



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY CONGRESS SPONSORED BY THE PONTIFICAL
COUNCIL FOR LEGISLATIVE TEXTS
FOR THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROMULGATION
OF THE CODE OF CANONS OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 9 October 2010*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Patriarchs, Major Archbishops,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Representatives of other churches and Ecclesial Communities,
Dear Functionaries of Eastern Canon Law,*

I welcome you with great joy at the end of the Study Congress that has appropriately wished to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the promulgation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*. I greet you all cordially, starting with Archbishop Francesco Coccopalmerio, whom I thank for his words on behalf of those present. I extend a grateful thought to the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and to the Pontifical Oriental Institute, which collaborated with the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts in organizing this Congress. I would like to express my warm appreciation to the Relators for their competent scientific contribution to this ecclesial event.

Twenty years after the promulgation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, we wish to pay homage to the insight of Venerable John Paul II who, in his concern that the Eastern Catholic Churches "flourish and fulfil with new apostolic strength the task entrusted to them" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 1), wished to endow these venerable Churches with a complete Code, common to them all and adapted to the times. So it was that "the constant desire of the Roman Pontiffs to promulgate two Codes, one for the Latin Church and the other for the Eastern Catholic Churches" (Apostolic

Constitution *Sacri Canones*) became reality. At the same time, the "very clear, constant and firm intention of the supreme legislator of the Church with regard to the faithful preservation and diligent observance of all the rites" was reaffirmed (*ibid.*).

The *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* was followed by two other important documents of John Paul II's Magisterium: the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) and the Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen* (1995). Nor can we forget the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (1993) and the *Instruction of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (1996). In these authoritative documents of the Magisterium various canons of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, such as the *Codex Iuris Canonici* are almost all cited in the text, commented on and applied to the Church's life.

This 20th anniversary is not only a celebrative event to preserve its memory but indeed is also a providential opportunity for verification, to which are called in the first place the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* and their institutions, especially the Hierarchies. In this regard, the Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones* already specified the contexts for verification. It is a question of ascertaining to what extent the Code has effectively had the force of law for all Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, and how the Code is expressed in the daily work of the Eastern Catholic Churches; it is also necessary to check on how far the legislative power of each Church *sui iuris* has provided for the promulgation of its own particular law, taking into account the traditions of this Church's own rite, as well as the provisions of the *Second Vatican Council*.

The themes of your Congress, divided into three units: history, particular legislation, ecumenical perspectives, indicate an especially significant course to follow in this verification. It must start with the awareness that for the Eastern Catholic faithful the new *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* has created a disciplinary situation which is partly new. It has become an effective means of safeguarding and promoting their own rite, understood as the "liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church *sui iuris*" (Can. 28 1).

Concerning this the *sacri canones* of the ancient Church which inspire the Eastern Code currently in force encourage all the Eastern Churches to preserve their own identity, which is at the same time both Eastern and Catholic. By preserving the Catholic communion, the Eastern Catholic Churches in no way intend to deny fidelity to their tradition. As has been reasserted on many occasions, the full union of the Eastern Catholic Churches with the Church of Rome, already achieved, must not entail a dwindling awareness of their authenticity and originality. The task of all the Eastern Catholic Churches is therefore to preserve their common disciplinary patrimony and to foster their own traditions which constitute a wealth for the whole Church.

The *sacri canones* of the earliest centuries of the Church constitute more or less the same

fundamental patrimony of canonical discipline that regulates the Orthodox Churches. The Eastern Catholic Churches can therefore make a special and relevant contribution to the ecumenical process. I am pleased that during your symposium you have borne in mind this particular aspect. I encourage you, for your part, to make it the object of further study, thereby cooperating in the common commitment to abide by Lord's prayer: "That they may all be one... so that the world may believe..." (Jn 17: 21).

Dear friends, in the context of the Church's commitment today to a new evangelization, canon law, as a specific and indispensable ordering of the ecclesial structure, will not fail to make an effective contribution to the life and mission of the Church in the world if all the members of the People of God can interpret it wisely and apply it faithfully. As did Venerable [John Paul II](#), I therefore urge all the beloved sons and daughters of the Eastern Churches "to observe the precepts indicated with a sincere soul and a humble will, with never the slightest doubt that the Eastern Churches will provide in the best possible way for the good of the souls of the Christian faithful with a renewed discipline, and that they will always flourish and carry out the duty entrusted to them under the protection of the glorious and Blessed ever Virgin Mary who, with full truth, is called *Theotókos* and is resplendent as the sublime Mother of the universal Church" (Apostolic Constitution [Sacri Canones](#))

I accompany this hope with the Apostolic Blessing, which I impart to you and to all who make their contributions in the various areas connected with Eastern Canon Law.

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