



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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1. An important Document of the Apostolic See: the Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, has recently been published. It is dedicated to the problem of academic studies and to the institutions which the Church creates for the purpose of serving these studies. This is an area which has a long and glorious past behind it. The Church, sent by Christ to teach "all nations" (Mt 28:19), came into *living touch with knowledge* right from the beginning. This is confirmed by the tradition of the most ancient Christian schools, especially the most famous ones in antiquity, such as the school of Alexandria and that of Antioch. Subsequently, it is testified by the whole secular effort of the monastic Orders, which, thanks to their tireless work, contributed to preserving the texts of the classics, that is, of the ancient pagan authors. And, finally, it is confirmed by the close collaboration of the Church with schools of various grades which spread instruction, and above all *with the Universities*, the features of which took shape in the Middle Ages. Many of the most ancient and famous Universities in the various countries of the European continent (and, later on, also in other continents) which still exist today go back to that time. For centuries they have been centres of knowledge and teaching, and the *culture* of the individual nations and of European countries (and also of other continents), *owes a great deal* to them. With regard to this vast problem of historical significance, which is in itself the subject of many studies and monographs, I will confine myself merely *to a brief mention*. It cannot be ignored, in fact, being a question of such importance for the mission of the Church also in our times. A brief mention should be made of the most ancient University and cultural centres, such as: Bologna, Rome, Padua, Pisa, Florence, in Italy; Paris, Toulouse, Grenoble, in France; Oxford, Cambridge, in Great Britain; Salamanca, Valladolid, in Spain; Cologne, Heidelberg, Leipzig, in Germany; Vienna, Graz, in Austria; Lisbon, Coimbra, in Portugal; Prague, in Czechoslovakia; Krakow, in Poland; Louvain, in Belgium; Mexico City, in Mexico; Cordoba, in Argentina; Lima, in Peru; Quito, in Ecuador; Manila, in the Philippines.

2. The above-mentioned Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* refers just to this. It is the fruit of the resolution of the *Second Vatican Council*, which declared that a new Document should be drawn up on the subject of the relations of the Church with academic studies. The preceding Document, the Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, was promulgated by Pope Pius XI on 24 May 1931 (A.A.S. [1931] 241-262). The rapid, I should say, overwhelming, development of knowledge in its various contemporary movements and, in relation to this phenomenon, the need of adapting academic institutions, set up by the Church to carry out their specific tasks, have made it necessary to revive also that outstanding document of 1931, which for decades had rendered great services to the Church and to society. The new Constitution is the fruit of many years of work. *The Congregation for Catholic Education*, under the guidance of Cardinal *Gabriel Marie Garrone*, directed this work

in agreement with the individual Episcopal Conferences and also with the environments of academic character most interested in it, as well as with the Catholic Academies themselves. Today, in the whole world, there are 125 Academic Centres of Ecclesiastical Studies. Of these Academic Centres, 16 are in Rome and are called also "Pontifical Roman Academies". In the world there are also 47 Catholic Universities erected by the Holy See and 34 Theological Faculties in State Universities. These *Academies took part* in the work of preparation for the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*.³ The new Pontifical Document has defined clearly what is meant by "Ecclesiastical Faculty": that is, the one that deals particularly with Christian Revelation and the disciplines connected with it, which, therefore, are connected with its evangelizing mission. It has defined the specific aims of Ecclesiastical Faculties: that is, to deepen knowledge of Christian Revelation; to form students in the various disciplines at a level of high qualification; actively to help both the universal Church and the particular Churches in the whole work of evangelization. It has clearly delineated the criteria of government of the single centres, in such a way as to render them all responsible and to guarantee an effective, collegial operation of the single centres. It has outlined the gifts required in teachers, from the standpoint of scientific preparation and testimony of life. It has introduced a new structure of Faculty curriculum. It has called the theological Faculties to a particularly important research function, that is, to express the Gospel message in the legitimate cultural expressions of the various nations. It has stressed the ecumenical, missionary and human advancement aspects that the studies of ecclesiastical Faculties should involve.⁴ The Constitution on academic studies will serve the same purposes as those served up to now by the Document *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* (supplemented, shortly after the closing of the Council, with the regulations issued by the Sacred Congregation under the title "Normae quaedam" of 20 May 1968). It is necessary here to express our *gratitude to all those who contributed to drawing up this important Document*. Concluding my address, which is necessarily rather short and concise in comparison with its subject, we must realize once more the purposes that will be served by the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, as they were served previously by the Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*. To answer this question, we must have before our eyes the Church in her mission. A mission defined by Christ the Lord when he said to the Apostles: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19), "preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). *To proclaim the Gospel, to teach*, means encountering the living human being, man's thought, which continually seeks the truth, and always in a different way and in new fields. He questions and waits for the answer. To find the true answer, in conformity with reality and exact and persuasive, he undertakes researches that are sometimes difficult and tedious. The thirst for truth is one of the undeniable expressions of the human spirit. To proclaim the Gospel, to teach, means meeting this voice of the human spirit at various levels, but especially at the highest level where the *search for truth* is carried out methodically in specialist institutes which serve research and the transmission of the results of investigations, that is, teaching. Catholic Academies must be places in which the evangelization of the Church meets the great universal "academic process" which bears fruit with all the breakthroughs of modern science. At the same time, in these Academies, *the Church continually deepens, consolidates and renews her own knowledge*: the knowledge she must transmit to the man of our time as a message of salvation. And she transmits this knowledge, first of all, to those who must in their turn transmit it to others in a faithful and true way which is, at the same time, adapted to the needs and questions of the generations of our time. This is *an immense work*, an organic work, indispensable work. May the new Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* make all those who are preparing for this work aware of their own task, in the community of the People of God. May it take them aware of their *responsibility* for the Word of God and for the fruit of human truth. May it be a challenge to persevering service of this

truth.

To the sick: To you sick people present here and to all those suffering in their homes or in hospitals, I address a particular

greeting, with a special thought for children who are hospitalized. Be assured that the Pope is and will always be with you. He follows you with fatherly understanding and with tender affection and does not cease to raise prayers to obtain for you the grace of fortitude which will make you overcome the difficulties and ordeals to which illness subjects you. Always remember that your pain, if associated with that of suffering Christ, is not only not vain, but is a privileged source of salvation for all men. May the Lord shower on you the abundance of his heavenly favours to sustain and comfort your hearts.

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