

8-3-2007

Opus Dei and Christian Formation: Compatible with a Lutheran Understanding?

Timothy Winterstein

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, pastorwinterstein@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/stmsp>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Winterstein, Timothy, "Opus Dei and Christian Formation: Compatible with a Lutheran Understanding?" (2007). *Master of Sacred Theology Seminar Papers*. 8.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/stmsp/8>

This Seminar Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Sacred Theology Seminar Papers by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

OPUS DEI AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION:
COMPATIBLE WITH A LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING?

A Seminar Paper Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematics
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

By
Timothy J. Winterstein
May 2007

Approved by

Dr. Joel Biermann

Advisor

Dr. Charles Arand

Reader

CONTENTS

PREFACE	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
Chapter	
1. FORMATIONAL PRACTICES OF OPUS DEI	1
Josemariá Escrivá	1
Formation in Opus Dei	5
2. OPUS DEI'S FORMATIONAL PRACTICES IN LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE	15
Can the Practices be Fitted to a Lutheran Context?	15
Character Formation and the Two Kinds of Righteousness	15
Sanctification of Work and Mariology	19
Liturgy	21
Prayer	23
Penance	25
Theological Study	29
3. SKETCHING A LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF FORMATION	32
Baptism, Repentance, and the Lord's Supper As the Foundation	32
Building on the Foundation	36
Confession and Absolution	36
Liturgy	37
Liturgy and the Culture of the Church	38
Prayer of the Congregation and the Individual	40
Reading and Hearing the Scriptures	42
The Study of Theology	44

Conclusion.....45

BIBLIOGRAPHY 50

PREFACE

“Those who want to live their Faith perfectly and to do apostolate¹ according to the spirit of Opus Dei, must sanctify themselves with their work, must sanctify their work and sanctify others through their work.”² These words of Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, are a fitting “motto” for the work of Opus Dei. In the Roman Catholic Church, Opus Dei (also called simply “the Work”) is officially a “personal prelature,” which is like a diocese that is not bound by geographical boundaries.³ The members of Opus Dei are members of their local parish and subject to their local priest and bishop. Their activities with Opus Dei are then not in place of their activities locally, but above and beyond what they might do with their local parish.

There has always been controversy surrounding Opus Dei, but it has intensified in recent years, especially after the beatification and canonization of Escrivá.⁴ This criticism has taken form in books setting forth the secrecy and conspiratorial aspects of Opus Dei’s work both inside and outside of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ No doubt interest in Opus Dei has been heightened

¹ In Roman Catholic usage, “apostolate” is “an organization of the laity devoted to the mission of the Church” (“apostolate,” Dictionary.com, *Dictionary.com Unabridged [v 1.1]*. Random House, Inc., accessed 14 March 2007, available from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apostolate>).

² Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, #70, accessed 14 March 2007, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/70>.

³ The Vatican’s declaration on Opus Dei can be found here: <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=217>. The closest parallel for Lutherans is perhaps the LCMS’s English District.

⁴ Escrivá was beatified on May 17, 1992 (before a crowd of between 200,000 and 300,000) and canonized on October 6, 2002 (http://www.escrivaworks.org/doc/josemaria_escriva).

⁵ Three of the most critical books have been published or reprinted in the past ten years: Michael Walsh’s *Opus Dei: An Investigation into the Powerful, Secretive Society within the Catholic Church* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004 [originally published by Grafton Publishers, London, 1989]); Maria del Carmen Tapia’s *Beyond the Threshold: A Life in Opus Dei* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Co., 1997); and the most conspiracy-minded, Robert Hutchison’s *Their Kingdom Come: Inside the Secret World of Opus Dei* (New York: St. (continued next page)

as well by the popularity of Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*.⁶

While some may consider it important, or at least interesting, to know what, if anything, Opus Dei has to do with governments, assassinations, world politics, and the behind-the-scenes workings of the Roman Catholic Church, it is not necessary to examine those things in order to understand Opus Dei's view of Christian formation. There does not seem to be any controversy about what methods of formation are used; both its supporters and its detractors acknowledge the ascetical practices, including the use of the cilice and other corporal mortification. The critics of Opus Dei are more concerned with whether Opus Dei exhibits cult-like features in its secrecy and control of members, and whether Opus Dei is just a name for a conspiracy that reaches to the highest levels of church and government. But whether those claims are justified or not—I happen to think they are not—has no immediate bearing on whether the ideas on formation are useful in and of themselves.

This paper is an examination of the formational practices of Opus Dei and whether Lutherans and Lutheran congregations might profit from a more sustained consideration of what it means to be formed as Christians.

Martin's Press, 1999). See also Peter Hertel's critical essay, "International Christian Democracy (*Opus Dei*)" in *The Church and Christian Democracy*, edited by Gregory Baum and John Coleman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1987), 95-105.

The most recent account of Opus Dei was written by John L. Allen, Jr.: *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2005). Besides being the most recent, it is the most balanced of the books I have surveyed, neither fawning nor hypercritical.

⁶ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Joel Biermann. If not for his systematics classes, in which I was introduced to Adolf Köberle and *The Quest for Holiness*, and two courses in theological ethics during the summer of 2006, this paper would never have been written. It was in those classes that a false tension (life lived solely between Law and Gospel) that I had been carrying around with me since my time as an undergraduate was resolved, and the true tension (life lived simultaneously in the two realms of righteousness) was heightened. Dr. Biermann also served as my advisor for this paper and I greatly appreciated his comments.

I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Arand for reading this paper and for his feedback. Some of these ideas were further clarified thanks to his class on the Small Catechism and his article on the two kinds of righteousness. (Any remaining unclarity is, of course, on my part.)

Thank you to the “Thursday Night Conventicle,” past and present.

I would also like to thank my parents, who have been unflinchingly supportive, and in whose home and by whose guidance my Christian formation began.

Finally, this paper is dedicated to my wife, Tennille, and to my children, Lucia and Jonas. Tennille, you have been forced to endure not only the four years of the Master of Divinity program, but an additional year for this Masters in Sacred Theology degree. “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all” (Proverbs 31:29, ESV). You, my children, are too young to know how much time I have spent away from you, but, nonetheless, you have been affected by it. “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5, ESV).

CHAPTER ONE

FORMATIONAL PRACTICES OF OPUS DEI

The thesis of this paper is that most of the formational practices of Opus Dei are indeed compatible with a Lutheran understanding of formation. However, they are compatible only within the Lutheran framework of the two kinds of righteousness, so that justification and sanctification are neither separated nor merged into one. First, I will give a brief biography of Josemaría Escrivá, since few Americans are familiar with Opus Dei (outside of sensational contexts such as *The Da Vinci Code*) and even fewer with Escrivá. Second, I will describe the formational practices of Opus Dei according to Escrivá's writings and other works about Opus Dei. Third, I will evaluate these practices from a Lutheran perspective, with a view to developing an initial sketch of how Lutheran formation might take place in a parish setting. My sketch of Lutheran formation will constitute chapter three.

Josemaría Escrivá

Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born on January 9, 1902 in Barbastro, Spain to a family of devout Roman Catholics.¹ According to the information at the authoritative Escrivá website, when Escrivá was two years old he became so sick that the doctor expected him to die. His mother, Maria Dolores, promised the Virgin Mary that if Josemaría recovered, she would take him on a pilgrimage to the chapel of Torreciudad in the Pyrenees. According to the website, "The next morning the doctor returned to call on the family. 'At what time did the little boy die?' he asked. The boy's father [José], unable to contain his joy, replied, 'Not only did he not die, but

¹ The following biographical information is taken from the Josemaría Escrivá website, accessed 30 January (continued next page)

he seems completely recovered!”” Escrivá had three sisters and two brothers; all three sisters died in infancy or early childhood, causing Escrivá to compare his father to Job.

When Escrivá was sixteen (1918), he and his family were living in Logroño, Spain. One day, he noticed prints of bare feet in the snow, left by a Carmelite friar. This made Escrivá wonder what he could offer God in light of such sacrifices. According to Escrivá, this was the beginning of his desire to do something for God.

“Our Lord was preparing me in spite of myself, using apparently innocuous things to instill a divine restlessness in my soul. Thus I came to understand very well the love, so human and so divine, that moved Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus when, leafing through the pages of a book, she suddenly came upon a picture of one of the Redeemer’s wounded hands. Things like that happened to me too — things that moved me and led me to daily Communion, to purification, to confession, and to penance.

“I began to have intimations of Love, to realize that my heart was asking for something great, and that it was love.... I didn’t know what God wanted of me, but it was evident that I had been chosen for something.”²

He decided that he should be a priest, and his father, though disappointed, supported his decision. But his father also advised him to study law in order “to make these civil studies compatible with his commitments in the seminary.” Escrivá finished his first year at the seminary as a day student in Logroño before entering the seminary of San Carlos in Saragossa in 1920. In November, 1924, while still at the seminary, Escrivá’s father died in Logroño. “Still in mourning, he was ordained a priest in the chapel of the seminary on March 28, 1925.”

After briefly filling in for a priest in the small town of Perdiguera, he returned to Saragossa to finish his law degree. He then went to Madrid with the hope of receiving his doctorate of law from the Central University there. While in Madrid, he served as the chaplain for the Foundation of the Sick run by the Congregation of Apostolic Ladies of the Sacred Heart

2007, available from http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=35&id_scat=34.

² Josemaría Escrivá website, accessed 30 January 2007, available from http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=213&id_scat=35.

of Jesus. He worked with the poor and sick in Madrid and brought communion to them. Out of this experience he later said to members of Opus Dei who were called to be priests: “To serve is the greatest joy that a soul can experience, and this is what we priests must do. Day and night at the service of all — otherwise, we are not priests.” He did not, however, receive his doctorate in law. He was supporting his family, who had moved to Madrid in 1927, by teaching classes at Cicuéndez Academy and tutoring students.

On October 2, 1928, he reported that he had a vision of what his life’s work was to be. With the sound of the bells of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels (it was also the feast of the Guardian Angels) ringing in the background, Escrivá saw what he believed to be the divine plan for Opus Dei.

What did he see? In an ineffable way, he saw people of every nation and race, of every age and culture, seeking and finding God right in the middle of their ordinary life, their work, their family, their friendships. People who looked for Jesus in order to love him and to live his holy life until they were completely transformed and made into saints. Saints in the world. A tailor saint, a baker saint, an office saint, a factory worker saint. A saint, seemingly like everyone else around him, but deeply identified with Jesus Christ. A person who directs all his activity to God, who sanctifies his work, who sanctifies himself in his work and sanctifies others through it. A person who christianizes his surroundings, who with warm simple friendships also helps his neighbor to come closer to Jesus — someone whose Christian faith is contagious.

He envisioned a way of holiness and apostolate to serve the Church, for all of this was the Church and nothing but the Church. The will of God was clear: open up to persons of any age, civil status, and social condition a new possibility of vocation for the Church right in the middle of the street. It was a vision of the Church that promised to bear abundant fruit of holiness and apostolate the whole world over. This would come about because Christians in the world would be able to renew the world without separating themselves from it in the least.³

At first he thought that Opus Dei was supposed to be only for men (since Catholic organizations were and are normally either male or female). However, on February 14, 1930,

³ Josemaría Escrivá website, accessed 30 January 2007, available from http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=218&id_scat=35.

“while celebrating Mass, he saw further what God wanted from him. God wished the Work to develop its apostolate among women as well.”

Throughout the next few years, Escrivá gathered students around himself to visit the sick and poor, and he organized catechism classes in the slums of Madrid. It was among these college students that Escrivá began to devise his approach to Christian formation. In 1933, he began teaching supplementary classes on law and architecture to students in an apartment with the initials *DYA* on the door. The initials stood for both *Derecho y Arquitectura* (Law and Architecture) as well as *Dios y audacia* (“God and daring”). In 1934, he published *Spiritual Considerations*, which would form the basis for *The Way* (probably Escrivá’s best-known work).

Toward the end of 1936, Escrivá avoided being killed during the Spanish civil war by moving constantly and finally fleeing to the “White,” Nationalist half of Spain via France, arriving on December 2.⁴ He remained in the city of Burgos (the “White” capitol) for the rest of the war, though he wrote letters to those whom he had mentored, as well as to visiting bishops, and he gathered items for beginning Opus Dei again in Madrid. He returned to Madrid in March 1939 and led a retreat in June. In September, *The Way* was published.

In 1946, Escrivá traveled to Rome in order to seek papal approval for Opus Dei. Twice, both in 1947 and 1950, Escrivá received that approval. During the next years, Opus Dei expanded, with a new residence in Rome, colleges for men and women, and courses of formation for people from different countries. He also worked to start the University of Navarre (Spain) in 1952 and the University of Piura (Peru) in 1969. Beginning in 1970, he traveled on “catechetical trips” to many countries, speaking to hundreds of thousands of people.

⁴ During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Republican supporters massacred Roman Catholic clergy and burned down churches, convents, and monasteries (see the Wikipedia article on the Spanish Civil War, accessed on 14 March 2007, available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Civil_War).

Finally, on June 26, 1975, he was back in Rome at the Opus Dei residence. After returning from speaking to the women at the College of St. Mary, he collapsed on the floor of his office and died. Almost immediately, requests poured into Rome to open the cause of his beatification and canonization.

Sixty-nine cardinals, and approximately 1,300 bishops from all over the world, 41 superiors of religious congregations, priests, religious [e.g., monks and nuns], representatives of lay associations, civil authorities and thousands of others asked the Holy Father to open the cause of beatification and canonization, manifesting their own conviction that this would be a great good for the Church.

On February 19, 1981, Cardinal Ugo Poletti promulgated the decree that introduced the cause. On November 8, 1986, the evidentiary phase on the life and virtues of the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá was completed. A parallel process conducted by the archdiocese of Madrid had concluded on June 26, 1984. On April 9, 1990, the Holy Father John Paul II declared the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá. On July 6, 1991, in the presence of the Holy Father, the decree sanctioning the miraculous character of a cure worked through the intercession of the founder of Opus Dei was read. This concluded the steps needed for beatification.

A pontifical decree of December 20, 2001, recognized the miraculous character of a second cure attributed to Blessed Josemaría's intercession. This opened the door to his canonization, which was then scheduled by John Paul II for October 6, 2002.⁵

Formation in Opus Dei

Reading the works of Josemaría Escrivá,⁶ one easily sees that everything he wrote was concerned with the formation of Christians to live holy lives in the midst of the normal and the mundane. Whatever a person's job, or social status, or race, or nationality, that person is called to holiness. Although Opus Dei was founded over three decades prior to the Second Vatican

⁵ Josemaría Escrivá website, accessed 30 January 2007, available from http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=232&id_scat=35. At his beatification, between 200,000 and 300,000 gathered in St. Peter's Square (see n. 3 in the preface above).

⁶ Josemaría Escrivá's works are online here: <http://www.escrivaworks.org/>

Council, much of what was said in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) echoed Escrivá's work.⁷ Chapter II, Article 10 reads:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. Thus through all these works befitting Christian men they can offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as living sacrifice[s], holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 12:1). Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).⁸

Article 31 speaks directly of the vocation of the laity, and describes well the aims of Opus Dei:

But the laity,⁹ by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven.¹⁰

They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven.¹¹ In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope, and charity. The layman is closely involved in temporal affairs of every sort. It is therefore his special task to illumine and organize these affairs in such a way that they may always start out, develop, and persist according to Christ's mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.¹²

⁷ See William Schmitt's introduction to Vittorio Messori's book *Opus Dei: Leadership and Vision in Today's Catholic Church*, translated by Gerald Malsbary (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1997), ix; also Escrivá, *Conversations*, #72 (on Vatican II and Opus Dei), accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/72>.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 10. (I am using the edition edited by Walter M. Abbot, S.J. and Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher [New York: Guild Press, 1966]. I will cite the title and article number, since translations vary.)

⁹ Footnote 163 (p. 57 of the edition I am using) says this: "The laity are here defined not only negatively (as those not ordained and not in the religious state) but positively, in terms of their baptism and their active role in the people of God."

¹⁰ Cf. Escrivá, *Conversations*, #60, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/60>.

¹¹ Cf. Escrivá, *Conversations*, #59, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/59>.

¹² LG, 31. Cf. Escrivá, *Conversations*, #61, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/61>.

Article 36 speaks of “the faithful,” who “must assist one another to live holier lives even in their daily occupations” and instructs them:

Therefore, by their [the faithful] competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them labor vigorously so that by human labor, technical skill, and civic culture created goods may be perfected for the benefit of every last man, according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word.¹³

Much of Article 39 and following contains wording so similar to some writings of Escrivá that it must be considered that perhaps someone familiar with his work had a hand in its writing.¹⁴ For example, Article 40 says, “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples, regardless of their situation.”¹⁵ And later in the same article: “Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”¹⁶ Where some might have suspected Opus Dei of a departure from the hierarchical nature of the Roman Church, namely its emphasis on the holiness of every human state, the same ideas can just as easily be found in *Lumen Gentium*. “In the various types and duties of life, *one and the same holiness* is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father, worshiping God the Father in spirit and in truth.”¹⁷ In what might have been a direct quote from Escrivá, Article 41 says, “By their daily work itself laborers can achieve greater apostolic sanctity.”¹⁸ Finally, at the conclusion of the section on the “call of

¹³ *LG*, 36.

¹⁴ In fact, Opus Dei reproduces Articles 41-42 on its website here: <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=12203>. Also reproduced is Article 2 of Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) here: <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=12204>.

¹⁵ *LG*, 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *LG*, 41, emphasis mine.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the whole church to holiness,” it says, “All of Christ’s followers, therefore, are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their proper state.”¹⁹

These sections from Vatican II reinforce what Opus Dei is trying to do, but what specific formational practices are undertaken by members of Opus Dei?²⁰ Contrary to the insinuations of some critics, Opus Dei is quite open about its formational practices. Its website details what is expected of those who might want to join. Regarding “Prayer and Sacrifice”:

The formation given by Opus Dei encourages prayer and sacrifice in order to sustain the effort to sanctify one’s ordinary occupations. Thus members strive to incorporate into their lives certain practices of Christian piety, such as prayer, daily Mass, sacramental confession, and reading and meditating on the Gospel. Devotion to Our Lady occupies an important place in their hearts. Also, to imitate Jesus Christ, they try to acquire a spirit of penance offering sacrifices, particularly those that help them fulfill their duties faithfully and make life more pleasant for others, things like renouncing small pleasures, fasting, almsgiving, etc.²¹

And under the section “Spiritual Formation”:

The faithful of the Prelature [Opus Dei] attend weekly classes called “circles,” dealing with doctrinal and ascetical topics, and a monthly day of recollection, a time for personal prayer and reflection on topics to do with Christian life. In addition, they attend an annual retreat lasting three to five days. Similar activities are also offered to the cooperators, to young people, and to anyone else who wishes to attend.

This formation is given in the centers of the Prelature and in other appropriate places. For example, a circle may be given at the home of one of the people who attend, and a day of recollection may be held in a church whose parish priest permits it to be used for that purpose.²²

A third description is given under “Commitments” for those considering joining Opus

Dei:

Members of Opus Dei participate in a program of spiritual, doctrinal and apostolic formation adapted to their circumstances and needs. Philosophical and theological

¹⁹ *LG*, 42.

²⁰ Besides these sections from the Opus Dei website, see notes 23 and 46 below.

²¹ Opus Dei website, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=12224>.

²² Opus Dei website, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=10878>.

instruction follows guidelines set down by the Catholic Church.

Commitments include a plan of spiritual life, centered on daily Mass, Holy Communion and frequent use of the sacrament of Penance, as well as reading Sacred Scripture and other spiritual texts, reciting the Rosary, and spending time in personal prayer. Through a life of joyful and generous self-giving to God and neighbour, they embrace the Cross of Christ hidden in the challenges of daily life. The Prelature's faithful also strive to carry out the duty that all Christians have of spreading the Gospel message effectively to those around them. This apostolic responsibility is an essential part of the Christian vocation, and thus of the vocation to Opus Dei.

Opus Dei encourages its members to fulfill these commitments with a spirit of complete freedom.²³

Escrivá's own writings give ample testimony to the means by which he wanted the members of Opus Dei formed. In the book *The Way*, which is the seminal work for those who want to understand Opus Dei, a number of the sayings (or "counsels," as their author calls them) address directly the notion of spiritual formation. In the section on character, Escrivá writes about the little things that form a person's character: "Don't despise little things, for by the continual practice of denying yourself again and again in such things — which are never futile or trivial — with God's grace you will add strength and resilience to your character."²⁴ The theme of the importance of "little things" recurs again and again in Escrivá's writings.²⁵

Escrivá also emphasizes the liturgy as an essential part of Christian formation. #522 says, "Have veneration and respect for the holy Liturgy of the Church and for its ceremonies. Observe them faithfully. Don't you see that, for us poor men, even what is greatest and most noble must enter through the senses?"²⁶ #523: "The Church sings, it has been said, because merely to speak

²³ Opus Dei website, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=48>. John Allen, Jr. gives a good list of formational activities as well in *Opus Dei*, pp.30-31.

²⁴ Escrivá, *The Way*, #19, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/19.

²⁵ E.g., *The Way*, #813-830.

²⁶ *The Way*, #522, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/522.

would not satisfy its desire for prayer. You, as a Christian — and a chosen Christian, — should learn to sing liturgically.”²⁷ #529: “‘The Mass is long,’ you say, and I add: ‘Because your love is short.’”²⁸ Finally, #541 speaks of the formation of practices necessary to the attendance at Mass:

Piety has its own good manners. Learn them. It's a shame to see those ‘pious’ people who don't know how to attend Mass — even though they go daily, — nor how to bless themselves (they throw their hands about in the weirdest fashion), nor how to bend the knee before the Tabernacle (their ridiculous genuflections seem a mockery), nor how to bow their heads reverently before a picture of our Lady.²⁹

Along with the liturgy of the Mass, prayer is an important part of the formation of *Opus Dei*. This means prayer in its normal form of spoken address to God, but it also means prayer in a much more comprehensive sense. For example, often work as a whole, offered to God, is seen as prayer: “Persevere in the exact fulfilment of the obligations of the moment. That work — humble, monotonous, small — is *prayer expressed in action* that prepares you to receive the grace of the other work — great and wide and deep — of which you dream.”³⁰ In a homily collected in the book *Christ is Passing By*, Escrivá writes regarding the “interior life,” one of the two “living supports of Christian conduct”:

First of all, interior life. How few really understand this! If they hear about the interior life, they imagine some obscure temple. For more than a quarter of a century I have been saying that such isn't the case. I talk about the interior life of ordinary Christians who habitually find themselves in the hubbub of the city, in the light of day, in the street, at work, with their families or simply relaxing; they are centred on Jesus all day long. And what is this except a life of continuous prayer?³¹

²⁷ *The Way*, #523, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/523.

²⁸ *The Way*, #529, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/529.

²⁹ *The Way*, #541, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/541.

³⁰ *The Way*, #825, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/825 (emphasis mine).

³¹ Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, “The Christian vocation,” #8, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/8.

In this same homily, Escrivá recognizes that this life of continuous prayer takes practice and that it will be difficult at first. However, the more prayer is practiced, the more it comes to rule a person's entire life. "Prayer then becomes continuous, like the beating of our heart, like our pulse."³² Finally, Escrivá writes, "Never be men or women of long action and short prayer."³³

A fourth part of Opus Dei's formation is penance. This can take as many forms as there are members. Pain, whether imposed from within or without, seems to be essential: "Let us bless pain. Love pain. Sanctify pain.... Glorify pain!"³⁴ It is battle against the temptations of the flesh. "Say to your body: I would rather keep you in slavery than be myself a slave of yours."³⁵ And: "In the deep pit opened by your humility, let penance bury your negligences, offences and sins."³⁶ Penance is realizing that suffering means purification: "If you realize that those sufferings — of body or soul — mean purification and merit, bless them."³⁷ But penance can be as simple as giving up extra sugar in your coffee!

We were reading — you and I — the heroically ordinary life of that man of God. And we saw him fight whole months and years (what 'accounts' he kept in his particular examination!) at breakfast time: today he won, tomorrow he was beaten... He noted: 'Didn't take sugar...did take sugar!'

May you and I too live our 'sugar tragedy.'³⁸

³² Ibid.

³³ *The Way*, #937, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/937.

³⁴ *The Way*, #208, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/208.

³⁵ *The Way*, #214, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/214.

³⁶ *The Way*, #211, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/211.

³⁷ *The Way*, #219, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/219.

³⁸ *The Way*, #205, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/205.

In point #180, under “Mortification,” Escrivá writes, “Where there is no self-denial, there is no virtue.”³⁹ Numbers 185 and 204 emphasize the small sacrifices, contrary to what the world recognizes as the real, “spiritual” sacrifices and heroics.⁴⁰

Escrivá also speaks of mortification as “prayer of the senses.”

In order to reach sanctity, an ordinary Christian — who is not a religious — has no reason to abandon the world, since that is precisely where he is to find Christ. He needs no external signs, such as a habit or insignias. All the signs of his dedication are internal: a constant presence of God and a spirit of mortification. As a matter of fact, only one thing is necessary, because mortification is nothing more than prayer of the senses.⁴¹

This unification of the outer life (life and work in the world) and the inner life (prayer, sanctification) is all part of Escrivá’s denial that the Christian life can, in any way, be “schizophrenic.” Speaking of the students and workers of Opus Dei, Escrivá said:

I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side, an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities.

No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics, if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit.⁴²

A fifth aspect (besides the little things of life, liturgy, prayer, and penance—including mortification⁴³) of formation in Opus Dei is serious doctrinal and theological study. While

³⁹ *The Way*, #180, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/180.

⁴⁰ *The Way*, #185, 204, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/185 and http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/204.

⁴¹ Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, “The Christian vocation,” #9, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/9.

⁴² Escrivá, *Conversations*, #114, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/114>.

⁴³ One aspect of mortification that has not been discussed in this paper is corporal mortification. Certain Opus Dei members (“numeraries,” who are celibate and make up only 30% of Opus Dei’s members) practice mortification of their flesh with items such as a “cilice” (a spiked chain worn around the upper thigh for two hours each day) and a “discipline” (a cordlike whip used once a week while reciting a prayer). (See John Allen, Jr., *Opus Dei*, 162ff.) While this form of mortification evokes interest because of its “medieval” nature, it does not seem to be an integral part of the practices of most Opus Dei members, nor is the use of such items confined to Opus Dei (Allen, 171-173).

Escrivá encourages piety as the “virtue of children,” he does not equate this childlike piety with ignorance.

We are to be pious, then, as pious as children, but not ignorant. Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously — all of which means theology. Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians.

Our desire to advance in theological knowledge, in sound, firm Christian doctrine is sparked, above all, by the will to know and love God.⁴⁴

Even this study, though, is not isolated from the rest of the spiritual life:

To work in this way is to pray. To study thus is likewise prayer. Research done with this spirit is prayer too. We are always doing the same thing, for everything can be prayer, all activity can and should lead us to God, nourish our intimate dealings with him, from morning to night. Any honourable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life, which is both simple and strong.⁴⁵

While the details of Christian formation may take different forms in the lives of the members of Opus Dei, these five elements seem to form the basic outline. According to Vittorio Messori, “The formation seeks to attain an ideal: to create men and women who are all of one piece, for whom life and work become prayer.”⁴⁶ All of this personal formation is not an end unto itself, but it is aimed at producing people who are salt, light, and leaven. It aims at transforming the world from the inside, rather than being people, separate from the world, who have to then work to influence the world from the outside.⁴⁷

To influence the world effectively, one must be like salt, especially in “its capacity to dissolve and pass unnoticed.”⁴⁸ And this is what Escrivá means by “naturalness.”⁴⁹ Nothing about

⁴⁴ *Christ Is Passing By*, “The Christian vocation,” #10, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/10.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Messori, 149. Messori gives another description of the practices of formation similar to what is found on the Opus Dei website, on p. 147ff.

⁴⁷ Messori, 97. Cf. Escrivá, *Conversations*, #60, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations/point/60>.

⁴⁸ *The Way*, #48, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/>
(continued next page)

the members of Opus Dei should say “Opus Dei.” Escrivá encourages everyone who is a part of Opus Dei to be formed by Opus Dei spiritually, but to do whatever they do to the best of their ability. Ironically, the “naturalness” of which Escrivá speaks will become, in contrast to the rest of the world, unnaturalness.

“And in a paganised or pagan environment when my life clashes with its surroundings, won't my naturalness seem artificial?’ you ask me.

And I reply: Undoubtedly your life will clash with theirs; and that contrast — faith confirmed by works! — is exactly the naturalness I ask of you.”⁵⁰

The leaders of Opus Dei do not give specific advice about what members should do with their money, free time, raising their children, voting, or acting politically. They insist that what the members of Opus Dei do, as long as it does not contravene Christian morality or the Roman Church, is up to them, and that Opus Dei is not pulling the strings politically or financially.⁵¹

Ultimately, Escrivá summed up the role of Opus Dei in the world this way:

Our Lord says: ‘I give you a new commandment: Love one another. By this love everyone will know that you are my disciples.’

And Saint Paul: ‘Carry each other's troubles and you fulfill the law of Christ.’

I have nothing to add.⁵²

book/the_way/point/48.

⁴⁹ Cf. *The Way*, #639ff.

⁵⁰ *The Way*, #380, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/380.

⁵¹ Interesting in this connection are appendices III (an interview with Escrivá) and IV (interviews with members of Opus Dei in Spain, especially from lower economic strata) of Jean-Jacques Thierry's book, *Opus Dei: A Close-up* (translated by Gilda Roberts. [New York: Cortland Press, 1975]), pp. 157-179.

⁵² *The Way*, #385, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/385.

CHAPTER TWO

OPUS DEI'S FORMATIONAL PRACTICES IN LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

Can the Practices Be Fitted to a Lutheran Context?

While any one of the five elements of spiritual formation described above could be fitted appropriately into a Lutheran understanding of spirituality, context is always king. For example, it cannot be forgotten that this is a self-consciously Roman Catholic organization. Vittorio Messori wrote, “The founder wanted the Work to have two characteristics etched in its being—to be *Roman* and to be *Marian*.”⁵³ And yet, anyone can be a “cooperator,” a person who supports the work of Opus Dei in some way. Cooperators do not have to be Roman Catholic, or even Christian.⁵⁴ The question, then, is whether the individual formational practices of Opus Dei can be abstracted from their Roman context and fitted into a Lutheran one, or whether the practices themselves are inextricably bound up with a doctrinal system as a whole that is incompatible with Lutheranism.

Character Formation and the Two Kinds of Righteousness

First, Escrivá's writings contain the idea that character is formed by the little things of everyday life. There is nothing objectionable about this. It is essentially moral common sense that follows Aristotle. How one reacts to the small annoyances, problems, and contingencies of life plays a determinative role in how one will react when faced with a large problem. Life is made up not of gigantic, life-altering moral conundrums, but of seemingly insignificant decisions. But these small decisions, taken together, are constitutive of a person's entire character. “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest

⁵³ Messori, 155.

⁵⁴ See the Opus Dei website here: <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=10879>; also John Allen, Jr., 26-27.

in a very little is also dishonest in much.”⁵⁵ This part of Opus Dei’s instruction does not conflict with any part of Lutheran doctrine. While it does not play as large a part in Opus Dei’s formational practices as the other elements do,⁵⁶ Lutherans could very fruitfully recognize the validity of such character formation. But the validity of character formation for Christians must be understood within a framework of the two kinds of righteousness (“before God” and “before humans/the world”).

How does an understanding of the two kinds of righteousness help us to consider character formation, as well as Christian formation as a whole, correctly? Often Lutherans understand “Law and Gospel” (or, in practice, “Law vs. Gospel”) as the dominant—or only—framework for understanding the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Christian life. However, if Law and Gospel are the only terms of reference, there is absolutely no room for any talk of character formation. As Charles Arand points out,

[T]he way in which law and gospel are often construed turns the distinction into an antithesis. At that point, the distinction between law and gospel turns into an opposition in which the gospel triumphs over the law itself, and not only the wrath of God. Any talk about good works is automatically understood to be talk about works righteousness. Furthermore, when this distinction is treated as a conceptual framework within which the coherence of the Christian faith is thought out, then whatever does not fit under the category of gospel is regarded as part of the law. Even the doctrine of creation becomes law for no other reason than that it is not gospel. This does not allow the theological space needed to speak positively about the Christian life within a world where the Judeo-Christian ethic—that could once be taken for granted—is crumbling.⁵⁷

Thus, in a purely Law/Gospel paradigm, it would not even be worth considering how Opus Dei’s ideas of Christian formation would fit into a Lutheran understanding. They would not fit at all—or, rather, they would fit only as Law over which the Gospel has triumphed. If the Gospel has

⁵⁵ Luke 16:10, *ESV*.

⁵⁶ I chose to include this topic because, as a theme, it seems to run throughout Escrivá’s writings, even though “being faithful in the little things” is not included as a separate item on Opus Dei’s website.

⁵⁷ Charles Arand, “Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, 15, 4 (winter 2001), 417-418.

triumphed, then, how can we bring the Law back in as something *good*? It would seem to be a contradiction of Paul's words that we are "not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14, *English Standard Version* [hereafter *ESV*]). But if that were the case, not only would Christians have no place for Opus Dei's character formation, we would have no real place for Paul's instructions on how *Christians* are to live (e.g., Ephesians 4-6). An understanding of the two kinds of righteousness, on the other hand, offers a very useful tool for understanding the Christian life without jettisoning the very heart of Christianity: justification by grace through faith in Christ.

The two kinds of righteousness are more fundamental to Lutheran theology than the Law/Gospel distinction in the sense that Law/Gospel are only understood rightly (i.e., Scripturally) within the framework of righteousness *coram Deo* and righteousness *coram hominibus*. Indeed, the two kinds of righteousness form the "conceptual framework" for the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, one of the foundational documents of the Lutheran Confessions.⁵⁸ They actually form and guide Melancthon's very argument in response to the Roman Catholics' contention that faith is perfected by love (using, e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:13).⁵⁹ The basis of a two kinds of righteousness understanding lies in a particular anthropology that views humans within two dimensions:

One dimension involves our life with God, especially in the matters of death and salvation. The other dimension involves our life with God's creatures and our activity in this world. In the former we receive righteousness before God through faith on account of Christ. In the latter, we achieve righteousness in the eyes of the world by works when we carry out our God-given responsibilities.⁶⁰

This sort of framework helps us to put faith and works in their proper places: at its most basic, the Christian life is comprised of faith before God and works before men. Thus, character

⁵⁸ Arand, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 418.

⁵⁹ Arand, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 419-420. Melancthon deals directly with this passage in Apology IV (*The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], 154:225).

formation fits primarily in the realm *coram hominibus*, as Luther contended in “The Freedom of the Christian.”⁶¹ And yet, for Luther, character formation is not an end in itself, as if I aimed at improving my character for my own sake. Instead, the actions that I take in view of forming my character are ultimately aimed at the good of my neighbor. If I am a better husband, it is for the good of my wife. If I am a better father, it is for the good of my children. If I am a better worker, it is for the good of those who rely on my work.

Further, the fact that formation of character lies upon the human, or horizontal, plane means that the strength of one’s character does not affect one’s standing before God in the positive sense. It is not as if, as Melancthon and the other Lutheran reformers recognized, good works and faith fit upon a single vertical axis, *coram Deo*. There is no way to get from the horizontal plane of good works, character formation, and righteousness before humans to the vertical plane of sin, salvation and righteousness before God.

What about the liturgy, prayer, penance, and theological study? I contend that these items, plugged into a Roman Catholic context (or a Baptist one, for that matter) would clearly contradict Lutheran theology. Mariology, for example, is clearly a major point of disagreement between Rome and Wittenberg. But the liturgy (exemplified by the Roman sacrifice of the Mass), prayer, penance, and theological study also become contentious when those aspects of formation are believed to contribute to the process of salvation. Inserted into the Roman system, everything becomes part of one’s passage to justification (which happens only at the end of one’s life).

In the process of justification we must distinguish two periods: first, the preparatory acts or dispositions (faith, fear, hope, etc.); then the last, decisive moment of the transformation of the sinner from the state of sin to that of justification or sanctifying grace, which may be called the active justification (*actus justificationis*)[;] with this the

⁶⁰ Arand, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 421.

⁶¹ See below under “Penance.”

real process comes to an end, and the state of habitual holiness and sonship of God begins.⁶²

However, a deep sense of liturgy, prayer, penance, and theological study rightly understood are often lacking in Lutheran spirituality (if we have such a thing!).⁶³ Perhaps they seem to contradict our theology more because we have an emaciated spirituality than because we have an opposing spirituality. The final part of this paper will be an attempt to sketch what such a Lutheran spirituality might look like.

Sanctification of Work and Mariology

Before addressing the helpful aspects of Opus Dei's Christian formation, we must deal with the problematic parts. The idea of sanctification of work sounds, at first, no different than how any number of Christians have understood vocation.⁶⁴ Luther clearly invested every Christian's vocation with a holiness which medieval Roman Catholicism had denied it.⁶⁵ He rejected the idea that one had to be in a monastery or convent, or take the sacrament of holy orders, to live a holy life. Against this understanding, however, is the fact that in practice the members of Opus Dei seem to invest work with an importance it cannot sustain. Vittorio Messori

⁶² J. Pohle, "Sanctifying Grace," Catholic Encyclopedia, accessed 14 March 2007, available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm>.

⁶³ Lutheran theologians such as David Yeago are working to remedy this situation. See, e.g., "Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age," *Lutheran Forum* 34(4), Christmas/winter, 2000, 6-16, and "The Promise of God and the Desires of Our Hearts: Prolegomena to a Lutheran Retrieval of Classical Spiritual Theology," *Lutheran Forum* 30(2), May, 1996, 21-30. See also Martha Ellen Stortz, "Practicing Christians: Prayer as Formation" in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, edited by Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1998), 55-73, especially 55-63.

⁶⁴ For example, the language of both George Herbert's poem "The Elixir," and Charles Wesley's hymn "Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go" is strikingly similar to language employed by Josemaría Escrivá. (Both the poem and the hymn can be found in *Working: Its Meaning and Its Limits*, edited by Gilbert C. Meilaender [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000], pp.115-116.)

⁶⁵ Messori quotes the Roman Catholic theologian Dominique Le Tourneau to the effect that the "Protestant conception of Original Sin" was "opposed to work" and that the reformers refused to attribute "any salvific value to the works of man, even if completed in a state of grace." Messori goes on: "The pious Protestant may have devoted himself, over the ages, to work of one sort or the other, but he was not convinced that this work had any value in the eyes of God" (95). The second part of Le Tourneau's contention is true, but Messori's is patently not. The work that one does has extreme value in the eyes of God; indeed, it is the means (His "masks") by which He serves His
(continued next page)

quotes Escrivá as saying, “the specific vocation to Opus Dei leads one to transform the ordinary and the normal...into a path where God is encountered: the God of Jesus Christ...”⁶⁶ What form this encounter takes is ambiguous. Is it simply that all work is seen as an opportunity to glorify God, imitate Christ, and serve the neighbor? Or does it involve something more “sacramental,” which even non-Christians can experience?⁶⁷ Lutherans can safely adopt the idea, if not the language, provided we put our vocations in their proper perspective, that is, remembering that they contribute nothing to our standing before God in Jesus Christ. Further, it is dangerous to suggest that we “encounter” God or Jesus in our daily work without defining what that means. Non-Christians could conceivably accept that idea, just as any pagan could say that “nature is my church.” In fact, Opus Dei gives credence to this contention since they accept as supporters non-Christians.⁶⁸

Clearly objectionable as well are the Roman elements of Mary as mediator between us and Christ, or the Pope as the infallible and divinely instituted vicar of Christ on Earth. That Opus Dei is, and sees itself as necessarily, “Roman and Marian” rightly gives a Lutheran pause. Without neglecting the proper honor and reverence due to the *Theotokos*, it is necessary to relativize Mary in relation to Christ. On the other hand, liturgy, prayer, penance, and serious theological study can and should be put to good use by Lutherans. These may seem to some to be “Romanizing,” “legalistic,” or unnecessarily anti-cultural, but they have been part of the way of the Church from her very beginnings.

creatures. The second half of Luther’s treatise “The Freedom of the Christian” ably demonstrates this.

⁶⁶ Escrivá, quoted in Messori, 99.

⁶⁷ At times, it sounds like the latter. For example, Escrivá said that the “others,” who are to be sanctified by the work of Opus Dei members, are “lay people like ourselves, only in need of discovering that their life can be the place where eternal beatitude can be prepared for each person” (Escrivá, quoted in Messori, 98).

⁶⁸ See above, p. 15 and n. 53.

Liturgy

When Escrivá says that it is necessary to learn how to sing with the Church, he is basically saying that it is necessary to learn how to participate in the worship life of the Church. To suggest otherwise is to have bought the lie that any individual can *reasonably* be expected to understand the life of the Church without indoctrination (in the positive sense) and instruction. This is behind the move to reduce the liturgy (what little liturgy, in some places, is left) to only that which can be understood by any visitor, whether Christian or not. Contrary to this notion, it is indeed necessary to learn, as Escrivá put it, the “good manners of piety.”

But the liturgy in terms of Christian formation is much more than learning good worship manners. In her book *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Marva Dawn argues explicitly for an understanding of the liturgical life of the Church that results in the formation of Christian character.⁶⁹ She does not speak only of the individual’s character. Instead, she connects the character of the individual to the character of the community in which the individual is situated. Character that is not formed in the context of the Christian community would be deformed character. “Who you are as an individual believer depends greatly upon the character of the community of believers in which you are nurtured. How faithfully does that community incarnate God’s presence and pass on the narratives that reveal God when they assemble together? ... [W]e must recognize that every aspect of the time we spend together in the worshipping Christian community influences the kind of people we are becoming.”⁷⁰

The liturgy in which we take part will determine, in large measure, how we think of ourselves, our neighbors, and our God. Dawn asks us to consider who the subject of our prayers and hymns is. Do we speak primarily of God as the one who acts, or do we speak of ourselves as

⁶⁹ Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995).

⁷⁰ Dawn, 105, 107.

the primary actors? Do our songs and prayers focus on how we are feeling, or do they promote “the development of habits of reflection and learning”?⁷¹ “A focus on self and feelings limits the nurturing of a godly and outreaching character. Moreover, a focus on good feelings actually distorts the biblical message and thereby distorts the development of genuinely *Christian* character. This is because the ‘self movement’ is founded upon the common assumption of the perfectibility of human nature.”⁷² To this point, Dawn quotes David F. Wells: “It is perhaps paradoxical that self-denial should build character and that self-fascination, more than anything else, should undercut it.”⁷³

The liturgical life of the Church is not, however, focused primarily on the *coram hominibus* aspect of character formation. In reality, it straddles the two kinds of righteousness. We are, first of all, (re)formed into the image of God in Jesus Christ by our baptism. The Spirit creates faith in Jesus in those whom God has called by His Word, reconciling them to the Father. This reconciliation is brought to mind by liturgical actions such as making the sign of the cross or speaking the Trinitarian Name. The highest point of the liturgy, the point at which the life of the Church reaches its climax, is the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. At every celebration of the Supper in which we participate, we are clothed again with the righteousness of Christ. Thus we are formed as God brings us into His narrative of salvation, grounded in creation and anticipating its (and our) eschatological consummation. We are brought into the story of God, and thus we are formed to be the Body of Christ that we are by virtue of our baptism. The question, as Marva Dawn reminds us, is what kind of people is being formed in and by a particular instance of liturgical worship?

⁷¹ Dawn, 107-109, 111.

⁷² Dawn, 111.

⁷³ David F. Wells, quoted by Dawn, 111.

But we are not only formed *coram Deo* by the liturgy. It is not only our individual standing before God that is at stake, but the standing of the whole creation and everyone in it. We are formed by the prayers and hymns to think of others also. We pray for “the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for *all people according to their needs*.” “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes,” Paul says (1 Corinthians 11:26, *ESV*). We proclaim the Lord’s death to one another (Christians), but we also proclaim it to those who might witness the Supper or ask about why we celebrate it. We bring our offerings not only for the maintenance of the building and the compensation of the congregation’s workers, but also for those who are in need, whether within the Christian community or outside it. In these ways and more, our character is formed *coram mundo*.

In and by the liturgy, then, God moves us by His Spirit out of our flesh (though not out of our bodies)⁷⁴ and outside ourselves: to and before God in the (passive) righteousness of Christ and to and before our neighbor in the (active) righteousness of loving action.

Prayer

Second, prayer has often been subject to neglect by Lutherans. It is as necessary to learn how to pray with the Church as it is to learn how to sing with the Church. Escrivá wrote: “I talk about the interior life of ordinary Christians who habitually find themselves in the hubbub of the city, in the light of day, in the street, at work, with their families or simply relaxing; they are centred on Jesus all day long. And what is this except a life of continuous prayer?”⁷⁵ Prayer takes place in the midst of everyday activity. But we are not simply born with this ability. It needs to be formed in us. Such formation can take place by reading (and memorizing) the Psalter, which

⁷⁴ I am taking “flesh” in the Pauline sense as “the old man” which characterizes our whole selves as sinners before God. Our bodies, on the other hand, are still God’s good creation, the resurrection of which we await.

⁷⁵ Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, “The Christian vocation,” #8, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/8.

has long been the prayer book of God's people (Luther is a prime example), as well as the collects and liturgy "made sacred by long use" in the Church. The Psalms and collects give voice to the feelings and experiences that we want to express to God. They also keep our prayers from constantly orbiting our own small world, of which we are the central (or only) inhabitant. To assume that *ex corde* prayer is better, or more "spiritual" than written or "pre-made" prayer is to assume that the *corde* does not have to be molded and formed. But it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks, and if the heart is not clean, neither will the words be.

Prayer, even if spoken in individual periods of meditation, can never be solely an activity isolated from the Body of Christ of which God has made us a part. It is the community of the Church, contemporary with us and extending throughout the ages, in which we are formed to pray. From the very beginning the members of the Christian community "devoted themselves to...the prayers" (Acts 2:42, *ESV*). We do not, and should not, draw only upon our own limited experience for prayer. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have written and prayed prayers for thousands of years, and we neglect their wisdom at the price of selfish insularity.

Neither is a deep life of (constant) prayer a spontaneous gift to the baptized believer. To cultivate a life of constant prayer, as Escrivá reminds us, takes practice. Adolf Köberle writes in his *The Quest for Holiness*: "There is an observation true to life in the statement of Claus Harms: 'Whoever does not pray at determined times does not pray at undetermined ones.' It is fanaticism and a disregard of our situation as sinners to think that we can dispense with such a regulated custom, usage and rule of prayer."⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness* (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999), 175.

Escrivá's understanding of a deep life of prayer that saturates daily life is surely a positive example for a Lutheran understanding of prayer. His words are a fitting goal for every Christian: "Never be men or women of long action and short prayer."⁷⁷

Penance

Third, penance can be understood rightly by Lutherans (although naturally it has negative connotations for Lutherans influenced by the controversies of the sixteenth century). Luther commends certain penitential practices, understood much in the same way as Escrivá describes them, in "The Freedom of a Christian":

Each one should do the works of his profession and station, not that by them he may strive after righteousness,⁷⁸ but that through them he may keep his body under control, be an example to others who also need to keep their bodies under control, and finally that by such works he may submit his will to that of others in the freedom of love....

For a Christian, as a free man, will say, "I will fast, pray, do this and that as men command, not because it is necessary to my righteousness or salvation; but that I may show due respect to the pope, the bishop, the community, a magistrate, or my neighbor, and give them an example. I will do and suffer all things, just as Christ did and suffered far more for me, although he needed nothing of it all for himself, and was made under the law for my sake, although he was not under the law."⁷⁹

Köberle is helpful here as well. "The Christian likewise knows that he must press forward if he is not to fall back but because his active renewal in Christ is always inadequate he does not find in it the ground nor even the confirmation of his fellowship with God; that he finds in the promises of the Gospel."⁸⁰ Penitential practices, while useful for keeping our still-sinful flesh in check, must be kept in their proper place, and not allowed to encroach on the pure, absolutely free, and

⁷⁷ *The Way*, #937, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/937.

⁷⁸ Obviously, at this point Luther runs against Roman Catholic theology.

⁷⁹ Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 621, 622.

⁸⁰ Köberle, 243.

unconditional nature of the Gospel. Here again, penitential practices fall within the sphere of *coram hominibus* righteousness because they contribute nothing to our righteousness before God.

While at first glance it appears as if this is an impossible position to maintain since God views our lives in their totality. But to say that penitential (or any other formational) practices are *coram hominibus* is not to deny that they are pleasing to God or that they are often the practice of the Law of God itself. The decisive question is *how* they are pleasing to God. They are not pleasing to Him because they make us better people or even because they are His commandments. They are pleasing *always and only* because Christians have been covered in the righteousness of Christ, and God views Christians as righteous for Christ's sake. Thus, to say that such practices are pleasing to God is not to put them *coram Deo*; they are not for God. They are not even for ourselves. They are for the benefit of those whom God has placed around us as our neighbors.

Escrivá and Opus Dei, however, take such penitential practices as more than simply controlling the flesh for the sake of the neighbor (although that aspect is clearly present in Opus Dei). In keeping with Roman Catholic theology, the righteousness of the individual Christian lies on a single plane, whether faith in God or good works for the neighbor. There are not two kinds of righteousness, but one: a righteousness before God, under which is subsumed righteousness before the neighbor.

The fact that pain is essential to the practices of Opus Dei should be examined more closely. Can this aspect of penitence be fitted into a Lutheran understanding of Christian formation? Pain from without, that is, pain that is imposed on us because we are followers of Christ, is no difficulty for Lutheran theology. Luther articulated clearly that the crosses which Christians bear are not self-imposed.

Do not, therefore, worry about where you may find affliction; there is no need to be concerned. Only be a pious Christian, preacher, minister, townsman, peasant, nobleman,

and lord; diligently and faithfully perform the duties of your office. Let the devil worry about where he may find wood from which to make a cross for you; let the world worry about where to find a stick from which to make a scourge for your skin.⁸¹

And: “We are neither to seek the cross nor to flee from it.”⁸²

Here, then, Opus Dei’s practices of corporal mortification run counter to Lutheran theology because they constitute a seeking after crosses for the sake of righteousness *coram Deo*. The status of the body for Opus Dei is unclear at this point (though it appears to be no less unclear for Lutheran theology). However, if the mortification of the body is for the sake of the soul, one wonders whether Opus Dei has given in to a false, unchristian dichotomy of the body and the soul. Köberle describes the position this way:

Because a relation to God is not expressed by the corporeal existence of man, that existence is therefore worthless and contemptible. It can be destroyed by excess but better yet by fasting and castigation. The body has no part in the life after death[!]. As a result asceticism is described as *mortificatio carnalis*, as the dulling, weakening mortification of the flesh for the liberation of the soul that is imprisoned in the material.⁸³

But the Scriptures speak of the person as body and soul together.

Here [in the domain of Biblical ideas] we find a very different conception. Here the body is regarded as something that possesses a value of its own and that together with the soul forms one indivisible, living organism. The motive for bodily discipline is no longer the mortification of nature because of contempt for it, but it becomes a disciplinary culture that springs from reverence for that body, which God has prepared to be a temple for His Spirit and which shall have a share in the resurrection. Because the *complete* man must undergo the judgment and will be transformed in his entirety it is proper that he be sanctified wholly and that the “whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 5:23.) *Evangelical ethics grounds the right and duty of asceticism not on the final repudiation of the body but on its recognition as the end of all things.*⁸⁴

Here Köberle hints at something which has been very little discussed in Lutheran circles (and not at all in this paper). That is, what is the relationship between the actions we do in this life that

⁸¹ *What Luther Says*, edited by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 360:1057.

⁸² *What Luther Says*, 360:1058.

⁸³ Köberle, 190.

affect our bodies, and our resurrected bodies in the next life? Perhaps it has not been discussed because it cannot be known; however, at the very least such a thought should give us pause before we act with ascetic care where the soul is concerned, but with all liberty where the body is concerned. “At all events even asceticism can be described by the paradoxical statement: Its exercise can give salvation to no one but its neglect can corrupt anyone.”⁸⁵

Another idea, also present in Opus Dei, that daily life presents us with crosses precisely because we seek to follow in the way of Christ, is a firmly Lutheran one. There is also no reason not to undertake a regular regimen of bodily self-denial, as long as particular ascetical practices are not enforced as if they, in themselves, are essential to an individual Christian’s life.⁸⁶ In the *coram hominibus* realm, Escrivá may well be right: “Where there is no self-denial, there is no virtue.”⁸⁷

The understanding of penance in Opus Dei falls under *coram mundo* righteousness for Lutherans. But the penitential practices (fasting, denial of pleasures, etc.) must not be confused with the Lutheran understanding of repentance, which is brought about only by the Spirit of God. The Lutheran definition of repentance, in contrast to the penitential practices of Opus Dei, finds its grounding in the righteousness of Christ *coram Deo*. Penitential practices, if they are to be utilized by Lutherans, fall *coram hominibus*, because they are help one better serve his or her neighbor. Repentance, as Lutherans understand it, is that divinely wrought despair of self to which the Spirit brings the free promise of grace in Christ to bear. But this recognition does not rule out for the Lutheran Christian practices such as those encouraged by Opus Dei. It only

⁸⁴ Köberle, 190-191, emphasis added.

⁸⁵ Köberle, 194.

⁸⁶ See Köberle, 184ff., where he discusses the proper place of a Christian’s individual discipline in relation to Justification and Sanctification. E.g., “A thankful enjoyment of the world is only possible when it is united with a strict discipline” (187).

⁸⁷ *The Way*, #180, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/>
(continued next page)

relegates such practices to the purely human realm. And it means that Lutherans cannot accept statements of Escrivá such as this: “In the deep pit opened by your humility, let penance bury your negligences, offences and sins.”⁸⁸ But if, removing the practices themselves from the Roman context, they can be understood according to the horizontal, human plane, Opus Dei is correct to see in them sacrifices that lead one to better serve one’s neighbor.

Theological Study

Finally, Lutherans have never been strangers to serious theological study. If we have been (often, rightly) criticized for our lack of emphasis on prayer and piety, we have never been accused of taking doctrine lightly. However, it can seem at times that theology is the domain only of certified theologians. Escrivá helps us to see that theology, which is nothing else than the flipside of our childlike piety, is a necessary facet of Christian spirituality. The understanding that all Christians can and should learn better who God is and what it means to be His people is especially valuable. Escrivá speaks of study and acquisition of knowledge “uncover[ing] the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature.”⁸⁹ This can be problematic if it collapses all divine revelation into what can be known by reason, experience, and scientific investigation. While it is always beneficial to examine one’s experiences in light of God’s will, what can it mean to uncover the divine meaning in the nature of objects such as a rock or a computer?

The fact that Opus Dei has weekly classes, monthly days of prayer and reflection, and yearly three-to-five day retreats should give Lutherans, who care so deeply for doctrine, pause. The classes attended by Opus Dei members are not random choices based on the whims of the

book/the_way/point/180.

⁸⁸ *The Way*, #211, accessed on 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way/point/211.

⁸⁹ Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, #10, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/10.

teacher or the students. They comprise an intentional course of instruction aimed at laying the foundation for the carrying out of individual vocations. Where do we have intentional, focused programs of indoctrination—getting the Faith into people? Where do we have intensive courses on the Lutheran Confessions that are aimed at every member of our congregations, not just those preparing for churchly service? Where do we have days of prayer within a comprehensive context of formation? Where do we have retreats focused around the liturgy, or prayer, or sacramental theology? While I know of examples, they are few and far between. We cannot expect even to approach the standards of Opus Dei unless we can realize Escrivá's goal of inculcating the Faith in every individual Christian. None of the programs of Opus Dei are aimed exclusively or even primarily at clergy. They are aimed at the people who are in the midst of the world in their jobs, schools, and homes. This emphasis is something Lutherans could do very well to recover. Talk about vocation is good, but it is necessary to take steps actually to form individuals for their vocations.⁹⁰ Imagine if every Lutheran congregation had a program of formation that included classes, monthly days of prayer and individual confession and absolution, and a yearly retreat. What would the face of the Missouri Synod be then in the world?

Overall, what weakens the formational practices of Opus Dei from a Lutheran perspective is that sanctification in Opus Dei is often hard to distinguish from justification. In Opus Dei, as in Roman Catholicism generally, everything, whether the Sacraments or our good works, is part of the path we walk to salvation and holiness. God's grace is what motivates us, or what assists us, or what works in us, but there can be no pure word of pardon and forgiveness since pursuing holiness is an integral part of justification *per se*. Lutherans have the ability, especially with the concept of the two kinds of righteousness (under which we are able to rightly

⁹⁰ The Concordia Seminary Institute on Lay Vocation is a very good start in this direction.

distinguish law and gospel for the assurance of troubled sinners) to keep vocation, holiness, sanctification, and our good works in their proper perspective with regard to our relationship with God.

CHAPTER THREE

SKETCHING A LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF FORMATION

Baptism, Repentance, and the Lord's Supper As the Foundation

What would a Lutheran doctrine of Christian formation look like? So far we have been discussing Christian formation. We have assumed that one who would be formed as a Christian *is* a Christian. This begs the question of what a Christian is. Stanley Hauerwas would caution us at this point that it is a dangerous mistake to separate doctrine and ethics, *who* a Christian is from what a Christian *does*. “[S]omething has already gone wrong if Christians have to ask what the relation or relations might be between doctrine and ethics. To assume that a ‘relation’ between doctrine and ethics needs to be explicated unjustifiably presumes that something called ‘ethics’ exists prior to or independent from ‘doctrine.’ Yet it is exactly that assumption which has shaped Christian practice and reflection about ethics in modernity.”⁹¹ According to Hauerwas, “Once there was no Christian ethics simply because Christians could not distinguish between their beliefs and their behavior. They assumed that their lives exemplified (or at least should exemplify) their doctrines in a manner that made a division between life and doctrine impossible.”⁹² While it may seem that for the moment I am separating theology and ethics, the following is meant to be understood as the substance of a single Christian life. Who a Christian is and what he does cannot ultimately be separated. However, for certain purposes they may be distinguished. “[T]he task of the theologian is not to deny that for certain limited purposes ethics can be distinguished from theology, but to reject their supposed ontological and practical

⁹¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them In The Truth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998 [published in the U.S. by Abingdon Publishers]), 20.

⁹² *Ibid.*

independence.”⁹³ With this in mind, then, there are three parts of a foundation for Christian formation (a foundation, however, that by its nature informs and permeates everything that Christians do). These are baptism, repentance, and the Lord’s Supper.

By *Christian* formation, it is understood that an actual Christian is presupposed, which means that the entry into the Christian life is presupposed. That entry, however, cannot be left implicit when so much in our twenty-first century, American culture depends upon the actions of the individual and what groups and cooperatives he chooses to join. Entry into the Christian life, which Christian formation takes for granted, is not at all like entry into other organizations. The members of the Christian Church did not *choose* to enter it. Membership is not *voluntary* in that sense. Paralleling our physical birth, in which we had no choice, we enter into God’s Church by baptism, often involuntarily as infants. Even adults, who may choose to be baptized, cannot by their choice enter into God’s Kingdom. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, *ESV*). One is born again, from above; one cannot choose one’s birth.

This baptism by which God joins us to the death and resurrection of Christ by His Spirit is not only something that begins our life as Christians. If it were, the link with Christian formation would be tenuous. Instead, baptism *characterizes* our life in the fullest sense of the word. We are “character-ed,” *given* our character, by our constant return to our baptism as the assurance of God’s promise of grace to us. Our baptism, whether we remember it or not, is God’s promise to complete what He has started. “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6, *ESV*). Making the sign of the cross when the Triune Name is spoken, for example, reminds us of this promise of God. As Regin Prenter puts it, “Baptism is a covenant in which God promises to drive out all sin

⁹³ Ibid.

in us.”⁹⁴ In our lives, we are literally re-minded, *given* a new mind, as the Spirit brings us into conformity with Christ. This happens daily, as Luther puts it in the Catechisms, through repentance: “What then is the significance of such a baptism with water? Answer: It signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”⁹⁵ In the Large Catechism, Luther writes,

“Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after.... What is repentance but an earnest attack on the old creature and an entering into a new life? If you live in repentance, therefore, you are walking in baptism, which not only announces this new life but also produces, begins, and exercises it. In baptism we are given the grace, Spirit, and strength to suppress the old creature so that the new may come forth and grow strong.”⁹⁶

In Prenter’s words, “Penitence is always a return to baptism.... If the covenant of baptism were no longer valid, no penitence would be possible. Or it would only be possible as a human effort under the symbol of the law. True penitence, evangelical penitence is a remembrance of the covenant of baptism. Penitence always takes place in the symbol of baptism.”⁹⁷

And thus we are brought to a meaning of penitence opposite that of Opus Dei. We cannot bring about true repentance by ourselves. At the most we can create guilt (in the modern sense of “feeling bad”). Only the Holy Spirit can bring about real repentance, and He does this by the Word of God’s Law that drives us, as sinful beings, to Christ as our refuge. We find penitence, then, not in *coram hominibus* righteousness, but in righteousness *coram Deo*. Preserving this

⁹⁴ Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, translated by John M. Jensen (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001 [reprint of 1953 Augsburg Fortress edition], 146.

⁹⁵ Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism, The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 360:12 (hereafter abbreviated *K/W*). It should be noted that immediately following the section on baptism, a section on “How simple people are to be taught to confess” followed from 1531 on (*K/W*, 360:15ff.).

⁹⁶ *K/W*, 465:65, 466:75.

distinction allows Christians to proclaim a condition-less Gospel that actually comforts sinners in the face of God's holy Law. As above, the penitential practices (distinct from the "penitence" of the Lutheran Reformers) of Opus Dei, to be compatible with a Lutheran understanding, would have to be confined to the *coram hominibus* active righteousness.

Along with baptism and repentance, the Lord's Supper is the third part of a foundation for a Lutheran doctrine of Christian formation. Regin Prenter writes, "But the symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper must be seen in their mutual connection. It is to the baptized—to them who by baptism have entered the way that with Christ leads to death and through death to resurrection—that the Lord's Supper is offered. Not until the Lord's Supper is seen in this relation to baptism does it become natural to call the Lord's Supper *viaticum*."⁹⁸ Unlike the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Viaticum (the Lord's Supper given to someone who is physically dying), a Lutheran understands every instance of the Lord's Supper as "food on the way" from death and to death. Everyone is dying a death facilitated by baptism. Prenter finds here a profound, "paradoxical connection" between baptism and the Lord's Supper:

Baptism leads us into a new life here on earth. It is the sacrament of regeneration. Its symbol is first of all attached to death, the physical death, and then through death to life. The Lord's Supper, however, is the sacrament of death, it is the bridge to the life to come. But its symbol is first of all attached to life because it is the sacrament that nourishes, the bread of life which through the forgiveness of sins gives new life. The symbol of the Lord's Supper is attached to death all throughout life. **Baptism attaches death to the living in order to lead them through death into life. The Lord's Supper gives life to the dying so that through life they may be led into death.** And in this paradoxical mutual connection the symbol of baptism and the Lord's Supper is a confirmation of the validity of God's promise to us.⁹⁹

These three foundational aspects of the Christian life are bound together, then, in everyday life. They are necessary to the Christian life, not least because baptism and the Lord's

⁹⁷ Prenter, 151.

⁹⁸ Prenter, 150.

⁹⁹ Prenter, 150-151, emphasis mine.

Supper were given explicitly by Christ Himself as means by which we are brought into and sustained in fellowship with the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Building on the Foundation

Confession and Absolution

Flowing out of this, how should the Christian life be characterized, in both aspects of that word: described and typified? First, the life of baptism should be made concrete, and the Church has within its tradition the means for this: private confession and absolution. In the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon writes, “Nevertheless, the preachers on our side diligently teach that confession is to be retained *because of absolution* (which is confession’s principal and foremost part) for the comfort of terrified consciences and because of other reasons.”¹⁰⁰ In the Smalcald Articles, Luther writes, “Because absolution or the power of the keys is also a comfort and help against sin and a bad conscience and was instituted by Christ in the gospel, confession, or absolution, should by no means be allowed to fall into disuse in the church....”¹⁰¹ Though the Lutheran Confessions emphasize that private confession is not commanded, nor should it be enforced by coercion (as under the papacy),¹⁰² Luther has this to say in the Large Catechism:

However, if you despise [confession] and proudly stay away from confession, then we must come to the conclusion that you are not a Christian and that you also ought not receive the sacrament [of the altar]. For you despise what no Christian ought to despise, and you show thereby that you can have no forgiveness of sin. And this is a sure sign that you also despise the gospel. In short, we want nothing to do with compulsion. However, if anyone does not hear and heed our preaching and warning, we shall have nothing to do with such a person who ought not have any part of the gospel. If you are a Christian, you should be glad to run more than a hundred miles for confession, not under compulsion but rather coming and compelling us to offer it. For here the compulsion must be reversed; we are the ones who must come under the command and you must come in freedom. We compel no one, but allow ourselves to be compelled, just as we are

¹⁰⁰ The Augsburg Confession XXV (German text, K/W, 74:13), emphasis mine.

¹⁰¹ Luther, The Smalcald Articles, K/W, 321:1 (VIII).

¹⁰² See Apol. XI (K/W, 186:5), and the Large Catechism (K/W, 476:1ff.).

compelled to preach and administer the sacrament. **Therefore, when I exhort you to go to confession, I am doing nothing but exhorting you to be a Christian.**¹⁰³

It is beyond doubt that Luther and the other Lutheran reformers would find the current state of their church shameful with regard to private confession and absolution.¹⁰⁴ In order to form people into the Christians they are, to exhort them to be Christians, we need a recovery of the great treasure of private confession and absolution that was handed down to us, but which we have allowed to fall into disuse. We have neglected Luther's "by no means," and surely Christian formation cannot help but be lacking without the personal absolving of troubled or terrified consciences.

Liturgy

The Lutheran Confessions connect private confession and absolution to both baptism and the Lord's Supper. Though not essential for receiving Communion, the confessions retained "the custom...of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved."¹⁰⁵ The Lord's Supper is the high point of the liturgy, which is, as Escrivá and Opus Dei recognize, an essential aspect of the formation of Christians. The liturgy, by which I mean the entire time of worship, is perhaps the most important aspect of Christian formation. "We must therefore be constantly asking how our worship reveals God and what kind of people we are becoming, because our perspectives and understandings about God and the specific attitudes and habits of being that are created by the elements of worship services affect how we think, speak, and act as we worship in the rest of life."¹⁰⁶ There is no question that a person is

¹⁰³ Luther, *The Large Catechism*, K/W, 479:29-32, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁴ It is telling that we even distinguish between "private" and "public" confession and absolution. In the sixteenth century, they had no concept of confession and absolution that was not "private." There was no general confession as we have it today.

¹⁰⁵ Augsburg Confession XXV (German text, K/W, 72:1).

¹⁰⁶ Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 119.

being formed by the worship in a particular congregation. The only question is *what kind* of person is being formed? If we know what kind of people God desires (those who are formed to the likeness of Christ, both *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*), we ought to be very careful that what we do in our services moves people in that direction. There is no room for mere entertainment or dumbed-down worship aimed at the lowest common denominator of participation. “How disturbing it is that many congregations dumb their worship down to society’s level instead of letting worship uplift the congregants’ souls and minds and spirits! What kind of character is being formed in the persons who participate in such flimsy worship?”¹⁰⁷

Liturgy and the Culture of the Church

It cannot be assumed that participants in worship know what is going on and why. Thus, instruction in the liturgy is necessary, both by words and by actions. It is true that the liturgy cannot simply be picked up and used by those who have not been formed to use it. The Church is a culture different than, and often opposed to, the culture of the world. The liturgy is for Christians who live within both cultures. Marva Dawn writes, “Against the toxicities of our milieu,¹⁰⁸ the Church creates an alternative society. Each believer needs to be enfolded in a caring community of faithful people who offer guidance, wisdom, the perspective of the Scriptures, and love to nurture character growth.”¹⁰⁹ As with any cross-cultural experience, immersion is the best way to go. The foreign culture (and the Church is such for those who have been raised in the culture of twenty-first century America) will be alien and different. It will require the work of acclimation and acculturation—not to the culture of the world, but to the culture of the Church.

¹⁰⁷ Dawn, 125.

¹⁰⁸ Dawn cites the entertainment and television based, market-driven culture grounded in efficiency and expertise (Chapter 2; pp. 21, 24, 29) and the idolatries of modern culture (Chapter 3).

While the Church's culture always takes place within concrete historical cultures, among people who have been formed in better or worse ways by their cultures, that does not mean that the culture of the Church is given its form by the culture in which she finds herself. Of course, aspects of language in the liturgy will change from culture to culture, but even here, language is not only English or Japanese. Quite apart from the vocables and the grammar, the Church has her own language that must be learned. This is not to say that the words should not be translated into the idiom of the people who are learning the language; but in the learning of what language does the student remain at the level of his or her own idiom? The goal is not simply to be able to translate in one's mind from Japanese to English (if the student is an English speaker), but to be able actually to think and move in the new language. The language is "learned," the speaker is fluent, once translation is no longer needed. Similarly with the Church's language: the goal is to be able to move freely and fluently within the world of forgiveness, redemption, cross, resurrection, baptism, Lord's Supper, absolution, and liturgy.

Obviously, translation will be necessary from time to time, just as it is for those who either do not know or are still learning a foreign language. Further, meaning is not only bound up within specific words, but in the whole context in which a word is spoken, and the whole matrix of meaning (in the Church's case, we might call it doctrine) in which a word is embedded. None of this is to deny that languages, even the Church's, do not change or develop. But languages develop out of what they are, not out of what they are not. In other words, when aspects of a language no longer adequately convey meaning, we do not invent an entirely new language (even if that were possible). If a word has no connection to the language in which it is found, it will not be adopted by many people. Neologisms must have an understandable connection to the cultural language in which they are invented or they will not convey meaning.

¹⁰⁹ Dawn, 117.

The liturgy acts as the center of the Christian life, and should be the primary location of Christian formation as people are formed in relation to their baptism by repentance and the Lord's Supper. They should be brought into the culture of the Church, which is an anticipation of the eschatological Kingdom of God,¹¹⁰ and through the liturgical life of the Church in all its fullness: movement, architecture, word, image, sacrament, prayer, preaching, song, confession, absolution, and structure, they will be indoctrinated and become accustomed to the life of Christ in relationship to the Father by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of the Congregation and the Individual

Related to the liturgy, and in many ways flowing out of it, is the prayer life of the individual Christian—which, of course, cannot be disconnected from the prayer life of the Christian community. “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:5b-6, *ESV*). “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2, *ESV*). “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances...” (1 Thessalonians 5:16, *ESV*). “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4, *ESV*). Clearly, Christians are to be people of prayer. The early Christians took Jesus seriously when He said, “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Matthew 21:22, *ESV*). Acts 1:14: “All these [the disciples] with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and

¹¹⁰ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, 1994, 1998), 3:37.

Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (*ESV*). Prayer constituted one of the four main characteristics of the early Christian community: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42, *ESV*).

But the practice of prayer is not divinely bestowed apart from means. It is necessary to learn how to pray and what to pray for. Thus, Jesus’ disciples ask Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1, *ESV*). Jesus’ instruction consists of an actual prayer, spoken to Jesus’ Father, who becomes our Father by virtue of our baptism. The Lord’s Prayer is the basic form of Christian prayer, containing all aspects of prayer, though, of course, it does not exhaust what can be said in prayer. While anyone, from the smallest child, can and should speak to God spontaneously out of the cares and concerns of the experience of life, we remain sinners turned in upon ourselves. The tendency is not to turn outward in prayer to the concerns of others and for the entire world, but to turn inward so that our prayers remain at the level of individual concern, which, if unchecked, devolve into selfishness. Therefore, it is necessary to learn from the Church, the Body of Christ, how to pray. As stated above, we have limited experience in this world. Those who have gone before us in the Faith, who have walked the paths of joy and sorrow in life, have much to teach us about how we should pray. We are inextricably part of the communion of saints throughout time and space, which means we never pray as isolated individuals. The written prayers of saints throughout the ages, as well as the collects and prayers of the liturgy, teach us the life of prayer that forms our individual times of private prayer. Perhaps most importantly after the Lord’s Prayer, the Psalter should become our prayerbook, as it has been the prayerbook of countless Christians before us. The Psalms contain the whole range of human emotion, and thus they teach us how to express ourselves in all circumstances.

Reading and Hearing the Scriptures

There is another aspect of Christian formation that fits with prayer but which has not been discussed thus far. That is the place of the Scriptures. Clearly, the themes of the Scriptures have been running throughout this paper, but what part do they themselves play in the formation of Christians? First, they fall under the *meditatio* that Luther includes in the three things that make a theologian. Christians ought to meditate on the Scriptures. But to what purpose? Only to see how the Scriptures apply to our lives?

If the preceding arguments have been true, it is clear that the Scriptures cannot be read in isolation, apart from the Body of Christ within which the Scriptures came to be. This means that one learns to read rightly only within the community of Christians. As James Voelz describes the valid interpreter of the Scriptures, it is the one who “becomes that reader...called for by that very text.”¹¹¹ How does one become this reader? One is “formed to assume that role by a community, a community which has assumed that role itself.”¹¹² In the case of the Christian Scriptures, the valid community that forms the valid reader is “that community which has produced, received and preserved” those texts, i.e., the Christian Church. “[T]hat community whose personal formation includes the production, reception, and preservation of a given set of documents is likely to teach its members to read those documents in a way ‘congenial’ to them.”¹¹³ It is in communion with the Christian Church that a person learns how to read the Scriptures as they were intended to be read (or heard).

How were they intended to be read and heard? Christians read and hear the Scriptures as those which bear witness to Christ (John 5:39, *contra* the Jewish leaders). The New Testament is

¹¹¹ James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 2nd edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 220.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

that which bears witness to the Son of God in human flesh, and John's words apply not only to his own gospel, but to the entire New Testament: "[T]hese [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, *ESV*).

If the New Testament bears witness to this Christ, and having heard and believed the testimony about Him, Christians have life in His name, we can look to Jesus to understand how to read and hear the Old Testament. And Jesus instructs us how to read and hear the Old Testament Scriptures: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened [the disciples'] minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45, *ESV*). Thus, reading and hearing the Scriptures rightly can only take place once one has been brought by the Holy Spirit into the Christian community. It is incorporation into the Body of Christ that is the necessary condition of reading and hearing the Scriptures correctly. The process does not end when one has been brought into the Christian community. There is an inescapable circularity as the Christian enters the community through baptism, is formed by the Holy Spirit by the liturgy, absolution, and the Lord's Supper, and returns to the Scriptures. The Scriptures, in turn, continue to form the reader/hearer.

The fact that Christians, until the advent of the printing press, primarily *heard* the Scriptures should highlight the fact that the Scriptures formed the hearer within the community in which they were read aloud. Lectionaries that are based around the life of Christ form the hearer in a specific way. Readings read in particular contexts, such as the Easter Vigil and its rehearsal of salvation history, form the hearer. Perhaps the fact that we have lost hearing as the primary way in which the Scriptures are encountered has meant the loss of an intentional formation by the Scriptures. Instead, many Christians read the Bible in seclusion, alone with only

their own thoughts to guide them. In such an environment, “the Scriptures” form “Christians” in as many ways as there are readers. That there is no objective reader, and that, in fact, there should *not* be any objective readers,¹¹⁴ should make us think twice about encouraging isolated reading of the Scriptures, apart from the reading of the Christian community across space and time.

The Study of Theology

Our prayers, worship, and reading/hearing of the Scriptures are not devoid of content. Here the study of theology finds its place. Opus Dei teaches us to regard more highly concentrated theological study. As Josemaría Escrivá put it, “We are to be pious, then, as pious as children, but not ignorant. Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously — all of which means theology. Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians.”¹¹⁵ Teaching the doctrine of the Church does not only take the form of imparting theological words and phrases. In actual practice, we learn the theology of the Church in every aspect of the Church’s life, perhaps most especially in the liturgy. The way we speak and worship, act and pray, forms in us the way we think about God. Indeed, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. As the “law” of prayer, so will be the “law” of belief. But *lex credendi* also forms *lex orandi*. Our prayer flows out of our belief. In other words, the way we worship will form the way we believe, and the way we believe will (or should) form the way we worship. Both inform each other and both are necessary to the life of Christians.

If we truly believe that the wells of Lutheran theology run deep, as deep as Christianity itself, we often do not act like it. Many times, we are satisfied to take unreflectingly from the

¹¹⁴ Cf. Voelz, 219.

¹¹⁵ *Christ Is Passing By*, “The Christian vocation,” #10, accessed 2 August 2006, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/10.

pool of contemporary theology, without recognizing the streams that run into that pool. We look for the flashy and exciting water with lots of activity, without realizing that it is often the shallowest streams that make the most noise. Still waters run deep, and it is up to the pastors and theologians of the Church to retrieve the treasures at the depths of the deep-running river of Christian faith and make them known to those who are brought into the Christian life (see Matthew 13:51-52).

We cannot throw new Christians into the deep end of Christian thought, however. There is a time for beginning in the shallows. But we must never be content simply to play like children in the shallow end. If we do, we receive the rebuke of both Paul and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3, *ESV*); “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity....” (Hebrews 5:12-6:1).

Conclusion

In summary, what does the Christian life look like? It is characterized by the baptism by which God brought us into the Christian life, repentance, which is the constant return to baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, which is our food of forgiveness and righteousness “on the way.” The Lord’s Supper forms the center of the Church’s liturgy, in which we are formed to the culture of

the Body of Christ. Here we learn to speak the Church's language and we are formed to the image of Christ, crucified and risen. This image takes shape in us by the work of the Holy Spirit as we are brought out of ourselves *coram Deo* in the righteousness of Christ in grace according to the Gospel, and *coram hominibus* in our active righteousness in love according to the Law. Flowing out of the corporate life of the Church, we are formed to be a praying people—which always takes place in the plural, although we remain individuals. Both our worship and our prayer are informed by the content of Christian theology, which is nothing other than the counterpart to our childlike piety. Indeed, "Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians."¹¹⁶

What has been hinted at, but not developed, is what this looks like in the life of an individual Christian. The specific form may be different, but there is a comprehensive sense in which every Christian's life should be the same. That is, since every Christian is not an isolated individual, but a member of the Body of Christ, a broad understanding of the Church is necessary to put Christian formation in context.

The Church does not exist only for her members. She is not a ghettoized sect existing in hermetic isolation from the world. She is both made up of God's creatures and serves those who are already members, and she also exists to bring those who are not members into renewed fellowship with God. In this way, the Church has both centripetal and centrifugal motions. She has a center who is Christ, who comes to His people in the preached Word and the distributed Sacraments. The Body of Christ cannot neglect these gifts if it is to remain the Body of Christ. The branches have no life outside the vine. Thus the Church moves first in a centripetal motion,

¹¹⁶ *Christ Is Passing By*, "The Christian vocation," #10, accessed 1 February 2007, available from http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by/point/10.

toward this center. The center, Christ, renews and restores the Body. The Head gives Himself for the Body, forgiving the members and bringing them into ever closer communion with Himself.

But the Church does not remain closed in on herself, as if she were an end in herself. She has also a centrifugal motion, moving outward from the center. The members of the Body do not remain within the walls of a building, but move outward into the world by means of their various vocations: working, playing, going to school, riding the bus, conversation; in short, *living life*. In the midst of the lived lives of Christians are those who are not members of the Body. By testimony and witness, by words and actions, those who are members make contact with those who are not. “[I]n your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience....” (1 Peter 3:15-16, *ESV*). Though Peter is speaking here primarily of testimony before those who persecute and revile, his words apply as well to those who come into any sort of contact with unbelievers. The Church, not only in corporate life, but in the individual lives of her members, acts as salt, light, and leaven in a dark world.¹¹⁷ “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:5-6, *ESV*). In the Christian’s daily vocation, the life of the Church is brought into the life of the world.

But the Body of Christ does not remain out in the world, which would mean letting those who are not members remain in the world. The centripetal motion back to the center must always continue, and the members bring the non-members back with them to the center, to Christ. This is how the mission of the Church works. This is how Matthew 28:18-20 happens. This is how “the Gentiles” become disciples: they are brought to the place where baptism and teaching goes

on and on until Jesus returns. There is no life outside the Church, because the Church is nothing other than where Christ is, giving His gifts, bringing humans into fellowship with His Father, making them members of His Body by grace in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this life of the Church, the Spirit conforms the members of the Body more fully into the image of Christ, as they share in the sonship of Jesus with the Father.¹¹⁸

In light of this description of the Church, the practices of Opus Dei can indeed be profitably fitted into a Lutheran context. Opus Dei's formational practices are aimed at forming individual Christians for everyday holiness, recognizing that holiness is not reserved for those in "holy orders." With very little modification, and within the framework of the two kinds of righteousness, the following description of Opus Dei could be a fitting description of all Christian formation:

Members of Opus Dei participate in a program of spiritual, doctrinal and apostolic formation adapted to their circumstances and needs. Philosophical and theological instruction follows guidelines set down by the Catholic Church.

Commitments include a plan of spiritual life, centered on daily Mass, Holy Communion and frequent use of the sacrament of Penance, as well as reading Sacred Scripture and other spiritual texts, reciting the Rosary, and spending time in personal prayer. Through a life of joyful and generous self-giving to God and neighbour, they embrace the Cross of Christ hidden in the challenges of daily life. The Prelature's faithful also strive to carry out the duty that all Christians have of spreading the Gospel message effectively to those around them. This apostolic responsibility is an essential part of the Christian vocation, and thus of the vocation to Opus Dei.¹¹⁹

As Luther put it,

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Matthew 5:13-16.

¹¹⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:239.

¹¹⁹ Opus Dei website, accessed 2 August 2006, available from <http://www.opusdei.us/art.php?p=48>.

¹²⁰ "The Freedom of a Christian," edited by Lull, 623.

As Lutherans, we find ourselves caught up in the paradox of faith and love, of righteousness *coram Deo* and righteousness *coram hominibus*. In this paradox, we live and move and have our being until Christ returns to make each of us no longer *simul iustus et peccator*, but *solus iustus* in Christ. Now, in every aspect of our everyday lives, we find ourselves addressed by Paul in his letter to the congregation at Philippi: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12-13, *ESV*). Toward the end of his book *The Quest for Holiness*, Adolf Köberle offers just such a paradoxical description of a Lutheran understanding of formation, bound up together with a Lutheran eschatology and holding the delicate balance of justification and sanctification:

As soon as we speak only of justification or of sanctification the diabolical ease begins that imagines it possesses all things, whether present or future and that, as a result, forgets either prayer and labor, or faith and hope, and consequently, in either case, suffers spiritual shipwreck. We find a true Christian eschatology only where the decree of justification and sanctification, possessing and not possessing, perfection and imperfection are ever experienced together. Whoever tries to speak without paradoxes and would consider each one of these realms alone, who tries to find a solution of the paradox now, betrays either Good Friday or Easter and fails to understand our present status between Pentecost and the Parousia, in which it is equally sin and disobedience against God if we do not “grow in grace” or if we seek to anticipate the glory of the final perfection.¹²¹

¹²¹ Köberle, 263.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, John L., Jr. *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 2005.
- Arand, Charles. "Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology." *Lutheran Quarterly* 15, 4 (winter 2001): 417-439.
- Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.
- Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995.
- Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). *Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbot and Joseph Gallagher. New York: Guild Press, 1966.
- Escrivá, Josemaría. Various Works. Available from <http://www.escrivaworks.org/>. Internet, accessed 12 April 2007.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Sanctify Them In The Truth*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.
- Hertel, Peter. "International Christian Democracy (*Opus Dei*)" in *The Church and Christian Democracy*, 95-105. Edited by Gregory Baum and John Coleman. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1987.
- Hutchison, Robert. *Their Kingdom Come: Inside the Secret World of Opus Dei*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Köberle, Adolf. *The Quest for Holiness*. Translated by John C. Mattes. Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999 (reprint of 1938 Augsburg Publishing House edition).
- Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Luther, Martin. "The Freedom of a Christian." In *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 585-629. Edited by Timothy F. Lull. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Meilaender, Gilbert C., ed. *Working: Its Meaning and Its Limits*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.
- Messori, Vittorio. *Opus Dei: Leadership and Vision in Today's Catholic Church*. Translated by Gerald Malsbary. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Opus Dei website. Available from <http://www.opusdei.us>. Internet, accessed 12 April 2007.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 3 volumes. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, 1994, 1998.

Pohle, J. "Sanctifying Grace." *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed 14 March 2007, available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm>.

Prenter, Regin. *Spiritus Creator*. Translated by John M. Jensen. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.

Stortz, Martha Ellen. "Practicing Christians: Prayer as Formation." In *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 55-73. Edited by Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1998.

Tapia, Maria del Carmen. *Beyond the Threshold: A Life in Opus Dei*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Co., 1997.

Thierry, Jean-Jacques. *Opus Dei: A Close-up*. Translated by Gilda Roberts. New York: Cortland Press, 1975.

Walsh, Michael. *Opus Dei: An Investigation into the Powerful, Secretive Society within the Catholic Church*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco (a division of HarperCollins Publishers), 2004.

Yeago, David S. "The Promise of God and the Desires of Our Hearts: Prolegomena to a Lutheran Retrieval of Classical Spiritual Theology." *Lutheran Forum* 30, 2 (May 1996): 21-30.

----- "Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age." *Lutheran Forum* 34, 4 (Christmas/winter 2000): 6-16.