

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY

**ADDRESS OF THE REV. FR. RECTOR  
OF THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY**

*The Rev. Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, S.J.*

*Friday, Nov. 3, 2006*

Holy Father: this is an occasion in which it is difficult to express the sentiments of the university community gathered here: the faculty, the students, the staff, all the other collaborators and benefactors without whom the Gregorian could not fulfill its mission: the Freundeskreis der Gregoriana, the Gregorian University Foundation of New York, the Foundation “La Gregoriana,” and other Italian benefactors. Joining us are the faculty of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and of the Pontifical Oriental Institute which together with the Gregorian constitute one Consortium.<sup>1</sup>

It is not enough to say “joy and gratitude.” Perhaps the more suitable word is “devotion” because it expresses that attitude which wells up in our hearts at the presence of the one whom Christ has chosen as Supreme Pastor of the Church, his Spouse, and with whom the University has by reason of its very history a connection that is quite distinctive, which joins us with that special bond which St. Ignatius of Loyola wanted the Society of Jesus to have with the person of the Roman Pontiff.

In 1551 St. Ignatius founded the Roman College in Rome, close to the Roman Pontiff, with a threefold purpose: the literary and scientific instruction and the religious and moral formation of young men; a theological, philosophical, and literary preparation of students of the Society of Jesus equal to that of any other European university; and the scientific and moral improvement of the secular clergy. The bond of the Roman College with the Successor of Peter assumed a very special significance at that very moment in history when it was founded, a time on the one hand troubled by the Protestant reformation which attacked the very contents of the faith and refused to recognize the role of the one who guarantees by the mandate of Christ the unity of the ecclesial community in the integrity of the one faith, but on the other hand also a time of great ferment of renewal and reform within the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pius XI, M.p. *Quod maxime*, Sept. 30, 1928, in AAS 20 (1928) 309–315.

The creation of the Roman College right next door to the Pope corresponded to the purpose of the Society of Jesus expressed in the *Formula Instituti* given by Julius III in the Apostolic Letter *Exposcit debitum* of July 21, 1550 where it is said the it is for every member of the Society of Jesus “*sub crucis vexillo Deo militare, et soli Domino ac Ecclesiae Ipsius sponsae, sub Romano Pontifice, Christi in terris Vicario, servire* (under the banner of the cross to be a soldier for God, and to serve the Lord alone and his spouse the Church under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth),” in order to commit oneself “*potissimum...ad fidei defensionem et propagationem, et profectum animarum in vita et doctrina christiana, per publicas praedicationes, lectiones et aliud quodcumque verbi Dei ministerium...* (chiefly . . . to the defense and propagation of the faith, and the advancement of souls in Christian life and doctrine through public preaching, teachings, and whatever other ministry of the word of God)” (n. 1). From the necessity to express and safeguard this *proprium* of the Society of Jesus arises the fourth vow of total availability to the Roman Pontiff in whatever he wishes to command “*ad profectum animarum et fidei propagationem* (for the advancement of souls and the propagation of the faith)” (n. 3).

The Roman College had a rapid development and already on Jan. 17, 1556 Paul IV conceded to it the faculty of granting academic degrees in philosophy and theology, raising it to the rank of university, the only one in Rome after the Studium Urbis “La Sapienza.” Following the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 by Clement XIV, the Roman College passed to the secular clergy of Rome, but after the restoration of the Society, Leo XII in 1824 entrusted it once again to the Jesuits, thus reestablishing its continuity with the Roman College.

The Roman College had the strongest of bonds with Pope Gregory XIII who is considered its second founder since by his personal intervention he had its historic building constructed in 1581. This edifice was later confiscated by the Italian State in 1870. In honor of this Pontiff the Roman College took the name of Gregorian University in 1873 and assumed the title of “Pontifical” which the Studium Urbis “La Sapienza” had lost because of its laicization after the unification of Italy. The Gregorian, in fact, was the only other university in Rome. It would remain the only Pontifical University in Rome until 1959.

The strong bond with the Pope found its most adequate expression with Pius XI who determined on June 21, 1932 that the Grand Chancellor of the Gregorian would be the

Prefect of the then Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities.<sup>2</sup> On this basis the Statutes of the University declared that the Pope governs the Gregorian through the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education and personally names its Rector.<sup>3</sup> This, according to what Pius XI declared, makes of the Gregorian in a unique manner the Pontifical University “*plenissimo iure ac nomine* (in the fullest right and name)”<sup>4</sup> and had it said several times to the same one that the Gregorian is “always for the Pope . . . his true and proper University: Pontifical in the full significance of the name.”<sup>5</sup>

Precisely because of its location in Rome and the strong bond with the Apostolic See, in order to be of use to it, the Roman College was considered by St. Ignatius the most useful and necessary college of all the others which the Society had founded. This would make of the Roman College the model for all the other Italian universities and for the colleges of the Society which were multiplying in the whole world.

Even in changed historical conditions the spirit of service to God and the Church, as a weight of great responsibility, remained alive in every part of the university community.

The service to the Apostolic See on the part of the teaching body is actualized above all in the teaching directed to the transmission of the contents of the faith and of the principles of Catholic morality in faithfulness to the universal magisterium and in research for an ever more profound understanding of such a patrimony, so that it may be efficaciously expressed in a manner faithful to the contemporary reality. Such a service to the Apostolic See is also rendered by all those professors who are consultants, official and otherwise, of the various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

In this service to the understanding of the faith — therefore to the comprehension of the mystery of God, of man, of the Church, and of human society — the following are distinguished in a special manner by reason of vocation: the study of theological subjects, of canon law, of philosophy, and of history which constitute the academic heart of the Gregorian University. Other human sciences such as psychology, the social sciences, and communications media, are studied thoroughly and taught always somehow in connection

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lett. Ap. *Gregorianam studiorum*, June 21, 1932, in *AAS* 24 (1932) 267.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, 268.

<sup>5</sup> Audience to the Pontifical Gregorian University, May 12, 1932, in *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 7(1932), 42.

with those others so as to contribute to the deeper knowledge of the mystery of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ and at work in the Church and in the world.

The Gregorian, then, as a work carried on under the responsibility of the Society of Jesus, has the mission of offering today as yesterday an integral formation of the human person, doctrinal and spiritual at the same time, inspired by Ignatian pedagogy which, founded on the personal and professional relationship between the teacher and the student, seeks in the latter the development of a free and responsible personality in whom study is nourished by that contemplative rapport with Christ who is the Truth, and to whom you, your Holiness, called us again in your recent meeting with the Pontifical Universities in St. Peter's Basilica. At the same time the Gregorian promotes those values which are especially emphasized by the Church and which were made her own by the last General Congregations of the Society of Jesus as responding better to the necessities and expectations of the people and Christians of today's world: the propagation of the faith which, animated by love in its social dimension, works for peace and justice in truth; the dialogue with the world of culture and science; the relations with other Christian confessions and other religions; the value and dignity of every person and of all creation.

Service to the local churches is provided by the fact that the students, about 3000, come from more than 130 countries, from 821 dioceses, and from 84 religious institutes. The Gregorian is following in the path of the insight of St. Ignatius: form those who will multiply. A clergy and a laity well trained with a valid pedagogical method and spread throughout the world, communicating such a method in the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to them, multiply the fruits of the Kingdom of God to the advantage not only of the Church, but also of society. There is established a sort of perichoresis. Each student, coming from a local church, carrying to the center of Christendom the richness of his own culture and of his own experience of the faith, enriches the experience of his student companions coming from other churches. This reciprocal enrichment becomes integrated in the intellectual and spiritual formation received here in Rome at the Gregorian and every student carries it back to his church of origin or at any rate where it shall be at the service of the Kingdom of God. This is an experience shared by the teaching body coming from around 40 countries. This makes of the Gregorian what the Roman College was from the beginning: "Universitas nationum (the University of the nations)."

To you, Holy Father, who according to the Statutes of the University has the supreme governance of the Gregorian, we request your blessing on our labors and on our efforts for an ever greater service to the Church in full fidelity to the Apostolic See, to the greater glory of God.