The mission of the Prelature of Opus Dei

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In this paper I am going to deal with a question that is central to the whole theme of this Study Day on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the execution of the Boll Ut sit by which Pope John Paul II established Opus Dei as a Personal Prelature—the mission of Opus Dei. The lecture will be structured around three main points. First, I will look at some aspects of the mission and structure of the Church in general. Then, I will set out certain fundamental elements of the specific mission of Opus Dei. Lastly, I will reflect on the way in which Opus Dei’s mission and structure fit into those of the Church in continuity and harmony.

1. The nature, mission and structure of the Church

Twentieth-century theology has provided an unprecedented wealth of semantic and theological insights for reflection on the nature of the Church. The culminating point of all this can be found in Vatican II’s Constitution Lumen gentium, which offers a wide range of imagery of Biblical origin that can be
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1. I would like to express my thanks for the observations and help I received in drafting this lecture from Professors Eduardo Baura, Philip Goyret and Antonio Miralles.
applied in analogous terms to the Church. It speaks, for example, of the sheepfold whose door is Christ, the field of God, the house or building of God, his family, the Temple of God, the “Jerusalem which is above” which is our mother and is described as “the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb”, Christ. At a more fundamental level the Constitution dwells on the Church as the “Body of Christ”, a classical image well described elsewhere, and the “People of God”, an image developed at length in the second chapter of *Lumen gentium*.

### 1.1 The “nature” of the Church

Despite the semantic and theological richness of the figures of the Church which I have just mentioned, the study of her nature and activity cannot remain exclusively at this level, which tends to be abstract and symbolic. This is for two reasons.

The first is that the Church’s divine and invisible aspect (considered in a special way in the first chapter of *Lumen gentium*) is made present in a visible, historical and corporeal manner, in a way comparable to that of the incarnation of the Eternal Word in human flesh. But the former aspect is not simply to be identified with the latter, just as the soul may not be completely identified with the body. The vivifying and

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4. In *Lumen gentium* we read: “the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (cf. Eph 4:16)” (n. 8).
5. The parallel between invisible/visible Church and soul/body is a classical one: cf. P. O’CALLAGHAN, “The Mediation of Justification and Justification of
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salvific action of the Spirit of God does not coincide completely with the activity of the visible and hierarchical organization of the Church. The link between the invisible and visible aspects is dealt with in depth in a key paragraph of Lumen gentium (n. 8). Historically, the relationship between “invisible” and “visible” in the Church has been seen in a variety of different ways in theological and canonical thinking; and with regard to the relationship between the Church and civil society in particular, history reveals a whole range of possible forms of interaction. This is due not only to the different possible theological approaches towards the Church. It is the paradoxical result of the fact that the Church always has the same nature (the People of God, the Body of Christ, vivified by the Spirit) while at the same time at the empirical and tangible level she is presented to people, times, culture, etc., in a great variety of ways. The visibility of the Church differs according to the different situations in which she acts. For this reason it is not surprising to find that every age has its own ecclesiology (or ecclesiologies); although rather than different ecclesiologies, it would be more correct to say that there is only one fundamental ecclesiology which appears in phenomenologically different ways according to the circumstances of the world in which the Church acts. This is so because the Church is a living reality—living because she is vivified by the Holy Spirit.

The fact that ecclesiology cannot be limited to describing the Church in abstract and univocal terms gives rise to a

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7. On the different sensitivities in the ecumenical sphere concerning the relationship between the visible and invisible aspects of the Church, cf. O’CALLAGHAN, “The Mediation of Justification and Justification of Mediation”
second difficulty, which follows on from the first. Specifically it arises in an ecumenical context, when the question is put as to the identity of the “true Church”, de vera Ecclesia. Among the various groupings of those who declare themselves Christians, we need to ask: which grouping is the true one, the original, that of Christ? Where is it that the universal saving design of the Father is made specific? Where does the Spirit of Christ operate? Among all the different visible manifestations of Christian life, it is not always easy at the empirical level to distinguish between what derives from the God of Jesus Christ and what comes from humans.

Some may argue that the question of the authentic, visible “subject-Church” does not matter so much, since what is more important is to identify the authentic “subject-Christians”. That is the now classic position adopted by the Calvinist theologian Karl Barth. He maintains that the Church is the sum, and therefore the result, of all the believers, those who have previously believed in the God of Jesus Christ. In her institutional aspect the Church would therefore have a predominantly associative character. In other words, for Barth the ekklesia would not convocate the people and unite them to Christ; it would instead be the fruit or result of such convocation worked a priori by the Spirit of the Lord.

According to Catholic ecclesiology, however, the “subject-Church” as such should be considered as something real and visible, albeit not only visible. In Christ the Church generates men and women to the divine life, while at the same time she gathers all believers within herself. In other words the Church is placed both “prior to” the believer and “posterior to” the believer. She is both Mother of humanity and

9. This is how the Decr. Unitatis redintegratio puts it: “What has revealed the love of God among us is that the Father has sent into the world His only-begotten Son, so that, being made man, He might by His redemption give new life to the entire human race and unify it” (n. 2).
People of God. Contrary to Barth’s position, therefore, we must say that the Church is recognizable not only in her members taken individually, but also in her visible institutional aspects. It has been traditional to see in the four “notes” of the Church—unity, holiness, Catholicity, apostolicity—a privileged path for authentically distinguishing and recognizing her presence.¹⁰

On the basis of what we have seen so far, we must conclude that it is not easy to speak of the visible nature of the Church of Christ, still less of her univocal recognizability. One reason for this lies in the fact that human sinfulness leaves its mark on the people and the institutions that go to make up the Church: she is sancta semel et semper purificanda [“at the same time holy and always in need of being purified”], as the Council says.¹¹ Another reason lies in what we have just seen, namely that the Church, living and always identical to itself, is involved—has to be involved—in the world and society in very different ways that vary according to times and circumstances. A third reason lies in the fact that the “heavenly Jerusalem” has still not come down to earth, and the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:21) has still not been revealed. The Church, as she awaits the glorious coming of her Lord, is still on a pilgrimage, on her way to the heavenly homeland, as chapter VII of Lumen gentium reminds us. “The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things.”¹² Thus the nature of the Church in all her motherly beauty will shine forth in a definitively recognizable way only at the end of time. For the moment, as Saint Augustine says, in a beautiful text quoted by the Council, the Church

¹⁰. There are some interesting considerations on the four notes in S. DIANICH and S. NOCETI, Trattato sulla Chiesa, pp. 308–381.
¹². Lumen gentium, n. 48.
“presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God.”

1.2 The epistemological priority of the Church’s mission

This reflection leads us to an important conclusion: since we are not able to determine with complete clarity the visible and recognizable nature of the Church by examining the extraordinary variety of her activities, we are obliged to look to her ultimate destiny, her end, in order to fully understand her nature. In other words, we ask ourselves not only what is the Church, but also why does the Church exist, what purpose does she have, what is the mission Christ has entrusted to her? And the mission of the Church, as recent Magisterium has stressed on repeated occasions, is evangelization, aimed above all at establishing a perpetual communion of man with the Trinity, and then the renewal in Christ of the whole created temporal order. The Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhöffer, in a letter written from prison during World War II, put it in a way that is typically his: “The church is a church only if it exists for others.”

Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi (1975) explains that the Church’s mission is identical to that of Christ. She takes her origin from the mission of her Lord. We read in one extract: “[...] ‘the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.’ It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His

death and glorious resurrection."\textsuperscript{15} Similar statements are to be found in other Church documents, especially John Paul II’s Encyclical \textit{Redemptoris missio} (1990) and the recent Note from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on \textit{Some Aspects of Evangelization}.\textsuperscript{16}

In summary, it is the development of the Church’s \textit{mission}—which is the extension in time and history of the mission Christ received from the Father—that makes her definitively recognizable as Church: indeed, it is her mission that carries her forward and gives her life, expressing with ever more intensity her motherly beauty.

In the light of all we have said up to now, it is interesting to reread the opening section of the constitution \textit{Lumen gentium}, to which we have already referred several times: "Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod [...] eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission."\textsuperscript{17} To put it briefly: since the Church’s mission is none other than that of Christ, the Council wishes to ensure that the Church, in the content and realization of her visible activity, in her presence in the world, in her mission, reflects her nature—which lives off the light and saving strength of her Lord—as faithfully as possible. This may be called the epistemological priority of mission.


\textsuperscript{16} CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization, December 3, 2007.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Lumen gentium}, n. 1.
1.3 **The Church’s mission and her fundamental structure**

Before going any further we need to make an important observation. The Catholic theologian Karl Rahner in his ecclesiology attempted to give full weight to what we have just seen, namely that it is the mission of the Church that should determine her fundamental structure, her concrete action, the goals she is meant to attain, and not the other way round. In this way the Church’s inherent vitality is expressed in such a manner as to enable her to respond quickly and efficiently to the challenges of every age, every culture, every situation. For this reason Rahner speaks, for example, of the sacramentality of the Church *as such* (he calls the Church *Ursakrament*), at the same time as he relativizes the value of the individual sacraments, which arise in time and acquire their structure in indirect dependence on Christ. In short, the mission is the substance, the structure the accident.

However, the Church’s structure should not be radically subordinated to her mission, as this relativizing approach of Rahner suggests. The structure is there precisely to make clear and express her mission, both in its content and in the manner in which it is to be carried out. To put it differently, both mission and (in its basic outline) structure were given by Christ. This is a necessary consequence of the close continuity existing between Christ’s mission and that of the Church. In fact there are true and proper actions of Christ that take place in the life of the Church, specifically in the celebration of the individual sacraments and the authoritative preaching of the word of God. These are not simply

20. Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing by*, n. 106, states: “You cannot separate the fact that Christ is God from his role as redeemer.” Cf. *ibid.*, n. 122. The same could be said analogously of the Church.
actions of the Church, the fruit of initiatives that she may plan according to circumstances; they are actions of Christ, which the Church not only celebrates, but actually receives and makes her own.

Thus we could say that while the Church’s *visible activity* is presented in all sorts of ways throughout history, her fundamental *structure* must remain the same, insofar as it expresses her *mission* and the different forms it takes. What is the best way for the Church’s fundamental structure to make clear and express her mission? This is a far-reaching question which we cannot deal with in detail here. The Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* of the Second Vatican Council gives a densely argued response to the question. There we read: “The mission of the Church pertains to the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ and by His grace. The apostolate of the Church and of all its members is primarily designed to manifest Christ’s message by words and deeds and to communicate His grace to the world. This is done mainly through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, entrusted in a special way to the clergy, wherein the laity also have their very important roles to fulfill if they are to be ‘fellow workers for the truth’ (3 Jn 8). It is especially on this level that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are mutually complementary.”

21. Decr. *Apostolicam actuositatem* (1965), n. 6. The Decree explains the “temporal” aspects of this mission: “Christ’s redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel” (n. 5). In the same document we read: “The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate, which the Church carries on in various ways through all her members. For the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate” (n. 2); cf. also nn. 5 and 7.
1.4 The structural minister–faithful relationship

In my opinion this conciliar text contains the fundamental elements of the innate structure of the Church which Christ founded and in which he continues to act through the Spirit. The sacred minister, the priest, makes Christ present in an immediate and direct way; only he can do so. In the priest Christ acts directly. However, the Church’s sanctifying mission must necessarily affect the world—created by God, though damaged by sin—in all its breadth and complexity, material and spiritual. It is here that the role of the lay faithful becomes indispensable. We can understand why Lumen gentium chose to speak of the secular character that distinguishes the activity of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world, an expression later taken up by the post-synodal Exhortation Christifideles laici.22 “The apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are mutually complementary,” said the text we have just quoted from Apostolicam actuositatem.23 In fact, for the Church to be able to carry out the mission of Christ to the world in a suitable way, the lay faithful have absolute need of the ministerial priesthood, in order to become Christian, and, on this basis, to be able to exercise their royal priesthood vis-à-vis the world. The priests, for their part, “need” the faithful: on the one hand because their ministry is carried out for the sanctification of the faithful (should they not carry out this function, their ordination would be superfluous), and on the other, because it is not


24. When we speak here of the “priest” we are referring to the entire ministerial–sacramental hierarchical structure of the Church: deacons and priests in cooperation with their Bishops, who are in turn united in the College of Bishops, under the primacy of the Successor of Peter, acting principally through the seven sacraments and the word of God.
possible for them (nor is it fitting) to attend to every aspect of the Church’s mission in the middle of the world.  

In summary, from New Testament times the fundamental structure of the Church of Christ can be seen in the fundamental minister–faithful relationship, which makes it possible for her to carry out her mission in the middle of the most varied circumstances.

2. Opus Dei’s mission

Twenty-five years ago, on March 19, 1983, the execution took place of the Papal Bull Ut sit, by which, on the preceding November 28, the Holy Father John Paul II had established Opus Dei as a personal prelature. Guided by this brief but densely packed document I will attempt to identify the central aspects of the Prelature’s mission and structure, and its place in the Church.

2.1 The purpose of the establishment of Opus Dei as a personal prelature

The introduction to Lumen gentium, quoted above, talks of the Church’s pressing need to reflect to humanity as faithfully and effectively as possible the light of Christ that illuminates her, and to communicate the saving strength that fills her: “The present-day conditions of the world,” the Constitution
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goes on to say, “add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men […] might […] attain fuller unity in Christ.”28 The first words of Ut sit, in my opinion, present a response to this desire of the Council Fathers expressed in the introduction to Lumen gentium, and perhaps in some way reflect that same desire: “With very great hope, the Church directs its attention and maternal care to Opus Dei,” we read, “which—by divine inspiration—the Servant of God Josemaria Escriva founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928, so that it may always be ("ut sit") an apt and effective instrument of the salvific mission which the Church carries out for the life of the world.”29 The same document explains that, twenty years earlier, Saint Josemaria Escriva, the Founder of Opus Dei, asked for an appropriate ecclesial configuration to be applied to the Work, “bearing in mind its true nature and theological characteristics, and with a view to a greater apostolic effectiveness.”30

Put briefly, the establishment of Opus Dei as a personal prelature is an act fully in keeping with the spirit which inspired the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiological reflection: ensuring that the Church in her visible action should be a faithful reflection of the salvific and illuminating activity of Christ.

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Ut sit goes on to express in a succinct manner the fundamental elements of Opus Dei’s mission, history and spirit. It is interesting to note how from the outset it intends to deal with the nature of Opus Dei and its place in the Church precisely from the starting-point of its mission. The second paragraph of Ut sit reads: “From its beginnings, this Institution has in fact striven, not only to illuminate with new lights the mission of the laity in the Church and in society, but also

29. Ut sit, AAS 75 [1983], p. 423.
30. Ibid.
to put it into practice; it has also endeavored to put into practice the teaching of the universal call to sanctity, and to promote at all levels of society the sanctification of ordinary work, and by means of ordinary work.” 31 According to the document, therefore, there are four things for which Opus Dei has striven: to illuminate the mission of the laity in the Church and in society; to put this mission into practice, in a specific way; also to put into practice the universal call to sanctity; and to promote the sanctification of work.

Clearly these are elements that correspond to what the Church has taught in the conciliar documents with regard to the overall mission entrusted to her by Christ: we could think in particular of the doctrine on the universal call to holiness in Lumen gentium, the sanctification of the world and work in Gaudium et spes, and the apostolate of the laity in Apostolicam actuositatem. However, according to Ut sit what is special about Opus Dei regarding the conciliar teaching is not so much the novelty of its message, but the fact that Opus Dei strives to put into practice the Church’s mission, to promote its effective accomplishment, to “serve the Church as the Church wishes to be served”, 32 as Saint Josemaria would often say. It is not that the Work devotes itself to offering further theoretical insights into the conciliar message, nor that it adds any new elements, but rather that it plays its part, alongside all other Christian believers, in putting it into practice.

We should also bear in mind that when reference is made to the “novelty” of Opus Dei, this should be understood in the sense of Saint Josemaria’s expression: it is “as old and as new as the Gospel”. 33 Indeed, the fact that its faithful strive to live holy lives (Ut sit speaks of “sanctification of

31. Ibid.
32. “The sole ambition, the sole desire of Opus Dei and of each of its children is to serve the Church as the Church wishes to be served, within the specific vocation God has given us”: SAINT JOSEMARIA, Letter, May 31, 1943, n. 1.
ordinary work, and by means of ordinary work”) serves to enrich and further develop the Church’s own understanding of herself. *Ut sit* states that Opus Dei’s efforts “illuminate with new lights the mission of the laity in the Church and in society”; and indeed, from the very start of its foundation the Work has helped and continues to help the Church to understand herself ever better, to recall the universal call to holiness, to make her true nature ever clearer.

Summing up we can say that Opus Dei’s mission substantially coincides with that of the Church. It wishes to be, quite simply, a little part of the Church.34

2.3 *An appropriate structure*

To be able to carry out its mission effectively Opus Dei needs an operative structure that is fundamentally in conformity with that of the Church herself. In reality, prior to the establishment of Opus Dei as a personal prelature such a fundamental structure already existed. From its very beginnings the Founder saw the Work as a body of priests and laity united among themselves by vocation and by mission.35 To be able to carry out its mission in an effective and lasting fashion, while adapting itself to the very different circumstances of countries and cultures, the prelature’s structure must reflect the structural minister–lay faithful relationship that distinguishes the Church herself. Opus Dei acts, as we read in the third paragraph of *Ut sit*, “as an apostolic organism made up of priests and laity, both men and women, which is at the same time organic and undivided—that is to say, as an institution endowed with a unity of spirit, of aims,

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35. While being in a pre-eminent way an ecclesial reality dedicated to the promotion of the laity, the need for the presence of priests within the Work was felt by Saint Josemaria from the outset: cf. A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, Vol. 1 (Princeton, 2001), pp. 339 ff.
of government and of formation”. Made up of priests and laity; in this simple expression we can identify the fundamental structure of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

3. Opus Dei in the Church’s mission

In order to clarify certain aspects of the nature of Opus Dei, in this last part of my paper I would like to consider two specific questions that concern the mission and structure of the Prelature (there are others), to see whether or not it fits in a harmonious and continuous way into the mission of the Church.

1. It is well known that the sanctification of ordinary work, in all its implications, lies at the very center of the spiritual and apostolic life of the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. But is it true to say that work as such, even though carried out in a Christian manner, pertains in the full sense to the mission of the Church? Or is it simply a particular aspect of the life of some Christians, who sanctify themselves through their work, leaving open other alternative areas as equivalent ways to Christian holiness? To put it in a different way, would it be right to think that the sanctification of work, although central for Opus Dei, is a theologically marginal phenomenon in the life of the Church?

2. Another question. The jurisdiction exercised by the Prelate of Opus Dei over the faithful belonging to the Prelature is of a personal kind, as the very term “personal prelature” indicates. This applies not only to the incardinated priests, but also to the laity who “dedicate themselves to the

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36. Ut sit, AAS 75 [1983], p. 423.
38. The Founder of Opus Dei speaks of the necessity of sanctifying work, sanctifying oneself in work and sanctifying others by means of work. Cf. Conversations, n. 10; cf. also the Homily “In Joseph’s Workshop”, in Christ is Passing by, nn. 45–49.
apostolic activities of the Prelature" to fulfill "the specific obligations undertaken through the juridical bond, by means of a contract with the Prelature," to quote *Ut sit* once more.39 The jurisdiction that the Church exercises over the great majority of the faithful, however, is of a territorial kind. A person’s belonging to a particular Church normally comes about and operates through domicile or quasi-domicile.40 It would therefore appear that belonging to the Prelature is to be distinguished from belonging to the Church in general, at least from the juridical point of view.

For these two considerations the question arises: are we dealing with particular commitments, which the person who belongs to Opus Dei must assume, but which have little to do with the wider mission of the Church or with the laity’s membership of the Church? In other words, could it be that incorporation into the Prelature of Opus Dei, especially in the case of the lay faithful, is marginal to or even in conflict with membership of one’s own particular Church? Or does it move in the same direction?

1. Let us consider first the question of sanctification of work. The fact is that Catholic theological reflection on work has been for the most part scanty and in general negative, even in recent centuries.41 Protestant theology has offered more positive considerations on the matter.42 However, the weightiest contribution to the theology of work comes, in my view, from the Biblical field, specifically with the increased theological importance given to Genesis’s description of man as being made in the "image and likeness" of God (cf. Gen 1:26 ff.). This definition of man was fully accepted by the

40. Cf. CIC 1983, cann. 12 § 3; 102; 372 § 1.
New Testament,\textsuperscript{43} the Church Fathers and the great theological tradition,\textsuperscript{44} but was commonly interpreted in spiritual terms, referring to the human soul and its faculties, and as a result the contemplative activity of humans. The text from Genesis, without denying this aspect which is well supported by the history of theology, indicates that the immediate consequence of the phrase “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” is the pressing invitation to man to “dominate” the earth. The invitation is accompanied by the divine blessing so that this activity might be fruitful and man might grow and multiply over the earth. In other words, man’s original and innate mission is carried out through human work, a participation in some way in the power with which God has created the world\textsuperscript{45} and with which he will, through Christ, bring it to fulfillment.\textsuperscript{46} Saint Josemaria was able to find in Genesis’s ut operaretur (Gen 2:15), understood Christologically, the basis for the theology of work.\textsuperscript{47}

Beyond the immediate dynamism of human work, therefore, we have to say that the mission entrusted to man in the beginning—a mission renewed by Christ through the redemption—is carried out by means of the work he actually does in the world, as he strives, always under God and with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} The notion of the image of God reached its fullest expression in Christ’s life of work (cf. Col 1:15).
\item \textsuperscript{44} Cf. the study by I. EGÚZKIZA MUTILOA, El hombre creado a imagen de Dios en la teología del siglo XX: las aportaciones de la teología positiva y su recepción en el Concilio Vaticano II (Rome, 2005).
\item \textsuperscript{45} Genesis speaks of God’s creational activity as “work”: Gen 2:1–3. In the same way Saint Josemaria speaks of human work as a participation in God’s creative power: cf. Friends of God, n. 57.
\item \textsuperscript{47} SAINT JOSEMARIA, Homily “Working for God”, Friends of God, n. 57. “Work is man’s original vocation. It is a blessing from God” (SAINT JOSEMARIA, Furrow, n. 482).
\end{itemize}
his aid, to establish the divine sovereignty over all things, so that God may be "everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:28). Sanctifying and sanctified work, therefore, is not a marginal activity in the life of a Christian. It is man’s innate vocation.

2. As regards the question of personal and territorial jurisdiction, it is fair to say that the basis for every jurisdiction over persons in the Church is their belonging to Christ, Head of the mystical Body, to whom each Christian is personally united through ecclesial faith. Every ecclesiastical jurisdiction is based on a personal, or rather inter-personal, reality. The believer relates to God in Christ in faith through the community of the Church.48 We may note in this regard the position of those who present the Church herself as a "person".49 In fact neither the Vatican Council II Decree Christus Dominus50 nor the Code of Canon Law51 speak of the territorial nature of the particular Church.52 It would be more correct to say that the particular Church appears, if anything, present "over" a

48. This is an aspect of ecclesiology brought out by H. De LUBAC in his 1938 work Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, 1988).
50. Cf. Christus Dominus, n. 11.
51. Can. 372 § 1, however, does speak of territorial membership. Regarding the origin of this canon, cf. the eighth directive principle for the revision of the Code of Canon Law: Principia quae codicis iuris Canonicorum recognitum dirigant, in Communications 1 [1969], p. 84, where we read: "Ecclesiae particularis certe certius hodie definiri nequeant partes territoriales in Ecclesia constituta, sed secundum praescriptum Decreti Christus Dominus, n. 11, singulae sunt ‘Populi Dei portio, qua episcopo cum cooperatione presbyterii pascenda concreditur [...]’. Cum tamen in determinanda Dei Populi portione, quae Ecclesiam particularern constituit, territorium quod christifideles inhabitant plerumque uti aptior haberi possit ratio, momentum servat territorium, non quidem uti elementum Ecclesiae particularis constitutivum, sed uti elementum determinativum portionis Populi Dei, quae hac Ecclesia definitur’”. On the importance of this principle, cf. the studies by A.M. PUNZI-NICOLÓ, G. DALLA TORRE, J.I. ARRIETA and J. MIRAS, in J. CANOSA (ed.), I principi per la revisione del Codice del Diritto Canonico. La ricezione giuridica del Concilio Vaticano II (Milan, 2000), pp. 549–666, and also P. ERDO and P. SZABÓ (eds.), Territorialità e personalità nel diritto canonico ed ecclesiastico (Budapest, 2002).
52. As was once the case: cf., for example, the expression of SAINT AUGUSTINE, Epist. 209; Pope INNOCENT I, Epist. 40.
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territory; the preferred definition for the particular Church is the *portio Populi Dei.* Any possible fundamental priority of territorial jurisdiction over personal jurisdiction could only occur in a (now outdated) theological context which in some way identified the Kingdom of God with an earthly kingdom. In everyone’s eyes the quite recent fact of globalization has rendered such priority impracticable.

At the same time, there is an important continuity between personal and territorial jurisdiction. Believers, united to God through the Church who passes on to them the divine life, act—or at least should act—upon the world to sanctify it and contribute to the establishment of God’s sovereignty within it. The life of a Christian, therefore, is normally lived out in the context of a territory. Consequently it is understandable that the personal character of membership of the Church should usually find expression in a territorial manner, always bearing in mind the Johannine warning that Christians are “in the world but not of the world” (cf. Jn 17:16). They are in the world to sanctify it, to transform it. Thus they contribute to establishing on earth, albeit partially and imperfectly, the sovereignty of God which will reach its fullness in eschatological times.

Rather than a territory, some authors suggest that the particular Church is the expression of a “cultural space” determined and constituted by a collection of varied social and personal relationships. From many points of view this is a valid and up-to-date view. However, it could indicate a unilaterally “associative” understanding of the Church, as a group of persons who set themselves up as “church” on the basis of their common spiritual or cultural preferences. That would be insufficient. As we have seen, the Church is not simply an alliance of believers, but as a Mother she actually communicates divine life to them, making them become

53. Christus Dominus, n. 11.
believers. That is to say, the "personalism" which constitutes the foundation of the Church's jurisdiction over the faithful does not come from the "base" up, but from Christ who "gives new life to the entire human race and unifies it".

To put it briefly, even though one's belonging to the Church may take on a variety of territorial (or cultural) forms, what it involves for each believer is the expression of a deeper belonging, of a purely personal kind. For this reason there cannot be any a priori conflict between belonging to a particular Church and a jurisdiction of a personal nature such as a military ordinariate or a personal prelature. In fact the membership of the faithful in Opus Dei is expressed in a markedly "territorial" way, not only because its faithful belong by full right to their own local Church, but also because they seek their own sanctification and that of others through their full insertion—dynamic and apostolic—precisely in that local Church, and not in spite of that insertion. Their belonging to the Work, therefore, strengthens their belonging to their local Church.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion: we have seen that the Church's activity, which has been extremely varied throughout the centuries and in very different human circumstances, nevertheless has a fundamental and invariable mission, as well as a fundamental structure that reflects it, both of these having been given by Christ. Then, following the main elements of the Bull Ut sit of John Paul II, we have attempted to show that the mission of Opus Dei, "a little part of the Church", fully shares in both the mission and the minister-faithful relationship of the Church. Finally, we saw that the specific elements (of which we considered only a few) of the life of the Prelature of Opus Dei and its members are not incompatible with the full presence of the Work in the Church, but in fact are harmoniously inserted within her.

55. Cf. footnotes 8 and 9 above, and the corresponding text.