

Franco IMODA

## QUALITY AS A DIMENSION OF ECCLESIALITY\*

*Considering the national and international academic scene and the challenge posed by the evaluation and promotion of quality, we should continuously ask how to place our universities (and, consequently, the academic community) as a complex system included in the Church. Universities cannot exist but within a situation well expressed in the concept/reality of sacrament: as such, they may be expected to become particularly sensitive areas in which the signs of the times are recognized and responded to.*

As the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Agenzia della Santa Sede per la Valutazione e la Promozione della Qualità delle Università e Facoltà Ecclesiastiche, or AVEPRO) celebrates its first ten years of activity, it may be important not only to ask how it has worked and what purpose it has served, but also to consider its significance—and that of its goal of quality evaluation and promotion—with regard to the *nature* and the *mission* of our institutions. Is AVEPRO's activity simply an expression of a commitment to the international community or does it also express a value representative of Church institutions of higher education as an anthropological entity in which our humanity can be fully realized?

With its growing experience, AVEPRO seems to have succeeded, despite some initial resistance, in finding forms of activity which are regarded (*post factum*) by Church universities and faculties as an opportunity for improving their accountability and for greater development. However, it seems that the *quality process* has also quite frequently presented a temptation to engage in a purely technical change considered as something which 'needs to be done.'

In the challenge we are facing, as in the case of any challenge, what seems to constitute limitations may also lead to asking broader and deeper questions: For whom and to what purpose are we responding to this particular challenge? What is the relationship between the one inherent in the quality process and the nature of a faculty whose mission is expressed in 'being the Church'? Which of the aspects of an ecclesiastical institution may be those related to quality

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\* For an earlier version of this article see [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322538936\\_La\\_Qualita\\_come\\_dimensione\\_della\\_Ecclesialita\\_in\\_Educatio\\_Catholica\\_Congregazione\\_per\\_l%27Educazione\\_Cattolica\\_III\\_3\\_pp\\_63-77](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322538936_La_Qualita_come_dimensione_della_Ecclesialita_in_Educatio_Catholica_Congregazione_per_l%27Educazione_Cattolica_III_3_pp_63-77).

and how should quality be conceived? Is ‘baptizing’ those aspects merely an *external rite*, that of obtaining approval from the competent authority, or is it a *transforming experience*, a dynamic process which testifies to their ‘being the Church’ and having a specific nature and mission? Can and should we therefore go beyond mere ‘recognition of degrees/titles’ or ‘fulfilment of requirements for financial support’?

In this sense, it seems important to reiterate the need to avoid dwelling (which is a common temptation) on the strictly ‘academic’ aspect of quality, however complex it might be, but to look at the *management* of an institution as a whole.

In outlining the mission of ecclesiastical institutions, the Church documents (Apostolic Constitutions *Veritatis Gaudium*<sup>1</sup> and *Sapientia Christiana*<sup>2</sup>) remind us that, in addition to the teaching/training of students and research, what is commonly known in international circles as the *third mission* is also important: “to collaborate intensely, in accordance with their own nature and in close communion with the Hierarchy, with the local and the universal Church [on] the whole work of evangelization.”<sup>3</sup> *Veritatis Gaudium* has also recalled four fundamental goals of the Church institutions of higher education, i.e., evangelization, dialogue, transdisciplinarity, and networking.

While fulfilling the task of evaluating and promoting quality,<sup>4</sup> AVEPRO has faced numerous challenges, and continues this process. First and foremost, there is the complex challenge posed by the situation in which it works. In fact, the ecclesiastical educational institutions in Europe alone are located in twenty-three countries, in which fifteen different languages are spoken; on the global level, the Agency operates in eighty-three nations (twenty-five in Africa, eighteen in the Americas, fifteen in Asia, and two in Oceania).

The institutions AVEPRO embraces with its activities vary significantly in terms of size, organization, specific mission, cultural background, and national

<sup>1</sup> See Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, January 29, 2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/01/29/180129c.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, April 17, 1979, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_15041979\\_sapientia-christiana.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15041979_sapientia-christiana.html).

<sup>3</sup> *Veritatis Gaudium*, Article 3, Paragraph 3. Burton R. Clark discusses the following relevant factors of development/quality: strengthened steering core, expanded developmental periphery, diversified funding base, stimulated academic heartland, and integrated entrepreneurial culture. See Burton R. Clark, *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways to Transformation* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 1998). See also Steven C. Bahls, *Shared Governance in Times of Change: A Practical Guide for Universities and Colleges* (Washington, DC: AGB Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> For further reading see Riccardo Cinquegrani and Valerio Napoleoni, “La valutazione nelle istituzioni accademiche ecclesiastiche: un’introduzione,” *Seminarium* 53, nos. 1–2 (2013): 119–33.

context, and can be subdivided into four main groups: pontifical universities; independent educational institutions including one or more faculties; institutions with one or more faculties within Catholic universities; institutions with one or more faculties within state-owned universities. The external evaluations conducted between 2011 and 2017 involved a total of fifty-five universities and one hundred and eleven other institutions/faculties.

In the present reflection, while keeping in mind these levels of complexity, we shall focus on five issues: (1) the definition of quality, (2) the triangle of ‘competencies’ and interdependence, (3) the areas of focus, (4) the Church framework of reference for governance, (5) quality culture and institutional leadership.

### THE DEFINITION OF QUALITY

It is clear that “with the Bologna Process, the quality of university education has gained an increasing importance and today, with the reorganization of studies into cycles that has begun in Europe, quality has probably become the main objective.”<sup>5</sup>

Without a doubt, quality is a complex concept, and an extremely controversial one, defined in a variety of ways. At least six definitions of quality have been identified by Lee Harvey<sup>6</sup>:

(1) Quality understood as *exceptional* refers to the traditional concept of ‘excellence,’ usually operationalized as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed.

(2) Quality seen as *perfection, or consistency*, focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero defects and getting things right first time.

(3) Quality evaluated in terms of *fitness for purpose* (aim, mission) refers to the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements or (in education) institution-defined to reflect the institutional mission (or course objectives).

(4) Describing quality as *fitness of the purpose*, one does not define quality *per se*, but is concerned with whether an organization’s quality-related intentions correspond with its purpose, also considering the context.

<sup>5</sup> Alfredo Squaroni, “Qualità, assicurazione della qualità, valutazione della qualità, accreditamento della formazione universitaria,” *Il Mulino*, no. 2 (2013), <https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.12828/74734> (translation mine).

<sup>6</sup> See Lee Harvey, “Evaluation for What?” *Teaching in Higher Education* 7, no. 3 (2002): 245–64.

(5) Quality as *monetary value* (investment) focuses on return on investment or expenditure. At the heart of the value-for-money approach in education is the notion of accountability. Public services, including education, are expected to be accountable to the funders.

(6) Definition of quality in terms of *transformation* refers to a process of change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of the transformation of the participant. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer.

Following careful reflection, it was agreed that the definition of quality that most suits the ends of AVEPRO is “fitness for purpose (aim, mission),” but due attention must be paid also to the “fitness *of* the purpose.” Hence, quality can be judged in relation to the extent to which an activity or service achieves the aims expressed in the institution’s vision and mission.

#### THE TRIANGLE OF COMPETENCIES AND INTERDEPENDENCE

It is therefore of great importance to take into serious consideration not only the academic educational contents and processes—which remain fundamental and central—but also the ways in which the educational process is ‘governed.’ These ways must conform to the considerations regarding each institution’s and faculty’s ‘being the Church’ and to the aims indicated in *Sapientia Christiana* (teaching, research, service to the Church/society) and *Veritatis Gaudium* (evangelization, dialogue, transdisciplinarity, networking).

The situation of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education which are called to ‘be the Church’ can be represented as a ‘triangle’ involving three ‘subjects’: the institution in question, the higher governing bodies (the Secretariat of State, the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Episcopal Conferences), and the evaluation agency (AVEPRO).

Three types of relationships between the subjects involved in the triangle may be identified: firstly, and foremostly, the relationship between the institutions (universities or faculties) which enjoy institutional autonomy and the higher governing bodies which regulate the activities of these institutions; secondly, the relationship between the governing bodies and the evaluation agency, which enjoys the independence of judgement and operational autonomy, but conducts its activity to support the governing bodies (by aiming at the improvement of the institutions) and for the purpose of their consultation; lastly, the relationship between the agency and the institutions which define the modes of evaluation (internal and external) and its schedule.

## TEN AREAS OF FOCUS

In the light of the experience gained over the ten years of the activity of AVEPRO, ten particular areas of focus can be identified: (1) reinforcing a comprehensive quality culture, (2) governance, organization, and transparency, (3) teaching, (4) teaching staff, (5) resources, (6) ‘openness,’ (7) the third-cycle evaluation, (8) the Hirsch index and affiliations, (9) recognition of qualifications and employability of graduates, (10) communication and information.

## THE CHURCH AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR QUALITY GOVERNANCE

The quality processes have called particular attention to the function of governance. How can one approach this aspect of the nature and mission of the institutions of higher education—and therefore of their quality—in the context of other Church institutions?

In contrast to previous centuries, the problems we are confronted with are, as Otto Semmelroth has suggested, rather ecclesiological than Christological in nature.<sup>7</sup> In this context, one might refer to the notion of the Church as sacrament. The notion in question, developed by the Second Vatican Council by applying the concept of sacrament (analogical to that used in the interpretation of seven sacraments) to the Church as a whole, must involve three fundamental categories: *res tantum*, *sacramentum tantum*, and *res et sacramentum*.

The first two categories: *res tantum* and *sacramentum tantum* indicate the two fundamental dimensions of the Church and refer, respectively, to the charism of the Church (the fundamental grace and love of God which is present in the Church, and which nurtures and enlivens it), and to the Church visible in signs (the Church which exists in time and comprises institutions, structures, and communities, and is therefore regulated by psychosocial laws characteristic of its particular components).

To affirm that the Church is *res et sacramentum* simply means to say that the Church cannot be considered but in its duality: there is no Kingdom of God, on the one hand, and the social incarnation of the Church, on the other, but the Church is the unity embracing these two aspects.

Hence, while speaking of the abovementioned ‘ecclesiological problems, or dimensions,’ we focus on a possible reductionist approach to the Church.

<sup>7</sup> See Otto Semmelroth, *Church and Sacrament*, trans. Emily Schlossberger (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1965); Otto Semmelroth, “La Chiesa come sacramento di salvezza”, in *Mysterium salutis: Nuovo corso di dogmatica come teologia della storia della salvezza*, ed. Johannes Feiner, Magnus Löhrer, and Tommaso Federici, vol. 4, 1. (Brescia: Queriniana, 1972), 377–437.

This can take either of the two forms: the *monophysite* one, which sees the Church as solely *charismatic* (and therefore subject to psychosocial laws and processes to a lesser degree, as if the Spirit active within the body of the Church could operate without human beings); or the *Nestorian* form, which, in contrast, tends to consider the Church solely from the *social* perspective (and therefore focuses exclusively on the laws, institutions, and authorities, separating the Church in the sense of an institution from the Church as a community).

By undermining the complexity of the Church and its unitary nature, the two forms of the reductionist approach would be inadequate in facing the challenges posed by academic institutions and their 'quality.' The Church and its institutions—describing themselves as catholic and ecclesiastical—never cease to be *res et sacramentum*, rather than give priority either to *res tantum* or to *sacramentum tantum*.

The complexity of the Church means that one needs to look at universities—even if they are considered as Church institutions—from both the theological and the psychosocial perspectives. Thus it is particularly important to inquire what *sacramentum* means in this context.

#### DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY CULTURE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Modern sociology distinguishes between two aspects of society: *societas* (in the sense of German *Gesellschaft*, the institutional aspect of society, its organizations and structures, acting as an intermediary in human relationships, e.g., the nation in which one lives and works) and *communitas* (in the sense of German *Gemeinschaft*, the personal aspect of society, society on a 'human scale,' focused on basic face to face relations, e.g., a family, a circle, a group, or a village).

Social psychology reminds us further that, in order to exist, each human group (community or society), and therefore also the Church (and its institutions), needs to fulfil certain indispensable functions: (1) the *political* function (that of *goal attainment*): to achieve the aims the Church sets for itself, it needs to develop a system of exercising power and authority, (2) the *economic* function (that of *adaptation*): the Church looks for and manages various resources and tools necessary for its survival, (3) the *legal* function (that of *integration*): the Church prepares instruments to resolve internal tensions and divisions emerging in it, (4) the *motivational* function (related to communion, or *participation*, and value): the Church provides motivation for belonging to a group, e.g., due to shared interests, needs, or ideals.



These four functions are fulfilled by a complex structure comprising the following systems and aspects: (1) the *external* system, i.e., the organization of a group in relation to the external environment; an external system makes it possible for the group to act upon the environment, (2) the *internal* system, i.e., the internal organization of a group aimed at achieving a balance of forces within it, (3) the *instrumental* aspect which refers to maintaining the means enabling the Church's pursuit of its ends (the visible structure of the Church), (4) the *consummatory* or *expressive* aspect which regards the use of ends, e.g., being able to enjoy the experience of being a community (the people of God).

In the light of the vision of the Church as sacrament, it is important to consider how the above description, which expresses the social (sociological) aspect of the Church, corresponds to the view proposed by the theologian John Courtney Murray, and in particular to the four components of the Church he identifies as those in which authority, and therefore quality, can be placed (*koinonia*—community, *diakonia*—service, people of God, and visible society).<sup>8</sup>

#### EVERY DULLES'S 'MODELS' OF THE CHURCH

In order to understand the place of authority in the Church, and particularly in its social dimension, it might be useful to refer to the 'models' of the Church proposed by the theologian Avery Dulles. In its addressing the basic aspects of the life of the Church conceived as *res et sacramentum*, each of these models corresponds to one of the fundamental functions outlined above (i.e., adaptation, goal achievement, integration, and motivation).<sup>9</sup>

In particular, Dulles speaks of the Church as: (1) *servant* (in the *political* sphere): in the Church this model does not refer exclusively to power, but connotes a tension, inseparable from the exercise of authority, between power and the service of love to society, (2) *institution*: it is related to the need to bring order to the Church, to adapt it to the environment, and to manage its (not only economic) resources, (3) *herald*: this model refers to the ethical/moral component of values, including spiritual values, proclaimed via testimony and spread through the presence of the charismatic power which necessarily becomes law (hence the tension between its spirit and its letter), (4) *mystical communion*: incarnated in history, the Church calls for a particular kind of

<sup>8</sup> See John C. Murray, "Freedom, Authority, Community," *America* 115, no. 3 (1966): 734–41.

<sup>9</sup> See Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974). He actually identifies five models, considering the first as a comprehensive entity related to the dimension of mystery/sacrament characterized as a "symbol" or a "symbolic model."

motivation for belonging to it, a motivation rooted in charity rather than in particular interests or needs.

In this context, bearing in mind the limitations of any brief reflection, one might propose the following comparison between the Church and the world of ecclesiastical universities (table 1).

Table 1. Comparison between the Church and ecclesiastical universities

The Church as	University as
Institution: organization	Institution: organization, resources, management
Servant: authority/hierarchy	Service: authority/hierarchy/leadership
Mystical communion: belonging/motivation	Community: belonging/motivation
Herald: values, norms, laws	System: values, norms, laws

The aspect that interests us most is that of quality as a dimension of ecclesiality, as an expression and realization of the Church as sacrament. The Church, and thus any ecclesial institution, including a university or a faculty, should express all the richness of its being sacrament, and as such, it must be considered as a complex whole, irreducible to any one of its aspects. In fact, thanks to its unitary nature, the Church remains in each of its dimensions the sacrament of the presence of God.

In our effort to understand the quality aspect of an institution (a university or a faculty) and its evaluation, we may also refer to an important contribution by the sociologist of religion Thomas O'Dea who has identified *five dilemmas* (or tensions) present in any social body, or community.<sup>10</sup> The description of these dilemmas may clarify—with a surprising pertinency—the dynamic aspect of the abovementioned 'models' of the Church. It is not difficult to grasp how the resolution of the five dilemmas might be relevant to the quality of Church institutions of higher education.

In this context, one can observe that the 'models' proposed by Dulles should not be seen as static, as they embrace a dialectic, an internal tension (perhaps never completely resolved), which becomes the basis upon which the exercise of authority can manifest both the richness inherent in its mission and its fragility.

The dilemmas/tensions described by O'Dea are the following:

(1) The *dilemma of symbolization* is a meta-dilemma which will always persist in the Church being sacrament, and take the form of the problem, or

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1, no. 1 (1961): 30–9.



challenge, of how a transcendent message can be effectively made temporal and visible.

(2) The *dilemma of mixed motivation* concerns the reasons for belonging to a religious group/institution. Even in relation to the Church as mystical communion, such reasons may be multiple and varied (some are religious in nature, while others are not, ranging from a quest to satisfy personal interests to a disinterested gift of self).

(3) The *dilemma of power* refers to the fact that the Church, while being a servant, is not exempt from experiencing the dynamic of power. As such, particularly in the exercise of its authority, the Church faces the tension between power and charitable service.

(4) The *administrative*, or *management dilemma* regards in particular the institutional aspect of the Church and the need for an organization to manage its means and resources, although this involves the risk of alienation (the Church becoming an end for itself).

(5) The *dilemma of delimitation* faced by the Church as a herald concerns concretization of the spirit, while remaining faithful to it, or the substitution of the law for the spirit.

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Considering the national and international academic scene and the challenge posed by the evaluation and promotion of quality, we should continuously ask how to place our universities (and, consequently, the academic community) as a complex system included in the Church. Universities cannot exist but within a situation well expressed in the concept/reality of *sacrament*: as such, they may be expected to become particularly sensitive areas in which the signs of the times are recognized and responded to.

Which of the specific characteristics of Church universities distinguish them from other institutions of higher education, or similar institutions serving educational, training, and research purposes? To what extent can a focus on quality aid *reflection* and, possibly, *action* leading to a progressive improvement in understanding the identity and fulfilling the mission of universities which describe themselves as ecclesiastical, or catholic?

Whenever our quality concerns refer to the type of governance implemented in a given institution, it may prove helpful to consider the anthropological framework.<sup>11</sup> In particular, in the light of our experience of the quality process, we may identify and, in a certain sense, reapply (especially in the context of

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<sup>11</sup> See Bahl s, *Shared Governance in Times of Change*.

the dilemmas discussed by O'Dea) numerous useful observations which have illuminated—and will continue to do so—various areas of our fragility and ones of strength, as well as opportunities open to us and threats we have to meet.

In other words, we may ask whether *authority* at our universities is managed in terms of service or of domination? Are institutional *resources*, be they economic, financial, human, and cultural, e.g., qualifications and competencies, considered (and become) ends for themselves or are they used as the means towards more universal ends? Are the *norms* regulating the institutional life of universities regarded simply as decrees and laws to be observed or as an expression of the 'spirit' communicating the most profound values of humanity? Is *belonging* to an institution, or community, motivated mainly by individual and utilitarian interests, or by the values which express the fullness of life of a person who can "fully find himself ... through a sincere gift of himself"?<sup>12</sup>

The quality evaluation and promotion may be seen and lived through as a complex and demanding process focusing on the weaknesses, but also on the strengths; it may be faced as a threat, but also as a promise, as a challenge, but also as a great opportunity.

It is in the light of this possible perspective that we can mention the *fundamental satisfaction* on the part of the institutions (faculties, universities, but also bishops-chancellors, and the Congregation for Catholic Education) which have become seriously engaged in the cooperation with AVEPRO: an institution whose name indicates not only the *evaluation* of quality, but also—and even more fundamentally—its *promotion*.

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<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*," Section 24, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

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## ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

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Reflecting on the ten-year activity of the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO), the author addresses the ways in which a focus on quality might help better understand the identity of Catholic universities and design activities which enable better fulfillment of their mission. Pointing to the complex reality of the Church, he stresses that ecclesiastical institutions of higher education

must be looked at from both the theological and psychosocial perspectives. He refers, among others, to Avery Dulles's description of the models of the Church and Thomas O'Dea's classification of dilemmas faced by Church institutions. In particular, he discusses the identity of such institutions in terms of the theological category of *res et sacramentum* and points to their distinguishing characteristics, giving particular attention to the issue of authority, or leadership, conceived of as service.

Keywords: AVEPRO, quality management, the Church as sacrament, leadership in the Church

Contact: Pontifical Gregorian University, Piazza della Pilotta 4, 00187 Rome, Italy  
E-mail: imoda@unigre.it

Franco IMODA, Jakość wymiarem eklezjalności  
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W świetle dziesięcioletniego doświadczenia działalności Agencji Stolicy Apostolskiej do Spraw Oceny i Promocji Jakości Kształcenia na Uniwersytetach i Wydziałach Kościelnych (AVEPRO), autor omawia wpływ perspektywy jakości na rozumienie tożsamości uniwersytetów katolickich oraz planowanie działań umożliwiających coraz lepszą realizację ich misji. Wskazując na złożoność rzeczywistości, jaką jest Kościół, podkreśla konieczność refleksji nad kościelnym szkolnictwem wyższym zarówno z teologicznego, jak i psychospołecznego punktu widzenia; odwołuje się między innymi do dokonanego przez Avery'ego Dullesa opisu modeli Kościoła oraz do klasyfikacji dylematów, przed którymi stają instytucje kościelne, zaproponowanej przez Thomasa O'Dea. Tożsamość tych instytucji analizuje za pomocą teologicznej kategorii *res et sacramentum* i przedstawia ich cechy charakterystyczne, szczególną uwagę poświęcając kwestii sprawowania władzy rozumianego jako służba.

Słowa kluczowe: AVEPRO, zarządzanie jakością, Kościół jako sakrament, przywództwo w Kościele

Kontakt: Università Pontificia Gregoriana, Piazza della Pilotta 4, 00187 Rzym, Włochy  
E-mail: imoda@unigre.it