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Press Conference for the presentation of Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution "Veritatis gaudium" on the new regulations on the Institutes of Ecclesiastical Studies

At 11.00 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held on Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution "*Veritatis gaudium*", on the new regulations on the Institutes of ecclesiastical studies.

The speakers were: Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education (for Study Institutes); H.E. Msgr. Angelo Vincenzo Zani, secretary of the same Congregation; and Professor Msgr. Piero Coda, president of the *Sophia* University Institute, member of the International Theological Commission.

Intervention by Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi

Our era constantly presents new challenges to all the actors involved in the world of higher education. Despite the inevitable difficulties, these challenges are a stimulus for academic institutions to make great progress. However, they are sometimes so demanding that the aforementioned institutions can be tempted by "a pseudoculture that reduces man to waste, research to interest and science to technique". Against this paradigm Pope Francis addresses an urgent invitation to all academics: "Let us dedicate ourselves passionately to education, that is, to drawing out the best from each person for the good of all" (*Meeting with students and the academic world*, Bologna, 1 October 2017).

The universities and ecclesiastical faculties, governed by the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (1979), fully belong to this academic world. They know not only the challenges, but also the potential. They cannot – by their very nature – escape the intrinsic questions addressed to them. In the light of its daily experience – which evaluates the numerous opinions gathered throughout the world – the Congregation for Catholic Education has proposed to His Holiness Pope Francis a new normative framework, as requested by many, so that the previous one "may be continuously adapted to the needs of the Ecclesiastical Faculties" (*Sapientia Christiana* 93).

Since their publication, the texts of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (April 15, 1979) and its *Ordinationes* (29 April 1979) have already been amended three times: on 2 September 2002, by the Decree

renewing the order of studies in Faculty of Canon Law, which, following specific approval by the Holy Father, revised Article 76 of the Constitution as well as articles 56 and 57 of the *Ordinationes*; 28 January 2011, by the Decree on the Reform of Ecclesiastical Studies of Philosophy which, following specific approval of the Holy Father, reformulated Articles 72, 81 and 83 of the Constitution as well as Articles 51. 1 a), 52, 59, 60, 61 and 62 of the *Ordinationes* (addition of Articles 52 bis and 62 bis to the *Ordinationes*); and 22 September 2015, with the Decree of the Congregation for Catholic Education concerning the new formulation of articles 8, 6° (now a five-year report) and 14, 6° of the *Ordinationes* (annual update of the database).

Since 1985, the Congregation for Catholic Education has published other normative texts on ecclesiastical academic institutions in the field of theology, philosophy and religious sciences: *Notio affiliationis theologicae* (1985), *Conventio ad affiliandum* (1985), *Normae ervandae ad affiliationem theologicam exsequendam* (1985) and *Normae de instituti theologici aggregatione* (1993); *Notio affiliationis philosophicae* (2014), *Conventio ad affiliandum* (2014) and *Normae servandae ad affiliationem philosophicam exsequendam* (2014); and the *Instruction on the Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences* (2008).

In addition, worthy of mention are the documents promulgated by the Supreme Pontiff Saint John Paul II: *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983) and *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990) which dedicate some canons to, respectively, the theme *De universitatibus et facultatibus ecclesiasticis* (cfr. cann. 815-821 CIC) and *De ecclesiasticis studiorum universitatibus et facultatibus* (cf. canons 646-650 CCEO), as well as the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1990) which, although dedicated to Catholic Universities, also refers to the ecclesiastical academic Institutions (cf *Norme generali*, Art. 1, § 2 and Art. 7, § 1).

In addition to the current canon laws, the Holy See has adhered, in the field of higher education, to four regional UNESCO Conventions: *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean* (30 November 1977), *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* (11 April 1997), *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education* (26 November 2011), and the *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States* (12 December 2014). This process led the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to establish, by the Chirograph of 19 September 2007, the Holy See Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO), which is an institution connected to the Holy See, in accordance with Articles 186 and 190-191 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*.

From this perspective, the Congregation for Catholic Education, through seven circular letters addressed to all the Ecclesiastical Faculties, gave the necessary information for a correct adaptation of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions to the needs of the Bologna Process and introduced new regulatory dispositions that have not yet been inserted in the canonical provisions of higher ecclesiastical studies.

Pope Francis has encouraged this revision, which he spoke about in his address to the participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Catholic Education on 13 February 2014: “The 50th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration, the 25th of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and the updating of *Sapientia Christiana* lead us to reflect seriously on the many formative institutions dispersed around the world and on their responsibility in expressing a living presence of the Gospel in the field of education, science and culture”. During the Plenary of 7 to 9 February 2017, this revision was discussed, improved and approved by the Fathers so that a “good part of the [...] work was dedicated to ecclesiastical and Catholic university institutions for the updating of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*” (Pope Francis, Address to participants in the Plenary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, 9 February 2017).

This revision was accepted by Pope Francis, who decided to issue a new Apostolic Constitution. It bears the date 8 December 2017, 52 nd anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican Council II, and is entitled *Veritatis gaudium*. The new Constitution on ecclesiastical academic studies indicates the meaning and, more specifically, the basic criteria for a renewal and relaunch of the contribution of ecclesiastical studies in an “outbound” missionary Church, as illustrated in the extensive Foreword, inspired by *Evangelii gaudium*.

The texts mentioned can also be found on the Holy See website and on that of the Congregation for Catholic Education (www.educatio.va).
