

Reflections on academic quality

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1. The Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* (VG), promulgated by Pope Francis on December 8, 2017, emphasizes the full integration of ecclesiastical academic realities in the evangelizing mission of the Church, in the world and for the world. Hence, the Regional Seminars, promoted by the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of the Quality of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO), under the impulse of the Dicastery for Culture and Education (DCE), are a concrete example of that “networking” in every part of the world, which must characterize ecclesiastical studies (VG 4,d).
2. Quality is the great challenge of ecclesiastical institutions. It takes place in three fields: teaching, research and the so-called “Third Mission,” that which takes place at the academic, cultural and social levels. Quality is especially necessary if we want ecclesiastical institutions to be authoritatively present where “new narratives and paradigms” are being formed (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 74). Quality must permeate academic life, shape it entirely and contribute to the flourishing fruit of the tree of science and knowledge.
3. Quality should be proposed as a natural condition of academic life, as a necessary value, as a measure of the mission of the Church in which ecclesiastical institutions participate. It is a quality that needs to be verified, among other aspects, in inter- and trans-disciplinarity, “exercised with wisdom and creativity in the light of Revelation” (VG 4c). There is a need for our institutions not to be a juxtaposition of departments without connections between them. Research requires exchange and scholarly work carried out in

deep and collaborative dialogue. In this sense, the focus on the unity that unites the different knowledges, that is, on the event of divine Revelation, which culminates in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus and is distributed through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is decisive.

4. Applying the theme of unity to the network of ecclesiastical institutions, it must be said that they are called not to work each on its own, but to weave relationships among themselves, but also with academic institutions in different countries. It is a matter of uniting efforts to provide answers to the great questions that touch humanity as a whole, not only those that are strictly academic. As the Pope said in his Audience to the Roman Pontifical Universities and Institutions (Feb. 25, 2023), it is necessary to “make a chorus” within the institutions, but also among the different realities of the network of ecclesiastical studies. It is important in this regard that ecclesiastical institutions with more possibilities feel co-responsible with those with fewer resources and thus grow mutual support and sharing (cf. Second Letter to the Corinthians 8:7-9).

5. The mission of ecclesiastical university institutions is valuable in the Church. They are not a marginal but a central reality, which must take up the challenge for quality, as “salt of the earth and light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16). In these words, Jesus, the Lord, calls us not to leave the world but to enter the world without conforming to him. The mission of ecclesiastical academic institutions depends on a broad vision that can discern the way to build with bricks permeated by a quality that does not depend on numbers but on conviction and excellence in the characteristic fields of ecclesiastical sciences: theological, philosophical, legal, humanistic, historical, social, educational, artistic, liturgical and philological knowledge. These are the knowledges that conform the polyhedron of the ecclesiastical sciences, according to the constitution *Veritatis gaudium*.

6. We will be salt of the earth and light of the world if we focus on excellence, on the quality of our institutions, and defeat that unwritten principle that quality is the exclusive patrimony of the most gifted institutions. There is a human being to be built and rebuilt in a world too accustomed to the destruction of dignity. In fact, quality is the name that dignity must receive from the academic point of view. We are all called to promote and evaluate it, taking into account different cultural and academic contexts and employing a culture of dialogue (*motu proprio Ad theologiam promovendam* Prologue, 4a). This is a necessary contribution to walking toward universal brotherhood, the only road that leads to peace, as Pope Francis' encyclical *Brothers All* emphasizes, which remains a light for the academy as well.