



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS IN THE MEETING
OF THE ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR AID
TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES (ROACO)***

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 22 June 2006

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Presbyterate,
Dear Members and Friends of ROACO,*

I welcome you with joy and greet you with affection. I cordially thank Cardinal Ignace Moussa Daoud, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, who has expressed your common sentiments. I extend my greetings to the Secretary, Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò, to the Collaborators of the Dicastery, to the other Prelates from the beloved Churches of the Holy Land and other Middle Eastern regions, as well as to the directors and friends of each of the Agencies represented here.

I thank you, dear friends of ROACO, for your service since 1968, giving a voice to the Churches of the different Oriental and Latin traditions in the territories entrusted to the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, supporting their activities of pastoral care, education and social assistance, and meeting their urgent needs. You have always been guided by an evangelical inspiration and an outstanding ecclesial sensitivity that stems from the bond that exists between you and the Successor of Peter.

Today's meeting gives me the pleasant opportunity to thank God, the provident and merciful Father, for the apostolic action carried out in these past years by the disciples of Christ in the Middle East, committed to witnessing with brotherly concern to the Gospel of peace and love, even among the many difficulties.

I am also grateful for your tireless efforts to preserve the special character of charitable activity in the Church. Continue to encourage the "formation of the heart" in the educators and charity workers who receive your help so that they will be led, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, "to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love" (n. 31).

I turn my thought with affection to the venerable Oriental Catholic Communities and in the first place to those of the Holy Land, to which you dedicate constant attention. It is the desire of all Christians to be able always to find a lively Christian community in the Land of Our Redeemer's birth. The serious difficulties they are experiencing because of the atmosphere of oppressive insecurity, the lack of employment, the countless restrictions with the consequent increase in poverty, are a cause of suffering to us all.

This situation makes equally uncertain the educational, professional and family future of the young generations who are, unfortunately, strongly tempted to leave the beloved Land of their birth forever. This is also happening in other areas of the Middle East, such as Iraq and Iran, which providently benefit from your generous consideration.

How are such grave problems to be faced? Our first and fundamental duty is to persevere in trusting prayer to the Lord, who never abandons his children in time of trial. This should be combined with an active fraternal concern that is capable of finding ever new and at times un hoped for ways to meet those peoples' needs.

I address an invitation to the pastors and faithful and to all who have roles of responsibility in the civil community to foster mutual respect among the cultures and religions, so that conditions for a serene and peaceful coexistence may be created as soon as possible in all the regions of the Middle East.

To this end, I assure you of my daily remembrance to the Lord, and I invoke the protection of Mary, Mother of God, upon each one of you, dear friends of ROACO, upon all those who are dear to you, and upon the praiseworthy institutions you represent. May God make your activity fruitful. I accompany these sentiments with a special Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly impart to you who are present here and to all your loved ones.

