

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Benedikt XVI. Heiligenkreuz (Austria) April 25-26, 2023

Introduction

The AVEPRO Evaluation Team for the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Benedikt XVI. Heiligenkreuz, Austria (from here on “Hochschule Heiligenkreuz”), consists of Prof. Dr. Dionisio Candido (President), Prof. Dr. Grzegorz Chojacki (expert), Prof. Dr. Peter Schallenberg (expert) and Ms. Rosemarie Mayr (student). The evaluation team—with the exception of Prof. Chojacki, who was absent with an excuse—visited Hochschule Heiligenkreuz on April 25 and 26, 2023. The on-visit took place in strict observance of the agreed schedule.

Prior to the visit, AVEPRO provided the Evaluation Team with the Self-Evaluation Report of June 2022. The Evaluation Team also consulted the External Evaluation Report of December 2012, which followed the previous visit of May 31 to June 1, 2012 and was published on the website of AVEPRO. Both the Self-Evaluation Report and the External Evaluation Report were useful for the Evaluation Team to get to know Hochschule Heiligenkreuz before the visit. After the visit, the Evaluation Team was able to conclude that the External Evaluation Report was carefully prepared and presented the different aspects (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of Hochschule Heiligenkreuz well. This made it possible to carry out the work required during the visit in the best and most straightforward way and to talk openly and constructively with all those involved.

The On-site Visit

The on-site visit took place on April 25 and 26, 2023 as follows.

On Tuesday morning, April 25, 2023, the Evaluation Team first met with the Rector Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Klausnitzer.

Afterwards, the Evaluation Team interviewed the working group that drafted the Self-Evaluation Report: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Klausnitzer (Rector), Doz. P. Dr. Johannes Paul Chavanne OCist (General Secretary and Prior), Doz. P. Dr. Martin Krutzler OCist (Dean of Studies), Johannes Auersperg-Trautson, BA (Project Manager, Fundraising, Human Resources), Anita Pichlhöfer, BA (Secretary), Sr. Germana Willi fso (Secretary), Lukas Albert (Seminarian of the Archdiocese of Vienna, Representative of Students of the 2nd Section).

Then the Team also met with the Institutes Directors (or their Representatives): Prof. P. Dr. Wolfgang Buchmüller OCist (Dean of Research, Institute Director, Institute for Spiritual Theology and Religious Studies), Doz. P. Dr. Johannes Paul Chavanne OCist (Institute Director, Institute for Liturgical Studies and Sacred Music), Doz. P. Dr. Bruno Hannover OCist (Institute Director, Institute for Church History and Canon Law), Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Klausnitzer (Rector, Institute Director, Institute for Dogmatics and Fundamental Theology), Prof. Dr. Helmut Prader (Institute Director, Institute for Moral Theology), Prof. Dr. Petra Ritter-Müller (Institute Director, Institute for Biblical Studies), Doz. Dr. Rupert Stadler (Institute Director, Institute for Pastoral Theology, Homiletics, Catechetics and Religious Education), Prof. P. Dr. Kosmas Thielmann OCist (Representative, EUPHRat - European Institute for Philosophy and Religion), Prof. Dr. Christoph Böhr (Representative, Institute for Philosophy).

In the afternoon a meeting took place with two student representatives of the 1st Section, with two student representatives of the 2nd Section, with eight students of the Licentiate, with six staff members from the individual Institutions, with the Dean of

Studies Doz. P. Dr. Martin Krutzler OCist and with the Dean of Research Prof. P. Dr. Wolfgang Buchmüller OCist.

On the morning of the second day of the visit, a meeting took place with the Rector Univ. Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Klausnitzer and with the members of the administration Doz. P. Dr. Johannes Paul Chavanne OCist (Secretary General and Prior), Johannes Auersperg-Trautson, BA (Project Manager, Fundraising, Human Resources) and Anita Pichlhöfer, BA (Secretariat Director).

In the afternoon, the Evaluation Team met with the Rector to discuss the results and recommendations and then presented them to the Quality Committee of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz.

The Evaluation Team was given a tour of the classrooms, learning facilities, media campus and library. The Hochschule Heiligenkreuz has well-equipped classrooms with modern electronic teaching equipment.

On the second day, the Evaluation Team also had the opportunity to have an in-depth conversation with Abbot Maximilian Heim OCist, who is the Grand Chancellor (Magnus Cancellarius) of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz.

Meals were taken together with the Rector and one or more professors and monks of the monastic community in the refectory of the monastery's guest house.

1. The Students

Remarks

The Hochschule Heiligenkreuz presents itself as an institution for higher studies in Theology, aimed primarily at students applying for Cistercian monastic life or the priesthood. In the Self-Evaluation Report one can read: "Hochschule Heiligenkreuz is the only institution of higher learning in the Cistercian order. It is the only Hochschule in Austria run by a religious order" (p. 6). Lay people who do not currently intend to take up religious life are in the minority. Candidates for the Cistercian religious life live in the Abbey. Seminarians live in the interdiocesan Seminary Leopoldinum, which is located on the territory of Heiligenkreuz Abbey: among them is a minority from Austria and a majority from other countries.

The foreigners devote the first two years at Heiligenkreuz to learning German. This is necessary because the courses at the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz are taught exclusively in German.

A strong economic investment for student housing is visible in the Abbey area. This is part of a vision of the Hochschule and the Abbey towards the students, whose identity is changing over the years, as explained in the Self-Evaluation Report: "In recent years, there has been a growing trend of hesitancy in making a decision regarding a spiritual vocation. For such "vocation seekers," housing options in and around Heiligenkreuz are essential. Thus, several student dormitories and communities have emerged in the vicinity of the Hochschule, which have a lot of potential when it comes to finding vocations" (p. 7).

A special situation affects many new enrolments, especially among those who come from abroad (in particular from countries of the African continent): they have the *Abitur*, but must achieve the language exam at level C1 in two years.

In general, the students interviewed are satisfied with the teaching provided by the professors and appreciate the study-promoting atmosphere at Heiligenkreuz. The obligation to attend all courses is also perceived as an important aspect of teaching.

Recommendations

A hallmark of student life at the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz is the opportunity to study in an environment marked by the presence of the Abbey. In this sense, the Self-Evaluation Report itself presents the so-called "kneeling theology" as a defining element of the

Hochschule Heiligenkreuz: “For more than thirty-five years, the Hochschule has enjoyed nearly consistent increases in the number of faculty and size of the student body. One reason for this can be seen in the “kneeling theology” that can be found here, in connecting faith, Catholic approach to life, and study” (pp. 7-9).

Already during the visit, the students emphasised the importance of the unity between faith and life, between study and prayer. They feel that the teaching they are given corresponds to the experience of religious life as witnessed by the monks and teachers (many of whom are themselves monks of the Abbey).

The students’ emphasis on harmony between study and life is something to be appreciated and deeply understood. However, it can also show a certain difficulty in dealing with the complexity of today’s world. In a pluralistic society, it is necessary to empower young people to be open to dialogue with all. As the Rector said during the visit, “We must not stay in our bubble.” Higher education should promote this kind of attitude, even if it is difficult to build bridges of dialogue with different experiences, even with those who do not belong to the Church. It is about helping a new generation of pastoral workers (priests, monks or lay people) to be witnesses of the Gospel in today’s pluralistic world.

Both seminarians and professors frequently mentioned during the visit the need to promote parish experiences. This would enable especially seminarians from abroad to develop a greater pastoral sensitivity, to gain a deeper understanding of Austrian and European culture and to improve their knowledge of the German language.

It also emerged during the visit that the training offered pays a lot of attention to seminarians and less to lay people who have not expressed a vocation to religious life. It is important to also consider and value these students when planning and running courses.

Finally, a large group of students who come to Heiligenkreuz do not have a *Matura*: they need a *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (that is, an examination required before attending courses of a degree program). It would be appropriate for this exam to take place in the first year and for these students also to have to meet the standard of study preparation required of all university students.

2. The Professors

Remarks

The Hochschule Heiligenkreuz currently has 86 professors (and 6 teachers of German), but only a few of them are qualified professors, while 4 *Habilitation* and 6 Doctorates are in progress. The teaching staff of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz consists mainly of Cistercians who belong to the Heiligenkreuz Abbey. There are also professors who are diocesan priests and religious who belong to other religious institutes. Various professors are often already retired. The professors receive an hourly fee of 29 euros, travel expenses and free board and lodging.

Recommendations

The number of professors is very high overall. However, many of them participate in the life of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz only in connection with the course they teach. Several non-Cistercian professors have already retired from other academic institutions.

The high number of professors can therefore be reduced. However, it is necessary that the members of the teaching staff have the appropriate academic qualifications, in particular the *Habilitation*, in order to be able to fulfil their teaching and research duties to the full. The existence of a sufficient number of professors with *Habilitation* is a prerequisite for access to Doctorate in Theology (STD) programmes.

3. The Study Plan

Remarks

The study plan is well organised and easy for students to understand. The courses usually extend over one or two semesters. However, there are also block courses, i.e. compact and intensive courses that take place over a few weeks. The courses are offered in the form of lectures, seminars and exercises (tutorials). The predominant form of teaching is the lecture. Lectures take place every day of the working week (except Thursdays), from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. (Saturdays only in the morning). Attendance is compulsory for all classes.

Teachers are very generous in preparing and offering personal scripts for the study of their subjects.

Recommendations

The curriculum takes into account to a large extent the needs and skills of the teachers, but less the learning dynamics of the students. A few examples may illustrate this.

1) The exams are about 12-15 per semester, with rather little content. The exam session lasts three weeks. Therefore students would like to have a longer exam period. But what is also important is that the obligation to take exams immediately after the end of the course encourages students to study during the course itself, but it does not encourage personal and independent research after the classes. 2) The scripts provided by the professors help students to get a basis of material to study, but can encourage laziness and does not stimulate personal study by reading sources and other texts. 3) Lectures are central to the teaching process. This promotes class participation and leads to discipline in time organisation, but runs the risk of students becoming passive and tending to settle for what they have heard and need for the exam. 4) Apart from the resident professors (mainly Cistercians from Heiligenkreuz Abbey), almost all other professors do not live permanently on site and come to Heiligenkreuz for the teaching time of their course. This factor limits the interaction between professors and students even outside of class time and prevents the realisation of Christian education as a life experience.

It may be useful to place students more at the centre of the educational process. In terms of acquiring a lifelong learning method, it could be useful to promote more seminars where students are active players in reproducing and presenting the acquired content. This was a wish expressed by the students in the interviews. Also, it might be useful to add some English courses, as many students come from English-speaking countries.

4. Research

Remarks

Generally speaking, in the field of scientific research, the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz is mainly concerned with deepening the thinking of Benedict XVI in various ways. The Hochschule also has two Institutes specifically devoted to research: the *Europainstitut für Zisterziensenforschung* (European Institute for Cistercian Research), which is highly regarded for its research on the Cistercian Order published in the journal *Analecta Cisterciensia*, and the *Europäische Institut für Philosophie und Religion* (European Institute for Philosophy and Religion), which deals with the thought of some of the great Christian thinkers.

These three research areas produce a large number of important publications, from professors within the Hochschule (mainly Cistercians), but also from external authors who often present their work at conferences. In fact, a number of important conferences are organised throughout the year, bringing leading thinkers to Heiligenkreuz. These presentations are then published in journals or ad hoc publications.

Recommendations

A closer look at the publications (*Analecta Cisterciensia*, *Ambo*, etc.) shows that the level of scholarship is not uniform. It might be necessary to mark more clearly which articles have been peer-reviewed and which have not.

Several articles were written by professors who do not have a stable role within the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz, but only an occasional one: this fact indicates that there is still no real planning for research that concerns the Hochschule as a whole.

This requires a strategic plan to strengthen research, starting with the research areas that are already well established. Therefore, an investment in human resources is also needed, i.e. full professors who, in addition to their teaching duties, have the competence and opportunity to devote themselves to research.

Finally, it might be useful to have a scientific committee for publications that also includes friendly professors outside Heiligenkreuz and outside Austria. This would make it possible to assign peer-reviewed articles to colleagues outside Heiligenkreuz and to host articles in other languages, especially English.

5. Governance

Remarks

There is a clear close relationship between the Hochschule and the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz. The Abbey is very generous in placing some of its monks at the service of the Hochschule and financially supporting its material facilities and academic activities. The statutes of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz state that the Abbot of Heiligenkreuz Abbey is the Grand Chancellor of the Hochschule.

The Hochschule Heiligenkreuz is headed by a Rector. For the first time in the history of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz, the current Rector (Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Klausnitzer) is a diocesan priest and not a Cistercian.

Recommendations

The role of the Abbot of Heiligenkreuz is also important for the Hochschule because several professors are monks of the Abbey. The Abbot therefore has a dual role and responsibility. This can lead to areas of conflict. From the Abbot's (Maximilian Heim OCist) own report, the Evaluation Team learned about the difficult matter concerning Prof. P. Dr. Alkuin Schachenmayr OCist, who was suspended from teaching by the Abbot but reinstated by a decree of the Holy See. A comprehensive and transparent discussion on the governance of the Hochschule is therefore necessary in order to rewrite the rules on the basis of positive and negative experiences.

Moreover, since many professors are Cistercians, their course of study (Doctorate, *Habilitation*, etc.) depends on the Abbot. These professors have to face the obedience to their Abbot on the one hand and the demands of academic activity in terms of teaching and research on the other hand. This inevitably affects the programming of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz. This would also require greater autonomy in the management of the Hochschule, at least for the creation of an adequate group of qualified professors.

During the visit, many expressed praise for the appointment of the current Rector, who is non-Cistercian. The Dicastery for Culture and Education has approved his mandate for four years. His professionalism and love for the institution, combined with his objective distanced view, will help to address the problems of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz in the best possible way. It is to be hoped that the (new) statutes can define that the appointment of the new Rector will be deliberated in advance by an academical committee such as the Academic Senate or the Representative Conference.

Other Annotations

1. The Financing

A delicate point concerns the sustainable financing of the Hochschule. Currently, in addition to the staffing of the Abbey Heiligenkreuz, a large part of the funding comes from donations. There are about 15,000 donors, of whom 900–1,000 are regular donors. Third party funding is underdeveloped.

It is recommended that a clear and future-oriented strategic plan be drawn up covering various aspects of the life of the Hochschule: from the salaries of the professors to research projects, publications, etc.

2. The Institutes

The Hochschule has eleven Institutes, which are headed by professors. The aims of these Institutes are varied: nine of them focus on the teaching of theological disciplines; two of them, on the other hand, are mainly concerned with the organisation of conferences and research (*Europainstitut für Zisterzienserforschung* and *Europäische Institut für Philosophie und Religion*).

It should be noted that professors who do not have a permanent position at the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz, but have only taught one course, can also be appointed to an Institute. A second observation is that only three Directors of the Institutes are professors with *Habilitation*. Therefore, a higher qualification is needed for these Directors. In addition, more dialogue within each Institute and between Institutes would be appropriate. The presence of numerous honorary professors makes long-term planning of teaching and research difficult.

3. The Library

The library of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz is highly appreciated for its section dedicated to Cistercian spirituality. It seems to be sufficient for a first access to theological studies.

However, it does not yet seem equipped for studies at a high academic level. Additional efforts need to be made, including the recruitment of dedicated staff, to expand the library collection in the field of Theology, also with electronic means.

4. The Secretariat

The work of the secretariat should be noted with appreciation. There is a “family atmosphere” which enables students to solve various problems during their studies at the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz.

Although overly protective behaviour towards students should be avoided, the atmosphere of affability and professionalism observed during the visit should be maintained.

5. The Mediencampus

The commitment of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz to the media is much appreciated. The facilities of Mediencampus (see Studio1133) show how much strength and energy is invested in the training of persons who know how to communicate the faith through the media: television, radio and web.

6. The STD

The identity of the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz seems to be well established and quite appropriate to the current educational offer. During the visit, the desire was expressed to achieve the academic status of a Doctorate in Theology (STD).

The required standard needs improvement in a number of areas: a sufficient number of professors with *Habilitation*, a well-equipped library, clear management of the Hochschule

with appropriate autonomy, etc. At present, the Hochschule Heiligenkreuz can rely on the Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät of the University of Vienna to benefit occasionally from the academic elements that are beyond its reach. Moreover, this link can become a model for other links with Universities outside Austria, with which the Hochschule can cooperate on individual academic projects.

September 18, 2023