

women in the sanctuary, seminary, and church bureaucracy. Moreover, in the rush to assure the world that the Church really values women, a monumental crisis is being ignored: that of men and fathers.

Men are staying away from the Church in droves, identifying religious leadership in family and church with women's work. The contemporary feminist portrait of the patriarchal church is largely a myth. Consider these statistics: more than 85 percent of those involved in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are women; 80 percent of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) teachers are women; 80 percent of prayer group members are women; 70 percent of Bible study participants are women; 58 percent of those identified as the most influential leaders in parish life are women; 60 percent of persons involved with youth ministry are women.

The dearth of male religious leadership and participation in church life is having devastating consequences on vocations and family life. The priesthood is often not seen as a manly vocation. Fatherhood is not seen involving religious commitment or leadership. The Church's response to the world about its teaching on the priesthood and on men and women cannot be determined by journalists and secular feminism, which I am afraid is largely the case today.

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#### Avery Dulles replies:

It has been the firm teaching of the Catholic Church since the struggles against Jansenism in the seventeenth century that God does not withhold from anyone the grace needed for salvation. Pius IX in several documents asserted that non-Christians living in invincible ignorance of the true faith could obtain eternal life, provided that they cooperated with the grace given to them. The Holy Office under Pius XII, clarifying this point, insisted that no one could be saved without supernatural faith, which could, however, be merely implicit.

Vatican Council II asserted in a number of texts that every human being can have faith and can be associated in a saving way with the mystery of Christ. John Paul II has picked up from Vatican II the idea that "seeds of the Word" are present in the great religions of the world.

The idea of "seeds of the Word" is not new. It comes into Christian tradition even before Origen. Justin Martyr, who spoke of the "seminal word" (*logos spermatikos*), taught that Christ is "the Word of whom every race of people were partakers" and that "those who live reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists." Clement of Alexandria, inspired by the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, declared: "The word is not hidden from any; He is a universal light; He shines upon all human beings."

On the basis of texts such as these it is possible to surmise that by accepting the illumination of the Logos, the unevangelized may have sufficient faith to attain eternal life. But it is important to keep in mind that the universal presence of the Logos is intended to be a preparation for the gospel, which discloses Jesus Christ as the only Savior.

In the contested passage concerning women in the Church, I was practically quoting John Paul II's address of September 3, 1995. If Father Villa has a quarrel with me, he must have one with the Pope as well. Fr. Villa is of course correct in what he says about the dominance of women in certain ministries, such as health care and religious education, particularly on the parish level. But women are conspicuously absent in policy-making positions at the higher levels of Church administration. Although the complementarity of the sexes must be respected, I do not see it as justifying the dearth of either male or female leadership, whether on the local or on the universal level.


#### In Defense of Opus Dei

It is surprising that your Briefly Noted on Joan Estruch's book (*Saints and Sinners: Opus Dei and Its Paradoxes*, March) gives such uncritical

acceptance to a deconstructionist analysis of Opus Dei. . . .

When a deconstructionist sociologist treats texts dealing with Christian faith and practice, the results will necessarily be altogether corrosive, particularly if he feels obliged to take a scholarly stance that excludes any sympathy for ultimate truth. Estruch subjects the writings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva and his followers to this kind of "objective" analysis. His results, often couched in cynical irony, range from the silly to the outrageous. Your review seems to buy into much of this when it repeats Estruch's charge that Escriva's "hagiographers" indulged in "excesses—if not outright prevarications."

Religious truth simply is not relevant to Estruch's deconstructionist method. It is inevitable that his almost endless and often rarefied juggling of multiple readings of texts



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leads to an unrelenting assault on an institution whose fundamental purposes have already been discounted. To assess Opus Dei in this way is akin to analyzing what goes on in a basketball game while disregarding the aim of the game itself.

Your review at least raises some suspicions about the book. It terms it "peculiar" and says the author "gets a bit hysterical" when discussing the relationship between Opus Dei and Pope John Paul II. Yet for all that, it accepts a number of Estruch's claims about the Prelature, even counting them "valuable contributions."

Of course central to Estruch's method would be the allegation that

the Prelature is *not* what the members or the Church say it is. Estruch makes this point with the assertion that Opus Dei has changed its purpose over the years and was really founded in 1939, not 1928 as the founder had often repeated and as the Catholic Church in fact solemnly proclaimed. These charges are patently untrue—and offered without a shred of hard evidence.

The book may add little to the study of Max Weber's theories about capitalism and the Protestant ethic, as your review concludes. But contrary to what the review says, it is doubtful that the book will be "of interest" for any understanding of

Opus Dei. Nearly everything it says about the Prelature is a caricature.

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#### Correction:

Derek S. Jeffreys of Chicago complains that his letter in the May issue refers to "the Montgomery bus boycott of 1965." He wrote, and we know, that the Montgomery bus boycott was in 1956. Sorry. 1969 has been a hard year for our proofreaders.

## In the Beginning

The sun was fierce that day,  
relentless even in its shadow. Heat  
clung to the walls and troubled  
the air like a presence almost seen.

She bent above the shallow bowl,  
pressing on the crush of wheat,  
grinding each stubborn hull beneath  
her clenched tool. Sweat trickled  
like a steady itch along her scalp.

She paused, still gripping the pestle,  
and lifted her head back wearily.  
An oven . . . the room was an oven,  
and she, the crumble of grain.

But now a sudden silence—  
no babble from the street,  
no wailing of the neighbor's child,  
no buzz of flies, no pounding hammer,  
or slam and slide of board on board;

only a pounding along the flat plane  
of her temples. It was as if  
a summer storm had gathered  
in the suffocation of this room—  
had caught her unaware, uncovered,  
and hung in wait above her,  
pressing, pressing down . . .

And into the heat a cold fire centered,  
like a gathering of lightning unreleased.  
Slowly she stood, pestle clutched tightly.  
Fear whipped down her back,  
encircling her, etching through the  
tightness of her skin,  
gripping across her belly like an omen.

"*MARY!*" That was all.

She turned with a sudden pivot,  
dropping her useless tool;  
and Love spoke softly, from the gathering  
of shadows and of heat, and from the  
steady glowing of the cool Fire.

As on the First Day, so it was . . .  
As in the Beginning, so it was . . .

Judith Deem Dupree