

WOMEN BEYOND IDEOLOGY: THE WORLD OF OPUS DEI

Edith Zeltner

'Faith has a future if it is a source of joy, for without optimism we can do nothing worthwhile. Not a "grin and bear it" cheerfulness but a sincere witness to belief. Theologians have too long been "masters of faith" instead of "servants of our joy" (St. Paul).'

Robert Spaemann's words must apply to questions like: equal rights in the Church, ordination of women, progressives and reactionaries. Why do these points bring such polarization? Is it their own difficulty or our weak faith? As Christians, we can tackle them without having to escape the everyday in some esoteric 'New Age' way.

No, our line must be a real and en-

thusiastic facing of the problems. This is how our minds grow. The reason for optimism? We don't have to invent anything new, there is a basic structure which invites—summons us indeed—to do our own thinking and make the world a more worthy place to live in.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá went a step farther and spoke of passionately affirming the world, with feet on the ground, and head and heart in heaven. It is no wonder that his spirituality has empowered people to have a creative approach to the situations in which they live.

Engagement with tradition can lead to dynamic solutions inspired in faith, joy and hope. Let me offer a couple of

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examples from my experience that Escrivá and his Opus Dei don't belong in an anti-progressive ghetto, facts which speak for themselves.

In the first place, women. Women are not an issue in Opus Dei. Equality doesn't have to be won there, it is a reality. Even back in the fifties women not only held half of the directive posts, they have also been setting up universities, schools and social projects. I know women doctors, engineers, homemakers and farmers. The 'home/career/both?' decision was rooted in their own situation. An Opus Dei priest recently remarked to me that he was a feminist; it is a long time since any of my women friends said anything like that. An interesting switch of roles!

Secondly, lay people. Lay people in Opus Dei don't want to be priests, or vice versa. Not out of passivity either,

for both feel that they have plenty to do as it is and in any case the Council told us that a priest is not more of a Christian than a lay person, man or woman, who, if a member of Opus Dei, will find him or herself organizing retreats, running catechetical courses, offering spiritual guidance and counselling young people.

Thirdly, social commitment: last summer I was involved with a group of Austrian students who spent a month in a shanty town in Peru, giving medical help, cleaning and feeding children. This was organized by Condoray, a women's Opus Dei centre, which has been running literacy and basic alimentary programmes in 26 Andes villages for the last thirty years.

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