

AVEPRO Evaluation Report

on the

Faculty of Catholic Theology
of the University of Vienna, Austria

(Final Version)

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1 Introduction

The present report is the result of an evaluation procedure organized by the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO) for the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna.

1.1 "Joint Evaluation"

The evaluation of the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna was performed as a "joint evaluation" which combined two different evaluation procedures.

Since 2002, the University of Vienna evaluates all its Faculties on a regular basis. These evaluation procedures are performed by the Office for Quality Assurance of the University of Vienna (BEfQS). The first BEfQS evaluation of the Faculty of Catholic Theology was performed in 2007. A second evaluation procedure of this type was scheduled for 2012. When the Faculty received the request from AVEPRO for an ecclesiastical evaluation, it asked for the possibility of combining the BEfQS evaluation and the AVEPRO evaluation into one single "joint evaluation". As a result of a written negotiation between the Faculty and AVEPRO, an agreement on the details of such a joint evaluation was found.

The members of the review group for the BEfQS evaluation were:

- Prof. Mechthild Dreyer (Philosophy, Mainz, Germany)
- Prof. Peter Hünemann (emeritus, Dogmatics, Tübingen, Germany) (*coordinator*)
- Prof. Norbert Mette (Practical Theology, Dortmund, Germany)
- Prof. Ruth Scoralick (Old Testament Studies, Tübingen, Germany)

Prof. Peter Hünemann had already participated in the BEfQS evaluation procedure in 2007. Therefore he was able to give some information on the previous evaluation to both review groups of 2012.

The members of the review group for the AVEPRO evaluation were:

- Prof. Heribert Hallermann (Canon Law, Würzburg, Germany)
- Prof. Drago Pintaric (Philosophy, Salzburg, Austria)
- Prof. Ulrich Rhode (Canon Law, Frankfurt am Main, Germany) (*coordinator*)

Whereas the AVEPRO review group was nominated unilaterally by AVEPRO, the members of the BEfQS review group were agreed upon between the Faculty and BEfQS. It would have been natural if this different way of choosing the members of the review groups had led to a higher degree of confidence towards the members of the BEfQS review group. However, such a difference could not be felt. The members of both review groups were treated with equal confidence.

1.2 The Self Evaluation Report (SER) and the Site Visit

The members of both review groups received the same Self Evaluation Report. It included parts which covered the evaluation forms prepared the BEfQS and other parts which covered the evaluation forms suggested by AVEPRO.

For the organization of the site visit, both the requests of BEfQS and the requests of AVEPRO were taken into account. It was on the request of AVEPRO that a conversation with external partners of the Faculty was included into the program of the site visit.

The members of both review groups were invited to and participated at all the meetings and conversations during the site visit.

The preparation of the draft report and its presentation to staff and students at the end of the site visit was performed jointly by both review groups. With regard to the content of the draft report, no conflicts whatsoever arose between the two review groups.

The AVEPRO review group wishes to express its deep gratitude to the Faculty for the excellent hospitality which it experienced in Vienna.

1.3 The Written Reports of the Review Groups

From the very beginning of the site visit, it has been the common understanding of both review groups that each group will write its own final report for the respective organization, according to the respective regulations and schemes of each organization.

The BEfQS review group has written its report in German. It is presented to BEfQS and will then be published on the web site of the university.

The AVEPRO review group presents the present report to AVEPRO.

It can be presumed that not all the details in the BEfQS report are of interest for AVEPRO, for its boards, or for the Congregation for Catholic Education. Therefore, it does not seem necessary to repeat every detail of the BEfQS report in the present report. In particular, most of the comments in the BEfQS report that just regard the individual Departments ("Institute") of the Faculty are not repeated in the present report. The review group assures that all aspects that it considers to be possibly interesting for AVEPRO etc., are included into the present report.

2 General Comments on the Self Evaluation Report

2.1 Description of the SER and the accompanying written material

AVEPRO sent the SER to the members of the AVEPRO review group on 12 April 2012. So the members of the review group had about four weeks to study it.

The SER covers the period from 2007 to 2011. It has 423 pages. It is mainly written in German, and it contains five parts:

- Part I (35 pages) describes the Faculty as a whole, including the SWOT analysis. This part has been prepared by the leadership team of the Faculty (dean, vice-dean, director of the study programs, and collaborators). The SWOT analysis is based on a discussion at a conference of the Faculty.
- Part II (209 pages) speaks about the 14 Departments (“Institute”) into which the Faculty was divided until the end of 2011. Each of the 14 subdivisions of Part II has been prepared by the respective professors/s and/or the other staff of the respective Department.
- Part III (14 pages) speaks about the study programs. It has been prepared by the leadership team, probably mainly by the director of the study programs. This part contains a special SWOT analysis with regard to teaching (pages 252-254).
- Part IV (23 pages) is entitled “Ecclesiastical Evaluation”. It contains answers to the questionnaires which have been provided by AVEPRO. For many of the questions in these questionnaires, the answers refer to the corresponding paragraphs in Parts I and III of the SER. Part IV has three subdivisions:
 - 1) The questionnaire “AVEPRO requirements”; as it seems, it has been filled in by the leadership team of the Faculty.
 - 2) The “Questionnaire for Teaching Staff”; it has been filled in by the director of the study programs.
 - 3) The “Questionnaire for Service Unit Staff”
- Part V (140 pages) contains nine different appendices:
 - 1) “Fact Sheet Faculty”.
 - 2) “Fact Sheet Departments”.
 - 3) “Fact Sheet Study Program”.

These three “fact sheets” have been compiled by the BEfQS. They mainly contain tables. All explanations in these facts sheets are in English.

- 4) The “Development Plan” of the University of Vienna.

- 5) Some basic facts about the six different study programs which exist at present.
- 6) The results of an evaluation which BEfQS has carried out among alumni of the Faculty (26 alumni have participated).
- 7) The accumulated results of an evaluation which BEfQS has carried out about the compulsory courses of the Faculty.
- 8) The results of a research on the employment situation of alumni of the Faculty.
- 9) The report of the review group of the BEfQS evaluation in 2007, and the comment that the Faculty had made to this report in 2008.

Together with the SER, the review groups received a second report, which has been prepared by the student council. This report has 35 pages, and it consists of two parts:

- The first part (18 pages) presents the results of an online survey which the student council has organized and at which 256 students have participated. The student representatives had prepared the questionnaire for this survey specifically for the 2012 evaluation procedure, based on their impression of the current situation of the students.
- The second part (13 pages) is the AVEPRO “Questionnaire for Students who have completed a first or second cycle Degree Course”. It has been filled in by the student representatives, based on the results of the online survey (as described in the first part).

In addition to these two reports, which had been sent to the review groups via e-mail, during the site visit a small report (4 pages) was distributed to the review groups in paper form by the student council of those who do doctorate studies in Catholic Theology.

2.2 Remarks on the SER and on the accompanying written material

The Faculty’s SER has been prepared with great care. It is complete, reliable, and honest. The SER contains answers to all the aspects which are mentioned in the AVEPRO questionnaires.

The SER is very rich in detail. For the review group it meant quite a challenge to identify the important aspects. For future reports, one might consider restricting the length of a SER in order to keep the reading manageable for the review group.

The preparation of the SER is described briefly on page 261. A more detailed description of the preparation would have been more helpful. In particular, for some parts of the report it would have been helpful for the review group to know from the very beginning, which person or which group was responsible for which part of the report, which other groups or persons had been consulted during the preparation period, and which others groups had access to the text before the site visit.

As already mentioned before, the different parts of the SER have been prepared by different groups. Most members of the academic staff were involved in two ways: Through their participation at a conference of the Faculty in January 2012 they contributed to the SWOT analysis in Part I of the SER. And they filled in a questionnaire which had been prepared by BEfQS and which focuses on the situation of the individual Departments. The answers to these questionnaires constitute the content of Part II of the SER.

The BEfQS questionnaire for the Departments did not contain questions regarding the general situation of the Faculty and of the study programs. Therefore, the SER, when dealing about these topics in Parts I and III, reflects mainly the opinions of the leadership team of the Faculty, but not necessarily the opinions of the entire academic staff. During the site visit the review group got the impression that in some aspects members of the academic staff disagreed with some of the statements made in Parts I and III.

In order to get a broader picture of the opinions of the entire academic staff on the overall situation of the Faculty and of the study programs, some sort of survey among the academic staff would have been helpful. The AVEPRO "Questionnaire for Teaching Staff" (pages 276 – 278) might have been helpful to achieve this goal. In the present SER, it seems that this questionnaire had been filled in by just one member of the teaching staff (i. e., by the director of the study programs). It is quite natural that it had seemed too much to ask all members of the teaching staff to fill in such a questionnaire, considered that they already had filled in the BEfQS questionnaire. However, the consequence of this way of proceeding is that the answers to the AVEPRO "Questionnaire for Teaching Staff" (pages 276 – 278) are not representative.

Whereas the SER follows a pre-defined structure which is used for the evaluations of all the Faculties of the University, the accompanying report of the student council deals with a set of questions which were developed just for that report. Therefore, the students could include questions into their report which are specific for a faculty of theology (e. g.: "What do you think about the relationship between the teaching staff and the Magisterium of the Church?") and questions which are of special interest in the current situation of the Faculty (e. g.: "Which suggestions do you have concerning the orientation period during the 1st semester [STEOP] which has been introduced recently?").

This freedom that the student council had when developing its report makes the students' text more interesting to read than the SER of the Faculty. The high number of students who participated at the survey carried out by the student council makes its report highly representative. The review group would like to say a special word of thanks to the student council for preparing that report.

Also the small special report presented by the student council of those who do doctorate studies was very helpful for the review group in order to understand their situation.

2.3 Recommendations

For future evaluation procedures the review group would like to make these recommendations:

- It would be helpful to restrict the length of the SER and the accompanying material, in order to make the material manageable for the review group.
- The survey among all academic staff should not just include questions on the situation of the individual Departments, but also questions on the overall situation of the Faculty and on the study programs.
- A higher level of participation of all academic staff in the preparation of the SER could be achieved by communicating a draft of the entire SER (or of substantial parts) to all academic staff, asking for feedback.
- In the SER, a table of abbreviations would facilitate the reading.
- It will be a considerable help for any future review group if the student councils accompanies the evaluation with such a high degree of commitment as it has shown this time.
- Concerning any written material, it would be helpful for the members of the review team to know in advance whether or not the material they have received via e-mail will be handed over to them also in printed form during the site visit.

3 Current Situation in the Faculty

Among the eighteen Faculties and centers of the University of Vienna, the Faculty of Catholic Theology is the smallest one with around 1.200 students coming from 36 countries. Among the Faculties of Catholic Theology in the German speaking countries, the Faculty in Vienna is one of the biggest; it is the biggest of all Faculties of Theology in Austria. It was founded in 1384 and lasts to this day as an integral part of the public University, with relationships to different other academic departments and disciplines.

When the first BEfQS evaluation took place in 2007, the Faculty was composed of single chairs, each one of them building also its own Department; in those days the Department of Practical Theology was the only one which was composed of two chairs („*Pastoraltheologie und Kerygmantik*” and „*Religionspädagogik und Katechetik*”). So the Faculty was divided into fourteen Departments (cfr. SER p. 12). The Faculty of Catholic Theology itself had only a few relationships to other Faculties or to the University, for instance in the field of study of religions. It offered mainly the “classical” study programs for future priests and teachers of religion in secondary schools. Besides, there was a high number of students aiming at a doctoral degree or at the postdoctoral lecturing qualification (“Habilitation”). The Faculty was conscious of its responsibility as a center of theological research and studies, both for the society in Austria and for the surrounding countries, especially in central Europe and in South-East Europe.

Stimulated by the previous evaluation in 2007 (cfr. the report and the recommendations in the SER, Appendix 9, p. 1-9), the Faculty has since then enhanced its situation in many positive and forceful ways. In particular the Faculty

- modified its internal structure by uniting the previous 14 Departments into the eight Departments which exist now, in order to enhance cooperation in the fields of research and teaching;
- created several new study programs, in order to reply to the present needs of the Church and of the society;
- drafted a new program for doctoral studies;
- started common research projects with other Faculties of the University, organized in five research platforms („Forschungsplattformen”), one of which is even chaired by the Faculty of Catholic Theology;
- expanded widely its international relationships;
- intensified ecumenical cooperation with the Faculty of Protestant Theology;
- prepared a new study program for future teachers of Orthodox religion in secondary schools;
- continuously reviewed its research activities in order to achieve synergetic effects and gain creative impulses.

During the same period the Faculty had to cope with extensive reforms required by the Bologna Process. Recently it was forced to introduce an orientation program (STEOP) which new students are required to absolve during their first semester. Besides, the Austrian law on higher education is subject to permanent and far-reaching changes. All this put a very high pressure on all the members of the Faculty, teachers and also students, but especially on the leadership team of the Faculty, the director of the study programs, and the service unit staff.

Quite naturally, the implementation of all these innovations, which were caused by different stakeholders – often not coordinated among each other, and in some cases to be introduced at short notice – resulted in a number of problems. Hence the site visit had to identify the reasons for some malfunctions of the new programs and structures, in order to help to improve the situation and to make some useful recommendations.

Recommendation

- There can be no doubt that the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna is well prepared to take the opportunities and to master the challenges that it faces today and tomorrow. During the next years the Faculty should aim less at further innovations and transformations; it is more important to elaborate continuously and patiently the changes that have already been initiated, and to try to eliminate some malfunctions. Therefore the review group recommends to slow down the innovation process and to concentrate more on the details of its implementation.

4 Summary of On-Site Meetings and Comments

The on-site meetings were distributed over three days. The first two days were filled with meetings with the different groups and persons; the third day was dedicated to the preparation of the draft report and its presentation to staff and students.

All of the conversations during the meetings were held in German. This did not create any problem, as all seven members of the two review groups were from Germany and Austria.

The first day started with a meeting with the rector of the University of Vienna. One of the main topics that were discussed with him was the way how the University of Vienna implemented the Austrian norms on the employment of post-docs, which create a precarious situation for many of them.

Afterwards the review groups were introduced into the quality assurance system of the University of Vienna by a member of BEfQS. In particular, some information was given about how the SER had been prepared with the help of BEfQS.

In a meeting with the dean and the other members of the Faculty leadership team, an introduction to the present situation of the Faculty was given. Among other topics, the dean informed how the Faculty has tried to intensify its relationships with Church authorities in Austria and in Rome.

The afternoon program started with a meeting with those professors who lead the eight Departments of the Faculty, and with their substitutes. Naturally, the main topic of this meeting was the reorganization of the Departments, which had become effective in the beginning of 2012.

The following meeting was about research in general. The review groups tried to grasp the different relevance of the „Forschungsschwerpunkte“ (focuses of research within the Faculty) and the „Forschungsplattformen“ (fields of common research with other Faculties of the University). It became clear how much the efforts put into research projects had increased over the past years. As a special topic of this meeting, the international relationships of the Faculty were discussed.

The last meeting of the first day and all meetings of the next morning were reserved to the eight Departments of the Faculty. The meeting in the afternoon of the first day was dedicated to the four smaller Departments (most of which have just one chair); the meetings in the morning of the second day were dedicated to the four larger ones. For the larger Departments, two meetings were held at the same time. Therefore, three or four members of the review groups were present at these meetings in the morning of the second day. Naturally, this method of having parallel meetings had advantages and disadvantages. It allowed more time for the meetings with the individual Departments; on the other side not every member of the review groups could meet with every staff member of all the Departments.

The afternoon of the second day was mainly dedicated to students and study programs. The first unit in the afternoon was a meeting with doctoral students. The doctoral students had carefully prepared this meeting; in particular they had prepared a paper (4 pages) which presented their requests regarding the program of doctoral studies, internationalization, some organizational problems, and the working conditions of those who do doctoral studies.

In the following hour a meeting with undergraduate students took place. They had prepared their own evaluation report, which had been sent to the review groups along with the SER. Discussion with these students was mainly about the study programs. One of the problems that were discussed was the high number of exams within the new study programs.

The following meeting regarded the study programs as such. The main participants of this meeting were the director of the study programs and his substitute, the student representatives, and the members of the service unit staff ("Studien Service Center"). It became clear that the most urgent problems which the Faculty has to deal with at present are the problems in the new study programs. The Faculty is faced with a dilemma: On the one hand, virtually everyone agrees that a revision of the new study programs is needed. On the other hand, the Faculty is hesitant to initiate a deeper revision, as this would entail a significant administrative burden.

On the request of the review team, a meeting with post-docs was inserted into the schedule at short notice. During the noon break of that day all members of this status group had met to prepare the meeting; two post-docs attended the meeting with the review groups. The main topic of the conversation with them was their employment conditions.

In the last meeting of the second day some of the external partners of the Faculty were present. They represented the diocesan seminaries for the formation of priests and the diocesan center for students of theology. Among the topics that were discussed with them were the effects that the new study programs have on the life of the students.

5 Mission, Objectives, Strategic Plan of the Faculty

5.1 Major Remarks

The Faculty of Catholic Theology is very much aware of its mission in the present time. Therefore it attaches great value to a strong philosophical fundament of its theology, and it emphasizes different ways of cooperation with other Faculties, departments and disciplines. Giving answers to the deepest questions of today's mankind and society is among the most prominent aims of the Faculty. By its cooperation within five research platforms of the University of Vienna, one of which is chaired by the Faculty of Catholic Theology, this cooperation has been given a solid structure. Besides, cooperation with the Faculty of Protestant Theology takes place in a long-term institutional form. Both Faculties together edit the book series „Theologie und Religionswissenschaft“. The chair for the study of religions („Religionswissenschaft“) within the Faculty means a unique chance; interreligious dialogue is given

an institutional form, and at the same time the Faculty is enabled to cooperate more intensively with other disciplines such as sociology, political science, and history.

The Faculty pursues clear major objectives. It aims at fostering its commitment for theologians in other countries of Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe, at supporting their networks, and at encouraging them to develop their own peculiar way of doing theological research. The database of the University research platform „Wiener Osteuropaforum” contributes significantly to achieving this goal. Furthermore members of the Faculty try to engage young scholars in their own research by offering them corresponding themes for doctoral theses.

In one way or another, many of the chairs of the Faculty are engaged in ecumenical dialogue and cooperation. In this regard, the Chair for theology and history of Eastern Christianity – the only chair for this discipline in a Faculty of Catholic theology in the German speaking countries – offers a unique chance. A special way of promoting ecumenical cooperation is the preparation of a new Master’s degree course for future teachers of Orthodox religion in secondary schools.

The Faculty is highly committed to promoting young scholars from abroad, especially from Central Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Already now it attracts an impressive number of doctoral students from abroad, and it intends to even increase this number. Experience has shown that in many cases the academic level of those who come from abroad is not really sufficient for starting doctorate studies immediately. One measure in order to address this problem is the introduction of a special Master’s degree course which prepares the students for doctoral studies and at the same time enables them to obtain the canonical licentiate in theology.

As a new objective, the Faculty aims at fostering academic contacts to and cooperation with universities in English and Spanish speaking countries such as the USA, the Philippines and Mexico.

In addition to imparting the academic theological qualifications, the Faculty also wants to enable its students to a committed dialogue with the pluralistic secular society. Ability for dialogue is fostered by the dedicated personal care for the students and by an arrangement of examination modalities which fosters this aim.

5.2 Minor Remarks

As the new internal structure of the Faculty became effective only in the beginning of 2012, the descriptions of the mission and objectives of some of the Departments are not yet very clear. In some of the Departments the texts rather contain an enumeration of heterogeneous goals and not common objectives of the cooperating chairs. In its discussions with the teaching staff, the review group encountered a high readiness of all the involved staff to fill the new structures with a common vision by formulating a common mission and common objectives.

5.3 Recommendation

The individual Departments will have to continue their efforts for an increased cooperation in research and teaching. On the other side, the specific identities and methods of the individual theological disciplines have to be preserved also within the new structures.

6 Teaching and Studies

6.1 Preliminary Remarks

Since 2008, the implementation of the degree programs in accordance with the Bologna Process, as well as with the respective ecclesiastical guidelines, has been the center of attention. A complete implementation of Bologna compliant curricula has taken place in the field of Catholic Religious Education (Bachelor, Masters), but not yet – due to State guidelines – for the Teacher Training Program.

With regard to degrees in Catholic Theology, the “Ecclesiastical framework regulations for a degree in Catholic Theology in Austria” (decree of the Austrian Bishops’ Conference, issued on 15 March 2007, with addenda from September 2007) apply. These regulations were approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education with a Decree “*ad quinquennium experimenti gratia*” on 17 July 2007. With a Decree issued on 18 July 2007, the same Congregation also approved the “Ecclesiastical framework regulations for a degree in Catholic Religious Education in Austria” for five years *ad experimentum* (decree of the Austrian Bishops’ Conference of 10 November 2007, with addenda from September, 2007). With regard to doctoral studies, the “Ecclesiastical framework regulations for a Doctorate in Catholic Theology in Austria” (decree of the Austrian Bishops’ Conference of 10 November 2007, with addenda from September, 2007) apply. This ruling was approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education with a decree “*ad quinquennium experimenti gratia*” on 13 May 2009.

In 2008 the Master’s degree for the Study of Religions, as well as the extension courses “Foundations and Methods of the Study of Religions” and “Key Topics of the History of Religions” were newly introduced.

From the beginning of the winter semester 2011/12, the mandatory introduction and orientation period (STEOP) for all Diploma and Bachelor degree programs was also implemented.

As of the winter semester 2012/13, curricula for the following degrees will take effect: MA Advanced Theological Studies/Theological Specialization, PhD Advanced Theological Studies/Religionspädagogik, and the university course “Economics-Politics-Ethics”, and in the fall of 2013 – as an extension curriculum – the Master’s curriculum “Orthodox Religious Education”.

The following observations and references are based upon the first experiences with the revised degree programs and study programs, and they aim at an improvement. These experi-

ences should also be taken into account when the Austrian Bishops' Conference prepares the revision of the ecclesiastical norms that is pending in the near future.

6.2 Introduction and Orientation Period (STEOP)

Since the beginning of the winter semester 2011/12, a mandatory introduction and orientation period (STEOP) was implemented for all Diploma and Bachelor degree programs in Austria. Its goal is to inform first-year students of the typical degree contents and requirements, in order to assist them in clarifying whether they have chosen the right study program. In the Faculty of Catholic Theology, experience shows that the STEOP fails to reach this goal. Instead, the STEOP, in its present form, acts as an obstacle to the studies. Such is the unanimous opinion of the students, of the director of the study programs, and of the teaching staff. This corresponds to the statistical data: A mere third of the first-year students completed the STEOP by the end of the winter semester 2011/12. This very low rate results from a combination of factors: 1. Only after the successful completion of the STEOP students are permitted to take any further exams. In the case of a failed exam, the exam may be retaken only once. Thus, the STEOP adjudicates on the further theological studies of the first-year student. 2. Whereas other Austrian Universities require less than 15 ECTS credits for the STEOP, the University of Vienna requires at least 15 ECTS credits. 3. Due to the variety of theological methods and contents, and due to the norms of the Holy See and the Austrian Bishops, the study programs in theology are anyway overloaded with content and courses. This situation forced the Faculty to allocate a high amount of content and exams into the STEOP. Some of the introductory courses of the STEOP are very demanding, e. g. the introductory course on the Hebrew Bible. All this puts a high pressure on the first-year students, something with which only a fraction of students can cope. For non-German-speaking students, passing the STEOP within one semester is practically impossible.

Recommendations:

- The review group recommends the Faculty to work resolutely towards a change of this situation. A solution has to be sought together with the rector's office and/or the senate of the University, with regard to a reduction of the credits points that are required for the STEOP.
- Besides that, a new agreement has to be found inside the Faculty on the question which courses and exams have to be allocated into the STEOP.
- Putting more course documents at the disposal of the students could lessen the pressure for the first-year students.

6.3 Workload

The ECTS system is one of the essential elements of the Bologna Process. According to this system, the number of ECTS credits which are allotted to a module or a course depends on the workload that a student must take on in order to achieve a clearly defined learning out-

come. For Austria, a decision has been taken that 1 ECTS credit corresponds to 25 hours of work. This includes the time for independent work and self-study of the student. In order to guarantee the feasibility of degree programs, a limit was set in terms of a reasonable workload for students. The workload must not exceed 300 ECTS-credits for a Diploma degree in Catholic Theology, 180 ECTS-credits for a Bachelor's degree in Catholic Religious Education, 120 ECTS-credits for a Master's degree in Catholic Religious Education, and 135 ECTS-credits for a degree in the Teacher Training Program.

Now some of the teaching staff obviously does not adhere to the time frame which is defined in the curricula. In such cases, the actual student workload and the anticipated study time which is legally required, diverge widely from each other. In an evaluation authored by the students, as well as in the hearing, the students heavily complained about the fact that the ECTS specifications are in no way consistent with the actual workload. In rather seems that the average workload is nearly 50 per cent higher, which is why, "on average, no degree program can, at this point, be completed within the standard time frame it takes to complete a degree" (p. 18).

Recommendation:

- Those responsible have to pay due attention to the aspect of a higher level of transparency and a more realistic prediction of the expected workload.
- In order to answer the question whether or not the defined learning objectives for the students are feasible within the given time frame, an ongoing evaluation of the anticipated ECTS workload is essential.

6.4 Freedom of Choice

In order to prevent the Bologna Process from turning university courses into a regimented school instruction, the review group encourages offering more choices to the students. It seems that the elective modules which are offered at present do not give enough freedom of choice.

6.5 Examination System

Though modular study programs have been implemented, the modules are, to a large extent, not perceived as modules, but rather as parts of a module, which are examined separately. 23 of the 55 modules for the degree program "Catholic Theology" anyhow consist of only *one* course: in two cases a module consists of a course with just one hour per week; 21 modules consist of a course with two hours per week. This is not consistent with the definition of modules as a combination of several courses into units according to their content. This extreme fragmentation results in a tremendous amount of individual exams, which is also mentioned in the self-evaluation report (p. 243).

During the site visit the director of the study programs and the students stated that the number of exams for a degree in “Catholic Theology” totals 101 exams (or certificates of proficiency). After the site visit, the Faculty corrected this number by explaining that 96 certificates are required, 81 of which are obtained through oral exams, while the other 15 of them are obtained in other ways (not through exams).

There were also complaints on the part of the teaching staff regarding the enormous burden due to exams. The review group sees here a desperate need for action.

Recommendations:

- The density of exams has to be minimized, and fewer, larger modules be designed. As a general rule, these larger modules should be completed with only one exam each, instead of several partial exams.
- It should be considered whether contemporaneously with the reduction of the number of exams new exam methods – which have been developed and proven successfully in addition to classic examination methods within the context of university didactics – should be implemented. This could even contribute better to a more adequate exposition of the whole Catholic doctrine (*SapChrist Art. 72 a*).
- The current practice of being able to arrange exams at any time, disrupts the continuity of university sessions, and is a distraction to students. Therefore the review group recommends the limitation of exam dates to the three dates during the semester which are legally required (at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester).

6.6 Drop-out Rate

According to the director of the study programs, the drop-out rate – with the exception of the doctorate program – is about 75 per cent. Whether and how these quotes vary within the various degree programs could not be specified.

Recommendations:

The review group strongly recommends:

- A comprehensive survey of drop-outs (motives, distribution among degree programs and academic terms).
- The introduction of mandatory academic counseling – perhaps by expanding the responsibilities of the Faculty’s “Student Service Center”.
- A reform of the present situation of the STEOP (see above).

- Measures for adjusting the number of ECTS credits to the actual workload (see above).
- An investigation about the connection between the drop-out rate and the language requirements (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew); in particular, the question is whether the present coordination between the curricula and the language courses and exams contributes to the high drop-out rate.

6.7 Teacher Training Program

Students in the Teacher Training Program have complained that the required time and effort invested in the study of Theology is disproportionately high in comparison to their other subject. A further problem which puts education students in a disadvantage is the fact that different amounts of ECTS credits are allotted to identical courses, depending on the program of studies within which the courses are frequented. These factors seem to contribute to the high amount of time which is needed for this program. Whereas the program is designed for a 9-semester curriculum, students needed an average of 17.2 (!) semesters to complete it.

Recommendation:

- The evaluation of the results of the empirical survey on the actual workload of the study programs (see above) should bring about a transparent, fair, coherent illustration of what is actually required for obtaining a degree within the different programs.

The representatives of the Institute of Practical Theology have objected to the fact that graduate students in the field of “Catholic Theology” receive a professional license, qualifying them for compulsory and special schools and, consequently, receive teacher tenure, even though they have received almost no educational and didactic training during their academic studies and, therefore, almost completely lack catechetical skills.

Recommendation:

- Should graduate students from the field of “Catholic Theology” continue to be qualified to teach in compulsory and special schools, the curricular percentage of catechesis and religious education has to be adjusted accordingly.

6.8 Mobility of Students

The rate of active students in the degree programs who take part in mobility programs such as ERASMUS etc. is lower than 4 per cent. Students consider the range of interesting, particularly English-speaking places to study, as being insufficient. The fear that course achievements from abroad are not adequately accredited in their home Faculty is considered

one of the biggest problems by the students. This fact apparently entails disadvantages, and it prolongs the duration of studies.

There is a need for improvement with regard to the Learning Agreements which are drawn up between the Faculty and the students who intend to study abroad.

Recommendations:

- A more intensive counseling for abroad studies should be made available.
- The list of recommended theological Faculties for abroad studies should be expanded.
- A more generous recognition of course achievements acquired abroad should be ensured through a more consistent implementation of the *Lisbon Recognition Convention*. In this way it should be guaranteed that abroad studies are enabled without causing a delay in the duration of the degree program.

7 Research

7.1 Research Architecture

The research architecture of the Faculty is very elaborate.

Research Platforms. Interdisciplinary research projects are implemented at the University of Vienna within the framework of research platforms („Forschungsplattformen“), which are designed as organizational units between several Faculties. At present, the Faculty of Catholic Theology is participating in five University research platforms, and it chairs one of them (“Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society”). The Faculty’s commitment within these interdisciplinary research platforms is very high. Thus the Faculty makes a valuable contribution to innovative research at the University of Vienna. The contribution of specific theological perspectives into these contexts is very desirable. At the same time, it can be noticed that the stress which this commitments put on the researchers sometimes tends to exceed their capacities, which in turn can have negative effects for their commitment for the Faculty’s teaching.

Research Focuses. At present the Faculty has four main research focuses („Forschungsschwerpunkte“). Research focuses concern the development of new, innovative fields of research that are designed to run for a period of three years. This time limit is in a certain contrast to the fact that these projects basically concern long-term research perspectives. The research focuses lead to a versatile output: academic theses and dissertations, other types of publications, workshops, symposia, guest lecturers. In this context, third-party funds are solicited and raised – in the past five years a total of 2.4 million Euros, which amounts to about 8 per cent of the Faculty’s total budget. The acquirement of third-party funds is, however, distributed very unequally amongst the individual institutes: While six of the former insti-

tutes solicited no third-party funds, 47 per cent of the total third-party funds were allotted to the Institute for Practical Theology alone.

Topic areas. The aim of defined topic areas („Themenfelder“) is to demonstrate the wide range of research at the Faculty; therefore their descriptions are rather broad. Currently, there are three such interdisciplinary topic areas which are being pursued and in which academic exchange takes place: “Ecumenism”, “Gender”, and “Christology”.

Individual Research. Naturally, different disciplines have their own research cultures. In theology, the high value of monographs is unabated. This requires that the academic staff has the necessary time for these forms of individual research.

Research Output. The Faculty manifests a formidable research output. For the five-year period 2007-2011, it can be broken down into these segments: 66 monographs, 72 editorials, 367 scientific essays in journals, and 407 in anthologies, as well as 537 lectures at international, and 817 lectures at national, conferences and symposia.

Research Planning – Research Management. In order to coordinate the research agenda, the Faculty has established the office of a vice-dean for research and a Faculty research committee. A Scientific Advisory Board, which is composed of three international members, advises the Faculty with regard to the development of its research profile. In this way, a regular deliberation on the research activities is guaranteed. During the past years, the Faculty members have tried to pool their research interests, to make use of networking opportunities, and to increase cooperation.

Recommendations:

- The Faculty’s enthusiasm, the research output of many staff members, and the efficiency of those who are responsible for research management, were highly esteemed by the review group. Nevertheless, the review group encourages the Faculty to reflect on its research architecture. How is it possible to reduce the tension between diversity and identity, between research multiplicity and profile development, and how can excessive heterogeneity be counteracted? How can the Faculty establish a balance between fundamental questions and questions regarding trendy issues?
- Due to the fact that many members of the Faculty are simultaneously involved in topic areas, research focuses and research platforms, there is the risk of a certain dispersion, as well as “the risk of wearing oneself out in too many projects” (SER, p. 227). For this reason, the review group encourages the members of the Faculty to rather “concentrate on a small number of research topics”, as the SER itself has suggested (p. 39).
- The Faculty has to avoid the risk of research being forced into an exuberant administrative system (proliferating processes of evaluation, exaggerated administrative procedures). In order to guarantee a professional administration of third-party funds (accounting of funds, contractual matters, etc.) and, at the same time, relieve the re-

searchers of administrative burdens, the Faculty might consider the establishment of a respective position within the Faculty management.

7.2 Early-Stage Researchers – Pre-Docs

In the summer semester 2011, 219 students were enrolled in the doctorate program. One third of them were international students from 24 different countries. Within the four-year period from 2007 to 2010, the average time it took post doctoral students to obtain a degree added up to 8.9 semesters. During the five-year period, 75 dissertations were approved.

The “student council of those who do doctorate studies in Catholic Theology” presented a very helpful paper about their situation. In this paper, the conditions offered by the Faculty to the doctorate students are described as constructive and agreeable. The paper, at the same time, gives concrete suggestions for improvement.

Recommendations:

The review group explicitly supports the following suggestions:

- The review group welcomes the presentation of doctorate projects, which is required by the new doctorate regulations, and which is open to staff and students of the Faculty. With regard to the concerns that were brought forth by the students, the review group recommends that the Faculty critically assesses the details of these regulations, as well as their application and implementation. For example, it should be considered whether it makes sense to introduce a norm which requires the supervisor of the dissertation to be present at the presentation of the doctorate project.
- The Faculty should try to determine why the doctorate students perceive the description of the new curriculum as being “quite unclear with regard to what requirements must, in fact, be fulfilled” (report, p. 1, n. 1).
- In order to facilitate the participation at the new doctorate program for working students, the doctorate courses could, where possible, be offered in block form.

The review team calls upon the dioceses whose priests are completing their doctoral studies to give the respective doctoral candidates sufficient leeway for their studies.

7.3 Early-stage Researchers – Post-Docs

During the conversation of the review team with the post-docs, the following topics were addressed:

- The employment conditions, which are considered to have no perspectives and, therefore, discourage motivation.
- The balance and relationship between research and work for the Department.
- The considerable loss of time due to writing virtually futile project proposals.
- Third-party funds and the Post-Docs' contributions of research work to the research profile of the Faculty.

Recommendations:

- Along with the proposal of a Post-Doc contract, the deans' office of the Faculty is to give extensive information concerning the work contract, as well as the career possibilities at the University of Vienna; where applicable, regular information sessions for Post-Docs would be helpful.
- It is recommended that the Faculty support the publication of the Post-Docs' research work by all means possible.
- The review team recommends that the Post-Docs' research activities be included in the Faculty's teaching program.

8 Governance, Management, Autonomy

Although the Austrian Law on higher education aims at monocratic structures, the Faculty of Catholic Theology practices collegial leadership. The members of the leadership team (dean, vice-deans, director of the study programs, as well as their representatives) meet regularly and discuss current, common questions.

There are various forums for the participation of all faculty members in the faculty's process developments and for the discussion of important questions: faculty conference, faculty assemblies, and faculty retreats.

The research agenda is coordinated by the newly created Research Committee, and the Scientific Advisory Board offers valuable suggestions, amongst other things, relating to the research strategy.

The dean, on a yearly basis, conducts an appraisal interview with every employee and an interview with professors and lecturers in order to discuss an agreement on objectives.

For Post-Doc positions, a list of criteria was established for the selection.

Despite all of these positive efforts, the SER also contains some criticism. The leadership team has complained about the shortage of human resources. It is the intention of the Facul-

ty to continue “a transformation of administrative positions for the benefit of academic positions” (p. 33).

The review team considers several improvements to be desirable.

Recommendations:

- The Faculty has to develop a human resources development plan.
- The allocation processes, which have been described by the students as “non-transparent” (report, p. 15), especially in the hiring of student assistants and tutors, should be objectified and made clearer for all.
- It is recommended that a careful review be conducted on the question whether a reduction of administrative positions is justified.

9 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

9.1 Summary

The SWOT analysis of the Faculty is spread over different parts of the SER. Part I contains a SWOT analysis of the Faculty in general (pp. 41-42); most of the Departments have presented their individual SWOT analyses in Part II; and Part III contains a special SWOT analysis with regard to teaching (pp. 252-254). The meetings during the site visit have proven that these analyses reflect the situation of the Faculty reliably and contain most of the aspects that need to be mentioned.

There is no need to repeat the complete lists of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the present report. It may suffice to mention some keywords here:

Strengths:

- size in terms of students, staff, budget
- the location in the center of the Austrian capital
- being part of the University of Vienna, the only university in Austria which has also a Faculty of Protestant Theology
- high qualification of academic staff
- excellent research output
- high number of doctoral students, many of whom coming from abroad
- clear profile with regard to research focuses
- significant interdisciplinary cooperation
- good ecumenical relationships
- good relationships to countries in South-East Europe

- a chair for the study of religions
- important periodicals edited by faculty members
- new organizational structure since 2012 (eight Departments)
- teaching and research well connected
- unique chairs and strengths (ecumenism, Oriental Churches, spirituality, Judaism)
- commitment of academic staff for didactical training
- high employability of graduates

Weaknesses:

- lack of visibility in the general public, public relations to be improved
- relationships with alumni still to be expanded
- the new, Bologna compliant degree programs still in need of revision
- the biggest problem: too many small exams
- university programs which tend to resemble school instruction
- not enough communication between teaching staff within interdisciplinary modules
- not enough knowledge about the real situation and the problems of the students
- study programs overly demanding, long duration of studies
- high drop-out rate
- low student mobility

Opportunities:

- high attraction for young researchers
- religious plurality in Vienna
- new licentiate program (still to be started)
- master program for teachers of Orthodox religion
- PhD program “Advanced Theological Studies / Religionspädagogik”

Threats:

- conflicts between the legal frameworks coming from State and Church authorities
- declining relevance of the Catholic Church in Austria
- polarization within the Catholic Church

9.2 Some threats produced by norms and guidelines which are given by external authorities

Some of the threats that the Faculty faces with regard to its study programs depend on norms and guidelines given to the Faculty by the state of Austria, by the University as a whole, or by Church authorities. The Faculty feels that some of these norms do not correspond well to its situation and needs. Concerning such norms, the main addressees of any recommendation are those authorities from which these norms depend.

With regard to Austrian law and guidelines given by the University, it seems that the biggest problem that the Faculty faces at present is the norms about the orientation period (STEOP). The review team got the impression that the STEOP rather does harm to Faculty and students than producing any benefit.

With regard to the norms given by Church authorities the review team wants to highlight two problems:

- It is desirable that to a certain extent the required credits for the program in “Catholic Theology” can be obtained also by courses in other Faculties and disciplines. This would require that the necessary minimum of course hours in theology be reduced.
- The conditions under which a student who has not obtained the canonical degree of the first cycle of Theology can be admitted to a doctoral program should be revised. In particular, it is desirable that these conditions should not be more demanding in Austria than in Germany. According to the “Akkommodationsdekret”, by which the norms of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* have been adapted to the situation in Austria, these conditions can be just the same as in Germany.

10 Plans for improvement

Mainly as a consequence of the Bologna Process, the Faculty is in a long-term process of transformation which has not yet come to its end. Many of the difficulties which are mentioned in Part 6 of the present report (on “Teaching and Studies”) derive from this process.

At the present moment, any plan for improvement has to focus mainly on the problems related to the study programs. This regards above all the STEOP, the drop-out rate, and the number of exams; besides, problems with regard to student mobility should not be neglected.

Dealing with these problems should not be left to the Faculty leadership team alone. In order to address these problems efficiently, it is indispensable that all academic staff is given the possibility to participate in this process. The Faculty leadership team will need the support of the entire teaching staff in order to coordinate the transformation and to present the necessary requests for changes from the competent authorities inside and outside the University.

The review team encourages the Faculty to continue this way with patience and in a spirit of constructive collaboration, and it wishes the Faculty lots of success in this undertaking.

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Heribert Hallermann
Drago Pintaric
Ulrich Rhode