



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MEMBERS OF ASSEMBLY OF
ORGANIZATIONS FOR AID
TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES, ROACO**

Thursday, 19 June 1997

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Members and Friends of ROACO!*

1. I address a cordial welcome to you all on the occasion of the joint annual meeting of the members of ROACO and the officials of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. I first greet Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, whom I thank for his cordial words expressing your common sentiments of affectionate devotion and explaining the many activities in which you are involved. With him I greet the Secretary of the Congregation, Archbishop Miroslav Marusyn, and the Undersecretary, Fr Marco Brogi. I am also pleased to greet Archbishop Datev Sarkissian, who has come as the representative of His Holiness Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians. Through the Archbishop I convey a fraternal greeting to the Catholicos, as I vividly recall our cordial meetings last December. Lastly, I greet all of you who have gathered here, and I express to each of you my pleasure and gratitude for the work you have accomplished.

I am pleased to meet you today, at the end of your convention, because I have noticed that despite the current economic difficulties, the generous commitment motivating the activities you represent has not diminished. As I recalled in my Apostolic Letter *Orientale lumen*, “the communities of the West are ready to encourage in every way ... *the intensification of this ministry of ‘diakonia’*, making available to such Churches the experience acquired in the years when charity was more freely exercised. Woe to us if the abundance of some were to produce the humiliation of others or a sterile and scandalous rivalry. On their part, Western communities will

make it their duty above all to share, where possible, service projects with their brothers and sisters in the Eastern Churches, or to assist in bringing to a successful conclusion all that the latter are doing to help their people” (n. 23).

Eastern Catholics have paid high price for fidelity I still remember very clearly my recent visit to the Churches of Lebanon, to which I gave the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Une espérance nouvelle pour le Liban*. In it I recalled that the ecclesial mission presupposes the common commitment and firm will to make the most of each person's charisms and the spiritual riches of each community in order to be the leaven of unity and brotherhood. This is also achieved through “an exchange of gifts among all, with particular attention to the poorest, a characteristic service of the Catholic Church towards all people” (n. 118).

2. In the future, ROACO will be ever more actively involved in the work which the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, spurred by the recent political changes, has begun: the broadening of the general perspective of service to the Eastern Catholic Churches by supporting and promoting them on their path in very different conditions. In fact, restored to new freedom, they are reflecting more and more systematically on how they can live their specific Eastern identity within the Catholic Church. In this very important process, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches feels duty-bound to show the universal Church's concern, by inspiring and promoting new initiatives in the area of research and of a deeper understanding of the liturgy, spirituality and history, in formation work and in practical pastoral planning. Similarly and in a complementary way, the Congregation is rightly committed to ensuring that the Church in the West appreciates with ever greater sensitivity the contribution made by the Eastern Catholic Churches, thereby encouraging an ever fuller expression of catholicity itself. I beg you to support and foster the Congregation in its increased activity, which in time will become more and more demanding.

A practical example of these projects is the forthcoming meeting of the Bishops and Religious Superiors of the Eastern Catholic Churches of Europe, to be held in Hajdúdorog, Hungary, from 30 June to 6 July next, and will have the identity of Eastern Catholics as its theme. This is a truly important event, which gathers for meeting, reflection and listening to one another all who work in the dicastery for the Oriental Churches and the heads of those Churches which have paid so high a price for their fidelity to Christ and to the Roman See and which are meeting for the first time after decades of separation and persecution. The meeting, desired by the Congregation, clearly expresses that pastoral style which is increasingly requested of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and occurs as a providential opportunity for Eastern Catholics to give new life to the legacy of their martyrs, to grow in awareness of the new pastoral needs and to face with faith and generosity the difficult situation of ecumenism, in which their role is called for again and again. I wish every success and an abundance of spiritual fruit for this initiative, which I cordially bless.

3. I would also like to strengthen what the Congregation for the Oriental Churches is doing for seminarians, priests and religious who are sent to Rome by their Bishops and Superiors to

complete their formation and ecclesiastical studies. In their places of study and formation they should be helped to find a strong atmosphere of faith, the habit of biblical prayer, attention to the quality of their spiritual life, the witness of communion and esteem among all those who guide them at various levels, and apostolic zeal for service to God's kingdom and to their Churches of origin.

I am pleased to draw the attention of ROACO and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches to another point. Several times in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, I mentioned the Holy Land in connection with the various phases of the Great Jubilee. It has always enjoyed the special affection of the entire Church.

From the very beginning of the Christian faith, the community of Corinth and the Churches of Galatia, motivated by the zeal of the Apostle Paul, put "something aside" and sent their "gift to Jerusalem" (cf. 1 Cor 16:1-4). The custom of aid has been strengthened by various initiatives, including the "Holy Land Collection", which is particularly important today.

If the land of Jesus is in the hearts of all the faithful, it cannot happen that that the Christian community should experience situations of social disadvantage and that, because of certain forms of poverty, those brothers and sisters should eventually leave their country in search of more dignified living conditions.

I therefore warmly invite the whole Church to remember that what is done on occasion for the Holy Land, usually on Good Friday, is an act of exquisite and necessary brotherhood, which truly expresses what the land of Jesus means for all Christians.

4. Dear members of ROACO, the Pope knows that you are dedicated to the formation of individuals as well as to the improvement of structures, that you are concerned about solidarity between Christians as well as humanization projects for needy peoples or those suffering from underdevelopment, that you encourage the work of Catholic communities such as dialogue between Christians and interreligious dialogue. I am very satisfied with the responses you make to the requests you receive, but I am also grateful to those peoples and communities who, thanks to the work of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and of ROACO, see support being given to their efforts for a more intense resumption of apostolic initiative, and feel that these acts of sharing stem from a genuine and more universal love.

May the Virgin of Nazareth, Mother of the Redeemer, strengthen you in your intentions and keep you constantly attentive to her motherly voice: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

As a pledge of divine assistance, I cordially impart my Blessing to you, and willingly extend it to all the Churches and organizations you represent and to the very different situations for which you work.

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