World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions: Challenges and Promises of Quality Assurance in Theological Education. Ecumenical and Multi-Contextual Inquiries Johannesburg.

Standards for Quality Assurance and Improvement in Europe

Reinhold Bernhardt, University of Basle, Switzerland

In the following presentation I leave out all the questions related to *accreditation* of institutions and programmes. I also set aside all questions related to assurance and development of quality in the fields of *research* and *administration*. Instead I focus on *education*, i.e., on teaching and learning. The debate on quality standards for education in general and theological education in particular refers not primarily to the *contents* of teaching but to the *pedagogical* aspects in a broad sense, which comprises not only teaching classes but all the components of learning processes: personal and financial resources, the qualifications of the teaching staff, the development of programmes and curricula, the definition of teaching objectives and requirements for achieving degrees, learning resources (libraries and computer-facilities), student support, information for prospective students, and so on. Teaching and learning processes can be studied under the aspects of the precondition (respectively resources), the structures, the performance, and the outcome. The outcome can be determined in terms of the achievement of knowledge or in a broader sense in terms of achieving competencies, which include skills, abilities, attitudes, forms of communication, and so on. Quality-management applies to all of those dimensions. It refers to planning, performance, and evaluation of the learning processes. Evaluation consists in permanent monitoring and assessment of all the dimensions of the process and it can be performed using internal (self-evaluation) and external (peer-evaluation) methods of measurements.

A) The institutional framework

Quality management depends on the system in which theological education is organized. Thus we have to take a look first at that systemic framework.

Theological education in the German speaking countries of Europe – on which I will focus – is split into an academic-studies part and the more practical part. The practical education for prospective *teachers* is conducted by state institutions, the practical education of *pastors* by church-run seminaries. The *academic* studies in theology on the other hand are normally performed at state universities. Thus quality assurance and improvement in theological

education is part of the quality management of the state universities. Theological faculties define their quality standards within the framework developed by the university as a whole. And the universities are embedded first in national networks of universities and secondly in European associations of academic institutions, such as the "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA). The "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" issued "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (Bergen 2005) and the universities have to comply with those standards.

Theological faculties are located in a triangle of academia, the churches, and the scientific community. The expectations from those three authorities are different and accordingly the quality standards which they propose vary. Churches, for example, are interested that at least the classic canon of theological disciplines (Biblical Studies, History of the Church and of Theology, Systematic and Practical Theology) is taught comprehensively. For the Roman Catholic church canonical law is also important.[1] The universities are interested in applying formal standards and procedures to all the faculties, which allow a precise cost-benefit analysis. The scientific community is interested in publications and in the output of excellent young scholars. In the interference of those three fields of force the theological faculties have to determine and apply standards of quality. But they are not free to set their standards independently, as the churches can do for the practical training of prospective pastors. The faculties can only render the rather general norms set by the university administration more precisely and apply them to their own needs, conditions, and structures.

A theological seminary run by a church (like a Presbyterian seminary for example) is able to set different norms of quality than an academic faculty can do. The theological seminary, for example, can regard spiritual growth of the students, or loyalty to a certain confession or to a certain way of theological thinking as an important objective to achieve. Its quality management then will consist in selecting a staff and creating a curriculum which guarantees that those aims can be reached. Quality management will focus on how effective those measures are, in terms of the intended purpose of the educational process.

A theological faculty, on the other hand, will focus on more intellectual qualifications and accordingly will consider quality as a matter of improving cognitive skills. Developing quality standards first of all requires determination of the *qualifications* which should be achieved (by

---

[1] See: Apostolic Constitution "Sapientia Christiana"
  (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15041979_sapientia-christiana_en.html), and: Norm of application, § 51.

"qualifications" I don't mean degrees but competencies): What knowledge should be transferred? Which skills are desirable? What is the supposed outcome of the educational process?

At a theological faculty of a state university the professors are expected to train not only pastors for the ministry but also teachers for public schools, scholars who strive for academic positions, and students from other disciplines who come to theology classes in order to collect some credit points. Thus it is required to train more the "brain" and the less the "heart" and the "hand" of the students. Spiritual development is not, and is not allowed to be, part of the curriculum.

That may be regarded as a disadvantage of our system of theological education. Its advantage, on the other hand, lies in its openness to other academic disciplines and to the secular society, in its high intellectual standards, and its striving for critical reflection.

I summarize the sketched system in the following scheme:
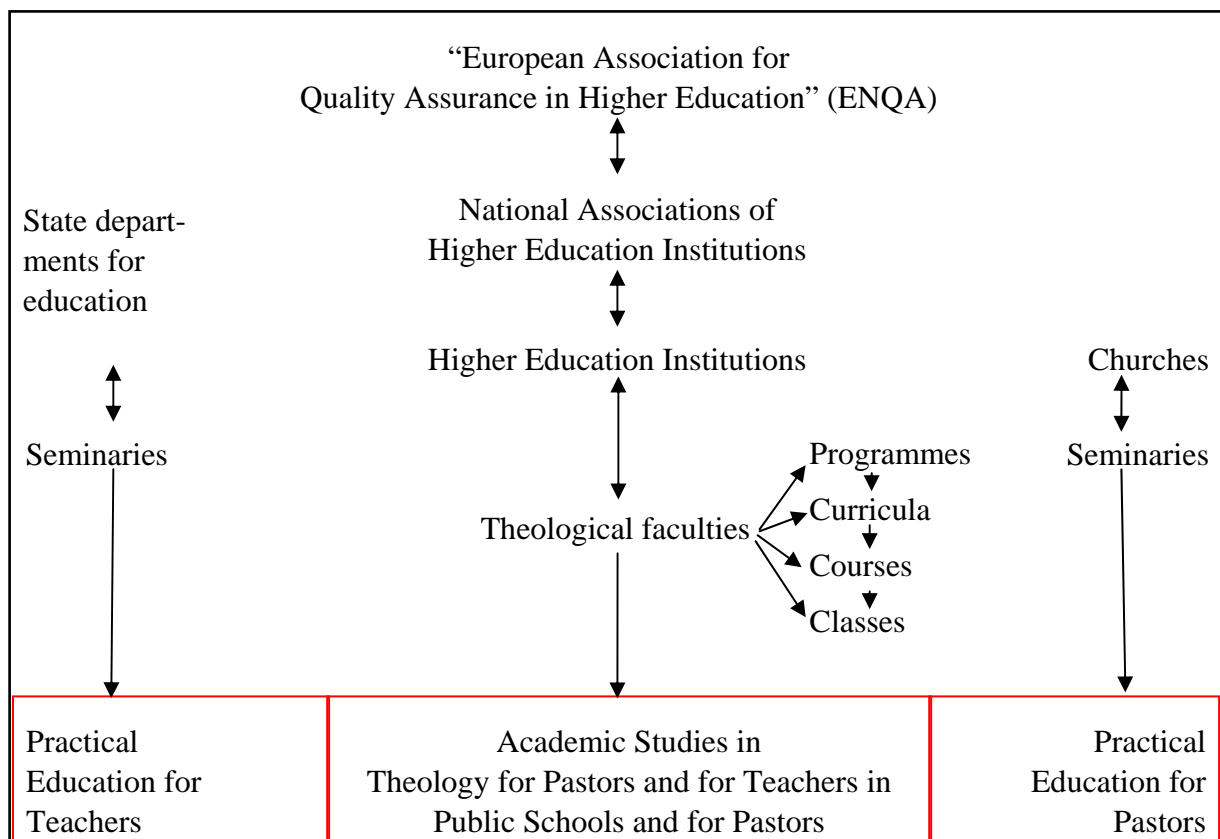
In the following points of my presentation I focus on *academic* studies in theology and refer to the different institutional levels on which questions of quality assurance and enhancement are debated. I begin with the highest level.

B) The European level: Quality-standards of the "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA)

The ENQA defined seven standards and guidelines for (internal) quality assurance within higher education institutions. I quote and summarize them:[2]

1. "Institutions should have a *policy* and associated *procedures* for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a *strategy* for the continuous enhancement of quality."[3]

2. Programmes and awards: "Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards." They are expected to develop and publish intended learning outcomes; to pay attention to curriculum and programme design and content; to specify needs of different modes of delivery (e.g., full time, part-time, distance-learning, e-learning) and types of higher education (e.g., academic, vocational, professional), to ensure the availability of appropriate learning resources. They should guarantee that programme approval procedures are developed; that the progress and achievements of students is monitored; and that the programmes are periodically reviewed. They should try to get regular feedback from students, employers, labour market representatives, and other relevant organisations.

3. Assessment of students: "Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently." The achievement of the intended learning outcomes has to be permanently measured. The assessment procedures should have clear and appropriate criteria for marking. The assessment should not rely on the judgements of single examiners and should be subject to administrative verification checks. Thus not only teaching but also testing and examination processes are to be included in the quality assurance and improvement procedures.

4. Quality of teaching staff: "Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so." Teachers need to be qualified not only with respect to the subjects they are teaching, but also pedagogically.

---

[2] http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20%282%29.pdf, 16-19.
[3] Emphasis mine.

They must have the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students. The staff recruitment and appointment procedures must ensure that all new staff have those competences. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills. Poor teachers are to be removed from their teaching duties if they are not able to improve their skills.

5. Learning resources and student support: "Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered." Libraries, computing facilities and human support in the form of tutors, counselors, and other advisers are to be provided and permanently improved. The effectiveness of the support services is to be routinely monitored.

6. Information systems: "Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities." They need to develop institutional self-knowledge. That means to collect data about: student progression and success rates, employability of graduates, students' satisfaction with their programmes, effectiveness of teachers, profile of the student population, learning resources available and their costs, and so on.

7. Public information: "Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering." Prospective students should be informed about the programmes, their intended learning outcomes, the qualifications the institution award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the learning opportunities available to their students.

C) The level of the national associations of higher education: "The Swiss University Conference"

In most European countries there are national associations of universities; in the case of Switzerland it is the Swiss University Conference (SUK/CUS), which issued guidelines for quality assurance in 2006.[4] The universities are required to develop and publish a strategy and a working system for quality assurance and enhancement, and to establish a culture of quality. The central pillars of it are:

---

[4] Richtlinien für die Qualitätssicherung an den schweizerischen universitären Hochschulen (Qualitätssicherungs-Richtlinien) vom 7. Dezember 2006 (http://www.cus.ch/wDeutsch/publikationen/richtlinien/index.php).

- The periodic (internal) *evaluation* of (a) teaching processes, programmes, and curricula, (b) the procedures for assessing the students, (c) the results of teaching, research and services and (d) resources, (e) equal gender participation and (f) the infrastructure of education.

- *Human resource development* by continuing pedagogical education of the teaching staff, and support for the junior staff, especially of women.

- *Information-based planning*: The universities collect relevant data for all their strategic decisions concerning research, teaching programmes, and the recruitment and development of their staff.

- *Communication*: The universities report the procedures and results of their quality management inwardly to the different groups within the university and outwardly to the public.

Those regulations are a very formal "letter-of-intent." They do not suggest or require certain measures but initiate a process and create a framework of general key points. The particular universities have to implement them and render them more precisely.

D) The level of the universities: Evaluation of courses at the University of Basle.

In 2006 the University of Basle launched a quality enhancement programme.[5] Part of this programme involves the evaluation of classes. As one example of measures of quality control and development I pick that measure out of a much broader conception and take a look at the current debate, as it is recorded in a recent draft.[6] I want to show how the evaluation of courses is supposed to work and where its problems lie.[7]

The suggested procedure involves three groups of persons: teachers, students, and directors of studies, who are in charge of the curricula. Other stakeholders – like members of the scientific community or prospective employers – are not immediately involved, but their assumed perspectives should be taken into account. Every group has its own understanding of what quality is and how it could be assured, controlled, and enhanced. Quality standards for good

---

[5] http://qe.unibas.ch/

[6] Universität Basel: Standards der Durchführung und Verwendung von Lehrveranstaltungsevaluationen an der Universität Basel für die Basisevaluationsphase. Entwurf der Arbeitsgruppe Lehrevaluation vom 30.5.11.

[7] For the general view on evaluation not only of classes but of programmes see: Wolfgang Weirer: Qualität und Qualitätsentwicklung theologischer Studiengänge. Evaluierungsprozesse im Kontext kirchlicher und universitärer Anforderungen aus praktisch-theologischer Perspektive. Münster 2004 (= Kommunikative Theologie interdisziplinär Bd. 2).

practice in organizing learning processes cannot be set once for all times but have to be negotiated in an ongoing process. The decisive body is the teaching administration of the university in cooperation with representatives of the faculties.

Once the standards are set, then the actual teaching and learning processes have to be audited according to them. It must be determined whether the processes meet the standards, and if so, to what degree. Different procedures of indirect and direct evaluation are possible. Indirect evaluation uses appropriate means to assess student's learning success by testing whether they have reached the predefined learning objectives. Direct evaluation asks for students' estimation of the class. The draft I refer to focuses on the direct evaluation.

It requests first that teachers enter into a permanent dialogue with the students about their progress of learning. At the beginning of the semester they should present the teaching and learning objectives, offer means of receiving feedback and encourage the students to make use of that possibility. During the semester they should periodically ask the students whether their learning progress is proceeding successfully, and whether there are obstacles that impede the process or impulses that should be strengthened. Different forms of communication between the teachers and the students may be used: oral conversation, e-mail, questionnaire, or an online form. The University of Basle has developed an online tool which allows students to give a structured feedback anonymously to their teachers.

Second, the draft suggests that the teachers give feedback to the students. They should expound their view on the learning process and give hints to the students how to improve it.

The third suggestion is that the teachers ought to inform the director of studies of their respective faculties about the performance of the class, the feedback of the students and his/her own impression of the teaching and learning process, and receive a kind of supervision from him or her. In cases where the student feedback indicates continuing problems with a teacher, the director of studies must suggest measures to improve the didactic quality or the curricular conditions. For example, the size of the group can be reduced, the style of teaching changed, or the modes of examination modified. "Intervision" (mutual class visitations of teachers), supervision, or coaching can be recommended. If those suggestions do not lead to better results, the director of studies can inform the dean of the faculty, who then decides what further steps should be taken. In the worst case a poor teacher could be removed from teaching and entrusted with other tasks in the administration of the faculty or in research projects.

On the other hand, the faculties are encouraged to acknowledge and reward *good* practice in teaching. The results of those evaluations should have an influence on assigning temporary and permanent teaching positions and on the promotion of teachers.

The evaluation is not an end in itself, but is meant to influence the conception and performance of future courses. Thus evaluation and development of courses form a permanent circle.

Concerning the *practical realization* of the suggestions, many questions remain open. Should the director of studies rely on the information conveyed by the teacher? Or should he or she have access to the online-evaluation-system? Or should he/she get directly in touch with the students to discuss didactic problems with them? The permanent assessment of courses is in effect an assessment of the teacher. That may put the teacher under enormous pressure. Is the director of studies counselor or evaluator and judge? What is the role of the faculty administration and of the dean? How could a system of gratification and penalisation be established? And so on.

But the more crucial questions are: What will be the effects on the relationships within the faculty? How will the competition among the teaching staff influence collegiality? Will the attention given to the student's evaluations lead him/her to lower the requirements the students have to meet? Will the teachers be tempted to be everybody's darling? Will they customize the level of teaching to the weakest students in order to get good feedback from them?

The standards and guidelines issued by the ENQA, by the national association of higher education institutions, and by the universities are rather formal and applicable to all academic disciplines. They do not determine what quality means in regard to particular disciplines. They do not describe the best practises in theology, medical studies, jurisprudence, and so forth. Instead they suggest formal procedures and methods. Quality management includes all the means which assure and improve the teaching processes, measured by its outcome – which means: by the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with the intended qualification. Quality management aims at good practice. But what is good practice in theology? What is the intended qualification? What part of that qualification is knowledge and what part are the skills associated with that qualification? Those questions must be answered by the faculties. Thus I move now to the level of the particular faculties and focus on theological faculties. The discussion I am most familiar with is the discussion in my own faculty. Thus let me give you an impression of the way we dealt with the questions at stake.

E) The level of the theological faculties: Defining teaching objectives

In the course of the so-called Bologna reform (1999) we had to redesign our curricula and to define teaching objectives for all the modules of the programmes. In 2006 we elaborated a conception for quality assurance and development. It defines quality of education in the following areas: curricula, teaching, examinations, information, counseling, and continuing education. I will focus on the first three points.

(a) Curricula

- Academic proficiency: The theological education should strive for a high scholarly level, based on research, and aiming at imparting profound knowledge, relevant skills, and the ability of critical reflection to the students.

- Basic education and specialization: The students should gain solid knowledge of the basics in theology and get the opportunity to delve into fields of special interest. Teachers are encouraged to introduce the students to their own fields of research.

- Interdisciplinarity: Theological curricula are open to other academic disciplines, relate to them, and oblige the students to gain a certain amount of credit points from other faculties.

- Relevance for current social issues: The curricula must reflect on religion in culture and society and be sensitive to changes in that respect.

- Professionalism: The curricula prepare students for executive positions in church and society as far as religious affairs are concerned.

- Didactic quality: The curricula give clear descriptions of the objectives, contents and performance of teaching as well as of the examinations. The given structures should leave space for optional studies.

- Mobility: Students should have the option of moving to other theological faculties easily. That requires that the curricular modules are compatible with those at other faculties.

(b) Teaching:

- Research-based teaching: Students should be introduced in research processes and results, so that they can develop an interest in sharpening their own fields of expertise and possibly going beyond the canon of classical theological knowledge, discovering new insights and ways of thinking.

- Community of learning: The teachers understand themselves as members of a learning community. Their competencies cover not only academic excellence but also pedagogical and linguistic-rhetorical skills.

- Comprehensive advancement of students: Not only their intellectual but also their social, emotional, and ethical potentials are to be fostered.

- Clear announcement of courses: A syllabus describes the setup of the course and the methods of teaching, and names the teaching objectives for the course and the requirements which the students have to meet.

- Didactics of the classes: The teacher has to be engaged and well prepared, presents the subject matters in a clear and illustrated way. He/she uses supporting media, like Power-Point, handouts, scripts, and so on. He/she applies varying didactic methods, and allows questions and discussions. By this means a positive learning atmosphere is created, which maximizes learning success.

(c) Examinations

- Transparency: An important feature of quality is the transparency of the requirements, the examination procedures, and the assessment criteria.

- Preparation and appraisal session: The examiners should give all the necessary information beforehand and feedback afterwards. They should explain the results of the assessment to the students and counsel them on how to improve their performance in future examinations.

- Sensitivity: The examiners are sensitive to the worry and anxiety of the students and try to help them to cope with such psychic stress.

- Student Feedback: The students should have the opportunity to give feedback to the examiner, in which they comment on the fairness of the procedure and its result. If a student regards the examination as unfair, he/she must be able to appeal to the director of studies or another superior authority. The faculties may consider installing the position of an ombudsman.

- Evaluation: The examination procedures must be evaluated regularly.

In the instruction for studying theology at our faculty we furthermore defined eight sets of competencies – sets of knowledge and skills which our students should acquire: religious-

theological, hermeneutical, historical, systematic, ethical, linguistic-relational, social and practical skills.[8]

1. "Religious-theological" means: Students develop the ability to reflect on theological and philosophical questions, consider their own religious convictions critically, develop a well-thought-out opinion and learn to communicate it. In his "Brief Outline of the Study of Theology," Schleiermacher wrote: "It is to be demanded of *every* Evangelical Theologian that he be occupied in the formation of a *personal conviction* with regard to all *passages*, properly so called of the System of Doctrine" (§ 219).

2. "Hermeneutical" refers not only to the exegesis and understanding of biblical texts but also to the perception and interpretation of religious phenomena and concepts in history and in the present cultural environment.

3. "Historical": Students develop an increased awareness of different historical contexts. They learn to understand scriptural texts and sources from the history of the church and of theology in reference to their specific place and time of origin. They are able to participate in debates on methodological and material questions of historical interpretations.

4. "Systematic": Students are able to analyze theological and philosophical concepts and argumentations, and to develop their own thoughts in a structured and reasonable way.

5. "Ethical": Students gain the capacity to reflect on normative contents of the Christian tradition, participate in discourses on current ethical questions, and suggest solutions for the debated questions.

6. Linguistic and rhetorical competence: Students gain sensibility in perceiving and using language. They learn to realize different functions of language, different language-games, and nuances in oral and written communication. They can speak and write to express themselves in a variety of forms depending on the particular situation.

7. Social competence: Students cultivate forms of behaviour which allow dialogical, open-hearted, sober, and respectful patterns of communication. That includes offering and taking criticism. Students are able to deal constructively with differences in opinions and convictions.

8. "Practical": Students understand forms of religious practice performed by individuals or by institutions like churches. They are familiar with theoretical concepts which allow them to

---

[8] See: Wegleitung für das Bachelor- und Masterstudium Theologie vom 12. Oktober 2009 (http://theologie.unibas.ch/nc/kopfzeile/dokumente/dokumente-sachgruppen/), 4.

analyze and assess those forms and to develop a sense of the way Christian faith should be practiced in a secular society in late modernity.

Surveying those competencies, we see that they comprise both knowledge and skills. First of all students need to gain *information* about texts, historical contexts, theological concepts, and manifestations of Christianity in our cultural setting. Secondly they need to gain *skills*: instructions on how to work with that information. How does one understand and interpret texts and contexts? How does one evaluate them and develop one's own opinion? How does one express oneself orally and in written forms, and how does one engage in debates on theological issues?

An important objective of theological education is to enable students to work autonomously: to know where to find what information, to develop strategies to gather and select knowledge, and to organize that knowledge into meaningful patterns. The aim of the educational processes is not to gain cumulative encyclopaedic knowledge, but to learn by example how to learn. That includes the ability to transfer insights from one field of study to others and the potential for imagining new ways of thinking and creating new insights.

To depict what quality in theological education is, depends on those objectives and draws attention to the means and methods which are used to mediate knowledge and skills.

F) Considerations and Questions

In the last part of this paper I would like to address some basic issues of the current debate on quality assurance and improvement. I begin with the very fundamental question: What is quality?

The term "quality" and the whole discussion on quality assurance, enhancement, development, and management originates not from the academic but from the economic sphere: from the theory of organisation as developed in the economic science. It aims at an "economization" of academia. The resources are to be deployed efficiently. That is a legitimate concern but it also needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. The main question is: Is it compatible with the understanding of education in theology? Does it carry implications - a certain apprehension of education and its outcome,

values, and norms – which may be in tension with a theological understanding?

Quality standards are supposed to be the same for all academic disciplines. But the disciplines and accordingly the ways of learning are very different. Critical thinking, for example, is much more important for the humanities than for the natural sciences. And theology again is different from other humanities insofar as it not only aims at transferring knowledge and skills to the students but involves their whole personality. Thus it is not satisfying to describe theological education as mediation of knowledge and skills. We need to understand theological education in a less technical and in a more humanistic sense as *Bildung*, which means comprehensive personal development (by the way: that term originates from the mystical tradition of Christianity. Meister Eckhart for example used it in relation to the *Gottebenbildlichkeit – imago Dei –* of humans). That includes academic proficiency but goes beyond.

The question arises: Can such a development become standardised? Can it be trained by curricula and academic programmes? Can quality of theological education be measured by criteria of efficiency? The more we understand theological education in such a broad way the more questionable are the definitions of quality in terms of transferring knowledge and skills – and the related means of quality assurance. That is why quality assurance and development in the humanities in general and in theological education in particular is criticized, sometimes harshly. Does it lead to a rather *technical* understanding of learning, which can be measured by the efficiency of its resources, its procedures and its output (which has to be assessed by formal criteria and expressed in marks)?

Of course there are methods of assessing personal and spiritual formation. It is possible to define what a mature personality is supposed to be and to define criteria regarding how to test and verify if it is given or achieved. But is that legitimate and useful? Is there not a certain danger that such methods put the student under a kind of conformity pressure? In order to succeed students will be eager to comply with the defined standards. And even if those standards aim at the autonomy of the students, at self-consciousness and critical thinking, a permanent adaptation to given standards is necessary.

Lee Harvey and *Diana Green* distinguish between five conceptions of "quality" in general and referred them to the debate on quality-management:[9]

1. *Quality as exceptional accomplishment in meeting or exceeding given standards.* According to this understanding quality must not be materially defined and cannot be quantitatively measured and controlled. It consists in the difference to the ordinary. The often used term "excellence" refers to such an understanding of quality as that which is very special.

2. *Quality as perfection of a certain practice and its outcome in view of a supposed ideal.* This understanding leads to a more quantitative notion: Quality means to avoid mistakes and imperfect practice. Quality control accordingly consists, for example, in checking student's attendance and their marks.

3. *Quality as usefulness and adequacy of purpose.* A good education in that outcome-oriented perspective has to be "good-for" something--a certain profession, for example.

4. *Quality as adequacy of value.* According to that economic conception the relation between expense (input) and benefit (output) is relevant for determining what quality is. A faculty which achieves the same output with fewer financial resources is "better" that a more expensive faculty.

5. *Quality as transformation of the nature of an item* (a "qualitative" change). It is not the product itself but the change which matters. In the case of education: It is not the number of graduates and degrees, nor the average of marks which indicates quality, but the empowerment of the students. And that is not easy to measure.

Different groups who are participants and stakeholders in the processes of education prefer different conceptions. It is mainly the research-oriented scholar who promotes type (1). The teaching staff often tends to understanding (2). Representatives of the job market probably will favour type (3). University administrations may tend to model (4). Type (5) will be preferred by the students – and hopefully by teachers and employers as well.

Each of these understandings creates its own expectations of what learning and its outcome is and of what quality-management should be. And again we have to ask: Are the conceptions of education which are implicit in that multi-dimensional debate on quality assurance and

---

[9] See HARVEY, Lee; GREEN, Diana: Qualität definieren. Fünf unterschiedliche Ansätze; in: HELMKE; HORNSTEIN; TERHART (ed), Qualität und Qualitätssicherung im Bildungsbereich. Schule, Sozialpädagogik, Hochschule, Weinheim 2000 (= Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 41. Beiheft), 17-39.

improvement in accordance with what theological education is supposed to be? The fifth model seems to be the most appropriate. But "empowerment" as a purpose needs to become specified: Empowered to do what?

Thus we need to turn to the questions of competencies which a "good" theologian should have. In all the discussions of that question it becomes obvious that the qualifications a theologian needs to have cannot easily be standardized. A broad array of competencies are desirable. Not all of them can be empowered in the same way and at the same intensity. How a given individual cultivates them depends on the person. The educational process should allow a broad scope to let the individual talents of teachers and students grow.

We may even ask if the focus on competencies isn't too narrow. For example, are empathy and attentiveness competencies? Competencies are abilities – they refer to the "doing" of a person, including intellectual actions. Theological education moreover takes the "being" of the person into account. It refers not only to the dimension of *logos* and practice but also to *eros* and *pathos*.

From that very fundamental consideration on the nature of "quality" further aspects come into view. First: What is a "good" teacher? In the debates on quality management in education role models of a good teacher are frequently presented. And according to those role models teaching programmes for prospective and current teachers are developed. But what about brilliant scholars who are and remain poor teachers? We should keep in mind that even a teacher who is not a brilliant pedagogue can have an important influence on his or her students. Karl Barth was a brilliant systematic theologian, but – as his former students frequently report – not a gifted teacher. He wouldn't have met the quality standards which are now asked for. But he gave rise to a generation of students not only with his theology but also with the dry style of his lectures. That is of course not meant to deny the importance of good teaching. For that purpose it is crucial to teach teachers how to teach, that is, to empower them to empower the students. But we should keep in mind that teaching and learning can work in very different modes of practice. Learning has a broader scope than teaching. It includes all the forms of self-learning of individuals and groups. Accordingly the evaluation of learning processes must refer not only to teaching but also to the infrastructure and the resources for learning (like libraries and computer facilities) as well as to counseling.

For the evaluation of the educational processes, student satisfaction is an important but not the only and perhaps not even the most important indicator for quality. It may be that students complain about a teacher, the style of his/her teaching, the work-load they have to carry and

their suffering from strain – but at the same time they achieve great success in learning. Thus the evaluation has to focus primarily on the transformation the students are undergoing. From my own studies I know of cases in which bad quality on the side of the teacher led to an intensification of learning on the side of the students. A teacher who fails to meet the minimum quality standards can unwittingly provoke the students to work on their own and thus lead to an increase of autonomy. Weaknesses on the side of the teacher can lead to a self-strengthening on the side of the students.

Another consideration concerns the trajectories of learning processes in theology. They do not always take place as linear succession in the growth of knowledge and skills. It may be that an unexpected disclosure of meaning occurs, which opens a new horizon. That kind of quality cannot be didactically planned, produced, and controlled. It is – theologically speaking – a matter of the Holy Spirit.

In his third speech on Religion to its Cultured Despisers Schleiermacher complained about an understanding of religious education as cognitive learning. Religious education has to open a space for inspiration, and what happens within the space cannot and should not be organized completely. Although *theological* education is not to be equated with *religious* education, the religious dimension – as a quality which cannot be measured by methods of quality assurance and improvement – should be taken into account. In his "Brief Outline of the Study of Theology" Schleiermacher wrote: "Since the Academical Instructor, dealing with youth who are especially animated by the *religious* interest, has to make *scientific* spirit, in its theological application, for the first time a matter of thorough consciousness in them; it is necessary to specify the method in which this spirit may be *quickened*, without *weakening* the religious interest."[10]

Let me close with a critical remark referring to the debate on quality in theological education. It seems important to me to use the term "quality" in a clear and specified way with a restricted scope of meaning. It should refer only to the "how," not to the "what" of education. It should focus not on the contents but on structures and methods. Defining and positing quality standards ought not become a carrier for proposing and promoting a certain understanding of "good theology" and for pursuing strategic interests aiming to enforce certain contents in the curricula of the theological study (like commitments to orthodoxy or liberation issues). It is important that an institution of theological education lay open its self-

---

[10]

understanding of theology and that it arrange its curricula according to it. That is part of the procedures of quality-management. The understanding of theology has to be formulated as a mission statement or self-commitment of the educational institution. Prospective and current students, the university (in case of theological faculties), the church (in case of a church-run seminary), and the public have to be authentically and objectively informed about the profile of the institution and its teaching alignment. The fields of teaching and the learning objectives have to be described in the syllabus for the offered programmes in general and in the syllabus for the single classes in particular. All that belongs to the quality management of the institution. But it does not belong to the depiction of "quality" that certain topics are taught, certain positions are held, and certain contents are favoured. The levels of discussion and practice have to be distinguished clearly: Issues of "quality" are located on a different level from issues of material contents. Gender-sensitivity, for example, is an (important!) objective of theological education but not a matter of the quality of education. The same applies for other teaching objectives like loyalty to a certain confession of faith. If the levels of discussion become confused, then the quality debate tends to become ideologized. Questions concerning the understanding and the teaching of theology need to be discussed separately from the debate on quality of teaching. Issues of the social context of academia, the churches, and the society as a whole are without doubt very important, but they should not be regarded as standards of quality.