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Letter of Saint Josemaría about the work of Saint Gabriel

This letter, which bears the number 29 in the collected works of St. Josemaría, speaks of the work of St. Gabriel, one of the apostolates (perhaps the most extensive today) that Opus Dei develops among people who have already passed their youth and who, in general, feel called to follow the path of holy matrimony.

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About the letter

St. Josemaría begins his *Letter* by explaining that the salvation brought by Christ is destined for all men and women without exception. But, although His redemption is superabundant, it must be noted that many do not know Christ and that evil has prospered in the world: “In the field that God made for himself on earth, which is Christ’s

inheritance, there are weeds. And not merely weeds, but weeds in abundance!” (no. 3), he writes. Faced with this reality, these pages are a call not to remain indifferent but to take part in the redemption with Christ. It is necessary, he says, to act like the leaven in the dough, with a slow and constant action, so as to divinise people (nos. 1-9).

It is in this context of wide apostolic horizons – he continues in nos. 10-15 – that the work of St Gabriel is located, with which “we fill all the activities of the world with a supernatural content which, as it spreads, will contribute effectively to solving the great problems of mankind” (no. 10). This is a key point in the *Letter*: the impact of St Gabriel’s work is not limited to improving the Christian life of those who participate in it, but leads, as a consequence of personal action, to animate and illuminate temporal

realities and structures with the life and light of Christ. In this section he speaks of the vocation of supernumeraries, highlighting this evangelising and transforming projection: they are people of every type and social class who can have a Christian influence, both in the leading positions of society and at the most modest crossroads of life, with a diversified apostolate, which has all the specialisations that life itself offers. Hence the importance of the secular professional vocation, part of the supernumerary vocation, which, among other aspects, differentiates it from the apostolates carried out by other entities within the Church.

The central part (nos. 16-32) begins by dealing with the relationship between holiness and personal apostolate. It then goes on to develop further the main theme of this *Letter*, which was already very much present in the previous section. The

professional and apostolic action is not only directed towards carrying out one's apostolate with individuals, but is fused together so that the member of Opus Dei aspires to build a more just and Christian society. To this end, the founder exhorts them to love the world and to be fearlessly present in all human activities and organisations. Without irresponsibly leaving the field open to the enemies of God and, at the same time, without acrimony: "Our attitude, my children, should be one of understanding, of love. Our action and approach is not directed against anyone, it can never have tones of sectarianism. We strive to drown evil in an abundance of good" (no. 25). Characteristic of Opus Dei's way of working is "a very great love for all people, a heart open to all their concerns and problems, and a broad understanding that leaves no room for discrimination or excluding others" (no. 26). But, St Josemaría

insists, a Christian cannot rest on his laurels: while remaining active, serene, realistic, we must strive “to Christianise all the activities of the world, and place Christ at the summit of all human activities!” (no. 28). In this area he underlines the importance of teaching the Gospel message to all peoples.

A brief section (nos. 33-37) is devoted to a gloss on some characteristics of the formation of supernumeraries. He dwells especially on the freedom which must inform this formation. Freedom also to develop in the broad field of personal and professional action and of the options open to opinion: “Freedom, my children,” he declares. “Don’t ever expect the Work to tell you what to do in temporal affairs” (no. 36). He exhorts each one to seek the solutions which, in conscience, one considers most appropriate to solve temporal problems. He complains that in the

Church there are those, driven by clericalism, who do not understand and respect this freedom.

There follows another short section (nos. 38-42) in which he sets out other characteristics of the apostolate of supernumeraries, men and women: it is not an ecclesiastical task; it must be imbued with humility; it is exercised in the sphere of civic duties and rights, because the vocation has a “fully secular character” (no. 41). He thus insists again on the need to be present, as Christian leaven, in human affairs and specifically, if the opportunity arises, in public life, bearing in mind the importance of civil legislation in shaping the lives of men and women in matters of moral relevance.

After a brief reference to cooperators (no. 43), he dwells on some specific apostolates, such as that of announcing the Gospel message to

public opinion through the mass media (nos. 44-46); the apostolate of entertainment; involvement in finance and in the various fields of economics and politics (nos. 47-52)

A final section (nos. 53-58) is devoted to family life and marriage, providing criteria for the holy exercise of conjugal duties at a time when sexual permissiveness was making inroads, as was the contraceptive mentality and divorce. The *Letter* ends with some concluding words which exhort members to commit themselves to the vocation they have received, supported by the awareness of their divine filiation (nos. 59-60).

The Letter is available in paperback format from Criterion Publishers.

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