

The Prelature of Opus Dei: apostolate *ad fidem* and ecumenism

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1. Introduction Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

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PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY OF THE HOLY CROSS, *Studies on the Prelature of Opus Dei, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution Ut sit*, translated and edited by Paul Hayward, *Gratianus* Series, Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Ltée, 2008 pp. 121–139.

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1. Introduction

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1. Cf. A. DE FUENMAYOR, V. GÓMEZ-IGLESIAS and J.L. ILLANES, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei. The History and Defense of a Charism* (Princeton/Chicago, 1994), p. 239, footnote 63.
 2. Cf. P. RODRÍGUEZ, *Iglesia y ecumenismo* (Madrid, 1979), pp. 60–75.

1952, referring to these cooperators, and having in mind especially those who were not Christian: “[they] are led by a noble friendship with a daughter or son of mine to take part in our apostolic works. And thus, as by an inclined plane, they have an opportunity to get to know the richness of spirit that Catholic doctrine contains. God will grant a good number of them the grace of faith, thus rewarding their good will, shown in their loyal collaboration in good works.”³ The cooperation of Catholics and non-Catholics in activities of human and social interest, imbued with a Christian spirit, is also a way of making Christ and the Catholic Church known.

Ecumenism in a theological sense, and apostolate *ad fidem*, are not identical. Ecumenical activity, as such, aims at full unity (including structural and organic unity) between the Catholic Church and other Churches and ecclesial Communities, while apostolate *ad fidem* in relation to non-Catholic Christians is geared to the full incorporation of these Christians into the Church as individuals. However there is no conflict between these two activities, since as we read in the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, “both proceed from the marvelous ways of God”.⁴ It is also evident that ecumenical activity and apostolate *ad fidem* (when directed to non-Catholic Christians) can overlap and strengthen one another.

The term apostolate *ad fidem* embraces the very substance of the Church’s mission. Although Saint Josemaria used the same term—*ad fidem*—to refer to the apostolate with both non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians, he was obviously not unaware of the fundamental difference between being incorporated and not being incorporated into Christ through baptism. Within this apostolic activity, what is clear is the distinction between what we could call “apostolate *proprie ad fidem*” with non-Christians, and “apostolate

3. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Letter*, December 12, 1952, n. 33, quoted in A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, Vol. 3 (New York, 2005), p. 336, footnote 57.

4. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Decr. Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 4. Cf. P. RODRÍGUEZ, *Iglesia y ecumenismo*, pp. 87–88.

ad plenitudinem fidei" with Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Apostolate *ad fidem*, in its various forms, is an expression of Christian love, which embraces every single person. "From the very beginning of the Work, not only since the Council," Saint Josemaria explained, "we have striven to live broad-minded Catholicism, a Catholicism that defends the legitimate liberty of every individual's conscience and leads us to treat all men and women (Catholics or not) as brothers and sisters and to collaborate with them, sharing their noble ideals."⁵

2. Mission of the Prelature and apostolate *ad fidem*

The Church has as her mission the *traditio Evangelii*, the transmission of the Gospel, understood in its widest Pauline sense of "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom 1:16);⁶ the Gospel which is the word that announces and gives eternal life (cf. Jn 6:68), above all in preaching and the sacraments.⁷ This apostolic mission and its universality were set out by the Lord in the words: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19–20). On this foundation of faith and baptism the Church is built up as the "People of God, which lives from the Body of Christ and itself becomes the Body of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist".⁸

5. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Conversations with Josemaria Escrivá* (New York, 2002), n. 29.

6. Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*, December 3, 2007, n. 2.

7. Cf. P. RODRÍGUEZ, *La Iglesia: misterio y misión* (Madrid, 2007), pp. 183–191.

8. "Die Kirche ist das Volk Gottes, das vom Leib Christi lebt und in der Eucharistiefeier selbst Leib Christi wird" (J. RATZINGER, "Zeichen unter den Völkern", in M. SCHMAUS and A. LAPPLE (eds.), *Wahrheit und Zeugnis* (Düsseldorf, 1964), p. 459.

The universality of the Church's mission is such that no one is excluded from its apostolic horizon. In this mission it is possible to distinguish three principal elements. In the first place there is what is normally referred to as "missionary activity", that is, the apostolate *ad gentes*, which we could consider as being *ad extra*, i.e. directed towards non-Christians. In the second place there is all the activity aimed at strengthening the faith and sacramental life of the Catholic faithful, including pastoral activity (the activity of the sacred Pastors towards the faithful) and the many forms of apostolic assistance which the faithful offer one another: activity *ad intra*. In the third place, there is obviously a large part of the human race that is to be found neither among Catholics, nor among non-Christians. This part, that is to say non-Catholic Christians, is also—by the Church's very nature—necessarily a beneficiary of her mission, through activity which we could consider as intermediate between *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In fact, non-Catholic Christians, whom we acknowledge as brothers and sisters, are incorporated by baptism into the one Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church,⁹ but their incorporation is not full.¹⁰

The Prelature of Opus Dei, as part of the Church, shares in the three fundamental dimensions of this universal mission, encouraging an intense development of the different aspects of the Christian vocation in and through all noble human activities, by means of a specific spirit and specific apostolic means. In the words of Saint Josemaria, "The Work was born to help those Christians, who through their family, their friendships, their ordinary work, their aspirations, form part of the very texture of civil society, to understand that their life, just as it is, can be an opportunity for meeting

9. Concerning the *subsistence* of the Church in the Catholic Church, according to the expression in *Lumen gentium*, n. 8, cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Responsa ad quaestiones de aliquibus sententiis ad doctrinam de Ecclesia pertinentibus*, June 29, 2007, nn. 2–3.

10. Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 3.

Christ: that it is a way of holiness and apostolate. [...] The one and only mission of Opus Dei is the spreading of this message, which comes from the Gospel, among all those who live and work in the world, whatever be their background, profession or trade. And to those who grasp this ideal of holiness, the Work offers the spiritual assistance and the doctrinal, ascetical and apostolic training which they need to put it into practice."¹¹ What it entails, therefore, always and in everything, is the transmission of the Gospel, evangelization, the *traditio Evangelii* in the Pauline sense referred to earlier.

This transmission of the Gospel necessarily embraces the three aspects of the Church's mission, for which all Catholics have personal responsibility: towards other Catholics, so as to help them—to help one another—live the faith they profess in a deeper and more consistent way; towards non-Catholic Christians, so as to offer them the possibility of full incorporation into the Church; and towards non-Christians, so as to help them discover the great treasure of faith in Christ. As the recent *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith recalls, "Everywhere and always, each Catholic has the right and the duty to give the witness and the full proclamation of his faith."¹²

Naturally the activity of the Prelature is centered on the pastoral care and Christian formation of its own faithful and that of the many others who take part in its formative activities. These faithful—priests and laity—in their turn, as they come into contact with non-Catholics through their family, work and so on, carry out with a spirit of initiative and responsibility the apostolate *ad fidem* which is a constitutive part of the Church's mission—an apostolate which Saint Josemaria considered a marvelous field of work "with those

11. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Conversations with Josemaria Escrivá*, n. 60.

12. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*, December 3, 2007, n. 12.

who do not know the true faith and who, nonetheless, are noble, generous and cheerful.”¹³

Apostolate *ad fidem* has different characteristics according to whether it concerns non-Christians or non-Catholic Christians, while at the same time there are certain common features. In any event, there is basically only one reason behind it: not personal affirmation, or the wish that one's own convictions should prevail, but Christian charity, sincere love for all souls, coupled with the desire to pass on the inestimable good of faith in Christ or the fullness of that faith. In the words of Benedict XVI, “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”¹⁴

3. Common characteristics of the different types of apostolate *ad fidem*

From the very beginning of Opus Dei Saint Josemaria frequently stressed the need and importance of what he called “personal apostolate of friendship” or “apostolate of friendship and trust”,¹⁵ in which, as he would explain, “Through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons—naturally, simply. With the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word which is full of the force of divine truth.”¹⁶

This apostolate is in harmony with an important anthropological consideration. Every human person, in one way or another, searches for a truth that gives meaning to his or her own existence: a truth that is attained not solely by reason,

13. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *The Forge*, n. 944.

14. BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Mass for the beginning of the pontificate*, April 24, 2005.

15. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Furrow*, nn. 191 and 192.

16. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Christ is Passing by*, n. 149.

but also thanks to the witness of some other person who merits full trust and can guarantee the authenticity of that truth.¹⁷ "Experience amply shows that sincere, brotherly dialogue generates trust, eliminates fear and preconceived notions, dissolves difficulties and opens people to serene and constructive comparison."¹⁸

Apostolate *ad fidem*, in its various forms, fits within this context. The witness and word of a friend can be very effective in preparing someone to receive the faith or the fullness of faith, even though it cannot take the place of God's grace. Furthermore, like any apostolate it needs to be based on prayer and sacrifice. Saint Mark, describing the election of the apostles, writes that Jesus "appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3:14). To carry out the mission, the most important thing is "to be with him". In this connection we may recall the advice of Saint Josemaria: "You have to be a 'man of God', a man of interior life, a man of prayer and sacrifice.—Your apostolate must be an overflow of your life 'within'."¹⁹

On this foundation of interior life, apostolate *ad fidem* is characterized by respect and love for freedom. Saint Josemaria was always a staunch defender of freedom. "I have always defended the freedom of individual consciences," he said. "I do not understand violence. I do not consider it a proper way either to persuade or to win over. Error is overcome by prayer, by God's grace, and by study; never by force, always with charity."²⁰

Respect for the freedom of all is not a mere tactic, but a requirement of justice and charity. Precisely for that reason, and because of the relationship that exists between freedom

17. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, n. 33.

18. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the European Ecumenical Delegates*, January 26, 2006.

19. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *The Way*, n. 961.

20. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Conversations with Josemaria Escrivá*, n. 44. These words of Saint Josemaria form part of his reply to a question on religious freedom.

and truth, this respect for freedom involves more than simply “not excluding”. It demands that each one offer the witness of their own Christian conduct, and make known to their friends the treasure of their own faith, in the way and to the extent they freely desire. Furthermore, apostolate *ad fidem*—loyalty towards the other person, which is an essential element of true friendship—excludes all pretence of agreement on doctrine if this does not really exist. Here too the words of Vatican II are applicable: “Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded.”²¹

One manifestation of the “broad-minded Catholicism” which Saint Josemaria referred to in a quotation given earlier is the openness of the Catholic liturgy, especially the Holy Mass, to non-Catholic friends who wish to attend, even though they are unable to receive Eucharistic communion. As is well-known, in the Church’s early period attendance at the Eucharistic liturgy was not allowed even for catechumens, although it has now long been the case that the celebration of the Eucharist in the churches has been open to all comers. The sense of the sacred and adoration that Saint Josemaria, in faithful adherence to the liturgical norms, promoted in the churches and oratories of Opus Dei is for many non-Christians and non-Catholic Christians a highly eloquent form of the presence of Christ. The liturgy reveals the mystery of the Catholic Church with quite extraordinary force: hence also its effectiveness in the apostolate *ad fidem*. We can understand why this should be so when we consider that it is in the Eucharist that the Church is made present in the most profound way, since “the Eucharistic sacrifice, while always performed in a particular community, is never a celebration of that community alone. In fact, the community, in receiving the Eucharistic presence

21. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 11; cf. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *The Forge*, n. 456.

of the Lord, receives the entire gift of salvation and shows, even in its lasting, visible particular form, that it is the image and true presence of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church."²²

Apostolate *ad fidem* can be—in fact frequently is—referred to as *proselytism*. Although the terms *proselyte* and *proselytes* are not used very frequently in the New Testament (they appear only four times; cf. Mt 23:15; Acts 2:11, 6:5, 13:43) they did pass from Judaism to the Christian tradition. We know, however, that the term *proselytism* has acquired a negative connotation, especially in the ecumenical context, and has come to be understood as the use of immoral methods to win adherents. But there are insufficient reasons (linguistic, historical, and still less theological) for attributing only a negative meaning to this word while ignoring its original positive meaning, which still remains valid.²³ Even in the civil (juridical and political) context, *proselytism* is understood as having a positive meaning: specifically, as an intrinsic component of religious freedom.²⁴

A very important point to bear in mind is that the term is quite often wrongly used in a negative way in order to express... its positive meaning! The effect of this is to promote a relativistic religious pluralism. As John Paul II pointed out, the call to conversion "is put into question or passed over in silence. It is seen as an act of 'proselytizing'; it is claimed that it is enough to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, that it is enough to build communities capable of working for justice,

22. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter *Communio nis notio*, May 28, 1992, n. 11.

23. On the origin, evolution and theological implications of the term *proselytism*, cf. F. OCÁRIZ, "Evangelización, proselitismo y ecumenismo", *Scripta Theologica* 38 [2006], pp. 617–636. Cf. also CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*, n. 12 and footnote 49.

24. Cf., for example, EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, Decision May 25, 1993, *Quaderni di diritto e politica ecclesiastica* [1994/3], pp. 734–739. Cf. also N. SARKOZY, *La république, les religions, l'espérance* (Paris, 2004), p. 153.

freedom, peace and solidarity.”²⁵ On the contrary, it is the inalienable mission of the Church—and therefore of every Catholic, according to his or her circumstances and possibilities—to ensure that every person—non-Christian, or non-Catholic Christian—is able to know and freely accept the inestimable good of full incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ.

Nor can it be overlooked that “the Church is not a reality closed in on herself; rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavor, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her: to gather together all people and all things into Christ; so as to be for all an *inseparable sacrament of unity*.”²⁶

4. Differences between the apostolates *proprie ad fidem* and *ad plenitudinem fidei*

These two forms of apostolate *ad fidem* have a common motivation, which is love for God and all souls; some common characteristics in the way they are carried out, which we have already mentioned; and a common aim, which is the full incorporation of all into the Church. At the same time, there is an obvious theological and spiritual difference (again already mentioned) between having and not having received baptism and the faith (albeit not full). This implies a clear difference in the content of the apostolic relationship of friendship.

In dealings with non-Catholic Christians, this apostolate is aimed at helping people to accept the Catholic faith as something not completely foreign to them (this is also true of ecumenical activity, which I will refer to later). It involves helping those brothers and sisters of ours to acquire a deeper awareness of the *elements of truth and sanctification* present in

25. JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 46. Cf. PAUL VI, Ap. Ex. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 80.

26. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter *Communio notio*, n. 4.

their own Christian communities, and inviting them, through the sincere friendly advice we offer, to live in a way that is more consistent with these gifts of the Spirit.²⁷ For example, Orthodox faithful can be encouraged to acquire a deeper doctrinal knowledge and a more intense practice of the mystery of the Eucharist, present in the Orthodox Churches; and to be aware of the urgent need which they also have of doing apostolate with friends and relatives, to help them come back to the faith and practice of their religion. Catholics too can obviously receive spiritual enrichment from this dialogue, which as the *Doctrinal Note* on evangelization reminds us, is "not only an exchange of ideas, but also of gifts."²⁸ What this also achieves is to provide a testimony of fraternity in the face of atheism and relativism, which have spread, often violently, across many countries of ancient Christian tradition.

It is not a question of ignoring or avoiding existing doctrinal differences, but of starting out from the common bases which, if taken seriously and studied and lived intensely, tend naturally towards the fullness of the faith. Catholics, when asked by friends, will not content themselves with simply offering explanations of this fullness; they will also, and in every case, provide a simple and strong testimony of it by their own Christian lives.

These general ideas may find a great variety of practical applications, because situations and personal circumstances vary so much. The way in which one might have apostolic dealings with, for example, a practicing Orthodox friend with good doctrinal formation, will be very different from the way one might deal with a non-practicing person whose doctrinal convictions are very weak.

The content of apostolic dealings with non-Christian friends will obviously differ still further, and will depend on

27. Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 3.

28. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*, n. 12.

whether or not they have any religion at all, whether they believe in the existence of a personal God, etc. Whatever the case, it is always possible to find a common basis at the human level which will serve as a starting point for the announcement of the great and definitive Good News: in other words, for helping them come to know Christ.

5. The Prelature's participation in ecumenical activity

Ecumenical activity, in its present technical meaning, is understood to embrace the combined effort to bring all Christian communities into a situation of full communion within the one Church of Christ.²⁹ The contribution that Opus Dei makes in this field has a number of different aspects. Above all it is carried out, as I have previously stated, through that which constitutes the activity of the Prelature as such, namely the pastoral care and doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic formation of its faithful and of many other people. This formation, which helps them realize the importance of their having received baptism,³⁰ necessarily includes an ecumenical dimension, both in the theological studies they undertake and in its spiritual and apostolic aspects. It is a formation aimed at helping people share in the Church's sense of urgency in fostering the unity of all Christians, knowing that, as John Paul II said, the movement to promote such unity "is not just some sort of 'appendix' which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work."³¹

In this way a *spiritual ecumenism* is fostered in each person, through a blend of personal conversation, holiness of life, and prayer, which the Second Vatican Council refers to

29. Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 4.

30. Cf. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Conversations with Josemaria Escrivá*, n. 24.

31. JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Ut unum sint*, n. 20. Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the European Ecumenical Delegates*, January 26, 2006.

as “the soul of the whole ecumenical movement”.³² We find an invitation to spiritual ecumenism in the exhortation of Saint Josemaria, “Offer your prayer, your atonement, and your action for this end: *ut sint unum!*—that all of us Christians may share one will, one heart, one spirit. This is so that *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!*—that we may all go to Jesus, closely united to the Pope, through Mary!”³³ We could also mention that one of the customs followed in Opus Dei is that of each one personally uniting his or her own prayer to the prayer of the whole Church during the *Octave of prayer for Christian unity*.

The permanent formation that the faithful of Opus Dei receive gives them—to the extent that their personal circumstances allow—the possibility of carrying out what we could call “personal ecumenism”. This is not merely spiritual personal ecumenism (which remains the indispensable basis), but includes many different forms of interpersonal dialogue with non-Catholic Christians, with whom they are in contact through family, professional or social ties, the aim being to arouse or revive these separated brethren’s own ecumenical awareness.

There are also many faithful of Opus Dei who, equipped with the formation they have received in the Prelature and their specific preparation, actively participate at different levels in what we could call “institutional ecumenism”: the ecumenical initiatives promoted by the Holy See or the Bishops’ Conferences. One recent example is the III European Ecumenical Assembly which took place in Sibiu (Romania), to which the Prelature of Opus Dei, at the request of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences, invited a delegation made up of seven members from different countries under the coordination of Msgr. Pedro Rodríguez, a well-known professor of Ecumenical Theology. Also in Sibiu, as a

32. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 8; cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the ecumenical meeting at the Archbishopric of Cologne*, August 19, 2005.

33. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *The Forge*, n. 647.

member of the Delegation of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, was Prof. José Ramón Villar, Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Navarre, who had been the representative of that Episcopal Conference in the process of preparing the Assembly.

In addition, the faithful of the Prelature who run certain apostolic works can, and often do, organize ecumenical activities. Instances of this are the theological Congresses and Symposia which have seen the active participation of Orthodox, Lutheran and other non-Catholic theologians. These pages are not the suitable place for listing the numerous activities of this kind that are carried out all over the world; apart from anything else it would be impossible to do so in a sufficiently representative manner.

The formation they receive in the Prelature provides a spur, especially for those who are expert in ecclesiology and ecumenism, to strive to ensure that their interventions in properly ecumenical activities are informed by the same fundamental attitudes we referred to earlier when dealing with apostolate *ad fidem*. These include, in the first place, an awareness of the need for prayer, since the full unity to which they aspire will not come about as the fruit of merely human effort, but will be above all a gift of God. As the then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in 1986, "A unity negotiated by men and women could logically only be an affair *iuris humani*. It would not involve at all the theological unity intended by John 17 and as a result it would not be able to be a witness for the mystery of Jesus Christ but merely a token of the diplomatic skill and the ability to compromise of those conducting the negotiations. That is indeed something, but it does not involve at all the genuinely religious level which is what ecumenism is concerned with."³⁴

There can and must be a sense of friendship in personal participation at ecumenical events. Sometimes it may not be

34. J. RATZINGER, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (Slough, UK, 1988), p. 137.

possible for this to happen in the same way as it would in a long-established friendship. Nevertheless, the fact that those taking part share the same Christian faith means that they should not see one another as “opponents” or “competitors”, but as brothers and sisters—not in full communion, it is true, but brothers and sisters in whom they can and must appreciate those “elements of sanctification and of truth” which “as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward Catholic unity.”³⁵ This appreciation is such that, to use the idea of Louis Bouyer, we will not ask our separated brethren to renounce anything that is positive and authentic in their great religious institutions, but instead ask them to think those things through, courageously.³⁶ This is an attitude of loyalty which at the same time leads to a rejection of any sign of the “false irenicism” referred to by Vatican II.³⁷ Furthermore, as John Paul II wrote, “A ‘being together’ which betrayed the truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of every human heart.”³⁸

Ecumenical activities are naturally marked by respect and love for the freedom of all, and must always remain so.

The existence of non-Catholic cooperators in Opus Dei, whom I spoke of earlier, obviously comes within the context of apostolate *ad fidem*, but it also fits within the overall context of ecumenism in general.³⁹ On more than one occasion, Saint Josemaria mentioned how, when—from the time of the Second Vatican Council—ecumenism began to grow in strength and spread through Church life, he said to John XXIII in a tone of filial trust, “‘Holy Father, in our Work everyone, Catholic or not, has always found a welcome. I have not learnt

35. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 8.

36. Cf. L. BOUYER, *Parole, Église et sacrements dans le protestantisme et le catholicisme* (Bruges, 1960), pp. 91–92.

37. Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 11.

38. JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Ut unum sint*, n. 18.

39. Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 12.

ecumenism from your Holiness.’ He laughed, for he knew that way back in 1950, the Holy See had authorized Opus Dei to receive as Cooperators people who are not Catholics or even Christians.”⁴⁰

To conclude this section on the various approaches to ecumenism flowing from the example and teaching of Saint Josemaria, I think it is worth recalling some words from his homily *Passionately loving the world*—words which refer not directly to ecumenism, but to the vast panorama of activities of Catholics in the middle of the world, as expressed in the following profound exhortation: “You must foster everywhere a genuine ‘lay mentality’, which will lead to three conclusions:

- be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one’s own personal responsibility;
- be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains; and,
- be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions.”⁴¹

Sufficiently *honest, Christian, and Catholic*. In considering these three qualities, and going beyond their ordinary meaning, there come to mind the three levels of the mission of the Church, and hence of every Catholic faithful: to be *human* (level of common human nature: dialogue with non-Christians); to be *Christian* (level of common baptism: ecumenism); to be *Catholic* (level of Christian fullness: apostolate within the Church). But going back to the proper meaning of Saint Josemaria’s words, it is clear that these three levels are also behavioral requirements within ecumenical dialogue: being *sufficiently honest* to take personal responsibility for presenting the faith in an unambiguous way; being *sufficiently Christian* to respect the separated brethren,

40. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Conversations with Josemaria Escrivá*, n. 22; cf. nn. 44 and 46.

41. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Conversations with Josemaria Escrivá*, n. 117.

not trying to impose as Christian doctrine matters that are open to theological debate; and being *sufficiently Catholic* to avoid provoking divisions among Catholics on account of ecumenical activity. In this regard there come to mind those words of Saint Josemaria, "It is a sad ecumenism indeed when Catholics ill-treat other Catholics!"⁴²

To finish, let us recall that Christ himself, who prayed *ut unum sint* (Jn 17:21), spoke of the need for us all to gather together to form "one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). "The full communion which the Lord desires among those who profess themselves his disciples calls for the common recognition of a universal ecclesial ministry [...]. The Catholic Church professes that this ministry is the primatial ministry of the Roman Pontiff, Successor of Peter".⁴³

The Catholic ideal that all Christians may come to acknowledge the authentic content of the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not provincialism, but universality. I will conclude with some words of Saint Josemaria, who was commenting in turn on something Paul VI had said: "'From this catholic Roman center,' Paul VI emphasized in the closing stages of the Second Vatican Council, 'no one is, in theory, beyond reach; all can and should be reached. For the Catholic Church, no one is a stranger, no one is excluded, no one is to consider himself far away.' I venerate with all my strength the Rome of Peter and Paul, bathed in the blood of martyrs, the center from which so many have set out to propagate throughout the world the saving word of Christ. To be Roman does not entail any manifestation of provincialism, but rather of authentic ecumenism. It presupposes the desire to enlarge the heart, to open it to all men with the redemptive zeal of Christ, who seeks all men and takes in all men, for he has loved all men first."⁴⁴

42. SAINT JOSEMARIA, *Furrow*, n. 643.

43. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Considerations on the Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the mystery of the Church*, October 31, 1998.

44. SAINT JOSEMARIA, Homily "Loyalty to the Church", June 4, 1972, in *In Love with the Church* (New York, 2002), pp. 40–41.