



**Evaluation of the**

**Faculty of Catholic Theology**

**Peer Report**

Date

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## 1. Executive Summary

[concise description of the review process, brief overview of the review team, summary of the main findings incl. SWOT]

- Strengths and Weaknesses (Internal factors)
- Opportunities and Threats (External factors)

The evaluation of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna took place from Wednesday 07 November to Friday 09 November 2018. The evaluation was conducted by request of the Faculty and in collaboration with the evaluation by AVEPRO.

Members of the expert committee appointed by the University were:

Prof. Dr. Linda Hogan, Trinity College Dublin;

Prof. Dr. Judith Könemann, Faculty of Catholic Theology, WWU Münster (Chair);

Prof. Dr. Johan Leemans, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven.

Members of the expert committee of the Agency AVEPRO were:

Prof. Dr. Drago Pintaric, Salzburg;

Prof. Dr. David Volgger, Faculty of Theology, Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome (Chair);

MMag. Florian Wegscheider, Catholic Private University Linz.

The expert committees decided to produce a joint report.

In the context of two days of inspection, the experts had the opportunity for an in-depth discussion of the Faculty's main topics and focuses – e.g. research focuses, internationalisation, study programmes, promotion of young researchers – with members of the Faculty on the basis of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and the presentations during the meetings on site. The selection of topics and focuses traces the guidelines stated in the Self-Assessment Report. The evaluation took place in a decidedly respectful and constructive atmosphere.

### Summary assessment:

According to the assessment by the experts, the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna is well positioned for the future based on its resources.

With 15 professorships and 14 associated professorships it has a good ratio between professors and students. Moreover, it has high potential for research and teaching in theology in general. An adequate structure of departments and institutes in the Faculty facilitates this potential, which is the result of reorganisation in recent years. Overall, it can be stated that the transformation process, that was begun in recent years, has resulted in many positive developments in terms of both substance and structure.

Particularly positive aspects are:

The breadth of the individual research topics and focus in areas of individual research expertise. The development of particular areas of interdisciplinary research complements this individual research in the distinct disciplines, since it not only connects different theological disciplines, but it also links disciplines outside of the theological field and, in doing so, facilitates interdisciplinary approaches among disciplines. Individual research expertise as well as interdisciplinary research in research associations can therefore be positively emphasised. This, together with the increase in international publications, also leads to an increase in international visibility. The establishment of a professorial post for Orthodox Theology is also a positive development, as it further expands the spectrum of theologies. Thus, the Faculty is in a good position – in terms of substance because of its individual research and joint research focuses and in terms of structure because of its different institutes.

The Faculty also has the potential to gain an important role in the future of research on religion in Vienna, and beyond, given the potential for partnership and collaboration with the other units in which the study of religion and theology occurs. The Department of Religious Studies with its non-denominational perspective introduces an enriching outsider's stance to the Faculty. With the Faculty of Protestant Theology and the Department of Islamic-Theological Studies, there are further ideal conditions for an interdisciplinary network of theological research of religion. Moreover, this allows for dialogue between a denominational theological perspective and a non-denominational research of religion.

Administrative changes also contribute to the positive overall development. In recent years, the Faculty has resolved significant issues regarding teaching and study programmes. The new doctoral studies programme also proves successful. Students especially the students underline the positive atmosphere for studying and the good supervisory relationships between teaching staff and students.

Not least, the systematic design of the evaluation as set by the Self-Assessment Report and the visit must be acknowledged. It focuses on the topics of internationalisation, interdisciplinary orientation and research and, thus, no longer primarily on the individual institutes as in the past.

Development requirements have been identified in the following areas:

The research strategy of the Faculty, with its aim to connect the highly qualified research of the individual faculty members and their respective international networks, is rarely visible despite the highly qualified research. Thus, its development could be intensified. Closely related to this point, the efforts for internationalisation only vaguely indicate which topics or themes they wish to pursue in terms of substance. There are possibilities for increasing interdisciplinarity in the second major research focus on Christian Identity.

Furthermore, in the area of teaching there are further development requirements despite all the changes that have been implemented in recent years. This means that the Faculty needs to increase the polyvalence of its courses and, thereby, the possibilities to choose between courses. Additionally, the Faculty needs to enhance the range of teaching formats so that, aside from lectures, other creative formats become possible and can be awarded with ECTS credits. The same applies to examination procedures, which should also have a broader range of methods. In this way, students could develop an interdisciplinary orientation as well as research-oriented competences (critical thinking etc.) in more depth. Further action is required concerning the arrangement of the cooperation with the KPH Vienna/Krems, especially regarding the standards of courses. Regarding the promotion of young researchers, there is potential for the Faculty to promote greater engagement with and involvement of those international doctoral students who are registered, but who do not have t employment at university.

Even though the question of human resource development is not one that arises at present, because the Faculty is currently in the process of appointing four professors, there is potential for future human resource development for the Faculty. This subject is related to the question of a development strategy of the Faculty as a whole. Additionally, there are development requirements concerning the awareness of gender issues and implementation of plans and strategies to address these.

## **2. Strategy**

### **2.1. Structure, Strategy and Development**

[e.g. assessment of mission and main objectives, organisational structure (also concerning small-sized departments), and strategic planning; positioning of the Faculty: international and within the Univ. of Vienna]

The Faculty of Catholic Theology describes as its main mission ‘to contribute to the question which contribution Christian faith can make to urgent contemporary issues in society and culture.’ To tackle this task, it analyses historical theological concepts and approaches relevant to the present day and critically assesses them with regard to these questions (cf. University of Vienna 2025. Development Plan, p. 73). The Faculty takes this explicitly into account with the two major research focuses of the platform “Religion and Transformation” (RaT), the developing research focus “Christian Identity in modern society”, the studies on the research of values, which exist for several years, and, recently, the study on migration. It is to be noted that RaT is a major flagship in this regard.

### Recommendations:

- Especially the second focus 'Christian Identity' is worth developing further. In particular, it should be structured with a stronger interdisciplinary and international focus.
- It remains unclear the degree to which the Faculty makes sufficient use of the cultural opportunities of the City of Vienna with regard to the focuses. There might be more potential.
- The Faculty has excellent conditions to establish itself as a location for research of religion because of the professorship for Orthodox Theology, the Department of Religious Studies and its network with other (Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic) theological players in Vienna. This means that it should further develop its own expertise and take it into account in the field of human resource development. Moreover, if possible, it should intensify the cooperation with the other theologies and further disciplines with possible connections to religion.

## **2.2 Governance and Administration**

[e.g. assessment of the interaction, communication, and decision making within the Faculty]

The professionalization of administration that has already been undertaken shows positive effects for the Faculty. The appointment of a faculty manager can especially be emphasised in this regard, as well as the creation of possibilities of further training and development for the administrative staff. It seems to be the case, which is striking, that in this area there are only a few incentive structures in form of rewards for outstanding performances or an increase in salary level for entrustment with special tasks.

The non-academic staff perceive communication and climate among themselves as well as in general as very positive. They emphasise the variety of tasks routinely they undertake.

In conversations with junior researchers (pre-docs; post-docs), it became apparent that, apart from informal communication, there are very few formal structures of information transfer between status groups.

Students wish for greater participation by the professors at study conferences. Moreover, the Faculty needs to deal with the issue of formal channels of communication, not least regarding information via Facebook and the University website.

### Recommendations:

- Development of formal ways of communication and information transfer for important events in the Faculty for all its members.

- Development of a formal way of information transfer between the academic status groups, especially between non-professorial teaching staff and professors.
- The Faculty needs to invest more in the support of its temporary academic staff in terms of human resource management at an interpersonal as well as on a structural level. It should take into account that pre- and post-docs are in an uncertain situation regarding support and information. Thus, the Faculty should strengthen support and information that allow them to discover their own potential, career-steps and ultimate goals. This should include benchmarking and information on how to evaluate one's goals and achievements.
- Development of incentive structures and systems of reward for administrative staff at the Faculty.

### **3. Resources**

#### **3.1. Human Resources**

[e.g. assessment of composition of staff, gender mainstreaming activities, internationality and mobility of staff; activities to attract researchers with an international first-rate reputation at the different qualification levels; faculty strategy concerning tenure track positions]

The Faculty is in a good position because of the personnel structure with 15 university professorships and 14 associate university professorships, which allows for a very positive ratio between professors and students. Therefore, it already has a wide range of opportunities. Regarding the change to the tenure-track system and the fact that in the upcoming years several associated professors will retire, the Faculty has enormous potential. To draw on this potential, the Faculty needs fitting development plans in terms of substance and structure, not least concerning the appointment of tenure track positions in the years ahead.

Gender mainstreaming is an integral part of the Faculty. Furthermore, there is the position of a Gender Equality Officer. However, notwithstanding the creation of this formal position, there are requirements concerning raising awareness regarding issues of gender equality in all areas of the Faculty (teaching, research, organisation of departments, promotion of young researchers, administration etc.) including in terms of the strategic direction and decisions in and for the Faculty. The support via peer-learning processes in the research platform RaT is a positive example for that.

The Faculty has considerably increased internationalisation in its research (including publications) and in staff mobility in recent years. However there are still development requirements concerning which themes or topics should be the focus of the internationalisation

agenda. In this field, the Faculty can use its core-competence of contacts and established cooperation with Southeast Europe. This also underlines that internationalisation does not exclusively have to be represented by relations to the Anglo-American region. Concerning staff mobility, the Faculty needs to explore more possibilities to increase the mobility of young researchers (pre- and post-docs).

### Recommendations

- Concerning gender equality mainstreaming, the Faculty should reflect on appropriate measures to create awareness and it should include bottom-up-processes. In addition to that, it needs to think about clear interim goals and ultimate goals regarding gender equality for the upcoming years.
- The Faculty should give more attention to strengthening young researchers' mobility and reflect on helpful tools. Young researchers could draw more heavily on short-term research stays in the context of Erasmus.
- The Tenure-Track System can be an appropriate guidance instrument not only for the substantial development of the Faculty but also for the development of new career paths for young researchers. In the future, the Faculty will also need to recruit suitable personnel on different career levels. For this, again, the Tenure-Track System proves to be helpful.

### **3.2. Budget, Equipment and Infrastructure**

[e.g. assessment of financial resources, facilities, technical equipment and support service facilities]

Overall, the Faculty is in a good position concerning finances, room and technical facilities. The premises can be easily accessed and are in proximity to each other. The common area for students is particularly positive because of its design and the possibility to spend a break there. However, there are some infrastructure problems. There is backlog concerning the equipment of the seminar rooms 6-8 in Schenkenstraße for the University (cf. students' letter from 06/14/2018). Moreover, in the library, the damp damages need to be repaired. The Faculty should install a possibility for video conferencing. Especially in times of increasing internationalisation, these modern forms of communication are of growing importance.

### Recommendations

- In the library, the damp damages need to be repaired.
- University management needs to remedy to the complaint concerning the equipment of rooms 6-8.
- The Faculty should install equipment for video conferencing and a video conference room.

## 4. Research

### 4.1. Research strategy

[e.g. assessment of research strategy and coherency of key research areas, international position of the Faculty; interdisciplinary research and research collaborations within and outside of the Univ. of Vienna]

In recent years, the Faculty has progressively developed interdisciplinary research associations besides the established individual research branches. These include the research platform “Religion and Transformation” (RaT) and the research focus “Christian Identity – a modern Perspective”. Further research focuses are situated in the areas of research of values and medical ethics. Particularly the research platform RaT with its activities and distinct structures does not only offer excellent conditions for research, but also an outstanding promotion of young researchers. Moreover, it implements interdisciplinarity to a remarkably large extent. In contrast, the second focus “Christian Identity” realises more strongly the inner-theological interdisciplinarity, which is also important. Nevertheless, concerning inner-theological interdisciplinarity, there are further development requirements. Regarding interdisciplinarity, both focuses complement each other in an exceptional manner, because RaT realises more strongly interdisciplinarity beyond the field of theology, whereas the focus “Christian Identity” supports more strongly the inner-theological interdisciplinarity. The latter is equally important because of the high differentiation in theology as an academic discipline. International networking is realised by individual researchers in their respective fields to a high degree. However, it is only minimally embedded in the Faculty as a research strategy. This issue needs to be further addressed.

#### Recommendations:

- In the medium term, concerning the flagship RaT the Faculty needs to establish structures and measures to develop a succession plan in order to increase the independence of RaT from its leadership, thereby ensuring its continued significance and profile.
- The Faculty should identify more clearly the differences and differentiating factors between the two research focuses, especially as both topics belong to the area of research on modernity.
- The research focus on „Christian Identity” should be more interdisciplinary in the field of theology. As it represents an example of inner-theological interdisciplinarity, this should be highlighted more strongly with the help of arguments. Moreover, it should strengthen its international orientation.

- The major research focuses should not displace the many small interdisciplinary projects that are realised as well in the Faculty, e.g. the research on values. The same applies to the acknowledged individual research, as performed in the different disciplines.

#### **4.2. Research performance**

[e.g. quality and visibility of research output and achievements, acquisition and amount of third party funding, internationality and interdisciplinarity of research activities and output]

In general, there is a good performance in the area of research: The Faculty has considerably increased its publications in English. Moreover, it has changed its publication strategies as far as possible for the theological field. Thus, it focuses more on the publication of essays and on publications in peer review processes not only for monographies and editions but also for essays.

The level of third party funding is still significantly lower than average at the University of Vienna. However, it has considerably improved and the allocation between the institutes has become more balanced (cf. Self-Assessment Report, App. 9f). Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the institutes concerning the acquisition of third party funding. Therefore, third party funding and the distribution of acquisitions over the institutes and disciplines will need further observation.

#### Recommendations

- The Faculty should decidedly continue the peer review process and it should constructively implement the peer review process in its own journals.
- Concerning the acquisition of third party funding, the Faculty could reflect on its incentive structures that render the expenses of acquisition more attractive. Furthermore, the faculty management could consider strategies to involve the disciplines more equally regarding the acquisition of third party funding. Concerning the applications the Faculty could think about a peer support system in which colleagues can support each other's applications. This would also strengthen interdisciplinary approaches.

#### **4.3. Third Mission**

[e.g. third Mission strategy and activities: societal impact and outreach]

The transfer of knowledge into important social sectors is good. The colleagues have broad networks and the media as well as civil society seek their advice and expertise regularly. Media trainings for all research members of the Faculty are indispensable for that.

### Recommendations:

- The faculty management should consider media trainings for researchers to prepare for these public appearances, interviews etc.

## **5. Teaching and Study**

### **5.1. Curricula and Strategy**

[e.g. assessment of the mission and objectives of the study programme in international comparison, assessment of the curricular structure and curricular developments]

The issue of study programmes and teaching constituted the focus of the last evaluation report by AVEPRO and took up room in the evaluation report by the expert committee appointed by the university at that time, too. Most of the recommended aspects have been implemented in the last evaluation period. In the context of this evaluation, the study programmes were not in the focus of the evaluation.

Concerning the Masters programme of Theology the Faculty needs to await the protocols for incorporation of the Vatican document “Veritatis Gaudium”, for which negotiations are currently taking place, before it can implement possible changes. In this context, it can adjust the distribution of ECTS credits pursuant to Roman requirements.

### **5.2. Study and Teaching Conditions**

[e.g. assessment of study conditions, support and advice services for prospective and new students, measures to ensure gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities; attractiveness of the study programme for international students and student mobility; teaching conditions including staff, rooms and equipment situation]

The situation of studies and teaching appears to be generally positive. Moreover, the lecturers have increased their teaching load in recent years. Furthermore, studies-service-centres (SSC) have a well-structured support system, which is organised according to the students’ needs.

Despite this generally very positive evaluation of the changes the Faculty has successfully implemented since the last evaluation, the following concerns remain regarding studies and examinations.

A first essential aspect concerns the ratio between workload and ECTS credits and, consequently, the awarding of ECTS credits.

A second aspect refers to the possibilities to choose between courses and the amount of compulsory courses. Here, more freedom of choice is desirable. This can also be created by increased polyvalence of courses through mutual recognition of courses as well as by using the existing possibilities for free choices in the existing context.

A third aspect is the amount of individual examinations and the design of examinations in general. In this regard, the last evaluation report has led to already implemented changes. However, these have not generated the intended results. The students complain about the amount of small individual examinations, which can be combined, but the overall amount remains. It needs to be emphasised that module examinations constitute of one test performance. This test can encompass material of several disciplines that are part of the respective module, but it cannot be divided into several individual examinations.

Fourthly, not only, but especially students perceive the cooperation with the Kirchlich-Pädagogische Hochschule (KPH) Vienna/Krems critically. This concerns teaching methods as well as the level of individual courses.

Concerning the rooms students complain about the equipment of the rooms 6-8 (Schenkenstraße) with furniture that does not comply with today's demands for studying (chairs with attached tables with insufficient space for necessary papers). Furthermore, there is an insufficient amount of coat rails. In a letter to the rectorate from the 14 June 2018, the students have already called attention to this.

#### Recommendations:

- The Faculty should review the ratio between workload and ECTS credits and, consequently, the awarding of ECTS credits. In doing so, it should take into account the existing liberties in the allocation of ECTS credits to courses.
- It is crucial that the Faculty considers increasing the polyvalence of courses. This way, it could significantly increase the possibilities to choose between courses that are open for different study programmes without an increased workload for the teaching staff.
- There is an urgent need for module exams to be conducted as **one** examination. This way, several subjects or courses of the module can be examined at the same time and the amount of examinations can be reduced.
- Moreover, the Faculty should consider additional examination formats, e.g. portfolios or other written formats like term papers over long essays.
- Concerning the cooperation with the KPH Vienna/Krems, the Faculty should have a conversation with representatives of the KPH about the points of criticism and standards of teaching.
- Lastly, the facility management should replace the insufficient furniture and equipment of the seminar rooms 6-8.

### 5.3. Interdisciplinary and Research-led Teaching

[e.g. interdisciplinary degree programmes; research-led teaching and assessment of how student research competencies are developed at the different phases of study (BA, MA, PhD) including supervision of theses]

There are currently no interdisciplinary study programmes. With the exception of the recently newly structured doctoral programme, the other mentioned aspects cannot be discussed as they have not been the focus of the evaluation.

The new doctoral programme seems to prove its worth in practice. The number of students stays stable, so that students changed to the new doctoral programme. Regarding the high number of international students, the Faculty could consider more ways to involve them, e.g. by introducing a moderate structuring to the doctoral programme. Additionally, there is an opportunity to consider how far it could provide additional support systems for these students, i.e. financial support for training and conferences as well peer-oriented support to facilitate adjusting to the new context.

Regarding the interdisciplinarity of teaching there are opportunities for development. This concerns inner-theological as well as trans-disciplinary interdisciplinarity. However, interdisciplinary teaching arrangements often prove to be difficult to arrange, because under present conditions cooperation between two colleagues leads to an increased teaching load, as in these cases, only half of the weekly hours per semester can be counted to the teaching load. This makes interdisciplinary cooperation in teaching much more difficult and does not present an incentive structure for cooperation.

However, it can be positively emphasised that the Faculty offers courses in the amount of 15 ECTS credits for students of other disciplines. This way, in teaching there are many possibilities for interdisciplinarity. Especially these opportunities can give a stimulus concerning internationalisation and interdisciplinarity. In this regard, the Faculty needs to reflect in how far it wants to further develop in the upcoming years.

#### Recommendations:

- The Faculty could consider support systems especially for international students as illustrated above. Moreover, it could facilitate an involvement of international students by introducing a moderate structuring of the doctoral programme.
- It is urgent that university management provides the opportunity to count the full number of hours to the teaching load in case of interdisciplinary cooperation in the context of teaching, since the current way of counting this seems to undermine the strategy of promoting interdisciplinarity.

#### **5.4. Quality Assurance and Alumni**

[e.g. excellence and quality assurance in teaching and examinations, conclusion drawn from quality assurance instruments (e.g. course feedback by students, graduate surveys; labour market integration of graduates and alumni activities]

This aspect was not in of the focus of the evaluation. Therefore, this report cannot give an assessment of these issues. However, among other things, it positively emphasises that the Faculty has “reworked its feedback policy by restructuring the questionnaire and evaluating its courses at about two thirds instead of at the close of the term” (cf. SAR, p.11 and p.31).

#### **Recommendations**

It should be kept in mind that the implementation of the results of the empirical survey in the actual teaching formats is crucial.

#### **6. Specific Questions by the Rectorate**

The Rectorate asks the peers to address the following topics:

1. Assess the long term strategic planning of the personnel structure at the Faculty; especially concerning the upcoming retirement of Associate Professors/ Docents during the next years.

As stated above, in the upcoming years, the Faculty has many opportunities to further develop itself in terms of substance and structure and to implement these developments by personnel decisions.

2. Assess the plans of the Faculty for additional joint activities in research, teaching and study with other Faculties of the Univ. of Vienna.

As stated above, the Faculty – together with the other theologies (e.g. Protestant, Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish), the Department of Religious Studies and other religion-related disciplines – has excellent opportunities to become a centre of research of religion. In doing so, it can introduce the specific and indispensable perspective of a denominational theology in the contexts of teaching and research.

3. Assess current third mission activities at the Faculty and the planning for the next years.

As stated above, the members of the Faculty are highly committed to participate in the transfer of knowledge into society.

## 7. Specific Questions by the Faculty

The Faculty asks the peers to address the following topics:

1. The Faculty has demonstrated a significant effort in supporting young scientists. Do you see further possibilities to promote them?

In light of the short contracts, the Faculty needs to provide pre- and post-docs with increased opportunities for continuing training and mentorship

. This way, applications to other universities become more promising. Moreover, there could be more participation in inter-university projects. Besides the excellent institutional support measures mentioned in the SAR on page 25 it is important to remember that the concrete and personal support by the supervisor has high value.

2. Until now, the Faculty was only partially successful in setting up partnerships with English-speaking universities in the framework of Erasmus. Due to the lack of study programmes in English at the University of Vienna, it is difficult to attract partner universities from the English-speaking world. Would you support the strategy of the Faculty to offer an English Masters programme to increase our attractiveness in this particular respect?

The implementation of an English Master-programme should depend on the question if the content of a possible Master-programme suggests courses in English. Furthermore, the Faculty should reflect on the main regions of internationalisation and, consequently, on the question if English is indeed the suitable language for these regions. It could consider a “two track-policy”, because, probably, not all colleagues are interested in an English Master-programme and some might prefer the Southeast European focus in the field of internationalisation.

3. The strategy of the Faculty to place 30% of its publications in high-quality journals was successful. Nonetheless, our internal criteria are wider than those of the Rectorate (see SAR 5.6. above). As an expert committee, do you see a possibility of bridging this tension?

The support measures mentioned in the SAR 5.6 on page 17f. are already suitable for international visibility and should be pursued consistently. The addressed tension also generates from the specific academic culture of theology that only slowly progresses to continuously peer-reviewed journals.