



The Holy See

***LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL ACHILLE SILVESTRINI
PREFECT OF CONGREGATION
FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES***

*To Cardinal Achille Silvestrini
Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches*

1. It gives me deep pleasure to convey my greeting in the Lord, through your kind offices Venerable Brother, to those taking part in the meeting of the Bishops and religious superiors of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Europe with the representatives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, to be held in Hajdúdorog, Hungary, from 30 June to 6 July.

The conference is an event of primary importance: the heads of the Eastern Catholic Churches will gather to understand better and better what the universal Church expects from the Eastern Catholics in full communion with the See of Rome. The meeting was possible because of the new-found freedom which presents the Eastern Catholic Churches of Europe with unheard of opportunities and commitments. They have paid dearly for their choice to remain faithful to the Lord and to communion with the Bishop of Rome, sometimes even the price has been the supreme gift of life. Deprived for decades of their clergy, often imprisoned or at any rate subject to wearisome surveillance and constantly restricted pastoral action, today these Churches, their strength depleted but trusting in him who overcame the world, face the arduous task of emerging from the catacombs to respond to the needs of the faithful, released at last from the bond of oppression but troubled by new illusions and subjected to new challenges.

2. The dicastery of the Roman Curia, over which your Eminence presides, has most fittingly sponsored this meeting to offer the Bishops, some of whom are proven confessors of the faith, the opportunity to meet, pray and reflect together with their co-workers in the Congregation, so that it may become better acquainted with their expectations and express more effectively and promptly the Holy See's instructions for Eastern Catholics. Through the Congregation for the Eastern

Churches, it is the Pope himself who is beside them, like a stone on which to construct the ever new building of fidelity to the Lord Jesus. The Church is built up through straightforward reciprocal listening.

I am convinced that this experience of coexistence will enrich everyone, reinforcing in the Eastern Catholic Churches the commitment to find the most appropriate ways to offer their own specific contribution: they make the treasure of the Christian East present in the heart of the Church and, at the same time, participate in the flow of grace which runs through the many and variegated forms of the body of the Catholic Church. The common expectation depends upon fidelity to this twofold vocation. I trust that a clearer awareness of this identity will serve to facilitate the precise place of Eastern Catholics in the ecumenical framework encouraging them to overcome misunderstandings and tensions which have caused and still cause great suffering. This reasserts what I said in my *Letter to the Bishops of the European Continent on relations between Catholics and Orthodox in the new situation of Central and Eastern Europe*: "It is my heartfelt hope that wherever Oriental Catholics and Orthodox live side by side there will be established relations which are fraternal, mutually respectful and sincerely seeking a common testimony to the one Lord" (*Letter to the Bishops of Europe on relations between Catholics and Orthodox*, 31 May, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 17 June 1991, n. 6, p. 2).

The more the Eastern Churches become themselves, the more effective will be their witness, the more visible their belonging to the Christian East and the more fruitful and valuable the way they complement the Western tradition.

3. I ask the martyrs, famous and unknown, venerated by these Churches, to accompany this event, interceding with our common Father to obtain openness of heart and mind, the courage of fidelity and blessed hope in the day of the Lord.

With this wish I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to Your Eminence and to all the participants at the meeting.

From the Vatican, 28 June 1997, the liturgical commemoration of St Irenaeus.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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