

In an ironic way, the sometimes-hostile curiosity provoked by Dan Brown's novel became an invitation to talk freely about aspects of Catholic faith and history that rarely receive media attention and a chance for many people to become acquainted with the relatively-unknown Opus Dei, an acquaintanceship that, in some cases, has even led some to join Opus Dei. In his summary of the communications lessons learned from the experience, Mora captures the paradoxically-positive cumulative effect of his strategy with the words that appeared as a headline in *Il Corriere della Sera* on the day of the film's release: "L'Opus Dei che sorride (e vince)", "Opus Dei Smiles (and Wins)".

John Wauck

Mary T. OATES - Linda RUF - Jenny DRIVER (eds.), *Women of Opus Dei. In their own words*, New York, Crossroad, 2009, 222 pp.

*Women of Opus Dei: In Their Own Words* offers a unique contribution to the still relatively new literature on Opus Dei. Edited by Marie Oates, journalist, novelist and public relations consultant, Linda Ruf, CPA, wife and mother, and Dr. Jane Driver, a physician and Harvard Medical School Instructor, *Women of Opus Dei* opens the door to the much needed conversation about what it means to be a woman in Opus Dei. *Women of Opus Dei* offers first hand accounts of Catholic women from a variety of cultural, socio-economic, family and professional backgrounds, who have found in Opus Dei a personal pathway to developing a closer relationship with God. Each of them describes in her own words what it looks like to discover God in her daily circumstances—from the most seemingly mundane work of changing diapers to the world of high stakes decision-making.

Of the fourteen women featured in this book, eight are married (most have children) and six are celibate. They are leaders—medical professionals, engineers and scientists, corporate executives, founders of NGOs, educators, entrepreneurs, hospitality professionals, stay at home mothers with ivy league educations and more.

While several books have attempted to illuminate what Opus Dei is from a theological and canonical perspective—e.g., Fuenmayor et al's *The Canonical Path* and Rodríguez et al's *Opus Dei in the Church*, and more recently, to describe Opus Dei as a response to a need in the universal Church Martin Rhonheimer's *Changing the World: The Timeliness of Opus Dei*—few works have articulated what it means to be a member of Opus Dei. Several works have attempted to describe a vocation to Opus Dei but often in a formal, detached way presenting generalized accounts of what members' commitments to Opus Dei entail. Scott Hahn broke new ground in his *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace: My Spiritual Journey in Opus Dei* (Doubleday Religion, 2006), providing a personal account of his vocation. The reader walks in the author's shoes and witnesses his life as a university professor, Scripture scholar,

husband and father and learns how he integrates his relationship with God into every aspect of his day.

Hahn's book is far from the only personal account of members of Opus Dei. Books have been written about Álvaro del Portillo, the first successor of Escrivá, and several early members of Opus Dei including Joseph Múzquiz and Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri. Many current members of Opus Dei were interviewed for news magazines and television programs, especially when Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* captured international attention as a best selling novel. Most of the published stories, however, tended to repeat the sad and sometimes angry testimonies from a handful of former members who recount their grievances with Opus Dei. These well-worn narratives combined with a lack of shared understanding about Opus Dei have contributed to a number of common perceptions including: Opus Dei is secretive. Opus Dei is monolithic. All of its members are elitist conservatives, politically likeminded and of similar personality and interests. Opus Dei demotes women to stereotypical domestic roles and limits their reach.

John Allen's *Opus Dei: An Objective Look behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* helps to shine light on why Opus Dei has been so misunderstood and misrepresented by the media and people in the Church. *Women of Opus Dei* addresses these perceptions in a fresh and compelling way without deliberately intending to do so.

First, the women in this book are not secretive about their calling to Opus Dei, as evidenced by their willingness to share their stories. At the same time, they do not wear their affiliation on their sleeve. They make it quite clear that the way that they have chosen is not about fanfare or public practices. Each portrait illustrates how these women find transcendence in their daily work. Through the activities and support they receive in Opus Dei, they learn to improve their work, to make it an "offering" or gift to God—whether they are preparing dinner, listening to their children, or helping a patient deal with a terminal illness. They help the reader understand both the practical and the deeply personal impact of their vocation to Opus Dei. We hear from a physical therapist who explains how and when she talks to her clients about God. We learn of a teacher who prays for her students with every paper she corrects. We learn how a marketing executive puts the customer first and prays for wisdom before each meeting. We learn how a mother transforms routine housework from drudgery to an encounter with God.

Second, there is nothing monolithic or cookie cutter-like about these women. We meet two immigrants, one political refugee, and an orphan. We hear from a former Baptist, a cultural Jew and a number of cradle Catholics. Each comes from a different socio-economic background, and each pursues her own distinct professional path. These women are not united by family, friendship or politics. The Stanford graduate and former Hula dancer, the once atheist and radical feminist who thought Catholicism a downright threat to women's independence, the bohemian Cuban refugee who went to Harvard, the NY public school teacher whose biological mother refused to

acknowledge her publicly as her daughter, the hospitality professional who pursued several lines of business before discovering the work God was calling her to, the oncologist who once longed to become a Buddhist, the physical therapist raising a blind autistic son all share the same call to Opus Dei, but they do not share the same story. The editors relate their subjects' highly individualized accounts in either an interview or testimonial format and successfully capture the personal voice of each woman.

Third, *Women of Opus Dei* also brings into sharp relief the dignity and professionalism of work in the home. Several women profiled here are mothers with prestigious degrees and enviable career opportunities. They have chosen to prioritize staying at home to raise their families not because this is what the Catholic Church expects of them, but because they have learned through the spirituality of Opus Dei that all work has dignity and can be raised to an even higher level of professional excellence when done for the glory of God and the service of others. Saint Josemaría's pioneering insights on women can be found in *Conversations* as well as on [www.escrivaworks.org](http://www.escrivaworks.org). His view that the care of a home is professional work to be respected as much as a doctor's or lawyer's professional work and remunerated justly was both progressive and unprecedented. Several of the stay-at-home mothers featured also work outside their home or initiated work compatible with family life. Two women profiled in the book have trained and chosen to make their professional livelihood the hospitality management and care of centers of Opus Dei. In doing so, they insure that residences and conference centers of Opus Dei are warm family homes with home-cooked meals and a clean and cheerful environment. They look after the people who live in them with the care and attention of a mother and the expertise of a professional. We learn how much they love this work and why. We also learn that they are paid well and provided generous benefits.

*Women of Opus Dei* offers fresh and original perspectives—captivating stories—on how Opus Dei helps fourteen women of diverse backgrounds keep their faith real and vibrant. It is a must read for men as well as women, for those who are searching for God and for those who already possess a deep faith, for Opus Dei skeptics and for those who genuinely want to understand how to put the spirit of Opus Dei into practice.

Karen E. Bohlin

Martin RHONHEIMER, *Ihr seid das Licht der Welt. Das Opus Dei – jungen Menschen erklärt*, Köln, Adamas, 2009, 368 S. = «*Vosotros sois la luz del mundo*». *Explicando a los jóvenes la vocación al Opus Dei*, Madrid, Rialp, 2009, 267 pp.

Der mitteleuropäische Durchschnittsjugendliche ist es nicht, den der Autor beim Schreiben als Adressaten seines Buches vor Augen hatte, sondern ein Jugendlicher, der „schon einmal den Herrn in der Stille darum gebeten hat, er, der Herr, solle etwas