



Saint Josemaría Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Articles and studies](#) - [Women in Opus Dei](#)

Women in Opus Dei

Michelle Matouk

It may surprise people to discover that Opus Dei, shrouded in orthodoxy, is really a radical, revolutionary movement in the Catholic Church. I certainly was taken by surprise when I stumbled upon that reality in my spiritual searching about eight years ago.

Saint Josemaría Escriva, upon realising that God willed all people to seek holiness, founded Opus Dei as a way to provide spiritual support and doctrinal formation to the laity in order to achieve sanctity through one's ordinary work and daily routine.

He broke down all barriers between the clergy and the laity by offering all people access to courses in theology, philosophy, spirituality, doctrine and providing personal spiritual guidance not only for members but for anyone who sought these spiritual services.

A brief look at the historic context of the inception of Opus Dei demonstrated to me more clearly just how ahead of his time Saint Josemaría was.

In 1930, a year and a half after establishing Opus Dei for men by divine inspiration, he understood that it was meant for women as well.

It is worth noting that this took place at a time when women were not educated to work in professions outside of the home. It was not thought that women could lead an independent life without masculine support. In fact the laws did not allow women to be involved in any business without the sponsorship of men.

Yet, in this cultural atmosphere, Saint Josemaría wrote to "his daughters": "Develop yourselves personally in society, among women, in work similar to that fulfilled in the world of your brothers; and undertake, as they do, all types of professional, social and political positions, etc." (Letter, 29 July 1965). This was very progressive thinking.

How is it that Saint Josemaría became a pioneer of the role and mission of women in the world and the Church? He is not the author of a new spirituality, but the instigator of a rebirth of a new and old spirituality.

He revealed Scripture's modern day relevance over and over again, as when, for example, he referred to *Genesis 2:15* in a meditation and remarked that "after two thousand years we have reminded the whole of humanity that man was created to work," and "there is no noble human task in the world which cannot be made divine, which may not be sanctified".

Most importantly, the inspiration of his message comes from the biblical principle that God created man *male and female*. Since man is made in God's image and likeness, what is specific to both male and female has its archetype in God.

Therefore, from the beginning, God intended for male and female to collaborate jointly, to bring to all human activity a masculine and feminine perspective.

In his desire to want what God wants, Saint Josemaría embraced this Christian tradition of equality of men and women which celebrates and ennobles the differences between the sexes, the differences which complement and balance one another.

On marriage, he echoed Pope John Paul II when he considered the relationship between spouses as being reciprocal (*Conversations with Msgr Josemaría Escriva de Balaguer*, 107-108). He encouraged women to help men to make the family by getting them involved in household and educational duties (*Conversations*, 89, 91).

Saint Josemaría advises women not to fall into the trap of imitating men, that equality means that a woman's feminine way of being is legitimate and valuable. In the public arena, he refutes the implication that there may be specific tasks for women alone: "As I said earlier, in this field what is specific is not the task or position itself, but the way in which the work is done. There are values which a woman more readily perceives, and her specific contribution will often, therefore, change the whole approach to a problem, and can lead to the discovery of completely new approaches" (*Conversations*, 90).

Finding Opus Dei gave me a sense of coming home, for these were the lessons taught to me by my devout parents, but lost somewhere in modern culture.

Rediscovering anew the valuable lessons preached by Saint Josemaría has empowered me to infuse my professional work as a mother, homemaker, architect and teacher with warmth and sensitivity to humanity that has resulted in a more far-reaching, positive effect than I ever could have imagined.

***Catholic News* , Port of Spain (Trinidad), 20 June 2004**