



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

## Founder of Opus Dei

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Historians and readers interested in the history of Opus Dei and its founder will find much to occupy their studies in Issue 3 (2009) of the journal [Studia et Documenta](#), published March 2009. The majority of the articles are in Spanish.

Biographies of St Josemaria have already covered the 1930s and given many details on his life as a young priest from Aragon, Spain, in the years following the founding of Opus Dei. Some aspects of the story, however, have not been published to date. For example, the biographies mention the group of priests he gathered around himself in those years, wishing to pass on his ideals to them, but little was known of them or their relationship with St Josemaria. For the first time, a detailed study has been made of these priests and their activities, and this also opens up new perspectives on the life of Madrid clergy during the Second Spanish Republic. The authors are Jose Luis Gonzalez Gullon and Jaume Aurell, both specialists in the religious history of the interwar years in Spain.

This article is one of several on St Josemaria's life in Madrid in the 1930s, all written in Spanish. The first is an introductory survey of the social, political, cultural and religious background to the period. Julio Montero, Professor of Communication History, and Javier Cervera, who specializes in the history of the Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War, present a vivid, carefully-researched piece with concise details providing a clear picture of the context in which Opus Dei began its activity.

Little, too, was known up until now about Luis Gordon, a young businessman working in beer production, who was one of the St Josemaria's very first followers until his untimely death wrecked the hopes St Josemaria had placed in him. Pedro Pablo Ortunez, an economic historian, and Luis Gordon Beguer, a nephew of the subject, offer an interesting contribution on the life of a very "normal" Catholic, in no way a stereotype, who really understood the message of secularity and

sanctification of ordinary life, in his work as brewer.

Another very interesting article is that on St Josemaria's connection with the *Obra del Amor Misericordioso*, or "Work of Merciful Love". Up till now there have been only the slenderest references to this aspect of his life. This new article shows that he was on familiar terms with this devotional movement, which derived directly from the Sacred Heart, and which, widespread in Spain at that time, disappeared after the Spanish Civil War. The author, Federico M. Requena, is an expert on the movement in question.

The historian Beatriz Comella concludes the section with an article on the *Patronato de Santa Isabel*, or St. Elizabeth Foundation in Madrid, where St Josemaria carried out pastoral work for several years.

Perhaps the most interesting and novel of all is an article that comes in the "Studies and Notes" section. This is a dense piece in Spanish by Jose Luis Illanes, the Director of the Istituto Storico, who presents the very first complete chronological list of St Josemaria's writings. It includes not just the posthumous publications but all the unpublished writings.

Illanes has carried out a studious examination of St Josemaria's extant writings and notes, including his preaching notes, which are preserved in the archives of the Opus Dei prelature. The fruit of his work is presented here as a panoramic overview of St Josemaria as a writer and preacher, and especially of the work that went into composing the various texts, including his letters and "Instructions", not yet published. Naturally, Illanes can only refer very briefly to the actual content of this ample collection of writings, which it is hoped will one day be published in the collection of the Complete Works of Josemaria Escriva being produced by the Istituto Storico. But the overall picture is itself extremely revealing of an inheritance that, as Pope Paul VI said to Mgr Alvaro del Portillo in 1976, belongs to the whole Church.

St Josemaria's little-known work as a teacher is the subject of two studies in this journal issue. The first, by Constantino Anchel, a great expert on the history of Opus Dei, covers his work as a teacher of Canon Law and Roman Law at the Instituto Amado and the Academia Cicuendez between 1926 and 1932. The second, by Pablo Perez Lopez, lecturer in Contemporary History, covers the classes in general and professional ethics given by St Josemaria on the official journalism course in Madrid, in 1940-41. The last article in the "Studies and Notes" section is a long study in French by the theologian Guillaume Derville on the historical-critical edition of *The Way*, published in Spanish by the Istituto Storico in

2002.

The “Documentation” section includes the complete text of one of the documents dating back to the early years of the life of Opus Dei. This is the account written by St Josemaria of his meetings with Mgr Francisco Moran, Vicar General of the Diocese of Madrid, from 1934 to 1938. The document is annotated by Santiago Casas, a lecturer in church history specializing in contemporary Spanish Catholicism.

The “Chronicle” section by Alfredo Mendiz lists events connected with Opus Dei or St Josemaria from 2006 to 2008.

As well as book reviews, the “Bibliography” section contains the second part of the “General Bibliography” about St Josemaria whose first part appeared in Issue 1 of the journal. The second part lists books under two headings: “Theological Studies” and “Other Studies”, giving a total of 350 titles, some of them accompanied by short explanatory notes.

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