



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE BIENNIAL MEETING
OF THE ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR AID
TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES (ROACO)**

Thursday, 24 June 1999

Your Eminence,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,

Dear Members and Friends of the Assembly of Organizations for Aid to the Eastern Churches (ROACO)!

1. I am pleased to address a warm welcome to you on the occasion of your meeting to coordinate aid to Christians of the Eastern Churches.

I affectionately greet Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and President of ROACO, and I thank him for his address to me on your behalf. I greet the Secretary, the Undersecretary and staff of the dicastery for the Eastern Churches, as well as those in charge of the agencies and everyone present here.

Your biennial meetings, which began in 1968, are now more structured, increasingly well-coordinated and well-attended, and have proven to be effective. I know that in recent years special attention has been dedicated to the method of conducting your work in close collaboration with the Eastern Catholic Churches, at whose service you operate. Your assistance is thus valuable to the Pope and enables him to exercise more diligently his ministry of presiding "in universal charity".

I thank you all, dear agency directors, for the work you perform under the guidance of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. Through your dedication you alleviate needy situations, guide socio-pastoral initiatives, help countries divided by conflict and come to the aid of numerous people stricken by poverty and many forms of marginalization.

2. In particular, you support the Eastern Catholic communities in the work of evangelization. With the Great Jubilee now imminent, believers are called to live their faith more intensely, in the awareness that they are "a leaven and, as it were,

the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 40).

The witness of faith must be accompanied by the service of charity: the proclamation of the Gospel of hope calls for the Gospel of charity. One of the signs of the Jubilee itinerary is the "Holy Door". Pointing to the door is an appeal to the responsibility of every believer to cross the threshold of mercy (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 8). "Door" and "threshold" are *signs of that charity* "which opens our eyes to the needs of those who are poor and excluded" and to the "need to create a new culture of international solidarity and cooperation, where all ... accept responsibility for an economic model which serves everyone" (*ibid.*, n. 12).

Through your generous dedication to the needs of our brethren of the Eastern Churches, the entire ecclesial community carries out its universal pastoral mission. Creating active co-responsibility helps overcome the temptation to selfish particularism and enables different peoples to feel linked to one great destiny, in which the Gospel has generated trust and hope in a new humanity.

3. With the Jubilee, the Church's attention will focus on Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem and the entire Holy Land, in which the Son of God took our flesh from the Virgin Mary. I know that you already devote particular attention to the holy places and are aware of the concerns and problems of the local Christian communities. I invite you above all not to ignore the expectations of young people and to help Christian families not to lose hope about housing and employment, even when faced with socio-economic problems and uncertain living conditions.

The universal Church, also through the traditional Collection for the Holy Land, is concerned for our brothers and sisters who live in the holy places of the Redemption. In earnestly recommending this act of love towards the Christians of those regions, I am sure that your efforts to bring aid to the most diverse parts of the Catholic world will find a grateful response in the Pastors and faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin community of the Holy Land.

Clergy and faithful show their willingness to work together, to plan projects and pastoral programmes in accordance with the recognized priorities of evangelization, charity and educational commitment. The formation of mature and responsible lay Christians who can offer a courageous witness of faith is of the greatest importance.

During the joyful Jubilee celebration, the numerous pilgrims who will visit the sacred places of the Faith will not only have the opportunity to share moments of prayer and communion, but also to come to know the works you support to aid catechesis, pastoral leadership and charitable action.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, I express my satisfaction with your concern to fulfil the requests you receive. Those communities which, through the service of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and ROACO, see their efforts for a more courageous revival of their apostolic zeal encouraged, express their gratitude to you through me.

May the Mother of God, Mary most holy, who "from the day of the virginal conception ... lived the fullness of her motherhood, crowning it on Calvary at the foot of the Cross" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 14), strengthen you in your intentions and continue to show "everyone the way that leads to the Son".

With these hopes, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and willingly extend it to the Ecclesial Communities to which you belong, to the organizations you represent and to the projects?for which you ceaselessly work.