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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 190919c

Thursday 19.09.2019

Audience with participants in the Conference organized by the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches

At midday today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Conference organized by the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's greeting to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning.

I offer my cordial greeting to all of you, professors of canon law, experts and members of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches, and to your President, whom I thank for her words. I congratulate you on the fiftieth anniversary of the Society, founded here in Rome in 1969, soon after the Second Vatican Council. The Society's founder was Father Ivan Žužek, who made significant contributions to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. I am grateful for this visit on the occasion of your jubilee celebration, which afforded me the joyful opportunity to embrace my dear brother, Patriarch Bartholomew, the Society's first Vice-President.

The work of the Society, bringing together experts from different Churches – Eastern Catholics, Orthodox and Oriental Churches – is of fundamental assistance to ecumenical dialogue. How much we can learn from one another in all areas of ecclesial life: theology, the experience of spirituality and liturgy, pastoral activity and, certainly, canon law.

Canon law is essential for ecumenical dialogue. Many of the theological dialogues pursued by the Catholic Church, especially with the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches, are of an ecclesiological nature. They have a canonical dimension too, since ecclesiology finds expression in the institutions and the law of the Churches. It is clear, therefore, that canon law is not only an aid to ecumenical dialogue, but also an essential

dimension. Then too it is clear that ecumenical dialogue also enriches canon law.

I would like to offer the example of *synodality*. When translated into established institutions and procedures of the Church, synodality expresses the ecumenical dimension of canon law. On the one hand, we have the opportunity to learn from the synodal experience of other traditions, especially those of the Eastern Churches (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 246). On the other hand, it is clear that the way in which the Catholic Church experiences synodality is important for its relations with other Christians. This is a challenge for ecumenism. Indeed, “the commitment to build a synodal Church — a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord — has significant ecumenical implications” (*Address during the Ceremony Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015).

Based on the common canonical heritage of the first millennium, the current theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church seeks precisely a common understanding of primacy and synodality and their relationship in the service of the unity of the Church.

Dear friends, your research also has a synodal dimension: you walk together and, in mutual listening, evaluate your traditions and experiences to find ways to full unity. I am grateful for your work which, I am certain, will be of great help not only for the development of canon law but for our moving ever closer to the fulfilment of the Lord’s prayer: “that they may all be one; [...] so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*).

Invoking God’s blessing upon your Society, I entrust all of you to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she may watch over you with her maternal affection. I assure you of my prayers, and I ask you also to pray for me. Thank you!
