Quality in relation to certain challenges introduced by *Veritatis gaudium*

The Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* introduces various elements of novelty. These affect a series of areas that can be analyzed from two interpretative viewpoints: one could be defined as system-related, the other content-related. These two terms are intended to define the impact that VG will have on the whole of the Holy See's Higher Education System on the one hand, and, on the other hand, effectively "what" will be changed.

Before diving into the details of this analysis, certain contextual questions should be asked:

Does VG mark a "revolution" of the system, or an "evolution"? Does it represent a continuation, discontinuation, or change of direction in relation to previous texts? Is it prevalently a "policy document" or "binding" in nature? Are the changes it introduces profound or superficial?

The thesis that this brief document sustains is based on three pillars that seek to answer the questions above:

- VG constitutes a definite continuity from *Sapientia christiana*, from the point of view of both its form (the Foreword of the previous Apostolic Constitution is an integral part of the text of VG) and contents (the majority of changes to individual articles reflect changes in the Canons or derive from the Holy See's adhesion to international treaties and agreements);
- VG has the significance typical of nation States' "Constitutions" or "basic laws": it is a largely policy-based text establishing values, criteria, objectives and aims, leaving the Universities and Faculties and their governing bodies freedom regarding (and therefore also the responsibility for) its implementation;
- The most profound change does not specifically concern the contents of Institutions' work: it does not alter "what" they are called upon to do. What changes is the "how" and "why", i.e. the aspects of the process, the characteristics and fundamental aims that must guide the teaching, research, third mission, governance, administration and life of an ecclesiastical academic community.

This interpretative framework determines a series of changes that could be considered evolutions in relation to the previous situation; one of the main shifts concerns the concept of quality and, consequently, the criteria adopted to assess to what extent an Institution is achieving the aims it has set itself. In fact, if quality is considered as an Institution's capacity to achieve set aims, the criteria used to evaluate ecclesiastical Faculties can be derived from the objectives stated in article 3 § 1 of VG: more precisely, this article very broadly defines the subject of evaluation, i.e. what is to be evaluated for the purpose of determining the quality of an ecclesiastical academic Institution. "The purposes of Ecclesiastical Faculties are: through scientific research to cultivate and promote their own disciplines, i.e. those directly or indirectly connected with Christian revelation or which directly serve the mission of the Church, and therefore especially to deepen knowledge of Christian revelation and of matters connected with it, to enunciate systematically the truths contained therein, to consider in the light of revelation the most recent progress of the sciences, and to present them to the people of the present day in a manner adapted to various cultures"[1]. Going back to the two interpretative viewpoints introduced at the beginning of this text, there can be no doubt that this constitutes an evolution from the point of view of both the system and contents simultaneously. An evolution of the system because all ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties are called upon to present "to the people of the present day" and in "a manner adapted to various cultures" the analyses, questions and answers that teaching and especially research shall provide to society, in order to deal with the "most recent progress of the sciences". An evolution in terms of contents because it constitutes an invitation to support processes that can bring Theology, Philosophy and the other disciplines increasingly closer to contemporary challenges. This can be done by introducing a mechanism to ensure the constant

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[1] Frances, *Veritatis gaudium*, art. 3, §1, Rome, 8 December 2017.

dynamism of knowledge, with its roots based firmly in teaching, but which spurs research to investigate new contexts and present the results in a manner that can enrich not only the academic community but the whole world (third mission). Research, in particular, becomes the fulcrum around which the Universities' and Faculties' work pivots: this work must be in the service of the Church's mission. However, while research is given high standing among institutional activities in academia, the true fulcrum of the system is, significantly, the community of students. Paragraph 2 of article 3 contains extremely innovative points in this sense: "train the students to a level of high qualification in their own disciplines, according to Catholic doctrine, to prepare them properly to face their tasks, and to promote the continuing permanent education of the ministers of the Church"[2]. The centrality of the student or learner is not solely confined to their university experience, but it is clearly indicated that the academic Institutions should increasingly prepare students to deal with tasks and the "professional" aspect of life, thus opening up a series of connections between concepts such as *learning outcomes* and the development of skills. Another innovative aspect is the promotion of educational tools and pathways aimed at *lifelong learning*. It is not by chance that these two key terms focus on learning, rather than teaching. Herein this lies one of the most innovative aspects of VG – the introduction of a new model of higher education Institution: while Universities were previously confined to the two categories of "Teaching Universities" and "Research Universities", Pope Frances hails the advent of "Learning Universities", i.e. academic Institutions in which the centrality of the student is characterized by his or her learning pathway, which leads to the development of the person as a whole. The unity of knowledge indicated in the Foreword[3] is perfectly complemented by the idea of the complete development of man[4] as the key result of the learning process.

If what has been written so far concerns the impact of VG on the concept of quality, a second level of reflection may regard the contents of evaluation, or rather what, in terms of quality, will be assessed in order to comprehend whether or not the academic Institution is operating in line with the indications of VG. Plenty of innovations (or evolutions) in relation to the past are present in this context, too: the academic Institutions are called upon to act as "cultural laboratories" in which to foster, in the light of their own missionary identity, "dialogue…an interdisciplinary approach… networking"[5]. Here the idea of a "University that goes forth" is clearly defined, and the priorities and poles around which to build strategies are outlined. Also in this case there is a connection between the ability to experiment typical of research (the idea of a laboratory), a fresh concept of teaching (no longer sectoral or monodisciplinary but interdisciplinary), and the dialogue, openness and networking that are typical aims of the third mission. These cultural laboratories will also have to interpret reality in order to create new leadership, capable of guiding a "cultural revolution". The "policy" aim of the Apostolic Constitution has, in the Foreword, all the elements it needs to launch a process of renewal of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions, by combining principles, policies, instruments, means and organizational mechanisms.

The academic Institutions "are not separate from the societies that host them"[6] and the participation hoped for in VG is oriented towards "building networks of respect and fraternity"[7]. The university Institution defined in VG appears as a combination between the idea of a community of professionals typical of the countries of north America, a significant organization with political and bureaucratic

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[2] Ibid., §2.
[3] Ibid., Foreword II, cit John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* n. 85, Rome, September 1998.
[4] Cfr. Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Rome, March 1967.
[5] Frances, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Foreword IV, Rome, 8 December 2017.
[6] European Commission, Green Paper, *Fostering and Measuring Third Mission in Higher Education Institutions, Brussels, 2008.*
[7] Frances, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Foreword V, Rome, 8 December 2017.

responsibility, as found in some areas of Europe, and a "network"[8] mechanism, encountered increasingly often especially in Asia.

This combination is not only connected to the universal logic with which the document deals, but also introduces a meta concept of polycentrism, according to which the building and reinforcement of networks appears all the more important if one considers that the term "network" derives from "net", which originally indicated an instrument used "to catch within the mesh a resource moving perpendicularly to the net itself. The metaphor has now been transposed and represents that which permits the circulation along lines and through nodes." In part, the metaphor is still highly significant if one considers that the net "gives more back to the environment in which it exists than it takes from it" and "therefore permits communication between nodes on the one hand and the "irrigation" of the surface it covers on the other"[9].

The dimension and the process of "networks" of relationships therefore produce added value in themselves. Indeed, while, in principle, formal organization also usually constitutes a network (think of the traditional organigram as a set of nodes and relations, in which the former are constituted by the different units and the latter represented by the lines that unite them), there are substantial structural differences between the two architectures. Hierarchical or functional organization is based on the principle of the division of work, through the precise and univocal assignation of tasks and responsibilities at each juncture, along rigid and prescriptive chains of direction, coordination and control. The typical "pyramid" form that ensues entails high transaction costs both vertically, along lines of hierarchy, and especially horizontally, between functional areas. In contrast, *network organizations* have *ad hoc* forms, which adapt in relation to the task in hand and are characterized by an emerging hierarchy, rather than conditioned by one defined *a priori*. A network is not a casual and slightly anarchic superimposition of wide ranging behaviours, practiced by the individual actors that it comprises at their own discretion. Instead, it is easy to distinguish a plurality of roles within it, determined not only by intentions (e.g. the attribution of responsibilities by the formal organization to its members), but also by the results of repeated internal interactions in response to the need to deal with situations and resolve problems. Its effective functions lead to the progressive formation of a structure from the bottom up, not plannable in advance, which expresses an intrinsic capacity for self-regulation. Due to the mutual and spontaneous convergence of behaviours, certain nodes take on the role of "specialist" (an actor to whom many refer in the case of a particular need), "coordinator" (a particularly central node, seen by the number of its relationships with others), "connector" (a node located between others, which are only capable of communicating through it), "gatekeeper" (a node that acts as an interface between a group and the rest of the network), etc. These roles are recognized only implicitly and not formally, and are identifiable through observation of how the network functions, using appropriate analytical techniques. Each network, in every moment of its existence, expresses in its mutable form the equilibrium between an aspect of specialization (what each node is capable of doing in a distinct way in relation to others) and an aspect of integration (the breadth and diffusion of the set of relations that characterize the connections between its components). A "well formed" network simultaneously maximizes the capacity to provide a specific (specialization) and systemic (integration) response to a complex problem, activating solution circuits via the selective and coordinated mobilization of its competencies.

It therefore appears useful to view networks as a "necessary and auxiliary" dimension of the organizational architecture and institutional functioning of ecclesiastical academic Institutions.

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[8] R. Middlehurst, *Changing Leadership in Universities*, in T.Schuller (ed.), *The Changing University?* Buckingham, SRHE-Open University Press 1995, pp.75-92.

[9] R. Brunet, *"L'Europa delle reti"*, in G. Dematteis, E. Dansero (ed.), *Regioni e reti nello spazio unificato europeo*, Memorie Geografiche, N.2, Firenze, 1996, pp.237-60.

"Networking" is another way of impacting organization and governance. A specific capacity for network management therefore needs to be developed. A network is productive if it is a point of redistribution, and above all of subjectivity, and universally perceived as such. Recognizing and bringing to light the subjectivity of individual actors implies practicing leadership delegation, attributing each member their autonomy, especially on the level of personal relations. It should be underlined that institutional networks are always accompanied by social networks, which are characterized by greater opportunities for experimentation with behaviours of use to improve problem solving in an informal context. The greater the autonomy, the better is the ability to deal with uncertainty. This parallel dimension should be valued, avoiding the syndrome of a "need for control" and instead supporting the "logic of responsibility" of each academic Institution and its governing apparatus. A "well-formed" network generates significant cohesive properties by itself. From a practical viewpoint, it requires two-track procedures, accompanying formal instruments of establishment and governance (typically constituted of statutes, agreements and protocols of understanding) with less formal settings and opportunities for interaction and free interpretation, of use to nurture its social rationale.

At the beginning of this document two levels of analysis were introduced: system- and content-related. The challenge is most impressive in relation to the latter, as it implies including in teaching (and in the whole life of the academic community) the concept of "active interpretation", i.e. "interpretation that does, that acts, that works, and does not limit itself to interpreting reality in a detached manner, but carries out what it understands and understands what it carries out"[10]. This concept reflects what Pope Frances has, on several occasions, presented as the combination of three languages necessary for education: "Education must touch the mind, the heart and the hands. Educate to think well, not just to learn concepts, but to think well; educate to empathize well; educate to do good. In such a way that these three languages may be interconnected: so that you think what you feel and do; you feel what you think and do; you do what you feel and think, in unity. This is educating"[11].

These challenges most probably seem too arduous, as they force Institutions to leave their comfort zone, call into question paradigms and conventions, and provide for a profound review of teaching, research and all the activities carried out by the academic community. The revolutionary feature introduced in the Foreword constitutes an invitation to academic Institutions to "teach to reform".

Riccardo Cinquegrani

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[10] D'Agostino S., *Veritatis gaudium un rischioso processo di apertura e dialogo*, in La Gregoriana Anno XXIII – n. 53 – Roma, May 2018.

[11] Frances, Pastoral Visit to Loppiano, Address of His Holiness, Parvis of the Mary Theotokos Shrine, Loppiano (Florence), 10 May 2018.
https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/may/documents/papa-francesco_20180510_visita-loppiano-focolari.html

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