



## **External Evaluation Commission Report regarding the evaluation conducted at the**

### **THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE VILNIUS ST. JOSEPH SEMINARY**

#### **Introduction**

External Evaluation Commission:

Denis BIJU-DUVAL	President
Giovanni ANCONA	Thematic expert
Adrián CANAL	Student representative expert

The visit was conducted **online** on 12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

The Commission met beforehand, on 6<sup>th</sup> May, to discuss how to conduct the visit. In particular, the Commission discussed the Institute's Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

#### **General information on the state of the Institution**

The Institute, which is currently affiliated to the Pontifical Lateran University (PUL - Pontificia Università Lateranense), has drawn up a draft for a new *Statute* and a new *Plan of studies* in line with the indications of the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) and the affiliating Faculty. The *Statute* and *Plan* must nonetheless be approved by the CCE and the affiliating Faculty.

The external evaluation visit confirmed that the Institute is a structure of quality: it has plenty of space and a comfortable environment, which favour the work of the educators, teaching staff and students, in view of their fundamental objective. Naturally, some improvements need to be made (acoustics and video-audio / IT equipment, internet connection), especially in relation to recommencing face-to-face teaching. Overall, this is a welcoming structure of quality.

## **Brief programme for the visit**

(The times indicated are Italian. Attempts have been made to make them compatible with both Italian and Lithuanian habits. The online meetings are to be held on the Zoom platform. When an interpreter is required, one will be selected from people who have no hierarchical role within the seminary or Institute and undertake to maintain the strictest confidentiality regarding the contents of the meetings held).

### **Wednesday 12th May**

*9.30 – 10.30 a.m.*

Commission only: definition of members' tasks; analysis of initial elements of particular importance for the purposes of the evaluation.

*10.30 – 11.00 a.m.*

Meeting with the Rector

*(Lunch break)*

*14.00 – 14.30*

Meeting with the Prefect of Studies

*14.30 – 15.00*

Meeting with the Secretary General

*15.00 – 15.30*

Meeting with the group that prepared the SER

*(break)*

*16.30 – 17.00*

Meetings with the Heads of Departments (Librarian, Bursar)

### **Thursday 13th May**

*9.30 – 10.00 a.m.*

Audio-visual presentation of the Institute, premises, facilities.

*10.00 – 10.30 a.m.*

Meeting with the students

*(Lunch break)*

*14.00 – 15.00*

Meetings with the teaching staff regarding their teaching and research activities

*15.00 – 16.00*

Commission only: debriefing

*16.00-17.00*

Meetings with the Moderator, the Archbishop of Vilnius

*(break)*

*17.00 – 17.45*

Individual meetings with staff

### **Friday 14th May**

*10.00a.m. – 12.00 midday*

Commission only: preparation of the final presentation

*(Lunch break)*

*14.00 – 15.00*

Meetings with the Rector and the Prefect of Studies to discuss results and recommendations.

*15.00 – 16.00*

Presentation of results and recommendations to all.



## 1. Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The SER was prepared following the parameters suggested by AVEPRO. It is essentially adequate, at least regarding the fundamental points.

### Comments

Preparation of the SER constituted a significant opportunity for the whole Institution to reflect on its current condition and especially its future development. The criterion of self-evaluation of all components of the Institution was deemed very profitable and constructive.

### Recommendations

A more specific clarification of the Institution's philosophical and theological foundations would be desirable, as well as a more convincingly prepared SWOT analysis, together with a clearer description of the global choice of courses, also in relation to ongoing developments.

## 2. Mission, Vision, Governance and Strategic Plan

The **Institution** reported an ongoing process in terms of “work in progress”, starting from the drawing up of a new Statute in line with the indications of the CCE and the affiliating Faculty (PUL) and preparation of the SWOT analysis. The Institution's mission and vision (as can be seen from the new draft *Statute* and the indications in the Strategic Plan) are essentially related to the context of the training (human, theological, pastoral and spiritual) of future presbyters, who wish to gain a theological qualification. In this sense, the structural connection between the Seminary and Institute does not prevent the Institute from having an independent general management in relation to the Seminary that hosts it, aside from appropriate cooperation. It should, however, be pointed out that the relationship between Institute and Seminary remains a sensitive subject, and one which the Moderator is currently dealing with, bearing in mind the indications provided by the CCE and the Congregation for the Clergy.

The Institute hosts only **theology students** (four-year theology programme). The students on two-year philosophy programmes study in Kaunas, although they are dependent upon the management of the Seminary and the Institution based in Vilnius. There are a total of 42 students (29 in Vilnius; 13 in Kaunas), which is the result of all students of theology in the whole of Lithuania being brought together.

In the abovementioned context, the work of the **Secretary General** is very important. He not only acts as a connection between the two institutions, but manages all the teaching and, in some way, also the logistics. However, the various initiatives of the **Secretary General**, although currently stable, are often of a personal rather than institutional nature.

In order to achieve its own objectives, the Institute has a **Library**, which is very well supplied with volumes for study (in all forms: works, tools, manuals, etc.) and benefits from the presence of a highly competent librarian who takes very good care of the library users. Moreover, the Library cooperates with other libraries regarding access to international databases. The library users are very satisfied with the service provided.

Concerning the **administrative side**, the Institute has a good level of resources and is administered in a balanced manner. However, there is currently no real Administrative Council and the figure of the Bursar is only an unofficial management role. He does not know about nor take part in the preparation of a budget. All economic matters are the prerogative of the Moderator, the Seminary's Rector and the Prefect of Studies. In any case, the economic resources available to achieve the Institute's objectives are quite sufficient.

The **Bishop Moderator**, the current Archbishop of Vilnius, is perfectly aware of the Institute's path to date and is strongly committed to helping the Institution grow and mature.

The **Seminary staff** (two bookkeepers and two cooks) are generally satisfied with the nature of their jobs and working conditions. They are very positive about their involvement in the common task of the seminarists' training.

## Comments

The description of the institutional situation reveals effective coherence between mission, vision, strategic plan and available tools. Some specific remarks may be made:

- a. A first comment should be dedicated to the ministry of the **Archbishop Moderator**, who is very committed to following the Seminary and the Institute and, in particular, to finding appropriate solutions to the delicate institutional problems prompted by the future evolution of the Statute in line with the requirements of the CCE and the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*.
- b. **Rector and Prefect of Studies** (with the new Statute: **Director**) cooperate harmoniously and profitably for the good of the Institution, while maintaining their independence and own prerogatives.
- c. The **Secretary General** is a competent figure, capable of finding very appropriate and suitable solutions to teaching and administration-related issues, especially in the period of the pandemic.
- d. **The Librarian and staff** are very attentive to the students' situation and wellbeing.

## Recommendations

- a. It is hoped that the future evolution of the Statute will force the members of the Seminary and the Institute to reflect upon the new equilibrium between the two institutions; to come to wise definitions of the role of each institution in the students' training; to objectify relationships between people.
- b. Greater harmonization between the institutions in Vilnius and Kaunas would be desirable.
- c. The creation of decentralized offices would be preferable (for each of the two institutions).
- d. It is hoped that some of the Institute's additional needs (equipment, more staff, etc.) may be met in the near future.
- e. The creation of an Administrative Council is also hoped for.
- f. More human resources should be allocated to the library.

### 3. Learning and research

The Institute's current plan of studies for students who have already started their studies is still cyclical (until they finish), while for newly enrolled students (from September 2020) it is linear. Concerning specific courses, the Institute has already presented a new project to the affiliating Faculty, which will be examined and, if necessary, corrected. In any case, the new project covers the necessary subjects and sufficient credits for access to the first level of the Canonical Baccalaureate (300 ECTS). Moreover, the number of credits is in line with the norms of the Lithuanian State for a second cycle degree (360 ECTS).

A minority among the students do not deem the intellectual preparation for the service of future priests to be important. In fact, the teachers have problems getting students to adopt the right attitude to their studies; not only because their previous education is insufficient, but also due to the different cultural origins of the students. The greatest problem is students' motivation to study: various students see the intellectual commitment as an inevitable duty in order to be ordained as priests (lacking the harmonization between the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions). However, there are some positive exceptions, which give hope for their future and that of the Institute. The students participate actively in the Institute's evaluation processes and in their own evaluation through special questionnaires.

The teaching staff are very involved and their competence and academic qualifications meet the demands of a good education in theology well. They cooperate voluntarily with each other. Their scientific publications also satisfy the criteria of research, which is important for the growth of the staff and the Institution. The current permanent professors all have doctoral degrees. Their employment takes place independently of the Seminary.

## **Comments**

The move from a cyclical to a linear structure for the plan of studies brings clear gains in terms of intellectual and educational coherence.

There is a certain level of conflict between the students and teaching staff. The study commitment is minimal. The students acknowledge the quality of the teaching staff, but deem the courses unsuited to their training (focused on entry into the priesthood). The students also have a significant load of pastoral activities, which often distracts them from their studies.

Concerning the teaching staff, their current stability is somewhat relative. In fact, many of them are employed by other academic institutions or undertake pastoral activities; this is detrimental to the overall progress of the Institution. The issue is the competence of the Bishops, who increasingly need to be convinced of the ministerial quality of the teaching.

## **Recommendations**

Specific theological-pastoral reflection regarding understanding of the ministry within the context of the new evangelization would be highly advisable: this aspect is important in order to better resolve the problems that have come to light in the SER regarding youth and vocational ministry.

Regarding the student-related problems: efforts in the field of teaching must be made in order to ensure better personal integration of the intellectual dimension of education on the part of less motivated students; it will be important to foster intellectual understanding of the priestly project, highlight the unifying principle of the programmes available, and ensure a more focused rhythm to student life, with long spaces of time dedicated to study and clearly defined times for complementary activities. Affiliation to PUL can be presented to the most promising students as a special opportunity to continue their education up to the academic qualifications of licentiate or a doctoral degree.

Face-to-face lessons should be integrated with the offer of inter- and trans-disciplinary study days, both with external contributions and with proposals involving interaction between the Institute's teaching staff.

Students' representation should be broadened and they should participate in the various bodies of the Seminary and the Institute via their inclusion in the governing bodies (Institutional Board, Administrative Council, Library Council, etc.)

Concerning the evaluation processes, reflection is required regarding the feedback provided: what should be done and what decisions can be taken by the authorities or teaching staff, based on the results of the questionnaires?

The weakness of the low number of permanent teaching staff should be addressed (according to the norms, at least 7), as well as their proper retribution, so that they do not have to spend time seeking additional forms of income. Institutional opportunities for cooperation among the teaching staff should also be multiplied.

## 4. SWOT Analysis

### Summary of the SWOT analysis

#### *Strengths:*

The Institute's affiliation to the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Lateran University contributes to maintaining the scientific and educational level of the Institute, while the degree in theology issued by this University gives students the possibility to continue their theology studies in Lithuania or in ecclesiastical universities abroad.

The good body of teaching staff, with appropriate qualifications.

The excellent and always accessible library.

The excellent infrastructure and sufficient material and human resources, which ensure that the process of studying can take place.

#### *Weaknesses:*

The low number of students.

The very different academic ambitions among students. The students of the Institute vary greatly not only in their abilities and prior education, but also in their motivation and ambitions: some of them do not aim for ambitious academic goals but are satisfied with meeting the minimum requirements to enter the priesthood.

The teaching staff are also involved in other jobs or services, which significantly decreases their ability to dedicate themselves to research activities (or makes it completely impossible).

#### *Opportunities:*

The large number of teaching staff members from other universities allows students to experience the general climate of university education in Lithuania.

The low number of hours in certain subjects makes it possible to invite the best teachers / professors in the subject from other universities.

The Institute's autonomy and relative independence makes it possible to modify the programmes in quite a flexible manner and adapt them to needs.

#### *Threats:*

The low number of students may put the educational quality at risk, as the learning within the process of teaching reduces the space for discussion and seminars.

The mode of payment by the hour and lack of prospects regarding an academic career may discourage teaching staff from paying sufficient attention to improving the quality of lessons and conducting research activities related to the Seminary.



## **Comments**

The SWOT Analysis highlighted all the elements with adequate objectivity.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the SWOT Analysis be integrated with the suggestions put forward by the External Evaluation Commission.

### **5. Quality Assurance in the Institution**

The QA is clearly evolving, given the gradual reorganization of the Institution. Basically, its new form, which will be given by the new Statute, will lead clearly to the adoption of a culture of strategic planning that is much more focused and well-suited to the objectives set.

## **Comments**

The situation can be described as a “work in progress”.

## **Recommendations**

The strategic plan must be effective and in line with today’s times and culture, while remaining set in the Lithuanian context.

### **6. Additional recommendations**

No particular remarks. As already mentioned, the Institution is evolving in line with the indications provided by the CCE and the affiliating Faculty.

### **7. Conclusions and presentation of recommendations in order of priority**

The impact of the Evaluation Commission on the Institution was very positive and profitable. The openness of the various members of the Institution meant that dialogue could take place without any particular problems. In short, the Institution seems to have greatly appreciated the external visit and was open to dialogue regarding the adoption of new quality-related aspects that will emerge from the future academic configuration.



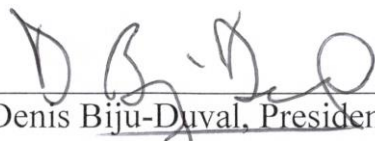


The important elements that the Commission has indicated in the final synthesis are those relating (in order of priority) to students, teachers and curricula.


In conclusion, the Evaluation Commission expresses an overall positive judgement on each of the following elements:

1. strategic management;
2. quality of studies and learning;
3. scientific and cultural activities;
4. regional and national development of the Institute.

Rome, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021

  
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