

Vatican City, 30 October 2006

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Circular Letter No. 4

To the Chancellors, Rectors and Deans
of Ecclesiastical Faculties
and for the information of
the Rectors of Catholic Universities and
Presidents of Episcopal Conferences:

At the beginning of the new academic year, the Congregation for Catholic Education wishes to present to all those responsible for Ecclesiastical Faculties some useful guidelines and information necessary for the correct application of the requirements of the Bologna Process in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

The contents of this Circular Letter are divided into three parts: the first part highlights normative guidelines; the second part provides a synthesis of the main points of the Bologna Process Official Seminar organized by the Holy See earlier this year; and the third part contains a request for information necessary for the Congregation to proceed through the next stages of the Process.

Normative Guidelines

From the time the Holy See began implementing the Bologna Process to the present, in various institutions of Ecclesiastical studies uncertainties have arisen and, at times, an incorrect understanding of the conditions for adherence to the Bologna Process. Specifically, the Congregation for Catholic Education is the “competent national authority,” and, unless explicitly conditioned in particular concordat provisions, it alone bears the responsibility for Ecclesiastical studies in its institutions. Not in a few cases, Ecclesiastical institutions have not implemented the reforms or have made adaptations according to the national systems in which they exist without respect for, or even disregarding, the relative Ecclesiastical norms.

In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, it is crucial to point out that the Holy See's adherence to the Bologna Process does not imply in any way a diminished competence of this Congregation over the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties dependent upon it.

Adherence to the Bologna Declaration and the subsequent participation of the various countries in the development of a unified European tertiary educational system have been decided on the intergovernmental level. What this means is that general guidelines come out of the agreements made between the competent authorities of the various countries and that the manner of implementation remain completely in their hands. In other words, no supranational body exists with the right to prescribe norms or to promulgate laws on these matters. Full legislative and normative competence remains, as before, in each country. Each country, and thus, the Holy See, continues to have the right of complete authority over legislation and the promulgation of norms related to university studies.

Consequently, in this phase of the Bologna Process, the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* and its respective *Norms of Application* remain fully in force losing none of their compulsoriness. Operating guidelines and every accurate interpretation concerning the requirements of the coordination of advanced studies in Europe, as they refer to Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities, are the competence of the Holy See, and specifically, of this Congregation.¹

To be clear, therefore, the previous circulars and those to follow are directed to enjoin norms by which university studies are organized, in accord with the current legislation of the Church, moving towards a better compatibility of our forms and operating procedures with those of European universities as well as fostering mutual acknowledgment of their academic and professional degrees.

Moreover, in light of what has been stated above, this Dicastery, in cooperation with the local bishops and the academic institutions themselves, is responsible for determining the particular way of implementing the Bologna Process, even in the countries where Ecclesiastical studies are integrated into the civil academic systems.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* concerning the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, 15 April 1979, n. 6: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 469-521. "Only Universities and Faculties canonically erected or approved by the Holy See and ordered according to the norms of this present Constitution have the right to confer academic degrees which have canonical value."

In other words, this Dicastery oversees the accreditation of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties. Moreover, the accrediting procedures required by other agencies, in those institutions with dual accreditation, do not substitute for those required by this Congregation. Except for those particular cases in which such issues are governed by Concordats between the Holy See and individual States, it is necessary that, whenever uncertainties or questionable interpretations relative to such matters arise, Ecclesiastical institutions should consult the Congregation for Catholic Education.

Information on the Study Seminar organized by the Holy See

In order to guide the process toward bringing about the “European Higher Education Area” by 2010, numerous study initiatives have been organized in these years aimed at putting into focus the courses, languages and necessary means of all the related matters.

Accordingly, the Holy See hosted a study seminar treating “The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area” in Rome between 30 March and 1 April 2006. This meeting was organized by the Congregation for Catholic Education in cooperation with the Association of Rectors of the Pontifical Roman Universities, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, UNESCO-CEPES and the Council of Europe under the patronage of the European Commission and attended by more than 240 representatives of different Universities, international organizations as well as the respective European nations.

For the first time, an event of this kind drew attention to the cultural challenges confronting the Bologna Process, to the necessity of our dealing with the questions surrounding the fundamental values and the cultural heritage that have evolved historically in the European university and to how these “core-values” can still attract students, researchers and teachers from outside of Europe.

With the participation of members of various cultural, scientific and religious groups, the Seminar was organized in various work sessions, consisting of a comprehensive presentation of key reports, debates, round table discussions and study groups. Various cultural exchanges, including an outstanding concert in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, arranged by the Italian Ministry of Universities and Scientific Research, and a visit to the Vatican Museums allowed the participants to discover the breadth of the cultural diversity of the several thousand year history of Rome. The Seminar concluded with an audience with Pope Benedict XVI bound to

have meaningful impact on the forthcoming meetings of the Bologna Process (Enclosure n. 1).

At present, the Acts of the Seminar are being prepared for publication in cooperation with UNESCO-CEPES so that the contributions of the Seminar will be available to all. It can be said that this event, beyond having offered to the participants an extraordinary occasion for professional interaction and an opportunity to become acquainted with the key institutions of the Church, has instilled above all a renewed sense of collaboration between the countries participating in the Process. In particular, one caught a glimpse of how “the European Higher Education Area” will be able to stimulate the university, on one hand, to open itself to the major issues on which the cultural debate and scientific research are concentrated, namely: the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice, the protection of the environment, and the pursuit of peace. On the other hand, it will hasten the unfolding of an interdisciplinary dialogue, on an academic level, that can counter the increasing degrees of fragmentation and an excessive specialization of knowledge. Such an interdisciplinary exchange will be able to avoid, what occurs in many cases, that the restraints of offering good professional training to meet the immediate needs of the labor market, sacrifices the goal of a well-rounded education on the human level.

Universities should encourage both an horizontal and a vertical interdisciplinary dialogue. The horizontal respects the epistemological framework of each discipline; whereas the vertical, requires the academic community to analyze and evaluate regularly the significance of each discipline as it relates to the transcendent value of both the human person and the world. The Seminar strongly endorsed this integrated vision of truth and a better synthesis of learning.

Requirements of the Congregation for Catholic Education

While planning for the above-mentioned Seminar and seeing it through to completion required the Congregation to take on added responsibilities, it also reaffirmed, on the international level, the significant cultural prominence and professional competence of the Holy See.

In the meantime, the members of the Commission for the Bologna Process have been meeting regularly and taking part in various projects, to advance the scope of the Bologna Process, to optimize the instruments and procedures for achieving the already established goals, and to prepare itself for the next Summit to be held in London, in May of 2007.

In this Circular Letter, we wish to highlight the main issues on which the Commission's work has been focused, subsequent Circular Letters will provide additional and more detailed information. These issues correspond to the topics already discussed in our earlier communications and further specify a practical model for their correct application in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

1. The "Qualifications Framework" and its future scope

Starting in 2007, all countries participating in the Bologna Process are expected to have begun at least drawing up a *Qualifications Framework* for all the subjects of advanced studies, providing the appropriate curriculum, the relative requirements and anticipated learning outcomes. The *Framework* for the Holy See's programs of study, found in *Sapientia christiana* and revised according to standards common throughout Europe, will provide a solid base for a precise assessment of the qualifications earned by students attending programs of Ecclesiastical studies. This task must be completed by 2010. The Congregation for Catholic Education, with the aid of international experts, has begun drafting a *Framework* for each program of Ecclesiastical studies.

In order to facilitate this task, we ask that, **by 20 December 2006**, you send the relative information concerning the status of each Ecclesiastical Faculty including both the customary study programs of Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law (cf. nn. 65-83 of *Sapientia christiana*) as well as the institution's other specialized programs (cf. Enclosure n. 2).

2. Quality Assurance and Accreditation

As already anticipated in the previous Circular Letters, this Congregation is establishing an agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation. To this end, guidelines for the relative procedures of internal assessment have been established and communicated in Circular Letter n. 3 (Prot. N. 392/2005/3, dated 12 July 2005). This procedure—one of the main elements of the Bologna Process—is designed to assist each academic institution to recognize the weak points in its programs so to improve the level of quality. Initial trials for this process will begin shortly.

The Congregation is opened also to receive suggestions on this matter in order to find models and instruments adapted for quality assurance and accreditation in countries in which civil law makes specific demands. Moreover,

we enjoin all Ecclesiastical Faculties, as already mentioned, not to seek accreditation from civil agencies without first having consulted this Congregation, which is the primary authority achieving the stated objectives.

3. Introduction of the “Diploma Supplement” and of the “ECTS”

In order to proceed with the appropriate implementation gradually and accurately, the Congregation now needs an accounting of each Ecclesiastical Faculty as to where it is in the introduction of the Diploma Supplement and the application of ECTS system (as required in Circular Letter n. 3, Prot. N. 392/2005/3, dated 12 July 2005).

We ask the Rectors of Ecclesiastical Universities, the Deans or Presidents of each Faculty, therefore, to compile the relative information sought in the enclosed questionnaire and forward it to the Congregation for Catholic Education **by 20 December 2006** (Enclosure n. 3).

While we understand that the implementation of the Bologna Process has demanded additional work in the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, we are convinced that, in time, these efforts will be of positive value for all.

Availing ourselves of this opportunity to renew our gratitude for your gracious cooperation and to express our sincere best wishes for the success of the newly begun academic year, we remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Simon Const. Juchacz



+ Jean Louis Brugnot
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