

Letter of St. Josemaría about charity in the transmission of the faith

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About the letter

The *Letter* deals with “the path we should follow in our apostolic work”. It sets out the form to be taken by the evangelising dialogue with men and women who want to come closer to the faith of the Church: combining a spirit of understanding and respect

for the freedom of consciences with fidelity to the deposit of faith. Or, using expressions coined by St Josemaría, to practise “holy tolerance” with people while practising “holy intransigence” with error.

The topic appears in his very early writings, in the 1930s; but it becomes especially relevant in the context of the year 1966, when St Josemaría sent this text to the members of Opus Dei. These were moments of theological and disciplinary crisis in some ecclesiastical sectors, and he called for tolerance towards people, avoidance of all fanaticism or fundamentalist rigidity, but also for fortitude and clarity in the presentation of doctrine. The *Letter* describes the way in which the new evangelisation – to use a modern expression – should take place, in a world that was becoming less and less Christian.

St Josemaría's message is one of optimism, of love for everyone, including those who reject God and religion, of understanding and living in harmony. And, at the same time, it is one of great clarity: faith and morality are untouchable and their demands cannot be watered down, in the hope that non-believers will be more attracted to a softened version of Christianity.

The content of the *Letter* could be broken down into several parts, although these divisions are not entirely clear cut. The first part (nos. 1-5) explains how the apostolate of Opus Dei takes place in the world, with friendship and trust in everyone, full of understanding, without being in enmity with anyone, trying to imitate Christ.

He then explains what "holy tolerance" and "holy intransigence" consists of (nos. 6-12). Fidelity to

Revelation means not giving way in matters of doctrine, and standing firm in the truth. But, at the same time, this firmness requires the exercise of several virtues and a desire not to reject anyone, overflowing with charity and abhorring fanaticism.

In the next points (nos. 13-15) he explains this last topic, insisting on the attitude of not shunning anyone, of living in harmony with everyone, respecting and loving the freedom of each person, even if they are in error; in a universal apostolate that extends to all. He then speaks of the example of Jesus Christ, whom every disciple must imitate, aiming to be *alter Christus*, another Christ. He comments on several examples in the gospel, where the attitude he is describing in this *Letter* (nos. 16-18) is evident in the Saviour. He then gives other examples from the New

Testament (nos. 19-21) in the same vein.

He ends by addressing the issue of understanding and dialogue with those who have turned away from the Catholic religion, who have ignored it or even are against it (nos. 22-26). He teaches that a person should know how to forgive, have a universal spirit, opening “the doors of our houses to people of all ideologies and social conditions, without discrimination of any kind, with one’s heart and arms ready to welcome everyone” (no. 25).
