

GOVERNANCE

1. All the faithful, by virtue of their baptism, have been configured to Christ and participate in the Church's mission. However, to administer the means of salvation – the revealed word of God and the sacraments – and to govern the People of God, Jesus Christ instituted a Hierarchy. He bestowed the power to teach, to sanctify and to govern the Church on the Apostles, with Peter as their head, and on their successors (the Roman Pontiff and the other Bishops). To help carry out its mission throughout history, the Hierarchy has created an organization that, based on a structure of divine origin, also has many changeable human elements. Those faithful who have received Holy Orders and hence belong to the Hierarchy, and all who in one way or another assist them, are bound to faithfully carry out this specific service to the Church. Nevertheless, all the baptized enjoy the same dignity as children of God and cooperate organically in building up the Body of Christ. The Church, then, is hierarchically structured, while at the same time there is a fundamental equality among all its members because of their common baptism. The Hierarchy exercises a mission of service for the benefit of the other faithful.

That part of the Church which is Opus Dei consequently participates in this reality. The mission of the Prelature – to foster the search for holiness in the middle of the world – is carried out by all its faithful. They do so principally through their struggle to attain sanctity and to carry out a personal apostolate, while living the demands of their faith in their ordinary daily affairs. The pastoral care they need to do this is, accordingly, provided by the Hierarchy: specifically, by the Prelate of Opus Dei, who is aided by the priests of the Prelature in administering the Sacraments and preaching the Word of God, and who exercises governance in accord with the criteria below.

2. The Prelate of Opus Dei is appointed *ad vitam* by the Roman Pontiff, through the confirmation of the election made by the General Elective Congress. He thus receives the *sacra potestas* necessary to govern the Prelature which, besides the mission of teaching and sanctifying, entails the duty to govern through advice, exhortations, laws and other acts of governance including, when necessary, the imposition of sanctions.

The Prelate, who is the proper Ordinary¹ of the Prelature, exercises his power in accordance with the universal legislation of the Church (in particular, the canons of the Code of Canon Law regarding personal prelatures and, by analogy, the norms on governing a diocese), the Apostolic Constitution *Ut sit* and the Statutes or *Codex iuris particularis* of Opus Dei, which the Roman Pontiff established when erecting the Prelature.

3. The Prelate's power of governance entails legislative, executive and judicial power. As is the case with all legislators other than the supreme authority in the Church, the Prelate exercises the legislative power personally. With regard to the executive power – the governance of the Prelature – he counts on his Vicars, who are always priests. A Vicar General assists him in matters that affect the entire Work, while a Vicar Secretary aids him in the pastoral work with women. In exercising the judicial power he can make use of a Judicial Vicar and of judges.

The Prelature is international in scope and is divided territorially into sections, called “Regions”

¹To understand this term one must keep in mind that the power of governance annexed by law to an ecclesiastical office is called *ordinary*. On the other hand, that which is conferred only on a person is called *delegated*. Ordinary power in turn is distinguished into *proper*, when it is exercised in one's own name, and *vicarious* when it is exercised in the name of another. The person who holds ordinary executive power is called an Ordinary. To state that the Prelate of Opus Dei is an *Ordinary* means that he holds an ecclesiastical office to govern the Prelature in his own name and not as a representative of another (e.g. of the Roman Pontiff).

(which normally coincide with a particular country). Each Region is headed by a Regional Vicar. In order to make it easier to know the people and the apostolates, the more developed Regions can be further divided into smaller territories that depend on the Regional Vicar. These are called “Delegations” and are also headed by a Vicar.

The Vicars, as Ordinaries of the Prelature, enjoy ecclesiastical jurisdiction within the limits of their territory and the functions they exercise. They are named by the Prelate. In keeping with the nature of a vicarious ecclesiastical office, they always act according to the mind of the Prelate: *ad mentem Patris*.

4. The norms found in the Statutes for the governance of the Prelature come from what St Josemaría understood as core characteristics of Opus Dei. Among these the following are especially significant: the family spirit that is lived in the Prelature; collegiality in the governance of Opus Dei; the spirit of service that inspires the tasks of formation and governance; and the freedom and personal responsibility that all the faithful in the Work live.

5. St Josemaría wrote that *direction in the Work is always collegial. We detest tyranny, especially in the exclusively spiritual government of Opus Dei.*² Collegial spirit, which takes on many different forms in the tradition of the Church, is a consequence of prudence and humility. It stems from the conviction that a person should not exclusively trust his or her own judgement, and should consider it necessary to consult others and take into account the differing points of view. Besides, although collegiality in the work of government may not always exclude mistakes, it does guarantee a greater objectivity in the decisions taken.

This principle of collegiality cannot be reduced to a series of procedural rules. It is the result of a spirit that has also been embodied in the Statutes. In particular, the Prelate and the Regional Vicars exercise executive power with the help of certain bodies which they must consult; and, in some cases, the consent of these bodies is required. For example, the appointment to certain offices mentioned here requires the participation of these collegial bodies.

6. The Prelate exercises executive power over the Prelature with the help of two governing bodies, one for the governance of the pastoral work with men (the “General Council”) and the other for the work with women (the “Central Advisory”). The General Council is made up of the Auxiliary Vicar, if there is one, the Vicar General, the Vicar Secretary, five other members and the delegates for each Region. The Central Advisory is similarly composed of eight women living permanently in Rome, and the regional delegates.

In a way similar to the Prelate for the entire Prelature, the Regional Vicar governs a region with the help of two collegial bodies: the Regional Commission for the men and the Regional Advisory for the women. The same structure is followed in the Delegations.

7. The pastoral care that the Work offers on the local level is organized through the Centres to which the faithful of the Prelature are assigned. These Centres are directed by a local Council so that at this level, too, collegiality is lived. Local Councils do not have power of jurisdiction and consequently their acts are not acts of ecclesial governance. The authority of the local directors pertains to the material organization of the Centre and the apostolic activities, and also to spiritual direction. Ordinarily the local Directors are lay persons.

8. The Prelate of Opus Dei is also President General of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. As such, he does not have power of jurisdiction over the diocesan priests who are ascribed to the Society. He carries out only those functions proper to one in charge of a clerical association. Consequently, the priests of the Society, each one incardinated in his respective diocese, are in no way under the jurisdiction of the Prelate. But they have the same vocation to live the spirit of Opus

² ST JOSEMARÍA, *Conversations*, 35.

Dei as every faithful of the Prelature.

The direction of the Priestly Society the Holy Cross follows more or less the same organizational structure as the Prelature and is inseparably united to it. Thus, the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross are ascribed to Centres directed by a local Council, and in each region of the Prelature the Regional Vicar is the counsellor of the society in that geographical area, aided by a spiritual Director and other priests.

9. Participation in the governance of the Prelature is always temporal (only the Prelate holds a life-time appointment). Those who are called carry out these roles with a professional outlook, knowing that they have to sanctify these tasks. Moreover, collegiality does not in any way diminish the personal responsibility of each member of the collegial body. Each person must act in the presence of God and loyally give his or her opinion regarding the decisions to be made. Likewise, each level of government has its own responsibility and should not refer these matters to a higher level body.

Government in the Church is a way to serve. St Josemaría expressed this in a very clear way: *If you are working for Christ and imagine that a position of responsibility is anything but a burden, what disillusionment awaits you!*³ That is why, in Opus Dei, those who are named to positions of government are not congratulated, since this is merely another way of cooperating in the mission of the Prelature. For the same reason, leaving a position is seen as simply changing the way one serves without this being in any way a demotion.

This spirit of service is carried out in the family environment proper to Opus Dei and, in a certain sense, proper to the Church, which is the family of God's children. Hence one should see the pastors of the Church as representatives of God's paternity. The awareness of being a family is lived in Opus Dei in an especially intense way. The Prelate is called the "Father," and official titles are not used for others in positions of authority in the Prelature. Those who represent the Prelate or assist him are treated with the same affection due other brothers and sisters who help the Father. Consequently we try to pray especially for them. But all the faithful are, as St Josemaría liked to put it, *both sheep and shepherd*. Those who hold positions of government need the formation and the help of the Prelature, and those who do not hold those positions also feel responsible for the sanctity of the others.

As has already been said, pastors of the Church and those who assist them are not "more Church," and logically the same can be said about the faithful of Opus Dei who assist in governing the Prelature: they are not "more Opus Dei" nor do they form a separate class. Like everyone they assist in carrying out the Prelature's mission, and they do so in this specific way.

A clear sign of the spirit of service that is lived in the tasks of government is seen in respect for the freedom of the faithful not only in temporal matters (over which, of course, the authorities in the Prelature have no power), but also in what refers to their spiritual life and apostolate, since what is proper to faithful of Opus Dei is that each strives to live their Christian vocation in the world with personal responsibility. That is why a characteristic of the government in Opus Dei is that *we give primary and fundamental importance to the spontaneity of the individual, to free and responsible initiative guided by the action of the Spirit, and not to organizational structures and tactics imposed from above, from the seat of government*.⁴ In this sense we can speak about the work of Opus Dei as that of an *unorganized organization* or as an *organized unorganization*.⁵

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³ ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Way*, 950.

⁴ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Conversations*, 19.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

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