



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO A DELEGATION OF THE PONTIFICAL ORIENTAL INSTITUTE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 90th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION***

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 6 December 2007

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters

It is a cause of great joy to me to welcome you on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, founded by the Pope who desired it, my venerable Predecessor, Benedict XV. That Pope's times were times of war, whereas he worked so hard for peace! Moreover, in order to guarantee peace he launched various appeals, and in 1917, the year your Institute was founded, he drafted a practical peace plan, a detailed project which unfortunately was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, in the space of a few months he set up three monumental works of incomparable value to guarantee peace within the Church: the Congregation for the Oriental Church, later renamed: "for the Oriental Churches"; the Pontifical Oriental Institute for the study of the theological, liturgical, juridical and cultural aspects that constitute knowledge of the Christian East; and the *Codex Iuris Canonici*.

Thank you for your visit, dear friends! I greet you all with affection. In the first place, I greet Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, whom I thank for expressing the sentiments of all; I greet Cardinal Spidlík, the Prelates present, Fr Kolvenbach, Prepositor General of the Society of Jesus, the students and all the members of the Community of the Pontifical Oriental Institute. I extend my affectionate thoughts to all those who in these past 90 years have contributed to making your Institute respond ever better to the expectations of the Church and the world.

So it was that within the space of five and a half months Pope Benedict XV, with whom I feel a

special bond, created the Congregation for the Oriental Churches - on 1 May - and the Oriental Institute - on 15 October. It was the Oriental Catholic Churches that were to benefit from them, enjoying a regime more consonant with their traditions under the gaze of the Roman Pontiffs, who never ceased to manifest their concern with gestures of effective support, such as, for example, inviting numerous Oriental-rite students to come here to Rome to increase their knowledge of the universal Church. Difficult periods have sometimes harshly tried these Ecclesial Communities, which remain close in spite of being physically distant from Rome, through their fidelity to the See of Peter. Yet their progress and staunch perseverance in difficulties would have been unthinkable without the constant support they could find in the Pontifical Oriental Institute, this oasis of peace and study, a meeting place for various scholars, professors, writers and editors, among the best experts on the Christian East. The Library, which is the jewel of this Institute, deserves special mention. It was founded by my Predecessor, Pius XI, a former librarian of the Ambrosiana and a lavish patron of the historical collection of the Pontifical Oriental Institute's library. This library is rightly famous throughout the world, as well as being one of the best libraries on the Christian East. One of my commitments is to enlarge it further, as a sign of the Church of Rome's interest in knowledge of the Christian East and as a means of eliminating possible prejudices that could damage the cordial and harmonious coexistence of Christians. Actually, I am convinced that the promotion of study also has effective ecumenical value, since drawing from the sapiential patrimony of the Christian East is an enrichment to all.

In this regard the Pontifical Oriental Institute constitutes an outstanding example of all that Christian wisdom can offer to those wishing to acquire an ever more exact knowledge of the Oriental Churches or to deepen that orientation in life according to the Spirit, who represents a subject on which the Christian East rightly boasts a very rich tradition. These are not only precious treasures for academicians, but also for all members of the Church. Thanks to the availability of a wide range of editions of the Oriental Fathers, today they are no longer treasures "under lock and key". It is the task of students at the Pontifical Oriental Institute to decipher and interpret them authoritatively, to work out dogmatic syntheses on the Trinitarian God, on Jesus Christ and on the Church, on Grace and on the Sacraments, to reflect on eternal life, of which we may have a foretaste in advance in liturgical celebrations.

Dear Professors, I express to you in particular my deep appreciation of all the good you do, dedicating your valuable time to your students. I thank the Society of Jesus with affection; for the past 85 years the Pontifical Oriental Institute has been entrusted to its academic competence and apostolic zeal. I warmly wish you every good, dear students who have come to Rome in order to share with so many others from every part of the world a direct contact with the heart of the universal Church. And my gratitude could not overlook a very important link; I am alluding to those who make an important contribution, although not directly involved in academic work: they are the friends who support the Pontifical Oriental Institute with their solidarity; the benefactors to whom we are so deeply indebted for the material progress of this institution; the personnel, without whom it would be impossible to assure its daily functioning. I say "thank you" to them all from the bottom

of my heart and, as a pledge of the divine reward, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you with affection.

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