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"I am indebted to Dan Brown"

Andrea Ermini is 28 and works in Florence, in Italy. A year and a half ago he read the "Da Vinci Code" and was surprised by the picture it gives of Opus Dei. He made enquiries and... now has joined the institution. "Thanks to Dan Brown," he says, "I have rediscovered the beauty of the faith."

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Andrea Ermini works in a company in Florence in human resources.

Having read the "Da Vinci Code" he was surprised at his harsh description of Opus Dei, an institution of the Catholic Church. "I found it suspicious and decided to make enquiries", he says.

How did you discover Opus Dei?

Andrea: It happened a year and a half ago. After reading the "Da Vinci Code", I was surprised that some critics should say Opus Dei was a "strange Catholic organisation", using brainwashing to recruit new members, secrecy and masochistic practices. That sounded rather odd and I decided to check up myself. It seemed absurd that the Church could approve of such an organisation.

I began in the easiest way possible, going to Google. I found the Opus Dei website straightaway. Then, my curiosity aroused, I bought a book by the Opus Dei founder, St Josemaría. It

was "The Way", a book of spiritual reflections. I read it in one go.

What was your Catholic faith like at the time?

Andrea: I guess I would go to Mass a couple of times a year, at Christmas and Easter. Though I wasn't practising much, I really did appreciate the Pope and the Catholic Church in general.

What happened next?

Andrea: My initial curiosity turned into a much deeper journey of conversion. At that time I saw the faith as a bit old fashioned, which wouldn't fit into my life, but was more suited to old ladies who had time to say the Rosary all day.

But the expression "sanctify work and ordinary life" really attracted me. It made an impact. Besides, the direct style of "The Way", where it

seems that St Josemaría is actually speaking to you, helped me to think things over.

Through the Internet, I found out that Opus Dei has set up things like the ELIS workers centre in Rome and the IESE business school in Barcelona. The idea that you could connect Christian living with work in a business school or with the most ordinary type of manual work really caught my imagination.

In the end I decided to send an e-mail to the Opus Dei website to make direct contact. I was given the address of a centre in Florence, my own town, the Accademia dei Ponti and I began to have spiritual guidance with a priest and got to know other members of Opus Dei.

And after that?

Andrea: I began to pray more often and to go to different meetings of

Christian formation organised by Opus Dei: we had monthly recollections and every week a talk about some aspect of the faith or a virtue to be practised. On 1 November 2005 I became a Cooperator of Opus Dei and on 13 May last I joined the Work.

The most radical change was when I discovered that I had to look after my "spiritual life" and that I could do so by realising that God is accompanying me every moment of the day. For some time I have been going to Mass daily and saying the Rosary. This helps me to keep my bearings and cheers me up as I go about my daily work.

So what do you think of the "Da Vinci Code"?

Andrea: To be honest if it hadn't been for Dan Brown, I wouldn't have rediscovered the beauty of the faith and my vocation. Perhaps God would

have found other ways to get to me, no doubt, but for me that it began with an enigma: a dark and sinister description of the Catholic Church. There's no question about it: I am greatly indebted to Dan Brown. And perhaps I'm not the only one...

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