife Association), CIBEFAM, la Pastoral Familiar de San José (a church initiative to promote marriage and family values), and the Asociación de Madres de Familias de Costa Rica (Association of Mothers of Costa Rican Families).<sup>126</sup>

In addition, *Romana* highlighted the work of the Women's Professional Institute, La Pradera, which provides a "social development program" at a home for families with problems of drug addiction, poverty and domestic violence. The teachers and students, *Romana* reported, "carry out a social development program...for girls aged 6 to 12 [and] provide talks on human and Christian values and personal tutoring aimed at fostering character formation and good study habits. A club for mothers offers classes in crafts and cooking along with talks on virtues connected with family life and the raising of their children."<sup>127</sup>

### Argentina

In Argentina, members of Opus Dei participated in military governments such as those of Onganía and Videla, but they were also active during the Menem period. Menem had named Gustavo Beliz, a member of Opus Dei, to be minister of the interior.<sup>128</sup> According to those who study Opus Dei, Chilean paper industry magnate Eliodoro Matte and Argentine oil magnate Gregorio Pérez Companc are important contributors to Opus Dei.<sup>129</sup> One of Opus Dei's main business schools is in Argentina—the Instituto de Altos Estudios Empresariales, or IAE.

### Uruguay

According to Emilio Corbiere, "Uruguay, especially Montevideo, is another place with strong Opus Dei influence. During the military dictatorship they put down roots in the Institute for Philosophy, Science and Letters, at the Catholic university, through Raquel Lombardo, the Minister of Culture, who was a

member of Opus Dei. ... During the Lacalle government, his Minister of Defense, the lawyer Mariano Brito, was a member of Opus Dei, and his former Minister of Health, the lawyer Carlos Delpiazzo was one of his fellow travelers. Another Lacalle sympathizer who was a member of the prelature was the economist Gustavo Licandro. ... Members of Opus Dei also include the former president of the Central Bank of Uruguay, Ramón Díaz, and the lawyers Ricardo Olera García and Augustio Durán Martínez, businessman and professor of administrative law, respectively; Vice Admiral Francisco Pazos, commander-in-chief of the navy, and chief of personnel of that branch of the military Rear Admiral Carlos Magliocca.”<sup>130</sup>

### Venezuela

People tied to Opus Dei supported the attempt to overturn Chávez in April 2002 and were members in the cabinet of Pedro Carmona, who seized power in a coup d'état. “Pedro Carmona has ties to Opus Dei. Many of those involved in the coup d'état and various members of the ‘provisional government’ are Opus Dei numeraries. The most well known of them is José Rodríguez Iturbe, a personal friend of Aznar (the right-wing former Spanish leader) and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Carmona, who resides in the same building that houses the headquarters of Opus Dei in Caracas. The coup d'état counted on the *in situ* blessing of Baltasar Porras, president of the Episcopal Conference, who was present at the swearing in of the usurper next to Cardinal Velázquez.”<sup>131</sup>

### Ecuador

Gustavo Noboa Bejarano, president of Ecuador from 2000 to 2003 was close to Opus Dei. He sent several members of his government to Rome for Escrivá’s canonization ceremony. In 2002 he and his wife attended the Mass commemorating the centenary of Escrivá’s birth. He also attended the

launch of a new Ecuadorian version of “Santo Rosario” [Blessed Rosary], a book by Escrivá.

## CRITICS AND EX-MEMBERS

Throughout its more than 80 years of existence, Opus Dei has demonstrated not only a great capacity to grow, but also greater stability than many other conservative Catholic groups such as the Legionaries of Christ. (The latter, founded in 1941, is in significant turmoil after its founder, Fr. Marcial Maciel, was accused of several counts of sexual abuse,<sup>132</sup> including some accusations of abuse from children he fathered while pretending to live the life of a celibate priest.<sup>133, 134</sup>) In contrast, as the journalist John L. Allen indicated in 2006, “to date no priest from Opus Dei in the US has been accused of sexual abuse....”<sup>135</sup> There have been a small handful of accusations elsewhere.

So far the main criticisms of Opus Dei coming from former members and analysts of that group relate to what they describe as its authoritarianism, the rigidity of its standards, its interference in the personal lives of its members, misogyny<sup>136</sup> and the manner in which it participates in business and politics.<sup>137</sup>

Journalist Isabel de Armas, who was a numerary of Opus Dei from 1966 to 1974, reported that in 1972 in Barcelona during a massive event with Escrivá, a young female numerary, a doctor, suggested directly to him that the text be modified, upon which “in the middle of a bitter silence he began to pace the stage in agitation, and furiously responded in an insulting and angry tone... ‘Do you know what it means to be discreet? Well, look the word up in the dictionary and you will find out. You could well use that knowledge.’”<sup>138</sup>

According to some of its critics, the manner in which Opus Dei operates in the business world – where it has adopted a generally liberal and pragmatic

approach—is in sharp contrast to its approach to sexuality, procreation and family life where it adheres to strictly conservative religious standards, which it considers in accord with so-called “natural law.”<sup>139</sup>

María del Carmen Tapia, who belonged to Opus Dei for 18 years, concluded that it “is the most conservative, retrograde and sectarian organization of the Roman Catholic church...a church within the church, with all the characteristics of a sect.”<sup>140</sup>

Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, theologian at the Universidad Carlos III in Madrid, agrees with that characterization. He believes that Opus Dei managed to reach influential positions in the Vatican thanks to Pope John Paul II and that it did indeed become a “church within a church.”<sup>141</sup>

**it “is the most conservative, retrograde and sectarian organization of the Roman Catholic church...a church within the church, with all the characteristics of a sect.”**

There are isolated testimonies of sexual transgressions, including a few testimonies related to sexual abuse within the order. However, it is more common for former members of Opus Dei to point to the repressive approach to sexuality that predominates within the organization. As one former member stated, “sexual abuses in Opus Dei are of a psychological nature and in most cases the damage is irreparable, much worse than the physical abuses in many cases.”<sup>142</sup>

The ease with which information can be spread using the internet has presented Opus Dei with new challenges. Websites have appeared that bring together former members of Opus Dei from many countries and allows them to collate and disseminate their experiences in a more systematized manner than was possible before.<sup>143</sup>

One testimony, by a man who was a numerary in Mexico for 25 years, said: “I very much loved the Work. I defended it before my university classmates...

before my family and friends. My dear former brothers—how could so many numeraries not be depressed, sad, neurotic and strange if you want to fight against the world through a system of rules and standards? Any psychiatrist knows that is psychopathological. There is no system, regardless of which saint constructs it, which can conquer that which in Christian asceticism is called the ‘World.’”<sup>144</sup>

With regard to Escrivá’s misogyny, former members of the group say that “all the works by the founder of Opus Dei were dedicated to and aimed at men, and in these works you can see a clear contempt for women.”<sup>145</sup> In that regard, this phrase is often cited: “If you want to give yourself to God in the world, rather than being scholarly (women needn’t be scholars: it’s enough for them to be prudent) you must be spiritual, closely united to our Lord by prayer; you must wear an invisible cloak that will cover each and every one of your senses and faculties; praying, praying, praying; atoning, atoning, atoning.”<sup>146</sup>

In November 2009, Eduardo Hidalgo, former philosophy student at the Opus Dei-run Universidad de los Andes, who was injured a few years earlier while participating in community work in the south of the country, filed a suit against the school. According to writings by his lawyer Estanislao Dufey, the leader of the community work prevented Eduardo from moving to Santiago to recuperate as he and his family wished “by means of psychological, moral, religious and even physical pressure. They didn’t help him and he remained in the south for more than a week suffering indescribable pains and being harassed by numeraries of Opus Dei, who warned him to ‘respect the will of God.’”<sup>147</sup>

Testimonies from Mexico, which have been reproduced on websites by Opus Dei dissidents, detail the methods by which the organization has recruited members in its schools and universities.

One of them dated July 2009 reads: “Normally we had closed-door meetings

in the office of the director during which we reviewed in minute detail the private and personal lives of each of the attendees of the circles, introductory religion classes, catechisms, Saturday meditations, cultural gatherings and social works that were organized in the Opus Dei center. All a student (especially one from the Universidad Panamericana) had to do was attend one of those activities and immediately he would be assigned a numerary to follow him. We would note his name on a list and we included him as a friend of one of the housemates.”<sup>148</sup>

According to that testimony, “in those meetings (to organize the proselytism) we spoke about everything, absolutely everything, without the least embarrassment and without the least little bit of respect for the privacy or conscience of anyone.”<sup>149</sup>

The following is testimony from a former student of the Universidad Panamericana, which is worth citing at length as a critical vision of the ideological influence that can be found there:

“I am a former student of the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City, from the class of 1986-‘91. I majored in the area of economic and administrative sciences (I don’t want to say which one because there were relatively few of us and I don’t want to expose myself further). Before the Universidad Panamericana, my education was mainly secular. I’m from a religious middle class family (without being fanatical about religion), which respects the individuality of each of its members, within certain natural limits.

“My class at Universidad Panamericana consisted of about 25 classmates, some of them from secular schools like me and others from non-Opus Dei religious schools. Many others were from Cedros, Yaocalli and other institutions of ‘the Work.’ There was a boy who had been a numerary since adolescence and a female aspirant of more humble origin. Although we were

young (age 19) and full of enthusiasm and good humor, the environment became difficult almost from the first semester as internal divisions and cliques with irreconcilable differences developed.

“I knew little about Opus Dei and the church in general, so I didn’t think I was a candidate for that organization. However, although my family is of modest means...my grandparents were Spanish and we are 100 percent white ethnically and rather physically attractive...I say that without pretence, it’s just the truth. For those readers who aren’t Mexican, I have to explain that both qualities carry a lot of weight in Mexican society, sometimes more so than money.

“Through my head numerary, they had their little ‘fight’ to invite me to retreats (where I was bored to tears until night came, when I died of laughter to see the numeraries baptize their beds with holy water to distance the devil from their dreams, and other clownery I can no longer remember) and to *tertulias* (literary or artistic gatherings) and other Tupperware-style parties. The relationship with the numerary who was assigned to me was becoming strained. I had to tell him to get lost around the third semester, after which I was socially ostracized by him and his band of crazies... Anyway, I didn’t lose anything and after reading some testimonies in Opus books, man what I saved myself from!

“The last I heard of that numerary is that he teaches class or coordinates something in El Cedros, one of the Opus schools in Mexico City. He was already a rather bitter and strange person back then. I don’t want to even imagine what he’s like now 20 years later. God willing I’ll never run into him again.

“The case of the female numerary was even sadder. I think that she truly believed that serving Opus Dei was to serve God live and in person. How much she must have suffered knowing that they didn’t totally accept her because

she was dark-skinned and poor! I think at some point she had a job outside of Opus Dei, but she ended up doing what so many other mediocre numeraries do. She joined the leadership of the Universidad Panamericana to take up a career (administration and marketing)

**"The case of the female numerary was even sadder. I think that she truly believed that serving Opus Dei was to serve God live and in person. How much she must have suffered knowing that they didn't totally accept her because she was dark-skinned and poor!"**

about which she had no idea nor way to contribute any fresh ideas since Opus Dei systematically limits her access to the internet, culture, events, social networks and the media—in short, everything that marketing involves!

"It might seem to you that I am resentful of Opus Dei without reason since in my case the damage was minimal. But bear in mind that this was a five-year period—10 semesters—of classes with a group that was completely and profoundly divided by the public and secret activities, favoritisms and public and veiled threats of these two poor numeraries and other equally disastrous people who filed through those classrooms."<sup>150</sup>

In 2008 the Colombian writer and journalist Fernando Quiro, who was born in Bogotá in 1964 and educated in the Universidad de La Sabana, wrote the novel "Justos." It took second place for the Planeta-Casamérica Latin American Prize for Narrative. In the novel, he relates his experience with Opus Dei, to which he was recruited as a student.

In an interview with the media, he said: "I joined [Opus Dei] at age 16 or 17 when I was studying in the school of Los Cerros, Bogotá. First they invited me to soccer games, on excursions... Then I began to receive everything else in small doses—the mortification, sacrifices, prohibitions. It's a perfectly

calculated brainwashing. If I wanted to be a numerary, as I wished, I had to give up women and, of course, sex. I gave up both and, according to Opus Dei, the best way to fight temptations of the body was with a cilice, which one had to use for two hours daily.

"One day I met a girl who was my age. I felt so guilty for having spoken with her and asking her for her phone number that I told my confessor. He treated me as if I had raped her. That's when I thought that I had taken the wrong path and that what I ought to give up was Opus Dei.

"When I began to have doubts, a guy locked me in a room and told me 'Look at so-and-so, who left [Opus Dei]. He got cancer and now his family is suffering very much.' Aberrant, don't you think? I was so angry that they ended up expelling me for one reason—I had become a bad example for the others. And they warned me, 'Remember that our father (Escrivá de Balaguer) won't give five cents to those who abandon his work.'"<sup>151</sup>

With regard to the use of the cilice, he says "They would tell you that it's a way of mortifying oneself for the sins of humanity, but I'm convinced that it was simply a sexual inhibitor. It's mortification like fasting on Good Friday, except that the cilice is something that you practice not just on Good Friday, but every day for two hours. And why was this done? They tell you when you're already submissive—to redeem the world and the sins of man. But in reality you discover that all that is done to replace sexual desire."<sup>152</sup>

Aside from schools it has established for the elite, Opus Dei tends to build centers in rural or marginalized areas where it combines community service with indoctrination.

One example is the elementary school Centro Nocedal, which opened in 1996 and for which the Nocedal Foundation was created three years later.

According to Opus Dei publicity, in the area of La Pintana in Chile,

which “has one of the worst levels of poverty in the country,” and where “the streets are an attractive place to be for most children,” a group of Chilean professionals who “were concerned about providing a better quality education to the most marginalized sectors of society,” bought six hectares of land in the village of Jorge Allessandri, better known as El Castillo, and built a school for 500 students. In addition to providing the same education one can get at any school in the country, it also has “a modern curriculum whose aim is to train students in electronics and telecommunications.”

The promotional brochure for Centro Nocedal says that “Parents know that their children will receive a strong academic, human and Christian background at this school. At the request of Nocedal’s promoters, the Opus Dei prelature collaborates on the doctrinal and spiritual training imparted in the school.” As a result, “parents immediately reported that their children prayed more, and they themselves also began speaking to God simply and naturally, sometimes after a long time of not doing so.” Once a week in the school there is catechism class and every two weeks a priest has a talk with parents. The same brochure says that “naturally a devotion to the Blessed Josemaría, founder of Opus Dei began to germinate....”

## THE OPUS DEI “SAINTS”

Among the promotion strategies of Opus Dei in Latin America is the canonization of Opus Dei members in the region. Among them are the Guatemalan pediatrician Ernesto Cofino Ubico and the Argentine engineer Isidoro Zorzano.

Ernesto Cofino Ubico (1899-1991), who has already been declared a “servant of God” in preparation for his beatification, was a supernumerary in

Opus Dei, which promotes him within the context of its antichoice propaganda as a “passionate defender of the right to and love of life especially that of the unborn.”<sup>153</sup>

Isidoro Zorzano Ledesma (1902-1943), an Argentine of Spanish descent, who has also already been declared a “servant of God,” was a classmate of Ecrivá de Balaguer in the Institute of Logroño. He was one of the first members of Opus Dei. During the Spanish civil war from 1936 to 1939, under the pretext of his Argentine nationality, he collaborated with the nationalists by “materially and spiritually helping many people, including members of Opus Dei who were isolated in the capital or locked in jails.”<sup>154</sup>

**Ernesto Cofino Ubico, has already been declared a “servant of God” in preparation for his beatification, was a supernumerary in Opus Dei, which promotes him within the context of its antichoice propaganda as a “passionate defender of the right to and love of life especially that of the unborn.”**

## CONCLUSION

Catholics for Choice has carried out extensive research over the years into the activities of conservative Catholic organizations around the world. More often than not, we find that there is far less to these organizations than their own propaganda suggests. In those cases we are happy to shine a light on their misstatements and exaggerations, as well as their general tendency to harbor and articulate extremely backward views towards women and minorities, as well as policies that promote a healthy approach to sex and sexuality. In so doing, we highlight their lack of influence and encourage our friends and colleagues in exposing the fact that these organizations are not as powerful as they might have thought.

Some organizations, however, do have the potential to cause serious damage to

the project of furthering reproductive and human rights around the world. Opus Dei, through its network of contacts, its access to powerbrokers and its financial clout, is one such group. In these cases, it is also important to highlight their activities, so that we can learn more about how they operate and come up with strategies to counter their influence. Our financial situation may never rival theirs, but our ability to influence progressive policymakers who share our mission of doing what is right for women and families around the world is certainly proportionate to theirs.

Opus Dei acts in many ways as a sort of political party under the centralized control of its leader. Its members are answerable to the head of Opus Dei, not the local bishops in whose jurisdiction they live. That gives it an advantage over other conservative orders, as they may single-mindedly pursue the goals of the leadership, even when they may not correspond with the priorities of the local bishop. Its religious and political activities closely adhere to the most conservative interpretation of Vatican teachings, and despite its protestations to the contrary, it seeks to ensure that others are required to adhere to their interpretation of the teachings as well. This is especially apparent in the manner in which it supports laws and policies that restrict reproductive rights and women's equality.

We do not take issue with Catholics, or anyone else, expressing their faith as they see fit. However, while religion can have a place in informing public policy, it should not be the deciding voice. Opus Dei seeks to ensure that its version of Catholic teachings should govern public policy. Policymakers need to be reminded that the vast majority of Catholics do not agree with Opus Dei, and that its attempts to influence public policy—especially when they come through unelected, undemocratic channels—should be rebuffed.

Exposing the activities of conservative Catholic organizations is a crucial step in

reminding Catholics and non-Catholics alike that these groups do not speak for the Catholic church. As we see in the United States and elsewhere, the views of Catholics generally reflect the views of the rest of society, on a host of political issues, including those related to reproductive rights, sex and sexuality.

Opus Dei has clearly had a role in shaping public policy in a more conservative direction. The aim of this publication is to provide some facts and background information to those who seek to counteract its influence. We hope it is useful as such and will be working with our friends and colleagues to ensure that its content is disseminated to all those who might find it useful.

## Notes

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- 27 Escrivá de Balaguer, *Forge*, Minos, México, 1998, point 310.
- 28 Ibid, point 933.
- 29 Ibid, point 942.
- 30 Ibid, point 939.
- 31 Ibid, point 928.
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- 33 Ibid, point 720.
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- 35 Julio Badui Dergal, *El Matrimonio Cristiano*, Mexico: Minos, 1991. Other books and flyers from that publisher reflect equally conservative positions. For example, *¿Divorcio? Inol*, by Santiago Martínez S., rejects what he calls the "sickness of divorce." Also, *¿Es lícito el control natal?* by Fernando Domínguez Ruiz, extols John Paul II's steadfast opposition to contraception, etc.
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According to this testimony, Opus Dei centers "work almost like exact replicas of medieval monasteries where self-flagellation, for example, is a daily practice. The Work, as members call the organization among themselves, is one of the church's most powerful institutions. It has an iron-like, inquisitorial structure...which includes "corporal punishments, the obligation to turn over one's salary, the impossibility of reading what one would like, and absurd prohibitions against things like being alone in an elevator with someone of the opposite sex, among many other rules that are unusual to someone from outside the order." (Ximena Sinay "Adios Rogando—La tortura de vivir en el Opus Dei," *TXT Revista Textual*, Year 2, Number 57, Buenos Aires, April, 16, 2004, [www.opuslibros.org/prensa/adios Rogando.htm](http://www.opuslibros.org/prensa/adios Rogando.htm), accessed Nov. 1, 2010.)

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