

THE CATALAN STUDENTS AGAINST OPUS DEI

On January 23rd 1961, the feast of St. Ramón de Penyafort, patron saint of lawyers in Catalonia, there were some incidents in the Faculty of Law at Barcelona University. These were condemned by an overwhelming majority of students of all the Faculties of the University, led by Catholic and Christian Democrat students.

As part of a rag, a Mock Trial is held by the Law students every year. This year, when one of the "witnesses" declared, "Yo sigo mi camino" ("I pursue my way"), disturbances broke out. (It will be remembered that 'El Camino' ("The Way") is the title of the manual for members of Opus Dei, written by its founder, Fr. Escrivá de Balaguer.) Two Opus Dei students broke in upon the stage, assaulting the students who were upon it, while some 25 other students from the same organisation attacked members of the audience, crying, "Long live Christ the Lord", "You are attacking the Catholic Church", and "Masons, Communists" etc. Finally the Mock Trial had to be "adjourned".

This outbreak of fanaticism, totally unjustified in view of the humorous character of the performance, contrasts with the open, tolerant mind of the majority of Catalan intellectuals and members of the University. Catholic students were the first to protest against the violent behaviour of the members of Opus Dei and to point out the dangers of the political activities of this organisation for the future of the Catholic Church in Spain at a time when even some of the bishops seem to be realising that the alliance of the Church with the Franco regime will in fact end in bringing harm to the Church.

The agitation spread to other Faculties of the University of Barcelona, particularly the Faculty of Economics, where more disturbances took place. Also, another performance of the Trial was announced for the 25th at noon. There was great expectation among the students, and some 3,000 from all the Faculties gathered to express their support of the firm attitude adopted by the students of the Faculty of Law. At the last moment the university authorities suspended the performance, fearing further disorders.

The Faculty of Law, a branch of the Students' Union, appointed a Commission of Enquiry, composed of the Delegate and the Sub-delegate of the branch and one student from each year, under the presidency of a professor. The Committee of the branch decided, among other things, to give another performance of the Mock Trial.

Finally, on the 25th, there was a Faculty meeting of the Professors of Law with the students' delegates. A resolution was passed expressing the students' confidence in the professors, and requesting them to find a solution of the affair before February 1st and to impose academic sanctions upon the students responsible for the disorders. Failing that, the students were prepared to strike in protest against the unjustified aggression of Opus Dei.

These incidents at the University of Barcelona have coincided with the agitation in the Spanish universities, particularly at the Faculty of Law of Valladolid, in connection with the new university just set up by Opus Dei at Pamplona. The Concordat between Spain and the Holy See gives the Church the right to establish a university of its own in Spain, but it is alleged that the new one at Pamplona is only an Opus Dei university, and that it was founded without any official notification to the Spanish Government. So far the Ministry of Education has withheld any recognition of the Pamplona University, to the disappointment of Opus Dei, which, it is said in Spain, would like

it to be officially recognised, to be entitled to grant degrees like those of all the other Spanish State universities, and to receive an official grant.

There are two residential colleges at the Opus Dei University at Pamplona, one for 100 male graduates and one for 100 female graduates from the under-developed countries of Africa and Asia. Opus Dei have two other similar colleges in Rome.

Some people think Spain should be included among the under-developed countries.

On February 6th 1961 the Times published the following information under the heading:

"OXFORD REJECTS PROPOSED ROMAN CATHOLIC HOSTEL

"A proposal by Opus Dei, the Roman Catholic organisation, to build a hostel in Oxford for 200 undergraduates has been refused by the Oxford University Delegacy of Lodgings. The decision was made at the end of last term but was not disclosed until today.

"The delegacy has a rule which says that no lodging house shall be licensed to accommodate more than 12 undergraduates. Opus Dei was told that to allow a hostel of the size proposed would make control and supervision difficult and would in fact be equivalent to the creation of a new college.

"The organisation was described in Oxford today as 'a powerful flying squad proselytising for the Roman Catholic Church'. One of its representatives, Dr. R. Maria, came to Oxford at the end of last year to try to establish the hostel.

"Grandpont House, a Georgian mansion on the banks of the Isis, was bought and the intention was to replace it with a modern building. In rejecting the project the delegacy pointed out that there was no objection to a hostel for Oxford graduates who are not subject to the same regulations as undergraduates about where they live.

"There was much opposition to the project from the Roman Catholic community in the university. It was learnt today that no pressure was brought to bear by them on the university authorities.

"A Roman Catholic teacher in Oxford said today that their church's chaplaincy was well qualified, with the Campion Hall, St. Benet's Hall, Blackfriars and Greyfriars, to look after the 500 Roman Catholic students in the university.

"He added: 'Opus Dei is an organisation of devoted, zealous Christians which tries to infiltrate its members into responsible positions in Government and the professions. Over the years a happy relationship has been established between the university and the chaplaincy and there is a gentleman's agreement that the chaplaincy does not indulge in proselytising.

"The university has come to realise that we are not trying to convert the rest of the university to Roman Catholicism. We do not want to be upset by anything that would appear to the university as sending shock troops into Oxford."