



**24th International Congress of the Society for the Law of Eastern Churches**  
“Fifty Years of Encounter Among the Eastern Churches:  
How Canon Law Assists in the Ecumenical Dialogue”  
16-20 September 2019, Rome, Italy

Welcome by Rector, Rev. David Nazar, sj

Your Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, Your Eminence(s), (Your Graces,) Your Excellencies, honoured guests, professors, students, and friends. Welcome to the Pontifical Oriental Institute for the 24<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the *Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches* on this the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this prestigious group founded here at the PIO in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council by a group of friends, Catholic and Orthodox, in order to enhance the study of the oriental canonist tradition common to both Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches.

Among our alumni, it is a special pleasure to welcome again one in particular. We retain a deep and living affection for you, Your Holiness. We still vividly recall your visit to PIO in 2008 for the Donohue Chair Lecture when this hall was filled to capacity to hear your talk “Theology, Liturgy, and Silence.” We continue to follow your work, your writings, and your health with deep interest. You are not infrequently a subject of conversation at pranzo—always positively, to be sure. And You can count on our constant prayers for your wisdom and peace.

The name of the Orientale is well known in its field. Of late, we have been doing some international publicity through travels, conferences, online videos, and publications. Due to the various conflicts, there is a growing interest in the West towards the churches of the East and the role they play in troubled times. Many who come to know us ask me about our courses in ecumenism. My answer often surprises them at first until they realize its justice. At the Orientale we do not study ecumenism so much as live it. The interchange among students is such that I never know who is Orthodox, who Catholic, nor who might be of another confession. We sense a deep unity in our faith in Jesus Christ. And it seems to me that this is the way it should be. May this congress be another step in the Gospel mission that we be one.

Buon lavoro.