

### 1. *Don Alvaro's second trip to Rome*

In the spring of 1945 peace returned to Europe as a result of the Allied victory, but many countries continued to suffer internal instability and violent ideological conflicts. The Marshall Plan soon went into operation, bringing reconstruction and economic development to a large part of the war-devastated continent; yet Spain, severely damaged by its own civil war and unable to rebuild during the Second World War, found itself ostracized from the international community by the great powers. Left with only its own scarce economic resources (it had neither oil supplies nor raw materials nor sufficient agricultural output to stave off starvation), the country was hard pressed to survive.

The problem was that Franco's Spain was viewed as a totalitarian dictatorship, with a recent history of friendly relations with the Axis countries. In consequence, the United Nations recommended that ambassadors be recalled from Spain, and a number of countries complied after December 1946.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, on February 2, the French border had been closed to Spaniards.<sup>2</sup>

The war years had other results. The College of Cardinals, which was supposed to have seventy members, had been reduced to a little over half that number. Only four of the men whom Pope Pius XII named to fill the thirty-two vacancies at the end of 1945 were Italian. For the first time in centuries, non-Italians were a majority.

The conferring of the cardinals' hats was set for February 21, 1946,<sup>3</sup> and a Spanish pilgrimage to Rome, with the bishop of Madrid

<sup>1</sup> See Alberto J. Lleonart y Amselem and Fernando María Castiella y Maiz, *España y ONU: La "Cuestión española,"* I (1945-46): Madrid, 1978, pp. 386-89.

<sup>2</sup> It was reopened on August 24, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (henceforth abbreviated as *AAS*) 38 (1946), 132. The creation of the new cardinals and the announcement of it took place in the Secret Consistory of February 18; see *AAS* 38 (1946), 133. The interviews, audiences, and visits following the assignment of titles and posts in the Sacred Congregations kept the new cardinals in Rome for another week.

presiding, was organized. The pilgrims traveled from Barcelona to Rome's port of Civitavecchia on the *J. J. Sister*. They returned on February 24.

Don Alvaro and José Orlandis went to the port of Barcelona to meet the bishop, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, and he filled them in on the latest news and the impressions he had picked up in Rome.<sup>4</sup> Late that night, the eve of his own departure for Rome, Don Alvaro wrote the Father a note that concluded: "Give us your blessing! You already know how much I think of you and how your son Alvaro has to pray for you. On the 26th, God willing, we will telegraph you from Genoa."<sup>5</sup>

A week earlier, Salvador Canals had found an apartment with balconies and windows overlooking the Piazza Navona; it could not have been more centrally located. It had a hallway, a small living room, a good-sized dining room, and some bedrooms, although one was crammed with the former tenant's furniture.

Once he arrived, Don Alvaro had scarcely had a moment to rest before writing to Madrid a letter of several pages in a very small script—that began with the story of his arrival in Rome.

Rome, March 2, 1946

Dear Father,

Here comes the first letter of this second stage in Rome. We are writing from our apartment at 49 Corso del Rinascimento, which Salvador providentially obtained. . . .

The boat trip was wonderful. We left at noon on the 25th with all our luggage, and reached Genoa on the 26th, at three in the afternoon. The consul and Salvador were waiting for us. Despite the consul's protests, we left for Rome in a Fiat driven by its owner, a count who is a friend of Salvador's. This was at about six in the evening. To save time, we went through the Bracco without waiting for a police escort. The count had provided himself with a *rivoltella* (a revolver). We could not have done much, but nothing happened.

We had supper in La Spezia, and despite being told again that it was very dangerous, we continued on, hoping to make the trip by night and arrive in time to see the Spanish cardi-

<sup>4</sup> See José Orlandis Rovira, *Mis recuerdos: Primeros tiempos del Opus Dei en Roma* (Madrid, 1995), pp. 36–37.

<sup>5</sup> AGP section B1, file 3, C-460224-1.

nals, who were to leave Rome early on the first. But we started getting flat tires; the two jacks that we had broke; and, finally, five miles from Pisa, we had another flat. Since it was night, no one would stop to lend us a jack or do anything else, so we securely shut ourselves up in the car to sleep. Maybe someone would help us when day came. We did not know we were so close to Pisa. And not until the next day did we learn that while we were sleeping, some bandits robbed a truck just half a mile from us, and took off with it, leaving its drivers tied to trees.

At daybreak we finally got help, and I celebrated Mass in Pisa—my first Mass in Italy—and we went on after the tires were fixed. But to no avail: breakdowns and more breakdowns. Instead of reaching Rome on the morning of the 27th, we arrived on the 28th, too late to have supper.<sup>6</sup>

Several pages follow relating, with a wealth of detail, how he obtained letters of commendation from the cardinals, most of whom, as Bishop Leopoldo had told them in Barcelona, had their bags packed and were getting ready to leave.

First, they got letters with no difficulty, from the three Spaniards—the primate of Toledo and the cardinals of Tarragona and Granada. Then they turned to the rest of the cardinals still in Rome. Of these, Cardinal Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, of Lisbon, was the first to provide a letter, doing so without even being asked. “I too must give you one!” he said. Then his secretary, a Father Corneira, took the initiative in obtaining a letter from Cardinal Teodosio Clemente de Gouveia, of Lorenzo Marques.

Don Alvaro's meeting with Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini of Palermo was notably warm. When he said that the Cardinal probably would not remember him, since when they last met he'd had a moustache and been dressed as a layman, the cardinal expressed great happiness and publicly praised the Work and, having met José María Albareda and José María González Barredo, some of its members. “You know already,” he insisted, “that wherever I am, the Work is. You must come to Palermo.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> AGP, section B1, file 3, C-460302-1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Don Alvaro decided to ask letters of commendation from all the cardinals in whose dioceses any member of the Work had carried out any apostolate, even the humble first efforts of someone doing research or studying on scholarship in a foreign country. He wrote the founder: "It is possible that we will get commendatory letters from the cardinals of Berlin, Cologne, Westminster, Palermo, and perhaps Milan and New York. With those of Toledo, Tarragona, Granada, Seville (his letter hasn't arrived yet!), and Lisbon, that makes 11 out of the 69 in the world. Not bad, although a few have turned us down."<sup>8</sup>

Don Alvaro had set up interviews for March 3 with some of the cardinals still in Rome. (Cardinals Francis Spellman of New York and Bernard Griffin of Westminster, who would no doubt have provided letters, had to leave too soon to be asked.)

In this international environment, Italian was the most helpful language, and this was a tongue in which Don Alvaro was not particularly fluent. He soon concluded that it was obligatory in Rome. "One can see," he wrote the Father, "that one has no choice but to speak Italian if one wants to be understood by all these people. I have tried to speak it from the first day."<sup>9</sup> But when he and Salvador showed up for their March 3 appointment with the vicar general of Cologne, he had to fall back on French. Despite his best efforts, after half an hour the vicar still did not understand why his cardinal should provide a letter. Apparently to show good will however, he invited them in for a minute to kiss His Eminence's ring. To the vicar's surprise, the minute became an hour and a half.

The conversation took place in the office of the cardinal, Joseph Frings. It began with a discussion of the language they would use. Cardinal Frings knew German, Italian, and Latin. Given the choices, Don Alvaro offered to speak in either Latin or his "three-day-old Italian." Cardinal Frings wisely opted for Latin.

When Don Alvaro saw, from the cardinal's questions, that he understood the Work perfectly, he turned to the purpose of their visit. "Habemus aliquas Litteras Commendaticias . . . fere omnium Episcoporum Hispaniae et etiam alicuius Cardinalis Lusitaniae, Italiae . . ." At this point Salvador, as if to corroborate what Don Alvaro was

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. The new Spanish cardinals were the archbishops of Toledo, Enrique Pla y Deniel; Tarragona, Manuel Arce y Ochotorena; and Granada, Agustín Parrado y García.

<sup>9</sup> AGP, section B1, file 3, C-460302-1.

saying, pulled out of his briefcase a stack of papers. Cardinal Frings looked surprised and exclaimed, "Sed insatiabiles estis!"<sup>10</sup>

"I answered him," writes Don Alvaro, "that it was usual to bring four or five commendatory letters for the *decretum laudis*, and therefore his would not materially affect that matter. But since the Work was in fact present and active in Germany, and since if Cardinal [Michael von] Faulhaber were in Rome he undoubtedly would give us a letter, and since, above all, 'esset nobis gaudium magnum Litteram aliquam alicuius Episcopi Germaniae possidere' . . ." <sup>11</sup>, Happy to oblige, the cardinal wrote his letter.

While there were obvious limits to the number of foreign prelates who could be asked for letters of commendation, things were different in regard to Spain. The founder had for years been going from one diocese to another and speaking with bishops. Now he set about obtaining letters from them. In some cases this had to be done in stages: first, an in-depth conversation with the bishop about the canonical situation of the Work; then a request that he write a letter; finally, making sure it got sent. This was sometimes not easy. Illness, travel, work, or well-meaning forgetfulness might result in delays—until Father Josemaría refreshed the bishop's memory, either directly or through the good offices of friends or acquaintances, like the bishop of Tuy, the abbot of Montserrat, or Father Eliodoro Gil.<sup>12</sup> This is why a project begun in December of 1945 dragged on until the following June.

Don Alvaro had brought with him to Rome a dozen or so letters. March brought a number of others.<sup>13</sup> On March 25, Father Josemaría wrote to Bishop José López Ortiz: "It's a shame we can't get together to talk, so that you would understand the need for many 'commendatories.' Thanks be to God, we have received them from Portuguese and Italian prelates and from all the Spaniards we have approached."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> AGP, section B1, file 3, C-460312-1 (Letter of Alvaro del Portillo, 12 Mar 1946). "Habemus . . .": "We have some commendatory letters . . . given by all the Spanish prelates and also some of the cardinals from Portugal, Italy . . ." "Sed insatiabiles estis!": "You really are insatiable!"

<sup>11</sup> "Esset nobis . . .": "It would make us very happy to have a letter from some German prelate." Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See AGP, RHF, EF-460206-1, 460420-1, 460324-1, 460421-1, and 460503-1 (letters to Bishop José López Ortiz, of Tuy, and to the abbot of Montserrat, Dom Aurelio Escarré).

<sup>13</sup> See AGP, RHF, EF-460324-2.

<sup>14</sup> AGP, RHF, EF-460325-1.

There were already more than thirty commendatory letters from the Spanish bishops when the members of Opus Dei in Rome made seven copies of each in order to make up booklets for the seven consultors of the Curia. One of them commented, “You’re really pushing!” But Don Alvaro said in a letter to the Father, “It’s too bad we don’t have all the commendatories!”<sup>15</sup>

Like Cardinal Frings, the Father may well have thought his sons in Rome insatiable. If so, he kept it to himself, while continuing to seek letters from bishops who had not yet responded. On April 14, he wrote Bishop López Ortiz: “Pardon my persistence. Those in Rome are urging me to obtain more commendatories. . . . I would like to know if those good gentlemen in León, Orense, and Guadix are breathing. Frankly, it won’t bother me too much if they refuse, although I don’t want that to happen. Let me know right away what the situation is.”<sup>16</sup>

A month later Don Alvaro wrote to him, “The commendatory letters have made up a marvelous book of a hundred pages.”<sup>17</sup> And letters kept coming. The last ones—those from the bishops of León, Ibiza, Plasencia, and Vic—arrived in the middle of June.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. “New forms” of Christian life

Clearly the founder could not fully agree with the contents of the decree establishing the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, since it did not altogether accurately express the Opus Dei’s real nature—its universal character—and so was not an adequate instrument for its development. Having obtained the incardination of priests of Opus Dei in the new Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, Father Josemaría felt obliged to explain why this canonical garb did not really fit. “For

<sup>15</sup> AGP, section B1, file 3, C-460403-1. This letter from Don Alvaro is registered as having been written on April 3, but was actually written on three days: April 3, 5, and 19.

<sup>16</sup> AGP, RHF, EF-460414-1.

<sup>17</sup> AGP, section B1, file 3, C-460517-1.

<sup>18</sup> See AGP, RHF, EF-460616-1. The collecting of commendatory letters was an all-out and exhaustive exercise. As is stated in the *decretum laudis* (24 Feb 1947) of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, the Holy See was presented with sixty letters from the prelates in whose dioceses Opus Dei was working, including eight cardinals and all the metropolitans of Spain. See Amadeo de Fuenmayor, Valentín Gómez Iglesias, and José Luis Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, trans. William H. Stetson (Princeton, 1994), p. 503. See also *Letter 7 Oct 1950*, no. 20; and *Diccionario de Historia Eclesiástica* (Madrid, 1972), vol. 2, p. 1012.