



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SYMPOSIUM ON THE THEME:
"THE LAW OF THE CHURCH - INSTRUMENT OF CHARITY"**

Friday, 23 November 2001

1. I am pleased to address you, venerable Brothers, as you take part in the Symposium held by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the taking effect of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. I greet each one of you, and especially, the Prefect of the Congregation, His Beatitude Cardinal Ignace Moussa I Daoud, and I thank him for his kind words on behalf of those who are present.

I wish to extend a special word of appreciation to all those who collaborated in this initiative to further scientific study, organizing and pursuing the programme of the observance. In particular, I thank the members of the scientific committee and the speakers, whose expertise has made a precious contribution to the Symposium. Nor can I fail to express my grateful recognition to all who, with their hidden but important cooperation, have assured its successful completion.

2. Yesterday I asked the Cardinal Secretary of State to convey my greetings and to treat some important points of the present canonical discipline. This morning I wish to reflect with you on the historical moment in which this observance is taking place. We are still feeling the benefits of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, in which East and West felt more closely united in celebrating the defining event of the birth of Christ. In those months, the whole Church turned with deeper faith and love towards the East. Interpreting the general sentiment of Christians worldwide, I made my pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In the most profound sense, it was a pilgrimage "*ad Orientem*", that is to Christ, in the place where He became incarnate "rising ... above us", as the Redeemer of man and the hope of the world: "*orientale Lumen*"! (cf. Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen*, n. 1).

In the prophetic light of the jubilee events, at the beginning of the third millennium, we look with hope to the future journey towards the full unity of Christians. As you know, for this reason I regard

the contribution of the Eastern Churches as essential "and I pray for a full return to that exchange of gifts which enriched the Church of the first millennium" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 48).

3. Fortunately, your Symposium has kept in mind the need to intensify fraternal relations with other Christians and, particularly, with the Orthodox Churches. In this regard I am happy to see that a representative of these Churches is taking part in the Symposium: I greet him with affection.

Thanks to the Second Vatican Council and to the continued dedication of many in these years, (that I have often willed to support and encourage), the Eastern Churches' "great liturgical and spiritual tradition, the specific nature of their historical development, the disciplines coming from the earliest times and approved by the Holy Fathers and Ecumenical Councils, and their own particular way of expressing doctrine" was acknowledged. "The Council made this acknowledgment in the conviction that legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission" (Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 50). I firmly hope that the journey of reconciliation between East and West will be your constant and primary concern, as it is for the Bishop of Rome.

In this perspective, Providence has allowed me to make a few major moves during the recent apostolic journeys to Greece, Syria, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Armenia. The liturgical celebrations and the fraternal meetings, that I was able to participate in during those visits give me continual consolation. During the visits I saw realized the expectations of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, that considers the ecclesial and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches as belonging to the whole Church (cf. Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 5).

In order to protect and make known the special values of this patrimony on 18 October 1990 I promulgated the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, which took effect on 1 October of the following year.

4. In the Apostolic Constitution *Sacri canones*, I expressed the hope that, thanks to this juridical instrument, that "tranquillity of order", that I already invoked on the occasion of the promulgation of the new Latin Code, might flourish in the Oriental Churches. The order aimed at by the Code, I explained, "assigns the primacy to love, grace and charism, and at the same time facilitates their organic development in the life of ecclesial society and of the individuals who belong to it" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 5 November 1990 p.1, n. 3).

I remember repeating the same wish a few days later during the Eighth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, highlighting the fact that the various bodies of laws regulating ecclesiastical discipline, though recorded in canons and sections, are nothing more than a concrete expression of the precept of love that Jesus, Our Lord, left us at the Last Supper, and that the Church, together with the Apostle Paul (cf. Gal 5,14), has always considered as the

precept that sums up every other precept (cf. n. 5: AAS 83 [1991], 488-489).

Hence, I was delighted to learn that the present Symposium has for its theme the motto "*Ius Ecclesiarum - vehiculum caritatis*" (the law of the Churches is an Instrument of Charity). This motto expresses the profound intention of the ecclesiastical Legislator in the promulgation of the juridical regulations. I am grateful that it has been understood, and even highlighted in the "poster" of the Symposium, through a meaningful image, inspired by a mosaic of St Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, a city linked to the Byzantine tradition. In the poster three ships are depicted, symbols of the particular Churches, that with their sails filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the guarantor of hierarchical communion with the Church of Rome, lead souls through the often rough sea of life to the sure port of eternal salvation.

5. Venerable Brothers, at the end of my brief reflection, I want to let you know how happy I am to note that in your Symposium there is a section dedicated to the theme "*Theotokos and Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*". As you well know, I entrusted to the Mother of the whole Church the preparation of this Code and its promulgation. Concluding the promulgative Constitution, I addressed a special prayer to her. I renew this prayer today with the same fervour: "Through her maternal intercession may she obtain from her Son that this Code become an instrument of the charity which, according to the extraordinary witness of the holy Apostle John, was abundantly revealed by the Heart of Christ pierced by a lance on the cross, and must be deeply rooted in the soul of every human being" (AAS [1990] 1043).

My Blessing upon all!