

REPORT FROM THE RECTOR OF THE PONTIFICAL ATHENAEUM OF SAINT ANSELM IN ROME TO THE CONGRESS OF BENEDICTINE ABBOTS IN 2016

1. Current situation of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm

As stated in the strategic plan of the Athenaeum, the pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm is the “Benedictine university in Rome”. Accordingly, for a congress of abbots, space and time is dedicated to this.

I would like, first of all, to highlight the enormous effort achieved with the help of all in the past four years since the last congress of abbots, starting from – and with the help of – the “Strategic Plan” proposed, executed and updated as referred to above.

In tandem with the universities of the great religious orders such as the Gregorianum, the Angelicum, Holy Cross, the Salesianum or the Antonianum and those which depend directly on the Holy See – such as the Urban University or the Lateran – our Athenaeum, together with the Regina Apostolorum, forms part of what are called the “Pontifical Roman Universities” which depend directly on the Apostolic See under the Congregation for Catholic Education.

At the end of the academic year 2015 – 2016, the number of students who attended our Athenaeum was 534 to which should be added the students of the two institutes incorporated into the faculty of Theology: the “Institute of Pastoral Liturgy” of Padua and the “Theological Academic Year” of Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem which accounts for 66 first-year students and 22 second-years. With these two institutes we have a total of 622 students.

If we compare these figures with those of four years ago during the last congress of abbots, the growth and expansion of our Athenaeum may be clearly seen.

And, of course, this does not include the hundred students from the summer courses held at Saint Anselm in the month of July, a novelty that shows the

increase and development that we have seen in the Athenaeum over the last four years.

Without giving numbers – since the students are not technically enrolled at the Athenaeum – we should bear in mind what one might call the “great romano-anselmian family”: the twelve affiliations and aggregations of the faculties of theology and philosophy which are a world-wide extension of our Roman headquarters.

2. Avepro

Over the 2nd/3rd of December 2013, we welcomed an external Commission for the evaluation of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm sent by AVEPRO or “agency for the evaluation of activities and functionality of the pontifical universities”. Presided over by Fr Francisco Javier Herrero Hernández (President), the Commission comprised Professors Gianfranco Coffele, Marc Rastoin y Declan O’Byrne. I recapitulate some of their concluding observations, the first of which was that of expressing the firm commitment of the academic authorities and of the Benedictine Confederation to implementing the modernisation of the institutions and for the resolute updating of its programs. What stood out powerfully was the effort involved in enhancing the proper character of the institution with its specific Benedictine identity along with the changes put in place to improve the anselmian structures. Some of the suggestions that we proposed have been – or, indeed, are being – carried out gradually, such as the adaptation of the Statutes to the new governance of the Athenaeum.

The final report – which is in the public domain – may be viewed on the AVEPRO website.

3. Characteristics of the teaching in the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm

If there is one quality that we wish to give to our teaching it is professionalism and “Benedictinism”.

Professionalism: over the years we have adapted a Benedictine college to a modern university. The demands of “adaptability” to the Bologna Process have allowed for the revision and adaptation of our academic, bureaucratic, information technology (IT) and media structures. We are building a modern university!

Benedictinism: ours is a Benedictine university which has chosen and carefully considered as its “outline theme”: ‘Theology, philosophy and liturgy within cultures and religions’, allowing it to develop an interdisciplinary agenda which develops the sapiential and Benedictine character of our teaching. On the two final starting-points of the academic year we developed this theme on study days entitled “Word and Scripture” for the academic year 2015 – 2016 and “Action” for the academic year 2016 – 2017.

On the rector directly depend the library, the secretariats, publications of the Athenaeum, the university chaplaincy and the students’ office.

4. The secretariats

✓ The general secretariat of the Athenaeum

In recent years, the general secretariat of the Athenaeum has completely reorganised its structure. The firm **Key2people** was called in to timetable

and put in place this new organisation. In this way, we have brought about a technological analysis of all the elements of the secretariat, beginning with pre-registration online concomitant with a study plan for each student which can also be compiled online. In the same way, students enrol for exams and receive advice and announcements by means of this same information technology – a simplification which has greatly assisted the overall progress of the Athenaeum. In conjunction with the general Secretary, Fr Pacomius Okoje, who performs his role with great professionalism, there are two full-time employees working in the secretariat with the assistance of a technician who helps them resolve any problems which may arise.

✓ **The Rector's secretariat**

With the invaluable assistance of Mrs Claudia Berger, the secretariat has a fundamental role with regard to all aspects of a university Athenaeum. It coordinates all the activities of the Athenaeum and of its professors.

✓ **Office of public relations**

Under the responsibility of Fr Giuseppe Piscitelli, this office looks after everything related to publicity besides acting as secretariat to the Pontifical Liturgical Institute.

✓ **University Chaplaincy**

The Chaplaincy embarks on each day with the Eucharist, and at the high points of the liturgical year prepares and coordinates a cycle of meditations led by professors and students. It also coordinates relations with the 'Vicariate' of Rome. Fr Pacomius Okojie directs it with efficiency.

✓ The Students' department (CSA)

In the last few years we have created this department which up till now has been led by Fr Luigi Gioia and of which, as from June 2016, Fr Ruberbal Monteiro da Castro will be the coordinator. The students themselves run it, having as their main aim, helping the new students who are starting out on their path at the Athenaeum, organising cultural visits and journeys as well as parties which help them to create links of friendship and cooperation.

5. External communication project and the Athenaeum's new website

The presence of a Benedictine monk, Fr Simon Stubbs OSB, as overseer of the "marketing department" and of the Athenaeum's website has enabled us to project ourselves onto social websites. We have taken important steps.

6. Evaluation by the students

Each year the students assess the courses, activities and structures of our Athenaeum. In 2014 we commissioned a sociologist, prof. Cinquegrani, to study the last five years' assessments, including the professors and the structures of our Athenaeum from 2009/2010 to 2012/2013. In this assessment, which may be consulted in the Rector's secretariat, it is clear that with regard to the students the only problem – in terms of successful teaching – is their limited knowledge of classical languages. The actions taken have made possible an interaction which allows for a three-tiered "scale": to report, consult and involve these three criteria in the actions of the university. The students have evaluated positively the teaching of Benedictine values (welcoming, hospitality, informality, personal care, etc). And so, we were encouraged to do something that we had accepted as a priority: to create a teaching strategy that establishes and makes clear our

way of teaching and of transmitting values that are specific to the context of monastic education.

1. The Library

The Library has continued its service but has extended it to the entire Confederation by means of a *scanner* which can meet the requests that come to us online, facilitating reproduction of the requested material. In the past few years, it has had to reduce purchases in order to keep to the budget allocated. Some recent measures – such as the inclusion in tuition fees of a quota for the library – has made it possible to cope with expenditure without incurring losses. Some improvements – such as the glass door with restricted access by means of the university license card – has made for better visibility. In the coming days, the old boiler heater will be changed, and a new air-conditioning system essential for the summer months will be installed. Thanks to the Swiss foundation, we have managed to extend the latter facility creating a room for doctoral students on the so-called ‘gallery of the dead Christ’. However, there is still much to be done and a solution will have to be met the insufficiency of funds which has forced us more than anything to reduce significantly the purchase of books in order to keep us to the set budget.

7. Publications

Our publications are the guarantee of our work. In the past four years, we have published 14 volumes of our *Studia Anselmiana* series including the posthumous work of Fr Adalbert de Vogüé on the literary history of the monastic movement in antiquity. We have instituted the “St Anselm Prize” for the best doctoral thesis of the Athenaeum which this year has seen its fifth issue with the exceptional allocation to two winners whose doctoral theses from the Athenaeum are about to appear in the series quoted.

8. On-line courses

At the previous congress, an opening up to new teaching methods online was announced. It is now an actual reality as for over a year we have initiated this possibility that opens our classrooms up to those who are unable to come to them directly.

1. The economic position of the Athenaeum

A university requires substantial and unfettered economic resources. The constant increase in numbers of students together with a policy of economic transparency and permanent control of spending has made it possible over the last two years for the Athenaeum to express a modest word of congratulation which enables us to face the future with hope. There are no losses since the reasonable fees, along with the constant assistance which comes to us from the Confederation by way of 'subsidy' and 'Solidarity', allows us to cover our expenses without undue anxiety. The Rector's Council at his monthly meeting analyses income and expenditure within the different sectors that comprise the Athenaeum's economy.

With the assistance of our Bursar and in keeping with normative Italian practice, we have set up work contracts for all the professors who are not monks. Priests and religious benefit from a special arrangement, also in accord with the prevailing norm.

2. Some concerns of the Rector of the Athenaeum.

✓ Infrastructure

The growing number of students points to an improvement in the economy of the Athenaeum, but it also points to a call for improved structures. Seeing the Athenaeum grow is a cause for rejoicing but even though its structures have been notably improved, they are neither sufficient nor adequate. Even now on

certain days – such as Thursdays – we have a problem with the increased number of students doing *masters* in architecture and music for whom there is a lack of adequate classrooms. We are still without a lecture hall which would enable symposia and congresses to take place but there is at the same time a dearth of large classrooms for many courses and the only one that we have – classroom 1 – lacks the minimum necessary security requirements for its use.

✓ The increase in students and monk professors within the Benedictine Confederation

A constant preoccupation on the part of the Rector is renewing the teaching body with Benedictine professors who can cover distinct areas of teaching. It demands great sacrifice on the part of communities to permit their monks to study and to teach in Rome. In terms of the future of the Athenaeum, it is a top priority to obtain Benedictine monks to study, do doctorates and then to teach here.

✓ The need for student bursaries

While the number of European students is diminishing, there is an increase in the number coming from other continents who are able to access university studies on through bursaries. Creating a major source of funding for grants is a constant concern. At present, thanks to the so-called “Academic Fund” and to *St Anselm’s Education Foundation*, we are able to make available a small number of bursaries, though these are certainly not enough to meet our demand.

3. Thanks

I cannot end without thanking Fr Notker Wolf who for 16 years as Chancellor of the Athenaeum has evinced his constant concern for it.

I offer profound thanks to all the monasteries which in one way or another contribute to enabling Saint Anselm's, as both university and college, to survive and to flourish.

I thank especially the foundations that help us: the *Development for North America* directed by Fr Benoit Allogia OSB and the *Development for Europe* directed by Fr Markus Muff OSB. Whether in relation to the Athenaeum as a building or to the personnel in their concrete situations, their contribution is fundamental for enabling us to move forward. I am grateful for the "Academic Fund" whose revenues allow us to undertake new projects in the same way that they give us grants, and which helps the library and pays for a teacher. I also thank the Austrian Congregation whose generosity makes possible the employment of another lay teacher.

Owing to the recent initiative and involvement of Fr Notker Wolf and of Fr Markus Muff who have sought the funding, we have completed a large Hall for students, offices for the Ecclesia Orans review magazine and most recently a magnificent staff room for external professors since the former one was in a deplorable condition. I invite all to take the opportunity to visit them.

4. The future of the Athenaeum

In the strategic plan, we have outlined our current circumstances but also our future. However, the future of the Athenaeum is – as at its inception – in the hands of the Benedictine Federation which we represent and on which we depend.

We continue to rely on the constant trust and support of all to go forward and we trust that our work, our presence and our ecclesial visibility may signify and show forth the vitality of the children of Our Father Saint Benedict.

