

Prot. 392/2005

Circular Letter n. 5

To the Chancellors, Rectors and Deans
of Ecclesiastical Faculties
and, for information,
to the Rectors of Catholic Universities
and the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences.

Since more than one year has elapsed since its last communiqué, the Congregation for Catholic Education takes this opportunity to present this Circular Letter¹ to Ecclesiastical Faculties in order to provide some directions along with more updated information. These indications, when applied, will enable academic ecclesiastical institutions to reach the necessary objectives of the Bologna Process in light of its 2010 deadline. In this letter, we wish to focus more particularly on two specific matters: 1. a comprehensive presentation of developments since the Circular Letter n°4 and, 2. a reminder of the guidelines that all Institutions are required to apply within the next few months.

1. Further developments of the Bologna Process

During the last year, this Dicastery, its related "Commission for the Bologna Process" and other invited experts have been greatly involved and actively participating in the numerous meetings organised at various levels. Since a detailed account in this letter would not be possible, we wish to highlight only a few of the more significant aspects.

In the numerous contacts made regarding the Bologna Process, there has been expressed repeatedly an appreciation towards the Holy See for the Study Seminar organized in collaboration with UNESCO and with the Council of Europe at the Vatican in March - April 2006. The themes dealt with in that Seminar were taken up and studied at greater length in other subsequent events (as for example the meetings in Athens, Oslo, Cluj-Napoca and Salamanca). The Proceedings of the Seminar, published in three diverse forms, gather and offer the rich reflections which occurred during those days².

The *London Ministerial Summit* (17-18 May 2007) has been a very important stage with the participation of a representative delegation from the Holy See. That Summit served to bring into

¹ The text of this Circular Letter, as that of the previous ones, can be consulted at the following address:
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/index_it.htm

² The publications that were made of the "Proceedings of the Seminar" are the following: UNESCO/CEPES, "The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area", in *Higher Education in Europe*, volume 31, 4 (2006); CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, "I valori accademici dell'università europea", in *Seminarium* 2 (2007); and again by the CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION: *I valori accademici dell'università europea*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City (2007).

focus the progress achieved up to now, the leading priorities for the two-year period from 2007 to 2009 and the perspectives of the Process beyond 2010. Among the assessments expressed regarding the manner in which each country is progressing towards the objectives set by the Process, the Holy See received a totally positive appraisal. Such an evaluation is due to the fact that our system of studies is, in itself, already well structured and does not require any significant transformations. The text of the Summit's final Communiqué, in which some of the conclusions from the Seminar at the Vatican were taken up, can be found on the internet³.

A particularly significant step was taken regarding the Holy See's involvement in the Bologna Process with the creation of the "Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality" (AVEPRO) by the Secretariat of State. The Agency was made official through a letter issued from the Secretariat of State, dated 19 September 2007, exactly four years marking the Holy See's joining the Process. The letter also officialized the appointment of Father Franco Imoda S.J., former Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, as President of the Agency. In its first stage of development, the Agency operates in direct collaboration with the Congregation for Catholic Education, where, at present, it has its location (the e-mail address is the following: avepro@cec.va). In a sequential Circular Letter, we will explain in more detail about the Agency, intended to operate autonomously, along with its specific tasks and its link with the Congregation for Catholic Education.

In order to reinforce collaboration in academic communities and to meet the requirements of the Process, a coordinating body has been created among Representatives of all the students of Pontifical Roman Universities. This group of students already has been operating in an organized manner within each academic institute, but now will constitute an Association with its proper Statutes. The Chair of the Association took part in the London Ministerial Summit and other meetings. In the future, it is hoped that links might be provided among all student representatives present in our academic institutions in Europe and all over the world.

2. Operative aims

In previous Circular Letters, the Congregation indicated the objectives and measures to be implemented in relation to the Process at the level of each Ecclesiastical Faculty. For the sake of clarity and with the aim of working with common tools and courses of action within the whole system of ecclesiastical studies, the Congregation, with the help of the Commission, is preparing a *Handbook* that will draw together the inherent regulations concerning the Bologna Process that are entrusted to those responsible for each academic institution. In anticipation of this publication, we wish to highlight a few aspects that will be taken up in the *Handbook* but, from now on, should be put to use and correctly implemented:

a) First of all, it is necessary to *check* that in each single academic institution the directions given in the previous Circular Letters are being implemented. These directions were the introduction of the new ECTS credit system⁴, the release of a free *Diploma Supplement*⁵ in two languages to the students who apply for it, and the setting up of *internal evaluation*⁶.

The answers received to our inquiry during the last months about the implementation of these directions have been very useful. Unfortunately they are incomplete and do not enable us to draw up a fully updated general framework. In the meetings of the "Commission for the Bologna

³ The London Communiqué, along with all previous Communiqués, can be found in several languages on the following web site:

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Ministerial_declaration_communiques.htm

⁴ This system should not be applied in a mechanical way but with a necessary flexibility in the respect of the typology of ecclesiastical studies and with a clear vision of the qualifications to which they prepare.

⁵ The model for the correct drawing up of the *DS* was sent with the circular letter n°2 dated 28 October 2004. An overall general description of the system of ecclesiastical studies is available in English and Italian and can be requested from the following e-mail address: avepro@cec.va.

⁶ To this aim, the Congregation recommends that in each institution where it has not yet been done, a commission should be created to face this delicate task with clarity and professionalism.

Process,” it has become more clear that adjustment to the directives issued by the Congregation, as well as the internal evaluation, constitute a key step regarding everything connected with the Process, and, above all, regarding the theme of quality.

b) Secondly, elaboration will be done on *the data base*. The *Handbook* will include a copy of the form that will serve to collect annually the necessary statistical information in order to update the data base that is being set up at the Dicastery. As this will be a computerized data base, it will be necessary to obtain and organize the e-mail addresses from all Ecclesiastical Faculties. For this reason, and also in view of the *Handbook's* publication, we ask if you would kindly contact us as soon as possible at the e-mail address database@cec.va in order to receive a copy of the form to be filled in and sent back to the same address. You will find enclosed with this letter a copy of the form to be used for information purposes only.

c) Thirdly, *quality promotion* is one of the main issues of the Process. It is also one of the objectives that the Congregation insists upon, especially in light of the repeated mention of quality in the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* regarding the special identity of ecclesiastical studies. This mutual concern for quality has led the Dicastery and the Agency to work in close collaboration. With this aim in view, both the Dicastery and AVEPRO will work closely while maintaining the appropriate distinction inherent in their respective competencies. Therefore, we invite all institutions to implement the above mentioned directives with a similar insistence. Indeed, the commitment entrusted to each institution constitutes the basis that will ease the task the Agency will then have to fulfil. The task of evaluation and promotion carried out by the Agency will enable the Congregation more adequately to support the quality of ecclesiastical academic institutions.

At this time, we wish to express our gratitude to those Rectors of Ecclesiastical Universities and the Deans and Presidents of each Faculty for having sent, within the appointed period of time, the information requested by the Congregation concerning particular qualifications offered through specialised studies existing in our academic institutions. We consider this data to be very useful as we begin the work of compiling the *Qualifications Framework* for ecclesiastical studies.

The recipients of these Circular Letters are asked kindly to make this letter known to all parties, either directly or indirectly responsible, of involved institutions. This would include Rectors of your own universities who may not have personally received the letter, secretariats, professors involved in the Bologna Process and quality assurance, etc.

For further clarifications and suggestions, please contact the e-mail address of the University Department of the Congregation at vati169@cec.va.

With our best wishes for a happy New Year of 2008 and our most sincere regards.