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Research and Teaching Profile

1 Objectives of Research and Teaching Profile

It is our intention to strengthen and develop the *EIB*'s position in the field of academic teaching and research, as well as to identify new ways of ecumenical education and formation in collaboration with both the different programmes of the WCC and the University of Geneva. We believe that the research and teaching profile will be beneficial in this respect and will include:

- **Enhanced visibility** of *EIB*'s unique expertise in academic ecumenical formation and lay education within the immediate constituency of the University of Geneva and the wider academic community, as well as within the ecumenical movement and the related networks of churches, institutions of higher education and formation and lay-academies.
- **Reinforced attractiveness** of *EIB*'s study and research opportunities in ecumenism for high-quality students and research fellows, seeking to ensure the continuity in ecumenical formation as well a constant intellectual stimulation which is the basis for innovation in both academia and the ecumenical movement.
- **Renewed fidelity** to the mandate of the *EIB* as ecumenical laboratory for future generations of ecumenists, taking into account the global societal and religious transformations that shaped the status of ecumenism in the 21st century and reinterpreting the meaning and target of an ecumenical academic programme in the light of these challenges.
- **Increased possibilities** for internal and external institutional collaboration and support for particular research projects around agreed upon thematic strands, so as to foster an externally communicable strategic planning, inner cohesion and sustainability of research and teaching activities.

2 Our Understanding of Academic Teaching in Ecumenism in the 21st Century

Academic teaching at Bossey has to be understood within a larger framework. As the Ecumenical Institute wishes to contribute to the formation of future generations of ecumenists, all facets of an ecumenical existence have to be addressed. This includes the cognitive, the emotional and spiritual as well as the practical formation of young people seeking to ground and reflect on their aspirations for the unity of the Church in a transformed world, characterized by a multi-centred global Christianity, the emergence of new religious movements and churches, as well as competing tendencies between globalisation and particularity.

It is precisely this plurality of universal Christian expressions which is also articulated in Bossey, through the contents of taught courses, but more so through the presence, exchange and sharing of a multi-cultural and multi-confessional body of students and staff which transcend

the usual boundaries of confessional formation or state university programmes. In this specific study environment students are time and again directly – and many times painfully – reminded of the existing divides in church and society, of past colonial and present cultural domination, the exclusion from accesses to education, of the rift between poor and wealthy and of the repercussions this has on the vision of the ecumenical nature of the Church.

Thus, the practical experience of living, learning and praying together constitutes an important element in the formation of what we call an *ecumenical competence*, which means the ability to discern, understand and translate for others the richness and challenges of a fellowship of Christian churches through a locally and globally lived faith in witness, prayer and service.

Bossey is also conscious that, alongside the traditional academic formation, new forms of continuing education programmes have to be developed to allow on the one hand for an integration of different target groups (students in ecumenism, clergy and lay people), on the other hand for the recognition of and reflection on the new historical situation of ecumenism in the 21st century, not any longer deeply embedded and deemed central to many churches on the local level.

It needs therefore a thorough analysis and accompaniment of processes of estrangement of Christian faith vis-à-vis a civil responsibility within societies, and tendencies of withdrawal into a self-contained confessionalism or into radical oppositional movements of fundamentalist character. This educational task is particularly relevant in a global context of pluralisation of religious identities, where either a relativistic attitude is adopted to the detriment of one's own religious identity, or an exclusiveness and inward-orientation is utilised for the claim of interests or the legitimacy of a certain position. These constellations are factual realities forming the experiential background of our students, and we therefore wish to equip them with the necessary self-critical and analytical tools to be able to build "bridges of understanding" for themselves, people within the fellowship of churches, and others standing in more distant relation with the ecumenical movement.

At the same time we wish to make them sensitive for the enrichment, but also for the difficulties inherent in the diversification of the religious and ecclesial landscape, so that they may become credible witnesses of the ecumenical movement.

3 Bossey's Teaching Profile

Bossey offers four academic programmes and related taught courses in four disciplines:

- Ecumenical Biblical Hermeneutics
- Ecumenical Missiology
- Ecumenical Social Ethics
- Ecumenical Theology

These disciplinary fields are covered within the four respective modules offered by the responsible professors throughout the Graduate School, and out of which the students have a free choice of two. Complementary courses offered in the Master of Ecumenical Theology/Advanced Master in Ecumenical Theology Programme in spring term, as the "Methodology Course", "Course on Contextual Theologies" and the "Interdisciplinary Course", conducted collaboratively by members of the faculty or with members of the Autonomous Faculty of Theology at the University of Geneva, allow for cross-cutting perspectives from different disciplines, a deepened systematic work on specific topics, as well as a profiled guidance in academic research in accordance with the needs of the students.

The compulsory plenary lectures on the history of the ecumenical movement during winter term represent the foundation of the essentials any student in ecumenism should be informed about.

It is through this teaching instrument that the major historical roots can be retraced and conveyed, which are indispensable to understand the present challenges and new developments in ecumenism and global Christianity. The awareness for and the critical discernment of the diverse factors that have contributed to the contemporary status of the ecumenical movement, its reception and role in a world that is marked by significant shifts, and where its beneficial contributions are no longer viewed self-evident even within the churches themselves.

Additional courses, like the one-off intensive seminars on highly debated issues in ecumenism and the interfaith-seminar, complement the teaching-portfolio of the institute in giving the students the opportunity to take part in current reflections of the WCC and the ecumenical movement and to identify their own positions.

Future initiatives of coherent planning and/ or anticipation, as well as coordination of joint taught programmes will contribute to a greater visibility of teaching profiles over a certain time-period. The integration of empirical methodologies and teaching units into the academic programme, as well as the development and design of new and innovative study modules (e.g. ecumenical spirituality, eco-justice) will constitute further fields of enlargement of the teaching profile at the EIB.

4 Our Understanding of Research

Research, in our view, has to be seen as integral part of the academic activities carried out in Bossey. It is the basis for our teaching endeavours, insofar as it offers us the opportunity to share its insights and results with our students, to stimulate their intellectual curiosity and to make them discover own interests of research. The unique setting of Bossey as institute of the World Council of Churches attached to the University of Geneva provides an excellent environment for conducting research in the field of ecumenism, especially with regard to the invaluable resource collections available in the library and archives.

Bossey's faculty covers theoretical or conceptual and empirical research methods, within research projects which are primarily undertaken individually by the members of the faculty. The results are shared with a wider public through publications and research reviews, or in conferences, seminars and lectures for a wide academic constituency. Furthermore the faculty seeks to encourage research undertaken by students and external research fellows, and to create, wherever possible, possibilities of exchange and joint projects.

The integration of new teaching modules will help to identify additional approaches as valid methods to both enhance the research impact and the teaching attractiveness of the programmes offered at Bossey.

5 Bossey's Research Profile

The research activities and interests as represented currently at the Ecumenical Institute are primarily conducted and followed up individually by the members of the faculty. Among these the following themes, arranged according to five research clusters, can be highlighted:

Ecumenical Biblical Hermeneutics

- Introduction to the Sacred Scriptures
- Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics
- The Gospel of Luke
- Anthropology and Bible (esp. OT)
- Anthropological and theological key to the understanding of divine-human relationship in the Hebrew Bible
- The absence of God in the Old Testament

- Apocalypticism and the Old Testament
- Exegesis and theology of the Book of Revelation
- Biblical hermeneutics in an ecumenical context
- Biblical understanding of poverty and wealth
- Church-State relationship in the light of the Biblical Revelation
- The literary and narrative presentation of the relationship between the King and the rebel prince in the Deuteronomistic History (2 Sam 13-20)
- Emotional expressions of pain in the Old Testament
- Hermeneutical and practical approach the Sacred Scripture
- The “Cry-Response” pattern in the Old Testament understanding of God-man relationship
- The Pentateuch
- Psalms and wisdom literature
- Methodology of Bible study in ecumenical perspective
- The relevance of canonical and theological approach in Biblical Interpretation
- Women in the Bible

Ecumenical Theology

- Ecclesiology
- History of the Ecumenical Movement/ History of Faith and Order
- Baptism/ The ecclesial significance of the baptism in the name of the Trinity outside one’s own Church boundaries
- Confessional studies
- Bilateral dialogues
- Role of the Church in the dialogue with non-WCC member churches
- Methodology of ecumenical dialogue
- Ecumenical hermeneutics – Understanding and misunderstanding between Eastern and Western Christian traditions
- A critical evaluation of the contribution of the ecumenical movement to the “visible unity” of the churches in light of the “ecumenical crisis”
- Moral discernment in the churches on the background of theological anthropology
- Authority in the Church
- The ecclesial presence of the Church beyond the limits of our churches
- Catholic Church and the ecumenical endeavour
- The role of the Bible in ecumenism

Ecumenical Ethics

- Ethics of religions
- Migrant ecclesio-genesis and theologies of migration
- Migration and ethical challenges (racism, economic-political exclusion, development)
- Religion and violence
- Cosmopolitanism and Peace Ethics
- Preaching the word of God in times of HIV/Aids
- Intercultural gender studies
- Understanding the role of religious motives in contemporary political discourses
- Theological perspectives of reconciliation in transitional contexts
- The churches’ responses to acculturation and estrangement
- Public theology: reflecting the role of religion(s) in civil society
- Healing and wholeness in charismatic renewal movements
- Global human trafficking
- Globalisation and ethics
- Images of the human/ images of God and human rights

Ecumenical Missiology

- Missiology (missionary ethos, language and methodology of mission; theology of atonement; Gospel and cultures; eco-theology)
- Intercultural theology (Contemporary understanding of mission)
- History of mission (esp. African Protestant missions of the 19th century)
- The influences of mission work in Namibia
- Global Pentecostalism and charismatic movement
- Conversion in cross-cultural perspective

Ecumenical Spirituality

- Lima liturgy
- Worshipping ecumenically
- Teaching ecumenical spirituality
- Spirituality and the Ecumenical Movement
- Initiation to Biblical prayer
- Introduction to Catholic theology and spirituality
- Hermeneutical approach to Biblical Spirituality
- Spirituality and resistance

Further development of cross-cutting thematic topics and resulting possibilities for collaborative research projects both within the faculty and externally will increase the attractiveness of Bossey as a centre for academic ecumenical research, to the benefit of the teaching tableau, as well as the interaction with local and international related organizations and institutes. Likewise, reflections on drawing funded research projects to Bossey are part of the process of ameliorating Bossey's overall research profile.

Updated April 2009 by Prof. A.Ekue