



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO MEMBERS OF THE "PRO ORIENTE" FOUNDATION

29 March 1979

*Lord Cardinal, Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is one of the unfathomable divine dispositions that you are only now able to pay to his successor the visit which, as delegation of the Board of Directors of the ecumenical Foundation "Pro-Oriente", together with your venerated founder and president, you already wished to pay to Pope John Paul I last year. I, therefore—representing at the same time also my unforgettable predecessor—receive you with all the greater joy and bid you a very hearty welcome,

For fifteen years, "Pro Oriente"—completely in accordance with the name of the Foundation has—been concerned with dialogue with the Orthodox Churches, and in the last few years particularly with dialogue with the Old Eastern Churches. As I emphasized just recently in my first Encyclical, true ecumenical work means "openness, drawing closer, availability for dialogue, and a shared investigation of the truth in the full evangelical and Christian sense" (*Redemptor Hominis*, [6](#)). Your many meetings, conversations, study sessions and publications have served this aim in a fruitful way. Through them, on the plane of personal contacts and specialized scientific research, you have contributed to better reciprocal acquaintance, to a deeper understanding of the different historical developments and traditions of the individual Churches of the East and of the West, and to a more conscious recognition of the rich common heritage which already exists. Looking back today, you can already point with joy and satisfaction to precious concrete results. The setting of the ecumenical foundation "Pro Oriente" was, then, in its time, a noble-minded and at the same time suitable answer of the local Church of Vienna to the special ecumenical task set by the Second Vatican Council. In the Decree on Ecumenism, the latter expressly urged those who wish to commit themselves to the full re-establishment of unity between the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church "to give due consideration to this special feature of the origin and growth of the Churches of the East, and to the character of the relations which obtained between them and the

Roman see before the separation, and to form for themselves a correct evaluation of these facts. The careful observation of this will greatly contribute to the dialogue in view." (Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.)

While I thank you sincerely on behalf of Our Lord and of the Church for the precious ecumenical work carried out hitherto by your Foundation "Pro Oriente", I request you at the same time to continue in your efforts with unabated zeal also in the future. May the journey you are now making for the purposes of study to Rome and Istanbul also strengthen and encourage you anew to do so. Through you, Lord Cardinal, I am happy to transmit to His Holiness the ecumenical Patriarch Demetrius I, whom you will personally meet shortly, the expression of my respect and brotherly greeting in the Lord. I willingly impart to you all the Apostolic Blessing, with my best wishes for successful days and a happy continuation of your journey.

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