

THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ECCLESIASTICAL STUDIES

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by

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The Second International Congress of Ecclesiastical Studies was convened by the Sacred Congregation for the Catholic Education, an organism of the Holy See destined to promote and direct the academic research and scientific teaching of the Christian Faith among the faithful, clergymen or laymen. Those called to take part in it were the Rectors or Presidents of Universities and Institutions of Higher Ecclesiastical Studies and of Faculties of Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law. Some attended in person, others, through their representatives. The Rector of the University of Santo Tomas, Rev. Fr. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., was represented by Fr. Jesus M. Merino Antolinez, O.P., Professor of Sacred Scriptures of the Faculty of Theology.

COMPOSITION: When we met in the big hall of the "Aula del Sinodo", at 9:00 A.M. of November 23, 1976, the Executive President of the Congress, Cardinal Gabriel Ma. Garrone assisted by Msgr. Antonio Javierre, Archbishop-Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, read an impressive list of delegates. Great names of persons and Institutions resounded. All continents were represented: Europe was very well represented with over 40 delegates; America, North and South, came second with some 20; and Asia with Africa completed the rest of the 92 delegates with the right to vote. Many Institutions, Episcopal Conferences from other different nations, the very Sacred Congregations have observers. Special mention should be made of the "resource persons" designated by the different offices of the Holy See. All in all, over 200 men of learning and academic responsibility filled up the imposing Hall, when the opening prayer, the "Our Father", was recited.

PROCEDURES: The procedures were fixed by Msgr. Javierre after Cardinal Garrone had greeted the delegates and pointed out to them the aim of the Congress, which is to assist the Holy Father

and his collaborators in finding out the precise lines for the definitive organization of Higher Ecclesiastical Studies. The Apostolic Constitution, "Deus Scientiarum Dominus", issued by Pius XI in 1931, has to be substituted by another one to be issued now in accordance with the directions of Vatican II and fitted to the needs of our times.

There will be three Commissions formed by the delegates. The I Commission would deal on **THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSITIES AND FACULTIES OF HIGHER RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THEIR EXTERNAL PROJECTION**. The II Commission would study **THE INTERNAL CONSTITUTION OF THE FACULTIES AND UNIVERSITIES**. The III Commission would busy itself with **THE INTERNAL FUNCTIONING OF THE FACULTIES AND UNIVERSITIES**. The delegates were requested to feel free to express their views with the most open frankness. The resource persons of the Sacred Congregations were meant to assist in the information available at the Holy See. The Plenary Sessions would afford the opportunity for all the delegates to hear evaluate and modify the work of the Commissions. The organization proved to be most efficient and successful.

One point stressed was that in order to shorten the discussions, the participation of the delegates and of the observers should take the form of interventions and contributions and avoid the debating process. It was not the fear of tempestuous sessions, because from the very first moment, a spirit of real Christian and priestly friendliness was evidenced when the voting delegates almost unanimously accepted the observers as having the right to be chosen officials of the Congress. In fact, several observers were so designated.

As for the language to be used, Latin was the first choice, but Italian became the most frequently spoken, followed by French, Spanish, English and occasionally, German. In the Plenary Sessions there was a simultaneous translation. The three minutes span of time per intervention was strictly observed as well as the submission in written form of the ideas presented.

THE WORK: It was strenuous work; the seatings went on from 9:00 to 12:30 in the morning and from 4:00 to 7:00 in the afternoon.

The Congress has been prepared a long time ago. Two years before the opening suggestions were asked from the Institutions and questionnaires were sent; during the previous year, the Sacred Congregation gathered the answers and collected them in four thick volumes of a little over 1,000 pages containing the reports of 167 Institutions aside from the information received from the Universities and Academic units of Rome itself. Since June 1 1976, our delegate has been busy analysing them in Manila.

The three initial Plenary Sessions were dedicated to the abstracts of such materials integrated by three "reporteurs" designated from three Pontifical Universities of Rome.

Fr. D. Dezza, S.J., former President of the Pontifical Gregorian University abstracted the documents for the **Nature and External Projection of the Institutions of Higher Ecclesiastical Studies**. He was particularly intent in pointing out the doctrinal foundations of the academic function within the Church. Msgr. Fr. Biffy, present Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical Lateran University, condensed the answers given by the Academies all over the world on the **Internal Constitution of the Institutions of Higher Ecclesiastical Studies**. His insights on the value of ways and means were extremely practical and outstanding. Fr. Jose Martins, C.M.F., Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical Urban University took up the **internal Functioning and Actuation of the Institutions**. His presentation of the formative process in the three degrees, firstly, "Formative I Cycle", secondly, "Specializing II Cycle", and thirdly, "Creative Specialized III Cycle", as well as his dealing with the relations — professor-student, was excellent.

Materials for two documents were to be examined and gathered as a result of the Congress. The main one was the Pontifical Constitution, a legislation by the Holy Father establishing the foundation of academic teaching and researching on the Faith. This would substitute that of Plus XI "Deus Scientiarum Dominus". The second will be the "Ordinationes" of the Sacred Congregation, a set of rules and procedures implementing the laws established and substituting for the former "Ordinationes" of 1931 and the present "Normae Quaedam". Suggestions and interventions were directed towards both documents.

The Commissions' work followed. Each Commission organized itself. Presidents were elected. For the I Commission, it was Fr. Bonné of Louvin (Belguim), later on substituted by Msgr. Poupard, Rector of the "Institute Catholique" of Paris (France) when Fr. Bonné had to leave for Belguim; for the II Commission, Fr. H. Carrier, S.J., President of the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome); and for the III Commission, Fr. A. Dimaglio, O.F.M., Conventual of the St. Bonaventure's Pontifical Institute (Rome). The members of the Congress were distributed through the Commission according to their choice and the UST delegate joined the I Commission.

The I and II Commissions adopted the reports of the respective "reporteurs" as position papers and examined all the aspects of ecclesiastical academic life. The III Commission dedicated the first two meetings to pick some seventy main points to be brought into discussion. The work was thorough. After the President had

presented one point, interventions poured in, sometimes these were followed by clarifications from the resource persons of the Sacred Congregation. The such frankness and conviction that the honest to goodness truth of the matter shone clear. All the time the Sacred Congregation, even when called to task, showed the broadest and most noble open-mindedness and the delegates responded with a wholehearted dedication to search for the best solutions. Views and ways from all over the world were confronted and evaluated.

The last four Plenary Sessions were dedicated to hearing the reports of each one of the Commissions by the whole Congress and to voting on the conclusions.

MAIN POINTS DEALT WITH: As we have hinted the reconsideration of the Ecclesiastical Studies, their formation and their accreditation through the academic degrees were exhaustive, especially for the Faculty of Theology and its specialized branches including Biblical Studies and History of Religions. Other points that were considered were:

1. **The place of Academic Studies in the Divine Mission of the Church.** The pastoral and salvific acceptance of the Word of God was acknowledged as the main function of the Magisterium in all its degrees; but the ministers and pastors, and in modern times, many a layman, need to be acquainted with the exactitude, scientific and proven, of the divine truth. Christ counted on the existence of such "scribes and doctors in the Kingdom of Heaven" and the glorious tradition of scholarship among the Fathers and Doctors of the Church stands for it. Such fundamental consideration was requested to be clearly stated from the very prologue of the future Pontifical Constitution.

2. **Distinction between the Seminary and the Academy.** The Seminary must center its attention on the pastoral formation of the candidates for priesthood, even as the scholarly approach to subjects must be brought to the level of excellence. The Academy must aim at research and specialization so that scientific knowledge of the divine revelation may be attained. The task of Seminaries which are Faculties — the Central Seminary of the University of Santo Tomas with its complete set of Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law is a good example — is a most delicate and important one that shall never yield to lowering of standards or to alienation from pastoral zeal.

3. **The "Nihil Obstat" of the Professors** or the approval of them by the Ecclesiastical authorities, was persistently discussed. A good majority of the delegates voted for its retention. Two requests were stressed: the first, was that it be limited to the highest level

of academic standing, the "Ordinary Professor", perhaps also to all levels of "Professors"; and the second, that the Sacred Congregation make available the standards and considerations deciding the granting or denial of the approval. Another request was, that the Local Hierarchy, Ordinary of the Place, or Episcopal Conference, be given a hand in the approval, met some opposition, and it was suggested that a friendly consultation by the academic authorities requesting the approval was in order.

4. **The Academic Freedom in Ecclesiastical Studies** was thoroughly discussed from both the technical and pastoral points of view. Faith, being divine by nature and salvific by purpose, can never be left to hazy hypotheses; certitude and firmness of its acceptance must be inviolable. Yet, reverent and honest research must be allowed and promoted by the pastors. If cases of daring disregarded of the sacredness of Divine Truth occur, a fatherly approach should be most carefully followed. The present writer confesses that he was pleasantly impressed by the spirit of unity and deep faith that pervaded in the exchange of views on the matter. One aim came forward: Serve the Truth of God.

5. **The Cycles and the Corresponding Degrees.** The three Cycles into which the full formation in Ecclesiastical Studies is articulated was unanimously maintained. The I Cycle dedicated to formation in fundamental studies had to be so disposed as to prepare a possible projection to the specialization of the II and III Cycles. The II Cycle was aimed at choosing a peculiar line of research that would provide the training for it, proven in a "directed thesis" and its defense. The question of a "comprehensive examination" and the manner it would be conducted was debated but not concluded. The III Cycle of creative specialized research" proven by a Doctoral Thesis and its defense was suggested to be rendered free from immediate sequence in relation to the II Cycle, from a fixed attendance to lectures, and from a determined number of years. Quality, not routine, should be the aim in view. As for the degrees, the "Bachelor" degree was rejected as unmeaningful nowadays. The I Cycle should be ended by a Licentiate in General Religious Studies; the II Cycle by a Licentiate in the line of Specialization; and the III Cycle by the Doctorate in the selected field.

6. **The Regionalization of the Institutions of Higher Religious Studies** was very much considered and taken up. It means the grouping of the Faculties according to the cultural background and the consequent academic problems common to institutions located in the same region. Such a vast plan was left to further study and determination by the Sacred Congregation.

7. **The relevance and requirement of Latin for Higher Religious Studies** met some oppositions; but the common agreement was that direct contact with the sources of scholarship, as well as the intercommunication of centers of learning needed a common language. Latin served the purpose and it was to be enforced.

8. **The intercommunication between Faculties and Universities** was most earnestly demanded. Common researches and projects, exchange of professors, passing on experiences and information, and living procedures of the kind were suggested to the Sacred Congregation for regularization and encouragement. The planned specialization of the institutions and the availability of them for accepting both professors and students were postulated. Both procedures of "Aggregation" of well-organized and provided institutions and "Affiliation" of those in need of promotion to existing Faculties, under whose authority academic degrees could be conferred, shall continue. It was strongly opposed that such procedures should apply to Institutions that cannot be duly assisted and supervised, like the Seminaries from India affiliated to Roman Institutions, or African to German.

9. **The relations between the Academies and the Hierarchy in Church** should be approached from a positive standpoint. The Academy should be a constant help to the local Churches for the understanding of the life of the Faith and the Hierarchy must take to heart the assistance and promotion of the academic life both within themselves and in the consideration of the faithful and of civil authorities. Problems and conflicts that shall arise must be dealt with in the spirit of two ministers of the same Saviour, Jesus Christ, who aim at His and His Church's service above all.

PROJECTION OF THE CONGRESS. It must appear daring to venture a guess at this point. Yet, we feel like foreseeing some happy developments coming from the Congress.

It was requested from and agreed to by the Sacred Congregation to collect, integrate and evaluate the interventions and suggestions made in the Sessions. In fact, an automatic recording air tape was made during Plenary Sessions and most of the speakers submitted in writing the gist of their contributions. An immensely valuable instrument of academic knowhow will therefore be available to the represented institutions because copies could be provided to each one of the delegates upon issuance.

The gathering of men responsible for Higher Ecclesiastical Studies from all over the world and their dealings on the best procedures to be chosen have had a most refreshing effect and created an atmosphere of dedication and scholarship really Catholic,

that transpired and grew up as the Congress went on. Many a delegate deep appreciation for the opportunities given and the inspiration gathered.

The frank exchange of views with the officials of the Sacred Congregation will have a lasting influence in the scholars that took part in the Congress, and above all in the objectivity of the provisions taken in the future legislation.

It was a "new" procedure and a happy initiative.

RESULTS

It was not ours to redact the future pontifical documents. We have just to prepare the materials, to ponder them, and to suggest the best and most efficient. Yet, the future documents were shaped therein.

Seen from within the Congress, and now at the spring level, the future legislation promises to be a true implementation of the provisions of Vatican II in the Catholic scholarship of future times.

A resplendent vision of divine self-confident hope surrounded the Sessions of the last days. It was clearly seen that in spite of the crisis in Faith so much talked about by a somewhat inimical press, the firmness of honest belief was unshaken. Love and sincere devotion to Jesus Christ and to His Vicar on earth was seen very much alive in every corner of the learned world. A deep and open renewal of service to the truth of God entrusted to the Magisterium and ministry both pastoral and academic, of the Catholic Church blossomed gloriously.

At 12:30 noon of December 1, 1976, the Holy Father Paul VI, entered the Hall of the Synod and was greeted by a hearty applause. A glow in his eyes spoke of deep emotion; he sat, looked again and again at the cheering audience, worked some seconds to control feelings and warmly spoke — "Grazie! Grazie! Grazie!" (Thank you!). After Cardinal Garrone had given His Holiness a brief report of the work done till the moment the Holy Father spoke extemporaneously. He said that he was filled with the sense of humility in the presence of the intellectuals of the Church greeting him as the Vicar of Christ and Supreme Master of the Church. He tried to elaborate further but one word came out trembling. "Grazie!". He then read a message written down dealing with the place and

mission of scholarship in the Church. He folded the papers and for a few minutes, without any formality and living in full joy of "feeling the flock of Christ" demanded from us the consciousness of the sacred ministry we have in the Church side by side with and as the greatest assistance to the Pastors appointed by Christ. Then he prayed with us to Mary, the Mother of the Word Incarnate and of the Church, and finally imparted the Apostolic Blessing. As a souvenir, he distributed to each of us a copy of a precious little book — "CONCILIO VITAM ALERE" written by Cardinal Felici. While leaving the Hall he looked back again and again at an audience that has brought to life the immortal firmness of the Catholic Faith. There, above all struggles and crisis, Jesus, the Master, reigned supreme.

Another occasion was cherished by the delegates — the Mass of the Holy Spirit, at the opening of the Conference, was a grand concelebration of two Cardinals, ten Bishops and Archbishops and 92 priests at the altar of the Cathedral in the Basilica of St. Peter. The Symbol of Faith and the Come Holy Ghost sung in Latin and in Gregorian melodies, resounded with the voice of centuries, those gone and those to come. Msgr. Antonio Cece, Bishop of Aversa (Italy) in his homily during the Thanksgiving Mass of December 3, concelebrated at the closing of the Congress, talked of that unshakeable Truth always old and always new, always immovable and always throbbing with eternal life.

We made the preceding remarks because in this Congress, as no where else, it became evident that academical knowledge is sublime, but the life of Faith makes it heavenly and everlasting.

The best incidents came unexpected. Somebody remarked that an invocation of Mary, the Mother of Wisdom would have given the inaugural Mass its completion. The hint was taken up by the presiding officers, and the evening Session of the first day closed with the Salve of the Pilgrims sung heartily by the most learned men of the Catholic world: "Eja ergo, Advocate nostra... Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis... ostende..." The Faith of Christ is alive!