



Saint Josemaría Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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The birthday of "alternative" feminism?

Anne-Marie Walker

Times online

St Valentine's Day is an important day for most people but this year it is especially important. Why? Is it going to be particularly chocolate-filled? Will there be a mountain of roses? No. It will be the 80th anniversary of the start of the women's section in Opus Dei and as a woman in Opus Dei that's really important to me.

Opus Dei began life on 2 October 1928 when a young Fr Josemaría Escriva caught the tiniest glimpse of God's plan for him within the Catholic Church. At that time, he believed that it would only be for men. However, two years later, while celebrating Mass on 14 February 1930, he realised that women were very much part of Opus Dei.

Sixty-two years later, in January 1992, I joined those women of Opus Dei. At the time I was an undergraduate studying English and Publishing from a Marxist and Feminist perspective. Feminism, as far as I could make out, was defined as women imitating men in the worst possible ways. Needless to say I was not impressed so I was fascinated to discover the Catholic Church's teaching on an alternative Feminism.

"A woman has to develop her own personality and not let herself be carried away by a naive desire to imitate, which, as a rule, would tend to put her in an inferior position and leave her unique qualities unfulfilled," said St Josemaría Escriva back in the late 1960s. John Paul II's 1988 Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, announced that women's "unique qualities" had a crucial role in saving humanity. He demonstrated women's dignity and vocation in the Church through our role model, Mary, the Mother of God and the other women in the Gospel. He even stated that we reflect God in our feminity because He possess both masculine and feminine attributes.

Twenty years earlier St Josemaría openly acknowledged the dignity and vocation of women: "Each woman in her own sphere of life, if she is faithful to her divine

and human vocation can and, in fact, does achieve the fullness of her feminine personality.” For me, my divine vocation was as a supernumerary and my human one to be a book editor. If I lived both vocations to the best of my ability, I would be fulfilled. Today I am still working on that task and today I thank God for Opus Dei, my vocation and the fulfilment in my life as a consequence.

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