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Consecrations of Opus Dei

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Personal and collective consecrations, whether of dioceses, other religious institutions, or civil entities, have a centuries-old tradition in the Catholic Church. Among those most deeply rooted in popular devotion are the consecrations made to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Entire countries, cities, particular churches, religious orders and congregations, families and homes, and of course individuals, have consecrated themselves to our Lady, to the Sacred Heart, or to other devotions, to ask for divine protection in particular needs.

At the same time, such an act has always entailed a commitment to Christian life, from the practice of a devotional act to identifying one's whole life with the spiritual meaning of that specific consecration, seeking a lasting effect that shapes one's own spirituality. For this reason, consecrations are often renewed periodically, often every year or on special anniversaries.

Opus Dei was consecrated by its founder on four occasions: to the Holy Family (1951), to the Most Sweet Heart of Mary (1951), to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (1952), and to the Holy Spirit (1971). In every case, Saint Josemaría took this step to ask for divine help in the face of specific needs. At the same time, these consecrations (and his instruction that they be renewed year after year) served to strengthen certain aspects of the life of piety of the members of Opus Dei.

1. Consecration to the Holy Family (1951)

The first consecration took place on 14 May 1951, in the oratory dedicated to the Holy Family (still under construction) at Villa Tevere. The decision to make it came quickly, shortly after the founder returned to Rome from a trip to Spain, during which he had learned that some people had sent the Pope a complaint against Opus Dei, signed by the parents of five Italian members of the Work. That letter contained grievances about their children's freely made decision to seek admission to Opus Dei.

Without delay, Saint Josemaría wrote: “Rome, 14 May 1951. Place under the patronage of the Holy Family — Jesus, Mary and Joseph — the families of our people, so that

they may come to share in the *gaudium cum pace* of the Work, and obtain from the Lord love for Opus Dei” (AVP, III, p. 194).

The founder’s reaction was not only due to that isolated incident. On other occasions, years earlier, some families of members of the Work had been cautioned against Opus Dei by certain religious (something similar to what had just happened in Italy) and there had been other misunderstandings from parents who, for various reasons, did not look kindly on their children’s vocation.

At the same time, the majority of families had welcomed that choice with joy, and even drawn closer to Opus Dei, to the point that in subsequent years they themselves asked for admission. But Saint Josemaría, who had a particular affection and esteem for the families

of Opus Dei members, saying that they owed their parents not only the gift of life but also “ninety percent of their vocation” (AVP, III, p. 188), was deeply saddened by this new opposition, especially because he knew the parents had been misled and were acting in good faith. He was always pained by the false accusation that Opus Dei separated children from their families, since he wanted just the opposite: for families to share in the warmth of home and the help of the Work, especially if the demands of God’s service meant that a son or daughter had to go far away to work.

He also knew that many institutions throughout history had faced such reproaches, and that the lives of the saints are full of examples of family opposition to the vocation of a son or daughter. Jesus Christ Himself placed following God’s call ahead of closeness to one’s relatives, with firm

words (cf. Lk 9:59-62; 14:26), and his life contains clear examples of this (cf. Mt 12:46-49; Lk 2:49).

In the formula, which is still recited in Opus Dei on the feast of the Holy Family, prayers are offered for the relatives of its members: “Grant them, Lord, to come to know better each day the spirit of our Opus Dei, to which you have called us for your service and our sanctification. Instil in their hearts a great love for our Work, and an ever-growing appreciation for the beauty of our vocation, so that they may feel a holy pride in your having deigned to choose us, and learn to thank you for the honour you have bestowed upon them. Bless especially their cooperation in our apostolic work, and make them always share in the joy and peace that you grant us as a reward for our dedication” (AVP, III, p. 195).

With this consecration to the Holy Family, Saint Josemaría reinforced the place of the Holy Family of Nazareth — the “trinity on earth,” as he liked to call them — in the spiritual life of the faithful of Opus Dei, both celibate and married. Years later, he would tell them: “Make a greater effort to seek the presence, conversation, relationship and intimacy with God our Lord, One and Three, through family devotion to the ‘trinity on earth’: let this habitual confidence with Jesus, Mary and Joseph be for us and for those around us like a continual catechesis, an open book that helps us to take part in the mercifully redemptive mysteries of God made Man” (Letter, 14-II-1974, no. 1; AVP, III, p. 687).

At the end of his life, he presented this devotion and the contemplation of this mystery as a royal road to God: “I try to reach the Trinity of Heaven through that other trinity of

earth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They seem more accessible. Jesus, who is *perfectus Deus* and *perfectus Homo*. Mary, who is a woman, the purest creature, the greatest: greater than her, only God. And Joseph, who is close to Mary: pure, manly, prudent, strong. Oh my God! What models!” (“Prayer”, 28-III-1975; Bernal, 1976, p. 319).

2. Consecration to the Most Sweet Heart of Mary (1951)

The second consecration took place on 15 August 1951, in the Shrine of Loreto. In the preceding months, the founder had a presentiment that a grave threat was hanging over the Work, based on a number of signs which, to varying degrees, seemed to point in that direction. But since he had no conclusive proof and did not

know to whom he could turn in order to act and dispel the danger, his inner anxiety had no outlet. At last, he asked all the members of Opus Dei to pray the aspiration, *Cor Mariæ dulcissimum, iter para tutum!* (“Most sweet Heart of Mary, prepare for us a safe way!”) and decided to consecrate the Work to the Most Sweet Heart of Mary. He chose the Shrine of Loreto, where the Holy House is venerated, to carry out the consecration, using spontaneous words as he celebrated Mass. Afterwards, he composed a formula and indicated that it should be renewed annually on 15 August.

Several months later, the threat that Saint Josemaría had sensed came to light, thanks to various circumstances, among them a warning from Blessed Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan. According to the available information, it was an attempt to

revise the juridical status of Opus Dei (which had been definitively approved by the Pope only a year earlier) in order to alter it substantially, even to the point of dispensing with the founder. After a firm protest from Msgr. Escrivá, addressed in a letter to the Pope, Pius XII put an end to any procedure that might have been underway, and the matter was closed.

This consecration is in harmony with the deep Marian spirit that characterises the spiritual life of the members of Opus Dei, and served to reaffirm something that had been lived from the beginning: placing the Work and its apostolates under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In its historical context, it should be remembered that Pius XII consecrated the whole of humanity to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1942, and in 1948 invited all dioceses, parishes, and Catholic families to

make that same consecration
(*Encyclical Auspicia Quaedam*, 1 May 1948).

Although Saint Josemaría did not establish a direct link with that papal request, connected with the peace of the world, the idea was in the air and may well have inspired the founder, faced with the grave need the Work was going through. Moreover, on 15 August 1951, the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, made by Pius XII on 1 November 1950, was still recent, making it a doubly fitting date for the consecration of Opus Dei.

3. Consecration to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (1952)

On 26 October 1952, the solemnity of Christ the King, Saint Josemaría consecrated Opus Dei to the Sacred

Heart of Jesus. It was the third consecration within the space of a year and a half. One of the reasons, we know, had points in common with the two previous ones: a “contradiction from good people” (cf. AVP, III, p. 227), also connected with the juridical status of Opus Dei. Another was the grave financial situation of the Work, as it strove to complete the construction of the central headquarters and the provisional seat of the Roman College of the Holy Cross in Rome. The works could not be halted without serious economic and apostolic harm, but there was no money to meet the debts. A third motive was the petition for peace—peace of souls and peace in the world. For this reason, he linked to this consecration the aspiration *Cor Iesu Sacratissimum, dona nobis pacem!* (“Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, grant us peace!”), which, in the 1970s, he completed with the words

et misericors (“Most Sacred *and Merciful* Heart of Jesus, grant us peace!”).

The founder probably decided to carry out the consecration between April and May 1952. By June he already had the formula prepared, which he would use on the feast of Christ the King and which, from the following year, would be renewed in all Opus Dei centres (cf. documents in AGP, A-85-2-01).

On the morning of 26 October 1952, during his thanksgiving after Communion, he consecrated Opus Dei before an image of the Sacred Heart, in what was then called the oratory-library, adjoining the office of the then President General (now the Prelate) of Opus Dei. The oratory was still under construction, and the image was not the one that presides there today. This consecration also served to strengthen the love and

devotion to the most holy Humanity of Christ that characterises the spiritual life of the members of Opus Dei.

The formula clearly shows the interior, personal surrender to Christ that Escrivá de Balaguer wanted to express in this consecration. Indeed, it states that, in consecrating Opus Dei “with all its apostolic activities, we also consecrate to you our souls with all their faculties; our senses; our thoughts, words and actions; our works and our joys. We especially consecrate our poor hearts, so that we may have no other freedom than that of loving you, O Lord.” The final petitions highlight love for Christ and for his Mother, service to the Church and to the Pope, and apostolic zeal. They also contain a double petition for unity: “Keep us always united, through love, to the Work, our Father, the Father and our brothers and sisters; (...) establish in our

hearts the place of your repose, so that we may remain intimately united to you, and one day be able to praise, love, and possess you for ever in heaven” (cf. AVP, III, p. 233).

The choice of the feast of Christ the King was apt, since on that day the consecration of humanity to the Sacred Heart (made by Leo XIII in 1899) was renewed each year. Pius XI had established this when instituting the new feast in 1925 (cf. *Encyclical Quas primas*, 11 December 1925). It was, therefore, a day dedicated to renewing the desire to identify oneself with Christ and take part in the Church’s evangelising mission to build up his Kingdom — objectives with which Opus Dei fully identifies, and which the consecration of 1952 served to reinforce.

4. Consecration to the Holy Spirit (1971)

The final consecration of Opus Dei was made by the founder on 30 May 1971, in the oratory of the General Council at Villa Tevere, whose altarpiece is a stained-glass window depicting the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

The motive for this consecration was manifold. Above all, Saint Josemaría wished to implore the help of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity to inspire and guide all the Work's activity and its expansion "among souls of every race, language, and nation," and to foster the holiness of its members amid the doctrinal and disciplinary crisis that was affecting many Catholic institutions in the post-conciliar years.

The formula, which is the longest and most elaborate of the four, also includes a special petition for the

Church, the Pope, and the pastors. It is very likely that the founder also had in mind, in making this consecration, the new juridical status for Opus Dei, the attainment of which was ultimately key to safeguarding the Work's genuine charism.

Finally, this act reflects a renewed flourishing of devotion to the Paraclete in the founder's soul; a devotion long-standing in Saint Josemaría, but which in those years he experienced as a "new discovery," particularly regarding the action of the Paraclete in the Mass (cf. AVP, III, p. 609).

With this consecration, Saint Josemaría was not simply recommending one more devotion to the members of Opus Dei. His aim was to encourage a more *pneumatic* spiritual life, to foster in those who by vocation are called to seek

holiness a deeper relationship with the Sanctifier, who he often referred to as “the Great Unknown,” since He was, at least in popular devotion and even in some theological-spiritual reflection, relatively little known. From these years dates a homily dedicated to the Holy Spirit, which he entitled “The Great Unknown” (later included in *Christ is Passing By*), in which he emphasises the constant action of the Paraclete in souls and in the Church.

Bibliography: AVP, III, pp. 189–195, 195–202, 227–233, 609–611; Salvador Bernal, *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Apuntes sobre la vida del Fundador del Opus Dei*, Madrid, Rialp, 1976; Federico Requena – Javier Sesé, *Fuentes para la historia del Opus Dei*, Madrid, Ariel, 2002, pp. 99–101.

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