



The Holy See

VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES

Via della Conciliazione (Rome)
Saturday, 9 June 2007

- ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
 - ANNOUNCEMENT OF APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW PREFECT
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES
-

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The day has come for visiting the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, to which the Pope has also been looking forward. Today is also important because it is the day on which the calendar of the Latin Church commemorates St Ephrem, the great Doctor of the Syrian Church. I am grateful to the Lord and to all of you for this very cordial meeting. I greet the Prefect, Cardinal Ignace Moussa Daoud, and thank him for his kind tribute. I extend my thoughts to Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò, the Secretary, to the Undersecretary, to the collaborators and to everyone present.

My first thought is of Pope Benedict XV, of happy memory, who established the "Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Church" 90 years ago. Blessed Pius IX had constituted the "Oriental Section" in Propaganda Fide. However, *"to forestall the fear that the Orientals might not be held in proper consideration by the Roman Pontiffs"*, Pope Benedict wished the new Dicastery to be completely autonomous, making arrangements for all that was necessary for it to function best.

And he himself took on its government. As the "*Motu Proprio*" *Dei Providentis* testifies, he wished to show clearly that "in Ecclesia leus Christi, ut quae non latina sit, non graeca, non slavonica, sed catholica, nullum inter eius filios intercedere discrimen" (AAS, 9-1917, pp. 529-531).

Exactly at that time a dramatic phase of history began, especially for Eastern Europe. The times that followed were to confirm how providential the Papal Provision had been. It aimed, through a specific Congregation, to assure Eastern Catholics of the Church's concern, which was later to accompany many of them in the long period of persecution. After the silence came liberation, and the life and mission of the Church could be resumed, developed and consolidated.

On this occasion, I thank the Lord once again for the design of his divine goodness. However, as a father and Pastor, I feel it is my duty to raise a fervent prayer to God and to address a heartfelt appeal to everyone in charge so that everywhere, from the East to the West, the Church may profess the Christian faith in full freedom. May the sons and daughters of the Church everywhere be granted to live in personal and social tranquillity: individuals and groups should be guaranteed dignity, respect and a future without any prejudice to their rights as believers and citizens.

From my lips comes an equally heartfelt plea for peace in the Holy Land, Iraq, Lebanon and all the territories placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, as well as for the other regions involved in the spiral of what seems inexorable violence.

May the Churches and disciples of the Lord remain there where divine Providence has placed them in the beginning; there where they deserve to remain, as a presence which dates back to the birth of Christianity. They have been distinguished down the centuries by a love that is undeniable and inseparable from their own faith, their own people and their own land.

This Visit places me in the footsteps of my venerable Predecessors, the Servant of God John Paul II and Blessed John XXIII, who came in person to meet the Superiors and Officials of the Dicastery. With this Visit, I also intend symbolically to continue the pilgrimage to the heart of the East which Pope John Paul II proposed in his Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Lumen*. Since the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the full patrimony of the Church of Christ (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 17), he urged people to become acquainted with her, saying: "The members of the Catholic Church of the Latin tradition must also be fully acquainted with this treasure and thus feel, with the Pope, a passionate longing that the full manifestation of the Church's catholicity be restored to the Church and to the world" (*Orientalium Lumen*, n. 1).

I began this pilgrimage in spirit by taking the name of a Pope who so loved the East. And in officially inaugurating the Petrine Service of the Bishop of Rome, I meditated at the tomb of the Apostle, gathering round me those Oriental Patriarchs who are in communion with the Successor

of Peter.

Thus, before the whole Church, I was spiritually immersed in the ceaseless flow from the source of the Apostolic Creed, making my profession of faith as the Fishermen of Galilee in the "Son of the living God" (Mt 16: 16). I was aware of the comforting promise of the Lord Jesus: "You are Peter" (ibid., 18). I had the certainty of having sons and daughters of the East beside me, with their Pastors who, faithful to their own tradition, also enjoy the benefit of the charism of communion conferred by Jesus upon Peter and his Successors.

Lastly, my Apostolic Visit to Turkey, unforgettable because of the moving embrace with the Catholic community and its ecumenical and interreligious importance, was another moment of special fruitfulness in my pilgrimage to the heart of the East.

Today, the Pope once again thanks the Eastern-rite Catholics for their fidelity paid with blood, concerning which wonderful pages have remained down the centuries until the contemporary martyrology! He assures them in turn that he wishes to stay at their side. And he reaffirms his profound esteem for the Eastern Catholic Churches, for their special role as "living witnesses to this tradition", (cf. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 1).

Without a constant relationship with the tradition of her origins, in fact, there is no future for Christ's Church. It is the Eastern Churches in particular which preserve the echo of the first Gospel proclamation; the most ancient memories of the signs worked by the Lord; the first reflections of the Easter light and the flickering flame of Pentecost that was never extinguished.

Their spiritual patrimony, rooted in the teaching of the Apostles and Fathers, has given rise to venerable liturgical, theological and disciplinary traditions, demonstrating the capacity of the "thought of Christ" for making cultures and history fruitful.

For this very reason, like my Predecessors, I regard the Churches of Orthodoxy with esteem and affection: "A particularly close link already binds us. We have almost everything in common; and above all, we have in common the true longing for unity" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 3). The hope that wells up from the depths of the heart is that this yearning may soon find its complete fulfilment.

The universal Church also finds in the patrimony of her origins the capacity for speaking unanimously and convincingly to the men and women of today: "The words of the West need the words of the East, so that God's word may ever more clearly reveal its unfathomable riches" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 28).

It was the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council which expressed the hope that the Eastern Churches might "flourish and fulfil with new apostolic strength the task entrusted to them" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 1) "of fostering the unity of all Christians, in particular of Eastern

Christians, according to the... Decree "On Ecumenism", by prayer above all, by their example [of life], by their scrupulous fidelity to the ancient traditions of the East, by better knowledge of each other, by working together, and by a brotherly attitude towards persons and things" (ibid., n. 24).

Thanks to a centuries-old way of life, they will first have to take on the interreligious challenge in a spirit of truth, respect and reciprocity, so that different cultures and traditions may find mutual hospitality in the name of the one God (cf. Acts 2: 9-11).

The Congregation has clearly-defined tasks which it carries out with competent dedication. I am pleased to be able to express my grateful appreciation to it and to encourage it to place its every action within the framework of the mission proper to the Eastern Churches and to that component of the Latin Church that is entrusted to it.

I reaffirm the irreversibility of the ecumenical option and the inevitability of the interreligious encounter. I praise the most correct application of synodal collegiality and the regular ascertainment of ecclesial growth inspired by the new-found religious freedom.

The Pope has very much at heart the priority of formation as well as the renewal of the family, youth and vocational ministries and the appreciation of the pastoral care of culture and of charity. The charitable movement, which the Congregation is supervising by the Pope's mandate so that the Holy Land and other Eastern regions can receive in an orderly and balanced manner the necessary spiritual and material support for their ordinary ecclesial life and special needs, must continue, indeed, must grow.

Finally, an intelligent effort is also required to deal with the serious phenomenon of migration, which sometimes deprives the sorely-tried communities of their best resources. It is essential to guarantee migrants a satisfactory welcome in their new context and the indispensable link with their own religious tradition.

With these concerns the Congregation stands beside the Eastern Churches to encourage the process, with respect for their prerogatives and responsibilities. In this far-from-easy task it knows that it can always count on the Pope, on the Bodies of the Roman Curia in accordance with their respective functions, and on the Institutions associated with it. I am thinking above all of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, which furthermore is commemorating its 90th anniversary and to which I address my gratitude for its irreplaceable and highly qualified ecclesial service.

I entrust these hopes to Blessed John XXIII. The East affected him so deeply that it led him to convoke the "new Pentecost of the Council" in docility to the Spirit and cordial openness to all peoples.

Close to us is the Most Holy Mother of God, whom I venerated in your Byzantine chapel before the

Holy Icons surrounded by the cloud of Witnesses.

Trusting in the All Holy, may the Eastern Churches foster that variety which does not harm but rather exalts unity, so that the whole Church may be the intimate "sacrament... of communion with God and of unity among all men" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1).

Dear friends, I consign to you my greetings for the brothers and sisters of the East so that they may feel, also through the daily work of the Congregation, that they always have a place in the heart of the Pope of Rome.

I therefore impart to each one my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your loved ones and to all the Eastern Catholic Churches.

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**ANNOUNCEMENT OF APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW PREFECT
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES**

Your Beatitude,

As I said in the personal Letter which I addressed to you, I have decided today to accept your resignation from the office of Prefect of this Dicastery which you presented to me some time ago. I am also pleased to take this occasion to express all my gratitude to you for the work you have carried out with generous dedication in such a delicate task.

I am comforted, however, by the thought that I shall still be able to avail myself of your competence in the collaboration you will continue to offer to me as a Member of various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and from this moment I also warmly thank you for this.

At the same time, as I have already had the opportunity to communicate to you, today, 9 June, the day on which the calendar of the Latin Church commemorates St Ephrem, the great Saint of your Country, Archbishop Leonardo Sandri succeeds you in your office as Prefect for the Oriental Churches; until now he has been Substitute of the Secretariat of State for the First Section of General Affairs.

At this moment, I also address my thanks to him for the help he has given me in his previous office, while at the same time I offer him my most cordial good wishes for success in the sensitive tasks which I am entrusting to him with this appointment.

I have asked Archbishop Fernando Filoni, currently Apostolic Nuncio in the Philippines, to assume the office of Substitute in the First Section for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, and I cordially greet him as I await his arrival at the Vatican this July.

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