

**EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**  
**Internationales Theologisches Institut**  
Hochschule für Katholische Theologie  
Trumau, Austria

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## **1. Introduction**

The AVEPRO Review Group visited the ITI on May 29 and 30, 2012. Based on its reading of the ITI's Self-Evaluation Report, the Review Group already had an impression of honesty and openness. Conversations with various members of the institute during the site visit affirmed the Review Group's first impression. The conversations were characterized by an open attitude, honest sharing of concerns and plans with the Group, and openness to collegial suggestions, while offering hospitality and help when needed. The commitment of those involved in the ITI impressed the Review Group, as it implies many of them giving much to the institute, its mission and objectives, and getting back less than would be possible elsewhere in the academic world.

The Review Group found an institution with a specific mission and profile. It aspires to realize its mission at a high level, both ecclesiastically and academically. The Review Group perceived as the ITI's specific characteristics:

- It's internationality
- The possibilities for real encounter between the Eastern Catholic *ecclesiae sui iuris* and the Latin Church
- The aspiration to be in direct contact with the (philosophical and theological) sources of the Christian faith, including the Jewish background it comes from
- The method of teaching, in the form of seminars and tutorials.
- The campus setting, in which, on the one hand academic studies and real life, including prayer and liturgy, are connected, and, on the other hand, lay faithful and ordained ministers give shape to the common priesthood in daily life, without, however, living too close together.

## **2. General comments on the Self-Evaluation Report**

ITI's Self-Evaluation report was perceived by the Review Group as helpful. It gave an honest impression of the ITI and the challenges and tasks the institute is confronted with. Additional data (e.g. concerning publications of the professors; master's theses; licentiate theses; doctoral dissertations) were made available during the site visit.

## **3. Site visit**

The site visit took place on Tuesday, May 29 and Wednesday, May 30, 2012. During these days, the Review Group had meetings with the Rector and the Dean, the Coordinating Committee, the Program Directors, selected students, the one PhD student the present on campus, the faculty and individual faculty members, the Development Officer and the Financial Office. The Group attended Holy Mass on Tuesday and the Divine Liturgy on Wednesday, following the presentation of its findings and recommendations to the faculty. The members of the Review Group also attended two different classes.

It was regrettable that the final composition of the Review Group was defined and the Self-Evaluation Report was forwarded only shortly before the date of the site visit (which had to be before the end of the classes). This hindered thorough preparation of the site visit.

#### 4. Current situation of the faculty

The ITI is a relatively young institution. It started life in 1995 in the former Kartause at Gaming, and took about ten years to develop its profile and obtain a more or less balanced teaching staff. In 2009, the ITI moved to a new campus in Trumau, a countryside location near Vienna and Stift Heiligenkreuz. In the academic year 2011-2012, the teaching staff consisted of 22 members (15 full time and 7 part time) for a total of 81 students. The average number of students in the last 7 years was 52.4. Over the last three years the total number of students has been growing. The emphasis the ITI puts on reading sources in their original languages brings with it a certain selectiveness in the admittance of new students. Financially the ITI is dependent on a combination of donations and student fees.

The ITI offers a theological education which is canonically recognized (STB, STL and STD). The STB is also recognized by the Austrian civil authorities as a theological master's degree (STM). In the STL students specialize in Sacred Scripture, Systematic (or Dogmatic) Theology, Eastern Christian Theology or Moral Theology, with special reference to Marriage and Family. Besides the theological curriculum, the ITI offers a two year professional master's in Marriage and Family for students with a bachelor's degree (not necessarily theological) – a legacy from the late Mater Ecclesiae Domesticae (MEDO)-Institute at Kerkrade, Rolduc (Netherlands) – and, since 2011-2012 a one-year general introduction to academic studies, including personal formation, from a Catholic perspective (also aiming to attract new students in theology): the Studium Generale. Taking into account the external activities and services of the professors, the staff members' teaching load is overall quite heavy. This could be at the expense of the necessary investments in research. The Review Group therefore suggests concentrating efforts in the area of education, rather than expanding the study programs.

In its current situation the ITI would benefit from stabilization and consolidation on the one hand, and balance on the other hand.

#### Recommendations:

- 4.1. Stabilization and consolidation are required above all with regard to the financial resources. Although the financial outlook is, according to ITI's Development Officer, rather positive, and although fundraising is a long term (and expensive) investment, finances are necessarily affected by economic fluctuations. In order to enhance the institute's financial stability, all parties involved, including the teaching staff, should be encouraged to seek external funding opportunities, for instance in the form of contract-related research projects (e.g. editing sources).
- 4.2. Stabilization, consolidation, and ongoing growth are also required with respect to student numbers. With regard to this issue, the ITI should, according to the Review Group, clarify whether it aims to attract a primarily German-speaking (in particular Austrian) or an English-speaking, international student population. Although the Review Group does not have detailed and specialized knowledge of both 'markets', it suggests the ITI thinks about an orientation towards both markets in the near future and towards the English-speaking market in the long term, taking into consideration the pace of secularization processes and inherent polarization in German-speaking Catholicism. Clarity about this question also affects the question of to what

degree non-native German speaking professors should be obliged to improve their German language skills.

- 4.3. According to the Review Group the ITI would benefit from a better balance between its Catholic identity, the development of which it emphasized in the initial phase of its existence, and an open dialogue with the (post-)modern society and the outside world, including ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Catholicity, after all, implies both a universal mission and an attitude of receiving and learning from the richness and the knowledge of the world, as the Church Fathers and St. Thomas Aquinas did from ancient Greek philosophy (cf. *Gaudium et spes* no. 44). *Das katholische "und"* may be confirmed as a guiding principle in education, research and services to the Church and society now and in the future.
- 4.4. The ITI would also benefit from a better balance between teaching and research. It is quite logical that a new institution initially emphasizes education, the development of curricula, and the clarification and implementation of its basic pedagogical-didactical principles. Moreover, the preferred method of reading sources in seminars requires intensive course preparation by the teaching staff. As a result, however, less energy has been invested in the development of a strong research culture in the institute. In the long term this will also affect the quality of academic teaching, which requires dialogue between research and teaching. In the opinion of the Review Group, the ITI should invest more in research by establishing a systematic research policy.

## 5. Mission, objectives, strategic plan

The ITI aspires to be an autonomous ecclesiastical faculty, which considers serving the Church and the academic community at large as its main mission. This mission is concretized in three principal objectives: 1) a theological education, nourished by reading of original texts, which forms the person as a whole and offers in-depth understanding of Catholic theology in its unity; 2) helping students to integrate their Christian and intellectual life in lively contact with the tradition of the Church; 3) to contribute to the increasing knowledge and practical competences in the areas of marriage and family, the relationship between Eastern and Western Catholic Churches, and new evangelization.

The Review Group has some uncertainty with respect to the diversity of ITI's objectives, which all need to be translated into concrete programs and activities. It is the Review Group's fear that it is too much for a relatively small institution such as the ITI to foster all these objectives simultaneously and to achieve a satisfactory academic level in all of them. The Group wonders what the main objective would be, if the institute were urged to make a choice? In the education section of this report, we will draw attention to some possibilities for more effective integration of these three objectives.

Moreover, it was not exactly clear to the Review Group what the Self-Evaluation Report meant by 'theology as a unified whole' or 'theology in its unity'. What is it, one may ask, that gives theology this unity and how is this made concrete in education and research? Does it refer, for instance, to the interaction between life, prayer and study or is it an utterance of loyalty to the Church's Magisterium?

## 6. Research

In the Self-Evaluation Report's SWOT analysis, the topic of research is only mentioned in the paragraph dealing with the Institute's weaknesses. The main problem seems to be the lack of supporting structures

for research and publications and the low number of conferences hosted by the ITI. Both difficulties are mostly due to financial limitations.

According to the Self-Evaluation Report, ITI's research seeks to contribute to the following areas: marriage and family, the theology of Thomas Aquinas and Eastern Christian theology, and Judaism in the light of the Christian faith. The ITI is aware that the intensity of research and the number of publications in some of these areas is not adequate. A higher number of peer reviewed publications is desirable in the areas of Eastern Christian theology and Thomistic Studies. The number of publications in the other areas (marriage and family, Jewish studies and philosophy) are at a relatively good level.

The ITI's academic staff includes professors who are very successful in the area of academic research. This can clearly be seen in the number of publications, which is very impressive in some cases. The ITI plans to publish its own journal and aims, by doing so, to stimulate research and publication by professors who are less active in this field and to support opportunities for scientific collaboration with other faculties. Some preparations for this have been made recently.

The ITI faculty members emphasize that education is the main goal of the ITI. In this regard the research activities serve only as a background. Most achievements in the field of research are the result of individual planning and initiative. Very often, academic involvement in other universities or faculties allows professors to be active in research.

The ITI has three PhD students. Two are supervised by the only full professor of the ITI, and the third is supervised by a visiting professor who holds the chair in moral theology at another university.

#### Recommendations:

- 6.1. The ITI would benefit from better organisation of its research. An adequate structure for planning and controlling research projects and fostering or maintaining its quality should be established, e.g. by appointing a vice-dean for research and/or a small research coordination team. The main tasks of this team could be: development of coherent research programs; approval of PhD proposals and control of their progress; reporting and (self-)evaluation; encouraging (also international) cooperation.
- 6.2. The ITI's areas of specialisation could be a welcome point of departure for the programmatic planned strengthening of the institute's research. Moreover, a more programmatic organisation of research could further ITI's distinct objectives and strengthen the external perception of its mission and identity.
- 6.3. The organisation of research demands a good balance between the teaching, research, management tasks, and service to Church and society. The Review Group recommends that the faculty agrees on an appropriate balance (e.g. 50% teaching – 40% research – 10% service and management in the case of full time appointment), which needs to be in line with the specific tasks of faculty members (e.g. management) and, if possible, could take into account the individual talents of faculty members in the fields of research or education.
- 6.4. Many professors expressed a strong desire for sabbatical leave. Due to financial limitations, such leave cannot be granted and little improvement in the situation is to be expected in the near future. The Review Group sympathizes with this wish in view of making more time available for research. In this respect, clear agreements on the division of the staff's time between research, teaching and other tasks, in combination with a more effective organisation of education, could

constitute a provisional, albeit not fully satisfactory, response to this wish. The professors are also invited to look for external funding for sabbatical leave.

- 6.5. Interaction between research and education should be stimulated, in particular in the STL phase of the curriculum, where teaching should increasingly be based on the staff's own research.
- 6.6. The use of the English language puts the ITI in an unusual position in the German-speaking theological field. This should be seen as an opportunity for building academic contacts and co-operation with the world of English-speaking academic theology, especially in cases of related interests in education and research.
- 6.7. The Review Group is very uncertain as to whether the planned ITI journal is the best tool to stimulate high level research. There is a real danger that the journal will hardly be noticed among the large amount of existing theological journals. Moreover, it would take a lot of effort and time to establish the journal as an acclaimed and valued journal in the field, in which outsiders will want to publish. As an alternative, we recommend that the Institute stimulates its staff to publish in internationally recognized and respected peer-reviewed journals. The presence of ITI professors in these journals, as well as their contributions as key note speakers in international conferences, are the best way to establish and to boost ITI's academic reputation.
- 6.8. The Review Group was not impressed by its meeting with ITI's only PhD student present on campus. He could not convince the Group that his research project was well thought out, and the Review Group grew uneasy with the fact that he, being the only PhD student at ITI, is lacking the support of fellow students and academic exchange. The Review Group also noticed a link with the lack of ordinary professors at the ITI, which, according to the Group, partly has to do with lack of finances, and partly with the difficulty in attracting qualified members of staff who understand the mission of the ITI. Therefore, it recommends that future PhD-projects be co-supervised in cooperation with established theological institutions or faculties. It also strongly recommends involving an external reader as member of doctoral committees.
- 6.9. The ITI has a rather small library at its disposal, which focuses on the availability of sources, reference books and standard books. Its financial possibilities do not allow for considerable growth, but require a careful acquisition policy in accordance with focus points in research and education. The Review Group recommends opening or safeguarding access to electronic data, if possible, in cooperation with Vienna University, and stimulating STL-students in particular to consult the Vienna library (although traffic connections are less supportive).

## **7. Education**

The ITI offers a full three-cycle academic program in theology: a) the *Sacrae Theologiae Magister* (STM), recognized as a Master's Degree by the State of Austria, and as a canonical Baccalaureate by Rome; *Sacrae Theologiae Licentiatus* (STL); *Sacrae Theologiae Doctoratus* (STD). Moreover, it offers a professional degree in marriage and family, the Master's program in Marriage and Family (MMF), aimed at preparing students who already have a first degree (e.g., a bachelor's degree) to work in the area of marriage and family. Finally, the ITI offers a *Studium Generale*, a one-year program of studies aimed at introducing young people to a wide spectrum of academic studies from a Catholic perspective.

In its Self-Evaluation Report, the ITI rightly claims that its focus on reading source texts and its choice of a seminar-based and tutorial style of teaching are its main educational strengths. Among the source texts, Scripture, the early Church fathers and Thomas Aquinas occupy the most important positions, along with a number of more recent theologians and the current Church teaching. With the seminar method, the

students are put into direct contact with the source texts, in an engaging and demanding interaction between the professor and the students.

The Self-Evaluation Report was very honest with regard to the institute's weaknesses, also concerning education. The commission highly values this honesty and wishes to encourage the institute to implement the changes and improvements included in the strategic plan as it was included in the Self-Evaluation Report.

The commission has a number of recommendations, which partly confirm the issues in the institute's report and partly broaden its perspectives:

- 7.1. It is recommended that a number of professorial chairs that have not yet been filled, due to financial constraints, should be so in the near future.
- 7.2. The programs would gain in strength if the learning outcomes of the individual courses, but also of the curricula in general, were more specifically defined, and if the examinations also explicitly tested whether the learning outcomes have indeed been achieved by each student. Once the learning outcomes have been determined, the requirements for the examinations can also be more clearly described and precise standards for grading the examinations can be developed (e.g. the cutoff point for passing or failing). This will also enhance the objectivity of the examination results.
- 7.3. The programs would benefit from better organization of the semesters, so that students would have more time to prepare for the examinations thoroughly.
- 7.4. While the commission strongly values the programs' attention to reading source texts, it does recommend, more explicit reflection – also by the faculty as a whole – on the underlying principles guiding the choice of particular texts to be read and topics to be dealt with. On the other hand, it recommends organizing one or more general courses, on top of the two existing church history courses, in which students can become acquainted with the historical context of the sources and the historical development of theological thinking. In the present curriculum, the source texts tend to be presented out of context.
- 7.5. In order for the study of theological source texts to be fruitful for theologians active in the present day and age, it is necessary to reflect on how these source texts, written with a different audience in mind, can be brought into dialogue with the issues of our time. The commission therefore recommends organizing a course on the philosophical and theological hermeneutical traditions that have systematically reflected on these issues.
- 7.6. The study program in Eastern theology could be enhanced by one or two classes focusing on the dialogue between Eastern and Western Catholic theology.

## **8. Governance and management**

In the current management structure of the ITI, the Rector plays a key role. He is assisted by the Academic Council, consisting of the Dean, the Administrative Director and the Chief Development Officer, as well as three professors. The position of Vice Rector foreseen in the statutes is vacant and has been for six years. In the conversations with the Review Group, a desire for a clear distinction between responsibilities and corresponding regulations was often uttered.

One of the weaknesses of ITI's structure and internal communication mentioned in the Self-Evaluation Report is the fragility or even lack of an independent academic leadership, as it is frequently influenced by the Board of Trustees, the Development Office and the Administrative Director. This causes a lack of

transparency in management and in communications between higher administration and the faculty, resulting in a mutual lack of trust. The Review Group's conversations with those involved in academic leadership and administration confirmed this perception. The Group perceived a marked preference for a formal distance between academic leadership on the one hand, which should be responsible for the areas of education and research, and administration on the other hand. Besides this, more transparent communication about financial possibilities and limitations is necessary.

The Self-Evaluation Report also contains questions about the desirability of departments, the procedure for hiring new staff, the attendance of faculty meetings, description of responsibilities and administrative tasks, and punctuality. The Review Group also noticed that the function of the Dean is mainly restricted to the area of studies.

Recommendations concerning a more transparent structure:

- 8.1. The Review Group recommends establishing a Management Team, with overall and final responsibility for the Institute. This should consist of the Rector, a Vice-Dean for education, a Vice-Dean for research, the Administrative Director and the Development Officer. It is beyond the competence and the insights of the Review Group to determine whether, when and to what extent the involvement of the Administrative Director and the Development Offices in the Management Team is necessary. In principle, academic leadership should decide on academic affairs, while staff members with other responsibilities make a supportive contribution to the core academic tasks of the Institute. It would also be possible to involve a representative of the students in the Management Team.
- 8.2. This proposal implies dividing the function of the Dean into two: a Vice-Dean responsible for research affairs, and a Vice-Dean responsible for educational affairs. Both Vice-Deans could be assisted by a small group of two or three colleagues at most, who share their responsibility and perform clearly defined tasks (for instance: Program Directors). On this level, it would be possible to achieve academic autonomy and self-governance concerning research and the curriculum.
- 8.3. The faculty as a whole should be given a serious consultative voice in research and educational affairs.
- 8.4. The implementation of a system of time organization concerning research, education and other tasks could also clarify to whom which administrative task is entrusted and for how long. In the opinion of the Review Group, administrative tasks, and even fundraising for projects (among other things) are normally part of academic functions. A system of annual or biennial performance interviews offers opportunities to evaluate appointments from the point of view of the interpretation of functions.

## **9. Closing remarks**

- 9.1. Concerning the financial challenges the ITI is confronted with, the Review group can only agree with the current strategy of stabilizing revenues from fundraising, building up reserves, increasing numbers of students, and higher tuition fees, especially by stimulating students and future students to fund their own studies. A yearly fee of about 20,000 Euros, however, would discourage European students from enrolling.
- 9.2. The Review Group recommends prioritizing the recruitment of an adequate number of ordinary professors. This should be done by way of an open call rather than in an exclusively informal way.

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Prof. Dr. Henk Witte (Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Netherlands) – coordinator

Prof. Dr. Pierre Van Hecke (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium)

Prof. Dr. Rajmund Porada (Theological Faculty, Opole University, Poland)

## **Addenda by the Internationales Theologisches Institut**

The Coordinating Committee would like to add some clarifying remarks to the following points and recommendations made by the Review Group:

### **3. Site Visit**

Regarding the timing of the composition of the Review Group and the forwarding of the Self-Evaluation Report, the Coordinating Committee of the ITI observes on this point that the Report was completed by the ITI in a timely fashion, and that the time frame when the Review Group was defined was not in its control.

### **5. Missions, objectives, Strategic Plan**

The Review Group's concern regarding the diversity of ITI's objectives we regard as legitimate, yet overstated. It writes that these objectives "all need to be translated into concrete programs and activities." Except for the concentrations in marriage and family or in eastern Christian theology, ITI's stated goals (intellectual education, personal formation, preparation for contributing to the Church and to society) do not pertain to a specific program, but are aspects of ITI's aim in all of its programs to educate and form students integrally and as members of Church and society. The integration, for instance, of Christian and intellectual life (the second stated objective of the ITI), is not fulfilled by a special program devoted to this purpose, but by, for instance, the linking of prayer, study, and life together on campus, pertinent to all programs of study.

By "study of theology as a unified whole," we understand principally the interrelation of subjects and the symbiotic effect made possible by a shaped and organic curriculum, in which the study of each subject is planned in advance with a view to the other subjects. Still, we understand "theology as a unified whole" not in a limited, but in a wide sense, including all that unifies theology as a science of faith: in the first place the analogy of faith, but then also the interrelation between the life of faith and the study of faith's object, and loyalty to the Church's Magisterium as an authoritative instrument for the articulation of the content of faith. We see this approach to theology as a counterbalance to the general trend to specialization in the academic world.

### **6. Research**

6.7 Regarding the planned ITI journal, the ITI discussed the matter at length, taking into account the various arguments for and against such a journal. Competent persons, and in particular the publishing house Herder, have given us their opinion that such a journal would indeed be valuable for stimulating ITI's role in theological research.

6.8. Regarding the doctoral program at the ITI and the one PhD student who was present on campus at the time of the visitation by the Review Group, we would like to call our attention to several important details. The aforementioned doctoral student had first come to the ITI just three months before the visitation by the Review Group. Recognizing the need for further research on the part of the student, we have sent him to the École Biblique in Jerusalem, where he is presently doing research under the direction of his second reader, Étienne Nodet. In general ITI requests that an external reader be a member of the doctoral committee.

6.9. The ITI's library consists of some 30,000-40,000 books.

## 7. Education

- 7.1. Financial constraints pose in some cases an obstacle to filling new chairs, but we have also been waiting two years for the Congregation of Catholic Education to name four professors recommended for appointment by the Grand Chancellor Cardinal Schönborn.
- 7.3. Our pedagogy expects and indeed requires of our students that they be actively involved in courses throughout the semester. In our opinion this makes a long period of study at the end of the semester unnecessary; final examinations only evaluate the work that has already been done by the student during the semester.
- 7.4. Regarding the presentation of courses in their proper context, it was originally foreseen that professors would present the needed context within the classes in which the sources are studied. Aware of various limitations with this approach, the ITI has already decided to introduce such courses presenting an overview of the theological sources in their context and basic hermeneutical principles.

## 8. Governance and Management

We wish here to make some notes on the function of the Dean.

In addition to overseeing the course of studies at the ITI, the dean is responsible for contact with other universities; the current dean is also present as a teacher at two other faculties, Vienna and Heiligenkreuz. Together with the rector he is present in the established meeting of the Bishops' Conference bi-annual meeting with the deans of all the theological faculties. He is responsible for the accreditation and approval of the curricula by the Austrian State. He is also involved with the rector in the development of the faculty.

- 7.3. Recommended division of the function of the dean into two.

The opinion of the dean and the rector is that oversight of research and of education within the institution, and external academic representation of the faculty to other institutions should be retained in the one person of the dean. The dean could nonetheless officially delegate to a professor oversight of research for the faculty as a whole or for a particular area. There is a consensus among the faculty that this is an adequate provision for oversight of research.

## Closing Remarks

- 9.3. The ITI has for some years advertised its need for professions to fill chairs on the German Bishops' Conference's website for theology in the German speaking world ([www.katholische-theologie.info](http://www.katholische-theologie.info)).

December 20, 2012