

2003

The Marian Spirituality of "Opus Dei"

Thomas Buffer

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buffer, Thomas (2003) "The Marian Spirituality of "Opus Dei"," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 54, Article 13.
Available at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol54/iss1/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

THE MARIAN SPIRITUALITY OF *OPUS DEI*

*Thomas Buffer, S.T.D.**

The date commonly given for the founding of Opus Dei is October 2, 1928. On that day, while praying in a Vincentian residence in the northern outskirts of Madrid, the twenty-six year old Father Josemaría Escrivá had an inspiration that would lead to the establishment of what is now called Opus Dei. When Escrivá died on June 26, 1975, there were over sixty thousand members of Opus Dei on five continents. At his beatification on May 17, 1992, over one hundred and fifty thousand persons filled St. Peter's square for the ceremony, and approximately 300,000 attended ten years later, his canonization on October 6, 2002. Today, Opus Dei numbers some 80,000 members worldwide, including both celibate and married laity as well as priests.

In little more than half a century, the young priest's vision has become a reality for thousands of dedicated laity and clergy throughout the world. Along the way, he and the members of Opus Dei have both endured much suspicion and enjoyed much success. The rapid growth, prestige, and influence of Opus Dei would alone render it worthy of consideration. If we move beyond these externals, we will find that the Work, as it is sometimes called, also has a distinctive spiritual teaching and discipline, closely tied to the person and teaching of its founder. This article considers both the external and internal manifestations of Marian doctrine and devotion in Opus Dei.

We also wish to ask what is new about the Marian practices of Opus Dei. In reading materials published by Opus Dei sources about the Work, I have been struck by the emphasis

*Fr. Thomas Buffer is a member of the faculty of the Pontifical College Josephinum (7625 N. High St. / Columbus, OH 43235 / tbuffer@pcj.edu).

on novelty. We are told that at the core of the organization is a new idea: all Christians, including the laity, can and should strive for sanctity in everyday life.¹ The claim is sometimes made that Escrivá anticipated the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the universal call to holiness. Prescinding from the question of the weight and validity of this claim, nevertheless I was inspired by it to look for possible novelty within Opus Dei's Marian practices. And, in fact, when I began to name and list these practices, I noticed that many of them, while not new in themselves, had been arranged in new ways, with special emphases. Upon closer investigation, it turned out that many of these emphases and arrangements within Opus Dei today can be directly related, not only to the piety of its founder, but also to events in his life, especially moments of crisis—either personal crisis, or critical points in the establishment and structuring of Opus Dei itself. We begin, then, by briefly recounting the life of the founder and the history of the founding of the Work.

1. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902–1975) and the Founding of Opus Dei

The earliest and most apparent example of a Marian element in Opus Dei, directly related to the life of the founder, was his recovery from a serious infection when he was two years old. The doctor who visited the sick infant told his mother that the boy would not live through the night.² She entrusted him in prayer to Our Lady of Torreciudad—the title under which Mary was venerated at what was at the time a small and obscure

¹As an example of this stress on novelty, see John F. Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith: The Early Years of Opus Dei (1928–1943)* (Princeton/New York: Scepter Press, 2002), 61–63, and *passim*.

²In the days before antibiotics, this was a very real threat. Consider also that three of Escrivá's sisters died in childhood (their names reflect the Marian piety of their parents: María del Rosario, María de los Dolores, María Asunción). Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 21: "... in Escrivá's young mind the series of deaths left a deep impression. One day he told his mother that the next year it would be his turn to die. She tried to calm his fears, reminding him of how our Lady had saved him from death as an infant and of how she had taken him to the shrine of Torreciudad. She urged him not to worry but to put his trust in the Blessed Virgin's care."

Spanish shrine.³ After the child recovered, his mother took him on horseback to the shrine to offer thanks. Years later, at the prompting of Escrivá, a very large shrine church and pilgrim center was built at Torreciudad, which is now the principal Marian shrine of Opus Dei.

Escrivá's parents were devout Catholics. The rosary was recited in their home, and on Saturdays they would go as a family to a nearby Church for Marian devotions, during which the *Hail Holy Queen* was prayed. This prayer was a favorite of Escrivá throughout his life.⁴ These Marian practices fostered by the founder's family have been codified in the official spirituality of the "family" he founded. On Saturdays, Opus Dei members are asked to perform some mortification and recite the *Salve Regina* or *Regina Coeli*.⁵ The priest who prepared young Josemaría to make his First Holy Communion taught him an act of spiritual communion that has also become part of the prayer life of the Work: "I wish, Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your Most Holy Mother received you, with the spirit and fervor of the saints."⁶ This prayer, found in prayer books published by Opus Dei, is often recited by members making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.⁷

In the course of his life, Escrivá made numerous pilgrimages to shrines of Our Lady. The first "Opus Dei pilgrimage" may be

³Torreciudad was the site of the final Christian counter-attack against the Moors in the eleventh century. Around 1083, a little shrine was built there, housing a statue of the Mother of God.

⁴Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 18, 243, 255, 256.

⁵"Tenero amore et devotione Beatissimam Virginem Mariam, Domini Iesu Christi Matrem et nostram, Praelaturae fideles colant. Quotidie quindecim mysteria marialis Rosarii contemplantur, quinque saltem mysteria vocaliter recitantes, vel, iis in locis in quibus pia haec praxis usualis non sit, aliam aequipollentem marialem precationem pro hac recitatione substituentes. Ipsam Deiparam, uti mos est, salutatione Angelus Domini vel antiphona Regina coeli filiali devotione honorare ne omittant; et die sabbato mortificationem aliquam faciant, recitentque antiphonam *Salve Regina* vel *Regina coeli*." *Codex Iuris Particularis Operis Dei* (hereafter CIP), par. 85. The complete Latin text of the CIP is published in Pedro Rodríguez, et al., *Opus Dei in the Church: An Ecclesiological Study of the Life and Apostolate of Opus Dei* (Dublin: Four Courts Press; Princeton: Scepter, 1994).

⁶François Gondrand, *At God's Pace* (New Rochelle: Scepter Press, 1989), 27.

⁷Interview with Dr. Robert Tatz.

said to be the trip he and two early members of the group took in 1933 to the shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles, near Avila. In later years he often reflected on this trip, and decided that it "would be a good way for members of Opus Dei to honor the Blessed Virgin in the month of May and to help their friends be more devoted to her."⁸ On their way to the shrine, they passed some wheat fields which reminded Escrivá of the Lord's words: "the fields are already white for the harvest."⁹ Consequently, Opus Dei members are not only encouraged to make a Marian pilgrimage every May, but also to invite others to accompany them, with a view toward recruitment.

The Spanish Civil War began in July, 1936, following a long period of political instability and cultural conflict. In 1937 Escrivá was in Madrid, where persecution of the Church made it impossible to conduct public religious ceremonies. Escrivá and seven others decided to cross over to Burgos, then in the Nationalist zone, where they would be able to carry on Opus Dei's apostolate. This required hiring a smuggler to guide them through the Pyrenees into the principality of Andorra, from where they could cross over into France and then down into the Nationalist territory. During this harrowing journey occurred the closest thing to a Marian miracle story to be found in Opus Dei histories. Escrivá and his companions were in an abandoned rectory, adjacent to a village church that had been sacked by the militia. Escrivá spent the night in prayer, weeping, torn between the desire to go where he could carry out his ministry freely and his sense that he should return to Madrid to share the fate of Opus Dei members and the relatives he had left behind. In his history of Opus Dei's early years, John F. Coverdale recounts:

Amid extreme inner turmoil, he did something he had never done before—request an extraordinary sign . . . Moved by his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who is invoked as the Mystical Rose, he asked her to give him a gilded rose if God wanted him to continue the attempt to cross over to the other zone of Spain.¹⁰

⁸Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 178.

⁹Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By* (Chicago: Scepter Press, 1974), 146.

¹⁰Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 245.

Early the next morning, Escrivá went outside the house, and when he came back he was holding a gilded wooden rose—a fragment of the altarpiece of the ruined church. He took this as a sign that they should continue their journey. According to Coverdale (who knew and worked with Escrivá), the founder rarely referred to this event, in accord with his general tendency to emphasize spiritual miracles over physical ones.¹¹ Nevertheless, even during his lifetime, the story was widely known within Opus Dei. (The church where the gilded rose was found was located in the Rialp forest; later Opus Dei members established a publishing house which they named "Rialp," with the rose as its symbol.¹²) The group resumed their trek, praying to Our Lady and their guardian angels for protection. After nearly two weeks, they arrived in Andorra and at once prayed the Hail Holy Queen. About a week later they were able to travel to Lourdes where Escrivá celebrated Mass.¹³

Escrivá often counseled his followers to count on Mary's intercession, especially in carrying out their apostolate. For example, in November 1939, Manuel Albareda, one of the first members of the Work, visited Zaragoza to recruit members there. His first act on arriving there was to visit "the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar to place in Mary's hands Opus Dei's future apostolate in the city."¹⁴

Opus Dei's growth in membership necessitated some form of canonical recognition. The 1917 Code of Canon Law contained no category into which Escrivá's vision would exactly fit, and Opus Dei often met with opposition from some Church officials. Escrivá relied on Our Lady's intercession as he labored to obtain official approval for the expanding organization. Many important dates in the history of the organization's "canonical path" coincide with Marian feast days.¹⁵ Initial papal approval

¹¹Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Scepter Publishers, 1985), 583: "I'm not miracle-minded . . . I can find more than enough miracles in the Holy Gospel to confirm my faith."

¹²Luis Carandell, *The Life and Miracles of Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer, Founder of Opus Dei* (Barcelona: editorial Iaiá, 1975), 187-188.

¹³Carandell, *The Life and Miracles*, 246-257.

¹⁴Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 328.

¹⁵Gondrand, *At God's Pace*, 27. See also A. De Fuenmayor et al., *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei* (Princeton: Scepter, 1995).

of the Work was dated October 11, 1943—at the time the feast of the Divine Maternity of the Virgin Mary (now January 1). The archbishop of Madrid applied the papal approbation on the archdiocesan level on December 8 (Immaculate Conception) of the same year.¹⁶ This action however was not the end of questions revolving around the structure and canonical status of Opus Dei. At various points in time, when these problems were proving especially difficult, Escrivá made a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine to ask for Mary's intercession. In 1950, shortly after Opus Dei received definitive papal approval, a plan was developed without the founder's knowledge to split the Work into two parts. Escrivá, deeply troubled, decided to make what he called a "penitential pilgrimage" to Loreto for the feast of the Assumption. On August 15 1951, he consecrated Opus Dei and all its members to Mary's Immaculate Heart. When he left the shrine, he was filled with peace and confidence. In the weeks to follow he would visit the shrines of Our Lady of Pompeii (Naples), Lourdes, and Our Lady of the Pillar (Zaragoza). At each shrine he renewed the consecration to Mary and prayed *Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum*.¹⁷ This aspiration has since found its way into Opus Dei devotional manuals. Not long afterward, Pius XII intervened to stop the plan to split the Work.¹⁸

Two decades later, in April of 1970, Escrivá again undertook what he also called a "penitential pilgrimage." He went first to Torreciudad and Fatima. At the first shrine, he walked barefoot up the still unpaved road, praying the fifteen decades of the Rosary. On reaching the chapel, he sang the *Salve Regina*. Similarly, he walked barefoot at Fatima. In May of the same year he

¹⁶Gondrand, *At God's Pace*, 199.

¹⁷Gondrand, *At God's Pace*, 242.

¹⁸Background and further details of this crisis may be found at an Opus Dei web site, www.josemariaescriva.info. There it is also noted, "From that time [i.e., the time of the pilgrimage to Loreto] he often repeated, and encouraged others to repeat, the aspiration *Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum!*" Escrivá recalled the event in a sermon for the first Sunday of Advent: "We stop in front of Mary, Joseph, and the Child, looking at the Son of God who has taken on our flesh. I remember now I made a visit—for a very special reason—to the Holy House of Loreto, Italy, on August 15, 1951. I said Mass there" (*Christ Is Passing By*, 12).

journeyed to Guadalupe, where he made a novena. On the fifth day, he prayed the following words, containing a reference to the custom of laying roses before the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe:

Our Lady, I bring you—for I have nothing else—thorns, the ones I have in my heart, but I am sure that with you they will turn to roses . . . Grant that we may have in . . . our hearts, little roses blooming all the year round; the roses of daily life, ordinary roses, but filled with the perfume of sacrifice and love. I have said little roses . . . for in my whole life I have only been able to do ordinary, everyday things . . . but I am sure that it is in this, my everyday, ordinary behavior, that you and your Son are waiting for me.¹⁹

From that day on, Escrivá exhibited greater confidence. In thanksgiving, he promised to place an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the crypt of the shrine church of Torreciudad. Before leaving Mexico, he saw a picture showing Our Lady giving a rose to Juan Diego, and said, "That's how I'd like to die, looking at the Blessed Virgin, while she hands me a flower."²⁰ Just five years later, on June 26, 1975, he opened the door to his office in Rome, glanced at the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the wall, and fell to the floor unconscious, stricken by a heart attack. He died the same day, and was buried the next day in the crypt of the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace in Rome.²¹

These events in the life of the founder have deeply influenced the spirituality of Opus Dei to the present (as will be discussed later).

2. Mary in the Writings and Piety of St. Josemaría Escrivá

References to Our Lady in Escrivá's writings are numerous.²² Looking over this body of work, we can identify the following Marian themes as especially frequent and important:

¹⁹Gondrand, *At God's Pace*, 303.

²⁰Gondrand, *At God's Pace*, 306.

²¹Cesare Cavalleri, *Immersed in God* (Princeton: Scepter Press, 1996), 240.

²²In fact, every chapter in Josemaría Escrivá's *Furrow* and *The Forge* ends with a reference to Mary. All of Escrivá's published writings are available on the internet,

— "To Jesus through Mary." The traditional saying (*Ad Jesum per Mariam*) is sometimes expanded: *Omnes cum Petro ad Jesum per Mariam*.²³ In other words, devotion to Mary not only brings one closer to Jesus, but also to his Mystical Body, the Church: "Mary continually builds the Church and keeps it together. It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the Mystical Body and more united to its visible head, the pope. That's why I like to repeat: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!"²⁴

— *Intercession*. Escrivá frequently recommends recourse to Mary's intercession when asking God for anything. She is a helping presence. "Before, by yourself, you couldn't. Now, you have turned to our Lady, and with her, how easy it is!"²⁵

— *Mary's Example*. She is an exemplar of purity, humility, generosity, and fidelity.²⁶ She is also a teacher of prayer.²⁷ In particular, she is an exemplar of the domestic role of women. "Just think, for example, of the marriage at Cana. Our Lady . . . was the only one who noticed the wine was running out . . . It is natural for a woman, a housewife, to notice something was lacking, to look after the little things which make life pleasant. And that is how Mary acted."²⁸ "We can't forget that Mary spent nearly every day of her life just like millions of other women who look after their family, bring up their children and take care of the house."²⁹

complete with a search engine, greatly facilitating research and analysis: <http://www.escrivaworks.org>.

²³Escrivá, *The Way*, 497, 833; also his *Christ Is Passing By*, 139, 144. This saying also forms part of the *Codex Iuris Particularis* of Opus Dei: "Haec semper Praelaturae christifideles in apostolatu meminerint: (1) zelus quo adurimur hoc unum quaerit, nempe ut omnes cum Petro ad Jesum per Mariam quasi manu ducamus[.]" (par. 111). A closely related idea is, "If you look for Mary, you will necessarily find Jesus" (Escrivá, *Forge*, 661). See also *Christ Is Passing By*, 11; *The Way*, 495.

²⁴Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 139.

²⁵Escrivá, *The Way*, 513; also 504, 514, 711. See also his *Christ Is Passing By*, 37, 140, 142; *Friends of God*, 155, 189; *Furrow*, 180, 555; *Holy Rosary*, Author's Note.

²⁶Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 172.

²⁷Escrivá, *The Way*, 502.

²⁸Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 141.

²⁹Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 148.

—*The Scapular of Carmel*. "Wear on your breast the holy scapular of Carmel. There are many excellent Marian devotions, but few are so deep-rooted among the faithful, and have received so many blessings from the popes. Besides, how maternal this sabbatine privilege is!"³⁰

—*Spiritual Family*. Escrivá's favorite image to describe Opus Dei was "family." His own mother and sister looked after the cooking and housekeeping in one of the first of Opus Dei's residences, and "the young members of the Work, who referred to Escrivá as 'Father,' soon began to call them 'Grandmother' and 'Aunt Carmen.'"³¹ Escrivá used the image of family with reference to Mary as a way to promote unity within the Church: "Seeing how so many Christians express their affection for the Virgin Mary, surely you also feel more a part of the Church, closer to those brothers and sisters of yours. It is like a family reunion. Grown-up children, whom life has separated, come back to their mother for some family anniversary. And even if they have not always got on well together, today things are different; they feel united, sharing the same affection."³²

—*Spiritual Childhood*. Escrivá encouraged his readers to consider Mary their mother in a very personal way, even to call her "my Mother:"³³ "[C]all on your holy Mother Mary, with the faith and abandonment of a child."³⁴ "Don't forget, my friend, that we are children."³⁵

—*Mary's beauty*. Mary is God's masterpiece: "How would we have acted, if we could have chosen our own mother? I'm sure we would have chosen the one we have, adorning her with every possible grace. That is what Christ did."³⁶ In addition to this appeal to the argument from fittingness, Escrivá appealed to Christian experience: "When you were asked

³⁰Escrivá, *The Way*, 500. See also his *Christ Is Passing By*, 142.

³¹Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 125.

³²Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 139.

³³Escrivá, *The Way*, 497.

³⁴Escrivá, *The Way*, 498.

³⁵Escrivá, *Holy Rosary*, 1.

³⁶Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 171. In the same passage Escrivá quotes St. John Damascene to support this line of thought.

which picture of our Lady aroused your devotion most, and you answered . . . 'all of them,' I realized that you were a good son: that is why you are equally moved—'they make me fall in love,' you said—by all the pictures of your Mother."³⁷ Mary's beauty is a reason for giving thanks to God.³⁸ Escrivá recommended glancing at an image of Mary or her Son as a reminder of God's presence.³⁹

Escrivá had specific ideas, related both to Christology and to the role of women, of the way Mary should be depicted.

His love for the Blessed Virgin Mary impelled him to keep a close eye on everything connected with devotion to her. For example, whenever he commissioned a painting or a statue of our Lady with the baby Jesus . . . he recommended that the artist try, as much as possible, to make Jesus look like his mother. Christ must, after all, have looked a lot like Mary, since his conception in her womb did not involve a man. . . . Our founder suggested placing in certain areas of our centers—laundry rooms and kitchens, for example—pictures that show our Lady doing washing, cooking, or feeding the child Jesus. In this way, those of his daughters whose chosen field of service is domestic administration can have a constant reminder of this ideal: that in all that they do to tend to the needs of the household, they should strive to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴⁰

Truly Exceptional.—Mary has been exalted beyond any other creature; Escrivá typically expresses this by the formula: "Greater than she (or: you) no one but God."⁴¹

Model of Chastity.—Escrivá exhorted his followers to appeal to Mary when tempted to sin against chastity, and this ad-

³⁷Escrivá, *The Way*, 501. See also his *Christ Is Passing By*, 178, and *Forge*, 491.

³⁸Escrivá, *The Way*, 268. Escrivá's "visual sense" or Marian devotion may also be at work in his remembering the story of the name of the shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles: "The statue [of Mary at the shrine] had been hidden during the wars between Christians and Moslems in Spain, and after a number of years it was found by shepherds. According to the story, when they saw it they exclaimed, 'What beautiful eyes; they are suns!' [Spanish: *son soles*]." *Christ Is Passing By*, 139.

³⁹Escrivá, *The Way*, 272; also his *Christ Is Passing By*, 142, and *Forge*, 73.

⁴⁰Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 139.

⁴¹Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 17, 171-172. See also his *Friends of God*, 276; *The Way*, 495-496; *In Love with the Church*, 39.

monition is found in Opus Dei's *Codex Iuris Particularis*,⁴² which he drafted.⁴³

St. Joseph.—While Escrivá's given name was José María, and his name was printed this way in early editions of *The Way* and *Holy Rosary*, he later took to signing his name as Josemaría, so as not to separate Joseph from Mary.⁴⁴ We cannot adequately present here his interesting teaching on St. Joseph; suffice it to note that Joseph is closely associated with Mary. "I don't agree with the traditional picture of St. Joseph as an old man, even though it may have been prompted by a desire to emphasize the perpetual virginity of Mary. I see him as a strong young man, perhaps a few years older than our Lady, but in the prime of his life . . . Joseph had a young heart and a young body when he married Mary, when he learned of the mystery of her divine motherhood, when he lived in her company, respecting [her virginal] integrity . . . Anyone who cannot understand a love like that knows very little of true love and is a complete stranger to the Christian meaning of chastity . . . Joseph could make his own the words of Mary, his wife: 'he who is mighty, he whose name is holy, has wrought for me his wonders.'"⁴⁵

His writings provide insight into the special characteristics of his own devotion to the Mother of God. According to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, his immediate successor as the Prelate of Opus Dei, Escrivá's Marian devotion was subordinate to his devotion to the Trinity and to Christ.⁴⁶ He also remembered that the founder was in the habit of making many aspirations throughout the day, and advising others to do so. Many of these aspirations have Marian content. In these aspirations we can easily recognize some of the same leading themes found in

⁴²Ament Praelaturae fideles et diligentissime custodiant castitatem, quae homines Christo eiusque castissimae Matri reddit gratissimos, pro certo habentes operam apostolatus castitate suffultam esse debere. Ad praesidium huius thesauri, qui vasis fertur fictilibus, summopere conferunt fuga occasionum, modestia, temperantia, corporis castigatio, SS. Eucharistiae frequens receptio, ad Virginem Matrem adsiduus ac filialis recursus" (CIP, par. 84, nos. 1-2). See also Escrivá's *The Way*, 511.

⁴³Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 239.

⁴⁴Carandell, *The Life and Miracles*, 68-69; Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 140.

⁴⁵Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 139.

⁴⁶Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 123.

Escrivá's writings, such as the emphasis on Mary's intercession and spiritual motherhood.⁴⁷

3. Mary in the Life and Spirituality of Opus Dei Today

The Marian shrine of Torreciudad can be seen as an architectural expression of the place of Mary in the spiritual teaching and discipline of Opus Dei. As we have seen, the Marian practices of Opus Dei members have for the most part been harvested from the Church's rich store of traditional prayers and devotions. The event of the Second Vatican Council and consequent upheavals in Catholic life did not fundamentally change the content or direction of Opus Dei's Marian practices. Like many Church leaders, however, the founder of Opus Dei was concerned about the general decline in Marian devotion after the Council. He hoped that the new shrine at Torreciudad would show that devotion to the Mother of God was not a thing of the past.⁴⁸

There are many other Marian devotions . . . [but] (a) Christian doesn't need to live them all. (Growing in supernatural life is not a matter of pil-

⁴⁷Examples of these aspirations, as given in Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 133-137: Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation! Sancte Pater omnipotens, aeternae et misericors Deus: Beata Maria intercedente, gratias tibi ago pro universis beneficiis tuis, etiam ignotis. Domina, ut videam! (a paraphrase of the plea addressed to Jesus in the Gospel, "Domine, ut videam!" [Mt 10:51]). Domina, ut sit! Glory to holy Mary, and also to St. Joseph! Monstra te esse matrem! Mother, my Mother! Sancta Maria, refugium nostrum et virtus! Holy Mary, hold back the day! (Alvaro del Portillo explains both the historical background of this prayer and the meaning Escrivá gave it: "According to tradition, during the siege of Seville led by King St. Ferdinand III, some Christian knights invoked the Blessed Mother with this prayer, asking her to help them achieve victory over the Muslims. The sun then slowed down its progress, and they were able to defeat the enemy. Our founder advised us to use this aspiration to ask for help in finishing our daily work with order and tenacity" Cavalleri, 134.) Sancta Maria, filios tuos adiuva; filias tuas adiuva. Sancta Maria, spes nostra, sedes sapientiae, ora pro nobis. Sancta Maria, spes nostra, ancilla Domini, filias tuas adiuva. Sancta Maria, regina Operis Dei, filios tuos adiuva. Sancta Maria, stella orientis, filios tuos adiuva. Dominus tecum. Hail, Mary most pure, conceived without sin. The entire antiphon, "Sub tuum praesidium . . ." or simply the words "Nostras deprecationes ne despicias." Blessed be the Mother who brought you into the world. Cor Mariae perdolentis, miserere nobis; miserere mei. Beata Mater et intacta Virgo, intercede pro nobis.

⁴⁸W. J. West, *Opus Dei: Exploding a Myth* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Little Hills Press, 1987), 89.

ing one devotion on top of another.) I would say, however, that anyone who doesn't live some of them, who doesn't express his love for Mary in some way, does not possess the fullness of the faith.

Those who think that devotions to our Lady are a thing of the past seem to have lost sight of the deep Christian meaning they contain. They seem to have forgotten the source from which they spring: faith in God the Father's saving will; love for God the Son who really became man and was born of a woman; trust in God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us with his grace. It is God who has given us Mary, and we have no right to reject her.⁴⁹

While in other places Escrivá appeals to a personal experience of filial devotion to Mary, here he justifies Marian devotion in theological terms, appealing to Mary's role in salvation history.

The founder took pains to distinguish Torreciudad from other Marian sanctuaries. He said, half-jokingly, that the movement's new shrine would have only ordinary drinking fountains dispensing ordinary water.⁵⁰ Instead of miraculous physical cures, he wanted an emphasis on spiritual renewal and conversion: "The founder had prayed explicitly for spiritual miracles . . . to take place at Torreciudad. In 1968 he had said, 'We shall not ask Our Lady of Torreciudad for external miracles. Instead, we shall ask her for many interior miracles: changes of heart; conversions.'"⁵¹ In line with this emphasis, the crypt at Torreciudad houses forty chapels, each with a confessional, and every one of these chapels is dedicated to Our Lady under a different title,⁵² including Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Loreto, and Our Lady of the Pillar (we have already noted the Founder's pilgrimages to these shrines).

Escrivá's insistence on quality in sacred art meant that there were to be no stalls selling tawdry tourist souvenirs there.⁵³

⁴⁹Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 142.

⁵⁰Interview with Dr. John Haas.

⁵¹Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 140.

⁵²Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 139.

⁵³Those brave enough to view the items offered for sale at www.lourdesdirect.com will see what I mean.

The Marian imagery at Torreciudad is related both to central themes of Escrivá's spiritual doctrine and to his own history of travels to Marian shrines. The prominent feature of the huge church is a reredos carved from alabaster, over fourteen meters high, enshrining the original image of Our Lady of Torreciudad. The panels of the reredos depict scenes from the life of the Mother of God—the betrothal, the annunciation, the visitation, the nativity, the flight into Egypt. But perhaps the most significant of all for members of Opus Dei is the image showing the workshop in Nazareth with Jesus helping St. Joseph carve wood . . . as Mary, also working, looks on contemplating her son.⁵⁴ The images of the reredos echo the founder's teaching that holiness can be found in doing one's everyday work faithfully, and that Mary is a model of contemplation.

A second source for the Opus Dei's Marian spirituality can be found in the *Codex Iuris Particularis* which indicates how Marian devotion takes shape in the daily lives of Opus Dei members. There we find that the Prelature's official patrons are "the Blessed Mary Ever Virgin, whom it venerates as Mother," and St. Joseph.⁵⁵ Devotion to Mary is subordinate to the "root and center" of the spiritual life of prelatore members, namely, the Sacrifice of the Mass (par 81,1); daily Mass is highly recommended.

"The members of the Prelature (*Praelaturae fideles*) should honor the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ and our Mother, with tender love and devotion." This honor is expressed primarily through prayer. The founder of Opus Dei prayed the fifteen-decade rosary daily, and members pray at least five decades each day. In regions where the recitation of the rosary is not customary, they may substitute "an equivalent Marian prayer." To the usual prayers of the rosary, members customarily add the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be for the pope's intentions, the same three prayers for the local ordinary, and an Our Father and Hail Mary for the souls in Purgatory. Families are en-

⁵⁴West, *Opus Dei*, 89.

⁵⁵"Praelatura tamquam Patronos habet Beatam Mariam semper Virginem, quam uti Matrem veneratur, et S. Ioseph, eiusdem Beatae Mariae Virginis Sponsum" (CIP, par. 5).

couraged to say the rosary together. They recite the Angelus or Regina Coeli daily. As noted earlier, members try to practice some Marian devotion every Saturday. The *Salve Regina* is sung on Saturday evening during weekend retreats. Recourse to Mary is recommended as an aid to guarding chastity.⁵⁶

Special liturgical emphases found within the Work combine Marian devotion with a remembrance of the founder. Members observe certain Marian feast days because of events related to the life of the founder and to members of his family, as well as critical moments in the development of Opus Dei itself (cf. Part Two). Thus we find the observance of Our Lady of the Pillar (October 12) and Our Lady of Torreciudad (Saturday of the second fortnight in September). For family reasons, members pay special attention to Our Lady of Monserrat (April 27), the anniversary of the founder's cure from diabetes,⁵⁷ Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (July 16), the name-day of the founder's sister, and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (November 27), the anniversary of the death of the founder's father. Members keep the feast of Our Lady of Ransom (September 24), Our Lady of Loreto (December 10) and Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12), because of the pilgrimages the founder made to those shrines. Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15) is the anniversary of the election of Alvaro del Portillo as the first successor to the founder as prelate. Finally, members also mark Our Lady of Peace (January 24), the title of the Prelatic church in Rome, and Our Lady of the Angels (August 2), the title of the church at the major

⁵⁶"Ament Praelaturae fideles et diligentissime custodiant castitatem, quae homines Christo eiusque castissimae Matri reddit gratissimos, pro certo habentes operam apostolatus castitate suffultam esse debere. Ad praesidium huius thesauri, qui vasis fertur fictilibus, summopere conferunt fuga occasionum, modestia, temperantia, corporis castigatio, SS. Eucharistiae frequens receptio, ad Virginem Matrem adsiduus ac filialis recursus" (CIP, par. 84).

⁵⁷Peter Berglar, *Opus Dei: Life and Work of Its Founder, Josemaría Escrivá* (Princeton: Scepter Press, 1994), 280: "For ten years (1944 to 1954), Escrivá suffered a bad case of diabetes—an interminable round of exhaustion, impaired vision, special diets, and injections. After a severe hypoglycemic shock, he inexplicably found himself cured of the diabetes, but good health was never restored." Berglar does not give the date of the cure, which was April 17, 1954. While this date coincides with a Marian feast day, I have not found any place where this cure is attributed to a special intercession of Our Lady.

Opus Dei formation center in Rome. The meaning of these liturgical emphases is certainly open to interpretation. While some would view them as evidence of the value placed on Mary's intercession in the history of Opus Dei and the life of its founder, others might evaluate them more critically, as signs of an exaggerated personality cult.

In addition to liturgical celebrations, Opus Dei members recall and honor Mary through sacramentals. All wear the scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. They try to have a picture of Mary in every room of their centers, following the founder's recommended practice of glancing at a picture of the Virgin as a means to remain aware of the presence of God.⁵⁸

A central means of formation and support for Opus Dei members is the "circle," a weekly small group meeting. It includes a scripture reading and commentary given by the leader, as well as personal talks about spiritual and doctrinal matters, and an examen. The members of the circle pray for each other and take part in shared apostolic activities. Once a year, on the feast of the Holy Family, each circle recites a prayer of consecration to the Holy Family. This prayer, composed by Escrivá, runs in part:

. . . O Jesus, our most lovable Redeemer, who in coming to enlighten the world with your example and doctrine, chose to spend the greater part of your life subject to Mary and Joseph in the humble house in Nazareth, sanctifying the Family that all Christian homes were to imitate; graciously accept the consecration of the families of your children in Opus Dei, which we now make to you. Take them under your protection and care, and fashion them after the divine model of your holy family.⁵⁹

At the conclusion of any group meeting, such as a circle, the men say "Holy Mary, our hope, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us," and the women say, "Holy Mary, our hope, handmaid of the Lord, pray for us."⁶⁰

⁵⁸Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 138. The origins of this practice date back to at least 1940; see Coverdale, *Uncommon Faith*, 327.

⁵⁹Gondrand, *At God's Pace*, 240.

⁶⁰Interview with Dr. Robert Tatz.

Members of Opus Dei make a day of recollection every month, and a retreat of several days once a year. Normally priests of Opus Dei preach at these exercises, and nearly every meditation or homily they offer will end with a reference to the Virgin Mary, following the example of the founder.⁶¹

Clearly the Blessed Virgin was a constant presence in the life and activity of the founder of Opus Dei, and the Marian presence continues in the lives of Opus Dei members today. While Marian devotion within Opus Dei consists largely of pre-existing and traditional elements, the arrangement and emphases of these elements are new, and intimately bound up with the life of the founder and the history of the Work. Thus, the Marian elements in Opus Dei serve, not only to nurture a sound Catholic piety, but also to strengthen the unity among the members.

⁶¹Cavalleri, *Immersed in God*, 138.