

# The Prelate, An Old Friend

Melina and Pascal Oudot are “teacher-researchers” in the Faculty of Law at Dijon. She is a member of Opus Dei, he is not.

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Secret society, white mafia.” Such are the horrors that I had read in my Encyclopedia Universalis about Opus Dei. That’s why the first time I went to a centre I gave my mother the address and advised her to make inquiries if she did not hear from me by evening.

## **Why did you go there?**

Out of curiosity. One of my teachers, whom I considered brilliant, belonged to the Work. I had ordered “The Way”, written by Josemaria Escriva, from a bookshop where the salesman did all he could to discourage me about this book. Upon reading it I immediately felt a great affection for its author.

## **What does it mean to be part of Opus Dei?**

I am not just a member of Opus Dei, I am Opus Dei. There are as many forms of Opus Dei as there are members. That is what drew me into it: the freedom and the diversity that people have, yet with an identical vocation.

## **Has this membership changed anything in your life?**

The change has been radical but inconspicuous; radical because my vocation presupposes efforts to lead a coherent Christian life, and inconspicuous because the things that I am called to do in my daily life are nothing spectacular.

## **How has your family reacted?**

My mother was my whole family. Her distress and her incomprehension were such that despite my courses and the 300-kilometer distance to be traveled, I took the train to reassure her. Her resistance did not last long. However, she asked me to wait for a year before making my decision, on the pretext that with Opus Dei things were more serious. That maternal ruse brought a smile to my face, but I agreed.

## **What would happen if you wished to leave Opus Dei?**

I can do this at any moment, but as a consequence I would be calling into question the way I have chosen to live. I would ask myself: Am I unfaithful to my vocation or did I not understand it very well in the beginning? But that would be as dreadful as asking myself if I had chosen the wrong husband.

## **Do people know that you are a member of Opus Dei?**

My friends do, that goes without saying. So does the pastor of my parish. It seems right to me that he should be acquainted with his parishioners. As for other people, I don't wear a pin marked "Opus Dei", but I don't hide my vocation. An example: At a dinner with colleagues from work, one lady attacked Christianity, the Pope and the Work. I asked her if she was talking this way because she had met people from Opus Dei, and I informed her that I

had been a member for more than ten years. Choking on her words, she admitted she did not know anyone in Opus Dei and had never gone to a Centre.

## **Does it upset you when people describe you as “ultra-Catholic”?**

It saddens me. Sometimes I hear myself saying: “How can I be part of Opus Dei?” because I don’t fit the cliches, namely that you are of the extreme right, that you come from a bourgeois family, you dress “conservatively”, you are scarcely open to discussion and you are preachy!

## **Opus Dei has been accused of a certain love for suffering . . .**

I don’t look for suffering but when it presents itself I associate myself with the One who experienced every kind of agony. To be a co-redeemer with

Christ is not love for suffering, it is fraternity.

## **What bothers you in Opus Dei?**

Not being able to invite the Prelate to dinner! When I met him with my husband, we had the impression that we were being greeted by an old friend. So, since then, we miss him.

## **Pascal, how did you become acquainted with the Work?**

I fell in love with the woman who was to become my wife.

## **How did you learn that she was a member?**

There was a photo of the Founder on her mantelpiece. I had vaguely heard talk about it and people around me had made me suspicious. But I thought that if my future wife was a product of its teaching, Opus Dei had to have some great qualities.

## **What do you think about criticisms made of Opus Dei?**

On the occasion of our beautiful and moving encounter with the Prelate, he said to me: “Opus Dei won't come between you and Melina one little bit.” I see every day how true this is. I am persuaded that my wife's attachment to Opus Dei strengthens our union and feeds our happiness.

## **Some people claim that women have an archaic position in the Work . . .**

It doesn't seem to me that women have second-class roles there. And at home we share the tasks, each according to his or her skills . . . We realized quickly that we didn't have all that much to do. My mother does the washing, my wife the cooking, and I pay for a lady to do the cleaning . . . I am not sure that Saint Josemaria would have congratulated me for this answer.

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