

## **A Witness to Diversity in the Catholic Church The Silver Rose of St. Nicholas for Monsignor Fortino**

“Anima e motore” – this is what they call Msgr. Dr. Eleuterio Fortino, the “soul and motor” of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican. The Silver Rose of St. Nicholas, founded by the Institute for Ecumenical Studies at the University of Fribourg and the Institute for Eastern Studies at Regensburg, will be given in 2008 to Msgr. Fortino. This prize is given “to persons who in their lives, like St. Nicholas, make visible the love of God for human beings,” his “philanthropy.” Those who hold the prize, “rooted in the life of their ecclesial community, give witness to the universal mission of the Church to all creation by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus contribute to reconciliation and communion in the Church, in humanity, and of all creation.” The Silver Rose is both an academic and ecclesial distinction, and thus expresses the fact that theological reflection can be fruitful only when linked to one’s personal witness at the service of the Church community. Following Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (2006) and Mother Abbess Josefina of the Varatec Romanian Orthodox monastery, Msgr. Fortino is the third person to receive the Silver Rose.

Eleuterio Fortino was born on April 21, 1938, in Lattrico (Latariko in Albanian) in the Italian province of Cosenza, into an Albanian family whose ancestors had moved to Italy with 40,000 of their compatriots who had been expelled by the Turks. The Italo-Albanians are of the Byzantine rite, and they are proud of having been “never separated from Rome,” while retaining their eastern traditions in the midst of the Latin parishes in their region. In 2007, the three Italo-Albanian jurisdictions concluded a synod, during which Msgr. Fortino served as General Secretary. Between 1958 and 1965, Eleuterio Fortino studied at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained a priest in 1962 at the Greek College. On April 1, 1965, Cardinal Willebrands called him to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which had just been founded in 1960. In this position Fortino was responsible for contacts with the Orthodox during the last session of the Second Vatican Council, first and foremost with the Greeks and Romanians. He continues with these responsibilities today, after ten years as head of the Orthodox section of the office, after five years as Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council, under Secretary Bishop Brian Farrell and President Cardinal Walter Kasper. Since 1965, Msgr. Fortino has been pastor of the Italo-Albanian community at the Church of St. Athanasius in Rome. Each Sunday, his homilies draw a large number of faithful. His more notable publications include *Liturgia Greca* (“Greek Liturgy”) published by the monastery of Grottaferrata’s St. Nilo Press in 1970, *La chiesa bizantina Albanese in Calabria: Tensioni e comunio* (“The Albanian Byzantine Church in Calabria: Tensions and Communion”) published by Bios in 1994, and *Il dialogo ecumenico: Verso un terzo millennio* (“Ecumenical Dialogue: Towards a Third Millennium”) published by Grafitalia in 2000. His many articles that have appeared in several languages in well-known journals reveal his untiring effort to promote a living encounter between church traditions, especially contacts between Rome and the Orthodox churches.

Since the beginning of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue at the international level in 1978, Msgr Fortino has served as secretary for the preparation of its plenary sessions as well as the planning meetings. Recently, he assisted the meetings in Belgrade in September 2006 and in Ravenna in October 2007. He is always an encouraging presence, offering precise formulas, a warm openness to his dialogue partners, and an attentiveness to the other person’s

questions and situation. Because of his atypical ecclesial roots, he brings a deep awareness of Catholic diversity to the Vatican's efforts to promote the unity of Christians.

The awarding of the prize is scheduled to take place around 21/22 June, 2008, at Bari near the Relics of St. Nicholas.