

Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**INSTITUT TEOLOGIC BAPTIST DIN BUCUREȘTI
(ITBDB)**

AGENTA ROMANA
DE ASIGURAREA CALITATII
SISTEMULUI SUPRACOR
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1. Introduction

This report summarises my impressions as a Foreign Expert visiting the **INSTITUT TEOLOGIC BAPTIST DIN BUCUREȘTI (ITBDB)**, Bucharest, for a periodical institution and programme review by ARACIS in April 2012.

I am very grateful to the Mission Director, Prof. univ.dr Romiță Iucu Bumbu, the Expert Coordinator, Pro.univ.dr Victor Munteanu, and to Prof.univ.dr Dumitriu Vanca with whom I worked closely in evaluating the study programme “Teologie baptistă pastorală” or the efficient way the evaluation process was conducted and to other members of the ARACIS team for their constructive and fruitful discussions during the evaluation process. I am especially grateful to the student representatives on the Commission, Oana Mitu and Mihaela Andreea Ciorei, who assisted me with helpful translation, summaries of discussions and who always willingly to my queries about general student educational experience in Romania.

Thanks are due to Conf.univ.dr Daniel M Mariș, Rector of ITBDB, Dr Ben-Oni Ardelean, Vice Rector, Dr Sorin Bădrăgan the Academic Dean, Dr Octavian Baban, the Course Director and other members of the Academic staff for their helpfulness and willingness to answer questions and provide appropriate resources in English.

Last, but by no means least, I want to thank Mrs Mihaela Băjenaru from ARACIS for her helpful support, translation and willingness to respond to queries.

2. The Baptist Theological Institute, Bucharest (BTIB/ ITBDB)

The history of the institution begins in 1921 as the Baptist Theological Seminary in Bucharest. This makes it one of the oldest Baptist theological institutions in central and eastern Europe, only pre-dated in central continental Europe by institutions in Hamburg and Budapest.

In 1925 a legal authority was created for the seminary. Difficulties of operation were experienced during the communist period, but after the political changes of 1989, the Baptist Theological Institute was raised to university status by the Prime Minister Petre Roman. It has buildings in two locations in Budapest, physically separated by some distance. The Rectorate and principal offices and chapel at Berzei Street, number 29, Bucharest Sector 1 and the library, classrooms and dormitory provision at Dambovitei Street number 9-11, Bucharest Sector 6.

In 2005 the BTIB was accredited by the Romanian Government and a degree at Bachelor level “Baptist pastoral theology” was validated. The Theological Institute is fully owned and operated by the Union of Baptist Churches in Romania. The academic staff are recognized pastors of the Union. The mission of the institution is to form Baptist pastors for the service of the churches in Romania by means of a first cycle four year Bachelor

240 ECTS Bologna style accredited degree in theology. The degree is offered in two forms, by day study (PZI) and by distance learning (PID).

Recently there has been a significant change in the leadership of the BTIB with the former Rector, Professor Vasile Talpoș, retiring from this post and a much younger colleague, Dr Daniel Mariș, being elected and appointed as Rector in his place. His appointment has only recently been confirmed by the Romanian Government and this institutional and programme evaluation comes at a significant moment to support the new leadership team in their desire to update and revise both the overall design of the course and to contemplate course and specialist subject development in the next phase of accreditation.

The BTIB has aspirations for the future to offer programmes at Cycle III (two year Bologna style M level degree) and ultimately to be able to supervise doctoral students.

3. Programme of activities during the inspection

After welcome from the Rector and introduction of the senior academic and administrative team, I participated in a session of the Commission when we discussed the principal issues to be addressed. I then joined Professor.dr. Dumitriu Vanca to explore in detail the four year Bachelor/Licentiate programme. In this exploration we held meetings with Dr Octavian Baban, Dr Soren Bădrăgan and Dr Ben-Oni Ardelean to discuss the content of the Cycle I Bachelor degree and the identification of core, or fundamental subjects, optional subjects and specialist subjects. We paid particular regard to the pattern of building up the topic from core, or fundamental topics and how students can choose special and optional topics to make a coherent degree programme suitable for Baptist pastoral theology.

At 17.00 hours I participated in a meeting with graduates of ITBDB and members of the Baptist Union Board and this was followed by a time of general discussion.

On Thursday at 09.00 we met a significant number of students (40 male) to learn about their experiences, following which I had specific meetings with members of the academic team including Dr Daniel Gherman, Dr Ioan Străinescu, Dr Samuël Bâlc and Dr Adrian Neiconi. Issues raised including the learning experience, formulation of the programme, appropriateness of the programme as preparation for pastoral ministry. The students clearly preferred the more open and interactive approach of younger members of the academic team over against the more formal lecture style of older members of the staff. There was an important discussion about the possibilities of students to engage in exchanges with other European institutions using the European Union Erasmus programme and the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools, but it seemed that students were largely ignorant of these possibilities as little information has been provided in the past about these possibilities.

In terms of student outcomes a very high proportion of the students on graduating were called to pastorates, associate pastorates and team pastorates within the Baptist Union of Romania and Moldova (there are normally three or four students from Moldova studying in Bucharest as opposed to the College of Theology in Kishinev, which is not accredited).

I had specific private meetings with three English speaking students. They were very positive about their educational experience and expressed great confidence in the new Rector and his team.

I also engaged in checking course reading lists, application procedures and general operating structures.

At 19.00 I participated in a technical meeting of the commission devoted to receiving reports and preparing the overall analysis of the institution.

On Friday at 09.00 I continued in technical meetings of the Commission and at 10.30 had a meeting with the Mission Director, Prof. univ.dr Romița Iucu.. We then held a plenary session of the commission, which continued throughout the morning..

4. Governance and Institution

The Baptist Institute of Theology took the whole evaluation very seriously. The Rector, Dr Daniel Mariș responded to every question, both fundamental issues and minor points of enquiry. The supporting team of Vice Rector, Course Director, Librarian and lecturers were all fully engaged in the evaluative process.

The headquarters building in Bucharest Sector 1 was erected in 1924 by the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board. It was completed and opened in April, thus the Commission arrived at a moment to note 88 years of the life of the buildings. Given the current difficult economic circumstances of Europe, inevitably the buildings vary in standards of upkeep. The property is owned, now, by the Baptist Union of Bulgaria, having been released to them by the Southern Baptists of the USA after the collapse of the communist regime. In the current economic climate and with the decline in financial support from Baptists communities in the United States and the United Kingdom it has, inevitably, presented challenges to the Institute leadership in the upkeep of the headquarters building, though the building housing the library is in better physical condition and the rooms housing the library collection have recently been upgraded. Indoor working experiences were perfectly adequate and classrooms included modern provision of overhead information beamers. The building was suitably equipped with WiFi for both academics and students and the provision of information technology seemed adequate. There is a modern large server for the library and work is in progress to place the collection catalogue fully on line. The Institute has adopted the interactive, on line academic learning programme, Moodle, and work is proceeding to place educational information on that platform. The Course Director, Dr Baban, additionally has his own web site with Moodle, www.obinfo.net.ro and has placed a significant body of material

there. In this sense the new academic team is already engaged in an appropriate and major updating of the educational method in the delivery of the academic programme.

The web site www.itb.ro does lack some basic information about the institute and should be expanded to include full profiles of Faculty members, areas of expertise and research interests, links to other partner institution web sites and links to web sites offering resources in Baptist pastoral theology.

5. Baptist history and identity

As the institution offers a degree in Baptist pastoral theology, I took particular care to explore how they understand and teach this module. In the first semester Baptist history is a critical component, then later in the degree there is a course on theological and ecclesial issues which cause controversy amongst Romanian Baptist communities. I explored the concept of Baptist history and contemporary identity with Dr Adrian Neiconi, who has assisted Professor Ioan Bunaciu in the delivery of this important programme.

As there is much contemporary debate within European Baptist life about contemporary Baptist identity and as I have not been able to locate certain key texts in the Institute library I thought it important to determine whether the institute engaged their students with these questions which are currently much discussed in western and central Europe. It could be important for the Institute to be aware of this debate and offer an appropriate critique to students from a Romanian Baptist perspective.

Recommendations

- A deliberate plan to purchase works on Baptist identity from Europe to be pursued, noting especially the series “Studies in Baptist History and Identity” (Paternoster Press) and the Regents Park College Centre for Baptist History and Identity.
- The library books on Baptist history to be updated to include more recent works by David W Bebbington, William Brackney, Bill J Leonard and Nigel G Wright.
- Under the Erasmus programme a colleague, or colleagues be invited to delivery a series of lectures and seminars on the current European debate on Baptist identity and mission.
- One or more Faculty member attend the Forum of the Consortium of European Baptist Schools, incorporating the Baptist Theological Teachers Conference in 2012. This event will be held at Odessa Baptist Seminary and will include sessions on Baptist spirituality and identity.
- Exploration be made as to whether the course should include some insights on the contemporary European Anabaptist movement. To this extent, contact might be made with Dr Stuart Murray Williams in Bristol, United Kingdom, a leading figure in this movement.

6. Pastoral formation

The focus of the degree programme on preparing students for pastoral ministry is clearly highly successful and appropriate to the needs of the Romanian and Moldovan Baptist communities, given the high pastoral employment rate of graduates. Noteworthy features of the programme include the fact that all the Faculty currently also engage in pastoral ministry themselves, thus keeping an important and updated interaction between theory and practice and this is to be highly commended.

The students themselves are placed in pastoral situations during vacation times and have opportunities to work with experienced pastors. The pastors and churches have opportunity to evaluate the performance of students. However, it is not clear as to the extent of congregational involvement in the process of evaluation in respect of the pastoral ministry assignments of the students.

Recommendations

- That the current pattern of anticipating academic staff to have pastoral responsibilities be confirmed as a matter of good practice to ensure a close relationship for academics between theory and practice
- That consideration be given to the greater use of congregation members in the work of evaluating the practical work of students.

7. Overall issues of curriculum

The general degree, or first degree (EU-Bologna cycle) of Bachelor or Licentiate in theology with a bias towards pastoral formation for ministry to a specific (Baptist) Confessional group within the Christian Church appears perfectly adequate and conforms to the generally recognized norms for the discipline of theology within the European Union. There is a proper and necessary accent on the Biblical languages of Hebrew and Koine or New Testament Greek to examine the original texts of the Bible and early church, alongside consideration of the contemporary examination of the texts which requires English, or German (English being predominant in the international European community and the preferred option of the institute). The other topics offered – introductions to the Old and New Testaments, history of the Christian community, systematic theology, philosophy, Christian ethics, Missiology (evangelism) and Baptist history are also present (but see later section on contemporary Baptist identity).

With my colleague in the subject expertise, Professor Vanca, I confirm that the structure of the Bachelor/Licenciate degree meets appropriate and recognized European Union standards in terms of the subject discipline of theology, with a confessional (in this case Baptist) bias..

Recommendations

- Given the specificity of the degree in “Baptist pastoral theology”, every opportunity is taken to engage with the debate on this topic (Baptist theology within the context of the local believing community) within the wider European

Baptist community through the EBF Theology and Education Division and the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS).

- The Rector and Academic team to take an early opportunity to review the course text books in the light of recent publications in English by leading Baptist scholars.

8. Developmental possibilities

From meetings with graduates and students it seems clear that conditions for the practice of pastoral ministry in Romania are in a state of flux and transformation. To maintain the high level of placement of graduates in a pastoral vocation the institute must remain active in identifying trends and movements within the constituency. Particularly a growing practice of team ministries and specialist ministries was commented on and discerned by both graduates and students. Some students are graduating and will enter these specialist ministries.

Here, it should be noted that the student body is exclusively male, in keeping with the current tradition of Romanian Baptists that the office of *pastor* is a male office and not open to women. Is the exclusively male notion of pastoral ministry applicable to subordinate and specialist ministries, such as working with youth and children? If the movement is towards multi-gifted ministry teams, then should the issue of providing theological formation for some women combined with specialist preparation for team ministry be considered? This tentative exploration would be in line with reflections going on elsewhere in central Europe and might open the Institute to the possibility at some point in the future of considering the idea of women students being formed for within the institute for specialist ministries within teams led by (male) pastors.

In the light of these issues raised by the interaction between the students, alumni and the Commission the institute might usefully engage in an exercise of research with the constituency of Romanian Baptists, including congregations and students as well as pastors in service, to explore whether there is a case for developing specialisms within the degree programme to address the contemporary ecclesiological and missional situation. Similar work has been done elsewhere in Europe and courses, programmes and whole degree structures addressed to meet the needs identified by research and evaluation have been developed and validated..

Recommendations

- a. Research be conducted within the constituency to identify if there is a case for developing a course or programme to address the issue of the nature of team work, how to create and sustain teams, especially when a key member departs.
- b. Research be conducted within the constituency to identify if there is a case for developing a course or programme to help students develop specialisms such as youth work.

- c. Research be conducted within the constituency to identify the case for developing a course in baptistic blended worship.

9. Library

The library is well appointed and the librarian seems committed to the development of the library as an increasingly useful resource for the Institute. Work is proceeding on placing the library catalogue on line. The institute has expressed itself committed to the development of on-line resources, which is very important in view of the fact the Institute has distance learning students.

The Library reveals some important coverage of basic theological and biblical works across a wide range of Christian confessions, including Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed and Lutheran. However, there appears to be a lack of current books on Baptist theology and identity, especially Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought and the series "Studies in Baptist History and Identity", also recent important works by leading Baptist theologians such as J W McClendon Jnr, Parush R Parushev, Stanley Grenz and Paul S Fiddes and Nigel G Wright.

Recommendation

- The librarian consults with librarians at other similar institutions using English (as opposed to German or Russian) as the main international language of the collection to acquire details of key acquisitions of books on Baptist history, theology and identity (The librarians group within the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools should be able to offer key assistance).

10. Research interests

The Institute commenced publication of a *Journal* on an annual basis several years ago (2002). This gives opportunity for the Faculty and students to present works of merit to a wider community. There is now an intention to increase the frequency of publication to twice in a calendar year. The Journal principally contains articles by academics of the institute in Romanian and in English, with occasional guest articles from distinguished academics in Europe such as the New Testament expert, Professor I Howard Marshall (Aberdeen) and Dr J Andrew Kirk (IBTS, Prague).

The development of the Journal as one aspect of advancing a progressive and proactive research culture is very important. , plus developing the publication profile of lecturers and students.

A proposal to develop research on Anabaptists in Romania, given the presence of communities in Transylvania and elsewhere in the 1600's and the significant deposits of

material in Cluj and Sibiu which are awaiting analysis and scientific evaluation, are very important and will add to the international academic profile of the institute.

The institute has a collaborative programme to encourage academics to take sabbatical opportunities at Regent's Park college, Oxford, but it might be worthwhile for the Institute to develop more concrete opportunities with other institutions in the European Union, such as Elstal, Tartu, Prague,

Publication in international peer reviewed journals by members of the academic staff should be strengthened and particularly looking to journals, such as *Baptistic Theologies (CR)* , *Baptist Quarterly (UK)* and *Review and Expositor (USA)* which are peer reviewed and in the appropriate indexes for theology and history and can thus provide a clear scientific scope for the presentation of the works of the academics.

Recommendations

- The librarian consults with other institutions in CEBTS about the possible exchange of Journals.
- Members of the academic staff make serious investigation to have published academic articles in indexed and peer reviewed journals in Europe, North America and Australasia.
- The Rector invite each member of the academic team to produce a research plan within their own discipline to cover the next few years
- The Academic team consider developing one or more interdisciplinary research activities for the next period and, if possible work on this plan with at least one other non-Baptist Faculty or theological institution in the Bucharest region.

11. Quality assurance and evaluation culture

Students reported that each course has an evaluative procedure with students asked to offer written comment on the value of the learning experience and the quality of lecture and seminar development. It is noteworthy that students commended younger lecturers for the educational methods used to deliver material for an enhanced learning experience, but expressed some concern about the didactic style of more senior (older) people. It can be expected that this situation will improve under the direction of the new Rector, Vice Rector, Dean and Programme Director (who has already established his own interactive web site).

The new academic team ought to give consideration as to how they develop the educational skills of their colleagues to take full cognisance of contemporary developments in adult education and learning.

Recommendations

- The Rector should initiate a regular (monthly) pattern of staff development seminars in adult education methods to develop and improve the educational

competences of his colleagues and promote a spirit of continuing educational development.

- The use of interactive and contemporary information technology resources must continue to be explored and when finances permit, be developed.
- Staff and students should be encouraged to work at least annually on specific research projects designed to enhance the application of acquired skills to contemporary Baptist ministry
- The Institute leadership team are encouraged to consider the use of adult education specialists from within the EU to advise on learning styles to enhance the learning experience.

12. Internationalisation

The BTIB has established contacts with Regent's Park College in the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, and with Tyndale Seminary in the Netherlands. It is a member of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools. However, financial constraints have not enabled significant internationalization of students and faculty to occur in recent years. There are limited lecturer exchanges principally with colleagues from Oxford and occasionally Prague, visiting Bucharest. Further internationalization is certainly an appropriate activity for BTIB to pursue both to expose Faculty and also students to contemporary theological developments and reflections in Europe.

The further involvement in the EU Erasmus programme by the Institute leadership and students should be encouraged.

There is an excellent standard of English language, written and spoken, amongst Faculty members, but this needs further emphasis amongst the student community with students offered opportunity in each year to improve their English language skills.

Recommendations :-

- The Rector and Senior Management Team should support mobility of lecturers and students with other Erasmus institutions in the EU.
- Find ways of engaging practically with other Baptist theological institutions in the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (www.cebts.eu)
- Ensure there are web links (mutual) between BTIB, CEBTS and partner institutions in order to improve information and internet communication contacts.
- Upgrade the curricula in Baptist history to incorporate current theological reflections on baptistic history and identity and the European discussion and research on a contemporary Anabaptist ecclesiology and mission.

- Strengthen the possibility for students to have additional English language tuition throughout their degree.

13. Summary SWOT analysis

It is clear that the Baptist Theological Institute, Bucharest, is at a critical moment of transformation. A clear, solid base for theological education and pastoral formation has been achieved under the previous long-time leadership. However, it is now important for the BTIB to engage in the revision of the programme to fully meet the expectation of the Bologna process and the latest law on universities in Romania.

SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Owned and supported by the constituency of Romanian Baptists and clearly respected by the willingness of the churches to offer to c 90% of the alumni vocational appointments.
- New, younger academic team of active and dedicated theologian/pastors open to the current changes and developments within the wider European academic community.
- Academic team members all have pastoral vocations within local churches, thus integrating the educational experience between theory and practice.

Weaknesses

- Inheritance of a somewhat fossilized programme, especially as related to Baptist(ic) identity.
- Financial constraints which inhibit the plans for the development of the library and on-line resources and maintaining the headquarters infrastructure.
- Need for more recent academic staff members to develop research and publishing activity.

Opportunities

- Development of new specializations in youth ministry, team working, worship leadership and music etc.
- Development of Faculty advancement programmes – in educational techniques, research opportunities, sabbatical studies, vocational development.
- Re-engagement with the wider European Baptist community in CEBTS, possibly by developing strategic Erasmus partners

Threats

- The current financial climate and the continuing reduction of external financial support presents serious challenges.

- An inheritance from the previous leadership of a lack of engagement with contemporary academic dialogue on European Baptist identity presents a challenge regarding serious reengagement with wider baptistic theological thinking.

14. Final comments

I have been very encouraged by the positive attitude of the Rector and his senior management team to address issues which are currently pressing upon them. When they have done this, they must engage in a period of consultation with their alumni and constituency to determine what additional action should be taken to meet the new needs of the constituency for the preparation and formation of Baptist pastors and pastoral team members for a wider range of pastoral ministry in Romania with particular regard to specialist topics and working in teams.



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