



LETTER
TO ALL EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS



Vatican City, February 22, 2010

4/2010

To Rectors and Deans
of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties
and, for information,
to Rectors of Universities

As announced in the Circular Letter No.7 from the Congregation for Catholic Education, dated 12 June 2009, this AVEPRO letter aims at establishing a first direct contact with all European ecclesiastical faculties and universities and giving some practical information on quality assurance procedures and their implications within institutions.

AVEPRO was created in 2007 by the Holy See following its adhesion to the Bologna Process in order to assess and promote quality in ecclesiastical higher education institutions. The primary role of the Agency therefore is that of fostering quality culture in ecclesiastical universities and faculties and proposing instruments and procedures to that aim.

As President of this new Agency, I am happy to write at a time when its structures are acquiring full shape, thus preparing it to better confront the task it has received, in collaboration with ecclesiastical institutions. A Pilot Project was carried out in 2008 with 8 European faculties to experiment and adapt evaluation procedures. It enabled us to prepare a number of basic guidelines which are already being used in our work with the Roman Pontifical Universities and a few other institutions. Questionnaires for internal evaluation are being collected and reviewed to be offered as templates. The web site is well under way and we hope it will become a useful means of information and communication. The Board of Directors has recently been appointed by the Holy Father and had its first meeting in on November 26, 2009, its members being:

- Sjur BERGAN, Head of the Department of Higher Education at the Council of Europe
- Prof Paolo BLASI, former Rector of the University of Florence
- Mons. Piero CODA, President of the Italian Theological Association
- Fr Philippe CURBELIÉ, Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic Institute of Toulouse
- Dr Jan SADLAK, Vicerektor for International Cooperation at the School of Social Psychology and Human Sciences of Warsaw (SWPS), and President of the International Observatory on Classification and Academic Excellence (IREG)
- Fr Friedrich BECHINA, F.S.O., Official from the University Department at the Congregation for Catholic Education



- Christian BOCK, doctoral student in Fundamental Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University
- Dr Annick JOHNSON, M. Id., Director of the Agency.

The Board meeting was an opportunity to have an overview of the work done and the strategic plan and to receive new, precious insights from them on various points. We are now looking forward to the appointment of the Scientific Committee as the last step in setting up the formal structure of the Agency.

While there is no doubt that quality is an everyday concern in the work of academic institutions, it is our hope that the Bologna Process, the common European Higher Education Area, and new procedures for improvement, can represent an opportunity in your mission in the service of the Church. The quality of the training offered to those attending your institutions is certainly of vital importance, especially if backed by good research, “since the destiny of society and of the Church itself is intimately linked with the progress of young people pursuing higher studies” (*Gravissimum educationis* 10). You are preparing those who will transmit the Christian revelation, and the old and new findings derived from the inexhaustible treasure of its wisdom, to a world deeply in need of it. In their activities of teaching and research, academic institutions should always favour the search for truth, through intellectual effort and honesty, and transmit to those who attend them a capacity for dialogue, in the sense in which Card. John-Henry Newman defines the University as: “the place in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonist activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.” (*Historical Sketches*, vol. 3 Longman Green and Co, p.16). The Holy See has entered the Bologna Process, on the initiative of the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Secretariat of State, with the strong certainty that such an open space of dialogue between countries is also a privileged area for a necessary, ever-renewed dialogue between reason and faith, between culture and religion.

AVEPRO has the task of helping institutions to fulfil their aims in the challenging conditions of today’s world, trying to make out new possible developments and new responses to difficult situations and matters of concern, with a view to continuous quality enhancement. Such a work is to be done in a spirit of collaboration, respecting the principle of subsidiarity, central in the life of the Church and also in the Bologna Process, according to which: “the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself” (*European Standards and Guidelines*, 2007, p.13). The main orientations which will guide us in our joint effort are those given in the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* (April 15, 1979), complemented by the norms of applications (“Ordinationes”) of the Congregation for Catholic Education, the norms provided in the Circular letters of the same Congregation about the Bologna Process as well as the statutes in which institutions define their objectives. Our QA procedures also follow the common approach agreed on by the European Ministers for Education in 2005 (Bergen Summit) for the European Higher Education Area, more particularly the *European Standards and Guidelines*. In addition the Congregation is working on a Handbook about the culture of quality in the context of Ecclesiastical Higher Education.

A first impulse and a few indications were offered to institutions by the Congregation for Catholic Education, more particularly in its third Circular Letter regarding the Bologna Process (12



July 2005), in which a number of guidelines were given concerning internal quality assurance, and more recently in Letter No 7. We know that a number of institutions have started pursuing quality with a systematic approach following these indications, and that some have also been solicited to do so by the various states in the countries where they are located. Others may feel they are in need of some more information and training in order to implement these procedures.

To help you get a more accurate knowledge of the practical details of evaluation and the quality systems to be set up, you will find the following attached documents:

- Circular letters 3 (with annex) and 7 from the Congregation for Catholic Education
- Briefing Note to Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties: an overall presentation of AVEPRO and the way in which a quality culture can be promoted in ecclesiastical higher education institutions.
- Guidelines for Internal Evaluation: a more precise description of the various steps to be taken by institutions to set up their own structures and procedures of quality assurance. The external evaluation will come after this stage.

This and more documentation will soon be available on the AVEPRO web site. We hope it will be of help to understand the motives, aims and scope of quality assurance as well as the way in which fruitful procedures can be set up in your institutions. We also look forward to meeting you at the conference planned in October by the Congregation on the recent developments of the Bologna Process in ecclesiastical institutions. You will be informed about it by the Congregation in the near future.

As there will be many diverse situations and levels of advancement according to institutions and countries, we ask you to kindly fill in the attached questionnaire and send it back by March 20th, 2010. It will greatly help us to organise work, possible training seminars and a calendar for future external evaluations. You will receive further indications but you may obviously start or go on with the phase of internal evaluation as indicated in the Circular letters from the Congregation and the attached AVEPRO guidelines.

I do hope this will mark the beginning of a fruitful collaboration between AVEPRO and all institutions and in the union of prayer I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr Franco Imoda S.J.
President