

The Christian University

Following is the text of a recent address given by Pope John Paul during a general audience in Rome.

An important document of the Apostolic See: the Constitution Sapiientia 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," 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 on other continents) which still exist today go back to that time. For centuries they have been centers 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.

The above-mentioned Apostolic Constitution Sapiientia 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 May 24, 1931.

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 Gabriel Marie Garrone, directed this work in agreement with the individual episcopal conferences and also with the Catholic Academies themselves.

Today in the whole world there are 125 Academic Centers of Ecclesiastical Studies. Of these Academic Centers, 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 Sapiientia Christiana.

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 centers, in such a way as to render them all responsible and to guarantee an effective, collegial operation of the single centers.

It has stated precisely the function of the ecclesiastical Magisterium with regard to "justa libertas in docendo et in investigando."

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.

The constitution on academic studies will serve the same purposes as those served up to now by the document Deus Scientiarum Dominus. 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 Sapiientia 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 . . . preach the gospel to the whole creation."

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.

This is an immense work, an organic work, an indispensable work. May the new Apostolic Constitution Sapiientia 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 make 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.

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

No Earthly Paradise Is Forever

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 6:41-51. (R1) 1 Kgs. 19:4-8. (R2) Eph. 4:30-5:2.

Over the triple doorway of the Cathedral of Milan there are three inscriptions.



Over one is carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath, the words "All that pleases is for a moment."

Over another is a sculptured cross, with the words "All that troubles is but for a while."

Over the great central entrance is this inscription: "That only is important which is eternal."

If someone could give us an elixir that would keep us young and happy forever, would we not fervently seek it? Yet life forever is exactly what Jesus offered when He promised Himself as the bread of life.

The Jewish response to this promise was startling. The Jews murmured against Jesus, just as their ancestors had done against God in the desert (last Sunday's readings). They murmured

because they thought Jesus was telling fairy tales. Marx called it "pie in the sky." They murmured because Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven. They knew better, or so they thought. "Don't we know his father and mother? Didn't he have a beginning, and so an end? Life forever? Who does he think he is?"

What did Jesus say? "Stop your murmuring." He said it gently and helpfully, as if to say, "Murmuring will get you nowhere." The futility of complaining! How vain to rebel! How empty, how useless to grumble!

Accepting Christ is not a human work — "no one can come to me unless the Father . . . draws him." So "stop murmuring," urged, and implied start praying! Should I fall and break my hip and be unable to rise, what would I do? Would I not call for help? In a like manner, I should call on the Father to draw me. We should, because those so drawn by the Father "I will raise up on the last day."

And how does the Father draw us? "They shall all be taught by God" — by God, the Holy Spirit! He, the Holy Spirit, will speak of the Father and will teach us about Him. No vision, of course, will He give us. "For no one has seen the Father

—only the One who is from God." But the Spirit will speak of the Father in our heart. Our only hope is in someone outside ourselves, like the Spirit of God. For the gospel is too other-worldly for the worldly; too humbling for the proud; too exacting for the self-indulgent; too lofty for the darkened understanding; too spiritual for the sensual. If one already thinks he is religious enough, if one prides himself on his 'goodness, if one is blind to his defects, how will he come to Jesus? Water won't flow uphill, nor will man act against his nature. His sole hope is in someone outside himself — the Spirit of God. "They shall all be taught by God."

To nourish this life, the Son gives Himself as the bread of life. "I am the bread of life." Manna nourished physical life; the eucharistic bread nourishes the spiritual life that leads to life eternal.

"If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever!" Live forever! Who in this world can ever make such a promise? Sure, prize shows on TV may offer a two-week trip to Tahiti or Acapulco, but who can offer life eternal? Yet what dream of happiness does not have an element of life everlasting in it? Yet is it not the one thing lacking in every earthly paradise? But for such a "paradise" we sweat and groan; "do not sadden the Holy Spirit" — by letting the eternal one elude our grasp.

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