



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Accounts](#) - [Carmen Escrivá](#)

Carmen Escrivá

Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, who knew St Josemaria's mother and sister very well, spoke in the book *Immersed in God* about what both of them meant for the founding and development of Opus Dei. "The availability of our Founder's mother and sister proved of incalculable value to Opus Dei."

On July 16, 1899, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the eldest of the six children of Don José and Doña Dolores Escrivá was born. She was named Carmen, and was the sister of St Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei. St Josemaría once remarked: "Carmen always used to tell me, 'I don't have a vocation.' And it was true, she didn't; but she sacrificed herself for the Work with so much affection..."

"The willingness of our founder's mother and sister to help out made all the difference in the world to Opus Dei," said Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, who knew both of them very well.

"The founder openly discussed Opus Dei with his mother, with his sister, Carmen, and with his brother Santiago, in September of 1934. If up to that moment his mother had always been a sure source of support for her son, from then on she collaborated with him in an even more effective, though unobtrusive, way. She seconded his wishes, intuiting the ones he left unstated; she subordinated all her plans, for herself and for her family, to those of God; she placed at her son's disposal all the resources she had.

After the war, when the residence on Jenner Street was initially being fitted out, the founder gave his mother a book describing the life of St. John Bosco. 'Now you wouldn't by any chance be hoping,' she said, 'that I'm going to act like the mother of Don Bosco? Because I don't have the slightest intention of doing any such thing!' 'But, Mama,' he replied, 'you already are!' And his mother, who knew that as well as he did, burst out laughing. 'And I will continue to do so,' she said, 'with great pleasure.' His sister, Carmen, did exactly the same. She too renounced

a life for herself and put all her energies into serving the Work – at first, perhaps, mostly just out of affection for her brother, but always with great love of God.

They transmitted the warmth that had characterized the domestic life of the Escrivá family to the supernatural family our founder was creating. We learned to recognize this in the good taste exemplified in so many small details, in the delicacy with which people treated each other, and in the way the material things of the house were cared for, which implied – and this is the most important thing – a constant concern for others and a spirit of service characterized by vigilance and renunciation. We had observed all this in the character of our Father, and now we saw it confirmed in the Grandmother [Mrs. Escrivá] and Aunt Carmen. We could not fail to treasure all this, and so, with spontaneous simplicity, family customs and traditions took root in us which even today live on in all the centers of the Work; family portraits and photographs, which help to make a house a home; a special dessert for someone's name day or birthday; the affectionate and tasteful placing of flowers in front of a picture of our Lady, or in some other appropriate place in the house.

Their willingness to help out made all the difference in the world to Opus Dei, especially in those early days. Carmen always confronted with a profound sense of responsibility this work that she had now freely made her own. She set up the domestic administration of many centers of the Work, courageously putting up with the discomfort and problems of the initial stages. Once everything was working well, she would step aside. She never became flustered, never let herself get agitated, worried, or overwhelmed, never lost her temper. She always appeared serene, possessed of an interior peace and a confidence in God which multiplied her effectiveness. I remember, for example, when she started setting up the domestic administration of the first two retreat houses of Opus Dei in Spain – La Pililla, in the province of Avila, and Molinoviejo, near Segovia. At first we did not even have any electricity. Carmen, as always, acted like it was no problem at all for her to take care of this work until conditions were such that the women of Opus Dei could take over.

We have to bear in mind that Carmen never belonged to the Work. She did not have a vocation to it. Yet every time the founder asked his sister for some help with the Work, she responded generously.

While the self-sacrifice of the Grandmother lasted until two years after the end of the Spanish Civil War, Carmen devoted herself to the needs of the Work for almost twenty years, going from one place to another, wherever her presence was needed.”

Excerpts from the book *Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaría, founder of Opus Dei, as seen by his successor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo*, Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter/Sinag Tala, 1996, pp. 67-72.