



CONGREGATION FOR THE EASTERN CHURCHES

# THE CATHOLIC EAST



VALORE ITALIANO

## Preface

*The Catholic East* is the fruit of a long and intense effort. It is published by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, the dicastery of the Roman Curia entrusted with supporting the Eastern Catholic Churches. The dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council placed the Churches of the East most appropriately within the communion of Churches:

By divine providence it has happened that various Churches, founded in various places by the apostles and their successors, over the centuries have formed into many groups that are organically united, which, saving the unity of the faith and the single divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical custom, their own theological and spiritual patrimony. Some of these, particularly the ancient patriarchal Churches, as mothers in the faith, have given birth to others as their daughters, with which they remain connected up to our day by a very tight bond of charity in sacramental life and in mutual respect for rights and obligations. (n. 23)

Thus, Christ's Church is the spouse *circumdada varietate* (Psalm 44: 15). Many motivations led our dicastery to promote this new edition of *The Catholic East*: first of all, the desire to make the Catholic faithful know honour, and love the Churches of the East in full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome, whose rich diversity is great and yet too little recognized.

To this aspiration is added the aim of presenting a tool for work and consultation that is combined with an effort at objective and academic historical reconstruction, but always capable of being refined and updated, in the hope that the full ecclesiality of our Churches, progressively rediscovered beginning with the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, may be appreciated more and more.

Third, *The Catholic East* desires to be a tribute to the Churches of the Christian East, Catholic and Orthodox, and to their numerous martyrs and confessors of the faith. When the Jubilee Year 2000 was approaching, the Congregation for the Eastern Churches organized a conference, "Faith and Martyrdom", and published its proceedings. Unfortunately, tragic

persecutions are being repeated even today, and the Christians of the East pay a very heavy price for the hatred that oppresses them and divides them one from another. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ have lost everything as they fled from their cities and villages, dispersed far from their lands and communities of origin. Others have been taken hostage and are imprisoned only because they believe in Jesus Christ.

In a context of historic upheaval, *The Catholic East* is a sign of trust in God for the future, and a bold invitation never to lose hope. This work is also a sign of gratitude for the pastors, witnesses of hope, who remained with their flock, despite indescribable suffering and tears.

This publication offers an apt occasion to recall a glorious but equally painful past. At the same time, it prompts gratitude for the journey that began with Vatican II: the decrees *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), the magisterium of Saint John Paul II in *Orientalis lumen* and *Ut unum sint* (1995), the Jubilee Year 2000, the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* of Benedict XVI (2012), and the Jubilee of Mercy promoted by Pope Francis in 2015.

We are fully aware that the Eastern Catholic Churches over the years have been considered simultaneously as bridges and stumbling blocks. Yet the self-understanding of these Churches goes beyond simple stereotypes: they live with great seriousness a full, rich, and responsible ecclesial life, aware of their individuality and uniqueness, and of their *par dignitas* with the other Churches of East and West. Through their fidelity to the liturgical and spiritual patrimony that they share with sister Orthodox Churches, they can promote the full communion which is so strongly desired:

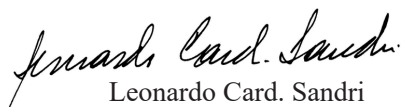
In the meantime, all Christians, both Eastern and Western, are strongly invited to raise to God fervent and continual prayers, even daily, so that, with the aid of the most holy Mother of God, all may become one. They should pray also so that the fullness of comfort and consolation of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, may be poured out on those many Christians of every Church who, courageously confessing the name of Christ, suffer and are oppressed. (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum* n. 30)

It is my sincere hope that *The Catholic East*, the first English edition appearing forty-five years after the previous Italian edition, contributes to a greater appreciation of the abundant gifts that these Churches offer the universal Church and of the sacrifices that their faithful

have made for love of their full communion with the Apostolic See. Their presence, which is a great blessing, calls for more recognition and appreciation.

Finally, I recall with loving memory the late Jesuits Fathers Vincenzo Poggi († 2016) and Robert Taft († 2018), and I express renewed gratitude to the president of the scientific commission of the Italian edition (2017), Fr. Ronald G. Roberson, C.S.P. I desire now to thank the scientific commission of the present English edition, which has worked in full harmony with competence, dedication, and selflessness, and whose learning and scholarly authority are well known: the president, Abbot Michel Van Parys, O.S.B., Prof. Fr. Edward Farrugia, S.J. and the secretary, Dr. Gianpaolo Rigotti. I am also very thankful for the other scholars for their capable assistance, and I express my deep appreciation to Dr. Mario Pirolli for the innovative proposal of co-publishing this work.

14<sup>th</sup> October 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leonardo Card. Sandri". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leonardo Card. Sandri  
Prefect



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*(Orientalium Ecclesiarum n. 30)*



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