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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. 231201c

Friday 01.12.2023

Message of the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the “Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo”

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to Professor Chiara Minelli, President of the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo*, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its founding:

Message of the Holy Father

To the Distinguished Professor Chiara Minelli
President of the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo*

The remarkable occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo* is a reason for particular joy to address to you, as to all the Members of this distinguished association, a cordial thought accompanied by gratitude for all those who, over these long years, have dedicated themselves to research aimed at “advancing and disseminating the study of Canon Law and State Law relating to the Catholic Church and other Churches and ecclesial communities” (Statute, no. 2).

As is well known, this Association originated and developed with the purpose of uniting experts in canon law from ecclesiastical and civil universities in many parts of the world, in the promotion of a discipline that is important for the life of the Church. The synergy that has developed among the many universities in various nations is highly appreciable.

Undoubtedly, the person is at the centre of canon law and civil law; the peculiarity of canon law is the person as redeemed in Christ, as faithful in the Church. Through laws, both the Church and civil society aim to procure the common good; however, in the Church this is not merely an external order that permits individuals to fulfil their obligations and exercise their rights; rather, it is an expression of the presence of Christ the Saviour, the inner reality of grace, which is a common good precisely because it belongs to all the faithful.

The fact that this relates to the law of the Church-People of God, whose vocation is holiness, requires that you, passionate devotees, always bear in mind that the *suprema lex*, in the light of which every ecclesiastical law must be formulated, interpreted and applied, is the *salus animarum*, which is already being implemented now, but will reach its fullness at the end of time. If you keep within this horizon, you will find on the one hand to remain steadfast to what is at the basis of Canon Law, Revelation in its twofold expression of the Word of God and living Tradition, and on the other hand to apply what Christ wants, through the canonical norm, to the concrete situation of each believer, so that he or she may be accompanied to accept God's will. The gift of spiritual discernment is to be sought. Paraphrasing a famous phrase of Jesus, remember that the law, whether canonical or civil, is made for man, not man for the law (cf. *Mk 2:27*).

The People of God lives in history, and therefore its forms of life and organization cannot be immutable. Here too, your art of discernment consists in knowing how to translate Christ's will for the Church, which must remain as such through time, into forms that promote the fulfilment of the mission received by her Founder: to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to all peoples.

The wisdom that comes from God, received in prayer and in listening to others, in diligent teaching as well as in the Courts and Curias of the diocese where you work, guides you in distinguishing what is essential in the daily life of the Church, inasmuch as it is desired by Christ himself and established by the Apostles, and also expressed in the Magisterium, and and what instead is merely a set of external forms, perhaps useful and significant in the past, but no longer so in the present, indeed sometimes an impediment to a witness that, especially today, requires greater simplicity to be credible. This essentiality of faith is what was transmitted to us by our mothers, the first evangelizers. Why not take it as a point of reference as an attitude of the spirit to be lived in the various situations of Church life?

The words of the Gospel, which challenge us as Christians, are eloquent: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (*Lk 18:8b*). We can ask ourselves, in the light of the events that are shaping today's reality in various spheres: "if the Son of man were to come today, would he find faith on earth?". One can even be a canonist, but without faith in one's way of reasoning. All the ecclesial dimensions and structures must carry out a pastoral and missionary conversion in order to bring to the world the only thing it needs: the Gospel of the mercy of Jesus. Even canon law is invested with this mandate that the Master gave to his Church; therefore, it is necessary for it to be more pastoral and missionary. Being pastoral does not mean that the norms can be set aside, and one should orient oneself as one wishes, but that in applying them one must ensure that the *Christifideles* find in them the presence of the merciful Jesus, who does not condemn, but exhorts not to sin anymore because he gives grace (*Jn 8:11*). Therefore, even when a severe penalty is to be applied to one who has committed a very serious offence, the Church, who is a mother, will offer him the indispensable help and spiritual support so that in repentance he may encounter the merciful face of the Father. All the baptized are invested with this task, but especially the Bishops and Major Superiors. This is how the missionary Church evangelizes also through the application of the canonical norm.

To you, dear brothers and sisters, gathered on this special occasion, I wish to express my thanks for the qualified service you render to the Christian Community. It is my hope that this Conference, whose relevant theme is "Fifty Years of the Promotion of Canon Law in the world panorama of Legal Science", will be a providential moment of reflection to renew your cooperation in such a delicate area of the Church. Be aware that you are instruments of God's justice, which is always indissolubly united with mercy.

As I assure you of my prayers for each one, I entrust you to the intercession of Saint Raymond of Peñafort so that the event you are celebrating may bring the desired results; I ask you please not to forget to pray for me, and I gladly bless you.

Fraternally,

From the Vatican, 1 December 2023