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Dressing Like a Lady

Inspired by St. Josemaria Escriva's teachings, a well-known London fashion designer, Helena Machin, is teaching young women how to dress virtuously and elegantly. A CNA interview.

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A London fashion designer is teaching young women to dress virtuously, after her brother's death made her rethink her life and career.

“I want to invest some time and love into the next generation,” said Helena Machin, who also works with high-profile clients as the creative director for a French milliner. Through her “Style Masterclasses,” she is showing women how to be “well-dressed” in every sense of the word.

“I want to have them embrace their femininity by modest and attractive dress and in doing so, fulfill their God-given potential,” Machin recently told CNA.

Helena came up with the masterclass idea after her twin brother James passed away from a terminal illness three years ago.

“He spent his life serving others, showing them the way to Christ through his heroic example, despite being unwell for a lot of the time,” she recalled. “Through his good

humor and good example he brought many people back to their faith.”

Around the same time Machin discovered Opus Dei, and its emphasis on the spiritual dimension of work and everyday life. Through the teachings of the organization's founder Saint Josemaria Escriva, she grew determined to sanctify her work in the fashion industry.

In a talk given at a charity foundation on Jan. 26, the designer discussed different body types and gave tips on dressing accordingly.

Art-criticism student Amy Mulvenna, 23, said Machin teaches women to reflect their true femininity and personalities – a welcome change from the approach of magazines that can encourage “presenting yourself without respect.”

Emily Green, a 19-year-old business student at King's College in London,

said the Style Masterclass “redefines the roles and distinction between men and women.”

“Women have become too manly in order to fit in the workplace,” Green observed. “This confuses the men and reasserts their position in a violent way, yet women don't expect or desire that.”

“I love Helena's approach to design,” said Green. “She has perfect terminology so you can tell she knows what she's talking about and she's on top of it, and this just captivates the audience. She believes dressing is a language, and it's so true.”

“We all want social recognition, and sometimes girls may dress just to fit in. But they don't realize they're just attracting less respect. If you don't respect yourself, others can't respect you.”

Medical student Vicky Weissmann told CNA she considered it “polite and a courtesy to others to dress well.”

According to Machin, this message of decorum works both ways.

The designer offered a tip to all young women: “If you want to be treated like a lady, dress like a lady.”

While continuing her professional work in the world of women's hats, Machin will also be giving presentations in schools and university chaplaincies. She will bring her Style Masterclass to London's Baytree Centre during the Easter season, in an intensive short course for 14 to 18-year-olds.

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