



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES**

*Thursday, 21 November 2002*

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches,  
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. I am happy to welcome all of you who take part in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. I thank you for your presence and greet you with affection.

In a special way I greet His Eminence Cardinal Ignace Moussa Daoud and thank him for his kind words on your behalf. My thanks go to the Secretary, the Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and to all your collaborators.

2. Your Congregation is called to help the Bishop of Rome in the exercise of his supreme pastoral office in all that concerns the life of the beloved Eastern Churches and their Gospel witness. This plenary assembly is focused on *three themes* related to important aspects of the life of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

In the first, you considered *the activity of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches over the past four years*. I am happy to recognize all that has been done in this period, and to encourage you to continue with determination on the path you have taken. I know that your Congregation gives priority to liturgical, catechetical renewal, and to the formation of many members of the People of God, starting with candidates for sacred orders and for consecrated life. This work of formation is *inseparable from the ongoing formation of the directors of formation*. I would like to recall now what I said in the Exhortation *Pastores dabо vobis*: "It is evident that much of the effectiveness of the training offered depends on the maturity and strength of personality of those entrusted with

formation, both from the human and from the Gospel points of view" (n. 66).

Through you, I willingly take this opportunity to send a cordial greeting to the superiors and students of the colleges and institutes in Rome which the Congregation supports. I hope that all whom the colleges have welcomed may receive an integral formation and may grow in an ever more ardent love for the Church, who is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Diversity of rite must never lead one to forget that all Catholics belong to the one Church of Christ.

3. Of special importance is the theme that refers to *the procedure for the election of Bishops in the Patriarchal Churches*. I will be pleased to give serious consideration to your suggestions, in the light of the norms on the matter of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. With the canons, I wished to establish a *modus procedendi* (form of procedure) that would safeguard both the prerogatives of those in charge of the Churches and at the same time the right of the Roman Pontiff to intervene "*in singulis casibus*" (in individual cases) (CCEO, can. 9). With the increased possibility of communication, something unforeseen in the past, the present manner allows the Head of the College of Bishops to be able to admit new candidates to hierarchical communion - without which "*Episcopi in officium assumi nequeunt*" (bishops cannot assume office; [Abbot translation of the Council]) (*Lumen gentium*, n. 24) - with his "*assensus*" (assent), as far as possible, before the election itself. In any case, whenever difficulties in the *application of the canonical norms in force* are pointed out to the Holy See, there will be an effort to resolve them in a spirit of effective collaboration.

With regard to the norms in this sensitive area that were worked out together with all the Eastern Patriarchs, I reaffirm what I observed regarding the principle of territoriality, on the occasion of the presentation of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* to the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1990: "Have faith that the Lord of lords and the King of kings will never permit the diligent observance of these laws to do harm to the Oriental Churches' welfare" (n. 12; ORE, 5 November 1990, p. 4).

4. Finally, venerable Brothers, I wish to stress how important it is to study with a global vision *topics that concern the situation of the Oriental Churches and their prospects for pastoral renewal*. In fact, a particular ecclesial community must not be limited to studying its own internal problems. Rather, it must be open to the vast horizons of the modern apostolate, to the people of our time, and especially to the young, the poor and the "fallen away". The difficulties that Eastern communities have to face in many parts of the world are well known. Scant numbers, poverty of means, isolation, and minority status often prevent a serene, fruitful pastoral, educational, charitable and relief activity. Moreover, you report a constant migratory flow of the more promising members of your Churches to the West.

And what can I say about the suffering in the Holy Land, and in other Eastern countries, caught up in a dangerous spiral that humanly speaking it seems impossible to stop? May God put an end to

this spiral of violence as soon as possible! Today I would like to entrust a prayer for peace to the intercession of Blessed John XXIII as we come up on the impending 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the famous Encyclical *Pacem in terris*. May he who lived so long in the East and who so loved the Eastern Churches, present our plea to the Lord. May he also intercede that these Churches may not be imprisoned in the formulas of the past but be open to the healthy "aggiornamento" which he set forth with the policy of the wise harmony between "*nova et vetera*" (new and old).

5. Today the Latin Church commemorates the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple, a liturgical memorial celebrated in the East since the sixth century. I entrust the life and activity of your communities to the Mother of God, who, prompted by the Spirit, made of herself a total "dedication" to the Lord. In these years I have been able to visit many of these churches: from the Middle East to Africa and from Europe to India. I invoke the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary upon all these brothers and sisters of ours, and particularly our brethren in the Holy Land and Iraq who are passing through difficult moments of great suffering.

With these sentiments, I renew to each of you my gratitude for your services to the Church, and I cordially impart my prayerful Apostolic Blessing to you all.