

Apostolic Letter in the Form of a “Motu Proprio”
of the Supreme Pontiff Francis
AD THEOLOGIAM PROMOVENDAM
with which are approved new statutes of the
Pontifical Academy of Theology

1. Promoting theology in the future cannot be limited to abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes of the past. Called to prophetically interpret the present and glimpse new itineraries for the future in the light of Revelation, theology will have to confront profound cultural transformations, aware that: “What we are living through is not simply an era of change, but a change of epoch” (Address to the Roman Curia, Dec. 21, 2013).

2. The Pontifical Academy of Theology, which arose in the early 18th century under the auspices of Clement XI, my Predecessor, and was canonically established by him with the brief *Inscrutabili* on April 23, 1718, throughout its centuries-long existence has constantly embodied the need to place theology at the service of the Church and the world, modifying when necessary its structure and expanding its aims: from an initial place of theological formation of clergymen in a context where other institutions were lacking and inadequate for that purpose, to a group of scholars called upon to investigate and deepen theological themes of particular relevance. The updating of the Statutes, desired by my Predecessors, marked and promoted this process: think of the Statutes approved by Gregory XVI on August 26, 1838, and those approved by St. John Paul II with the Apostolic Letter *Inter munera Academicarum* on January 28, 1999.

3. After almost twenty-five years, the time has come to revise these norms, to make them more suitable for the mission that our time imposes on theology. A synodal, missionary and “outgoing” Church can only be matched by an “outgoing” theology. As I wrote in my Letter to the Grand Chancellor of the Catholic University of Argentina, addressing professors and students of theology, “Do not settle for a ‘desk’ theology. Let your place of reflection be the frontiers. [...] Good theologians, like good pastors, also smell of the people and the street and, by their reflection, pour oil and wine on people’s wounds.” However, openness to the world, to humanity in the concreteness of its existential situation, with its problems, wounds, challenges, and potential, cannot be reduced to a “tactical” attitude, outwardly adapting now crystallized content to new situations. Rather it must urge theology to an epistemological and methodological rethinking, as indicated in the Proem of the apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*.

4. Theological reflection is therefore called to a turning point, to a paradigm shift, to a “courageous cultural revolution” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’*, 114) that commits it, first and foremost, to be a fundamentally contextual theology, capable of reading and interpreting the Gospel in the conditions in which men and women daily live, in different geographical, social and cultural environments, and having as its archetype the Incarnation of the eternal Logos, its entering into the culture, worldview, and religious tradition of a people. From here, theology cannot but develop into a culture of dialogue and encounter between different traditions and different knowledge, between different Christian denominations and different religions, openly confronting everyone, believers and non-believers alike. Indeed, the need for dialogue is intrinsic to human beings and to the whole of creation, and it is the particular task of theology to discover “the

Trinitarian imprint that makes the cosmos in which we live ‘a web of relationships’ in which ‘it is proper to every living being to tend toward another thing’” (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, Proem, 4a).

5. This relational dimension connotes and defines, from the epistemic point of view, the status of theology, which is urged not to close itself in self-referentiality, which leads to isolation and insignificance, but to grasp itself as embedded in a web of relationships, first and foremost with other disciplines and other knowledge. This is the approach of transdisciplinarity, that is, interdisciplinarity in a strong sense, as distinct from multidisciplinary, understood as interdisciplinarity in a weak sense. The latter certainly promotes a better understanding of the object of study by considering it from multiple points of view, which nevertheless remain complementary and separate. Instead, transdisciplinarity should be thought of “as the placement and fermentation of all knowledge within the space of Light and Life offered by the Wisdom that emanates from God’s Revelation” (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, Proem, 4c). Hence the arduous task for theology to be able to make use of new categories elaborated by other knowledges, in order to penetrate and communicate the truths of faith and transmit the teaching of Jesus in today’s languages, with originality and critical awareness.

6. Dialogue with other knowledge evidently presupposes dialogue within the ecclesial community and an awareness of the essential synodal and communal dimension of doing theology: the theologian cannot but live fraternity and communion in the first person, at the service of evangelization and in order to reach the hearts of all. As I said to theologians in the Address to the Members of the International Theological Commission, November 24, 2022: “Ecclesial synodality therefore commits theologians to do theology in a synodal form, promoting among themselves the capacity to listen, dialogue, discern and integrate the multiplicity and variety of instances and inputs.” It is therefore important that there are places, including institutional ones, in which to live and experience theological collegiality and fraternity.

7. Finally, the necessary attention to the scientific status of theology should not obscure its sapiential dimension, as already clearly stated by St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 6). Therefore, Blessed Antonio Rosmini considered theology a sublime expression of “intellectual charity,” while calling for the critical reason of all knowledge to be oriented to the Idea of Wisdom. Now the Idea of Wisdom inwardly holds Truth and Charity together in a “solid circle,” so that it is impossible to know truth without practicing charity: “because the one is in the other and neither of the two is found outside the other. Hence he who has this Truth has Charity with it that fulfills it, and he who has this Charity has Truth fulfilled” (cf. Of the Author’s Studies, nn.100-111). Scientific reason must expand its boundaries in the direction of wisdom, lest it dehumanize and impoverish itself. By this route, theology can contribute to the current debate of “rethinking thinking,” showing itself to be a true critical knowledge insofar as it is sapiential knowledge, not abstract and ideological, but spiritual, elaborated on its knees, pregnant with adoration and prayer; a transcendent knowledge and, at the same time, attentive to the voice of the people, thus “popular” theology, mercifully addressed to the open wounds of humanity and creation and within the folds of human history, to which it prophesies the hope of ultimate fulfillment.

8. It is a matter of the pastoral “stamp” that theology as a whole, and not only in one of its particular spheres, must assume: without opposing theory and practice, theological reflection is urged to develop with an inductive method, which starts from the different contexts and concrete situations in which peoples are inserted, allowing itself to be seriously challenged by reality, in order to become discernment of the “signs of the times” in the proclamation of the salvific event of the God-agape, communicated in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is necessary that the knowledge of people’s common sense, which is in fact a theological place in which so many images of God dwell, often not corresponding to the Christian face of God, only and always love, be privileged first of all. Theology is at the service of the Church’s evangelization and transmission of faith, so that faith becomes culture, that is, the wise ethos of God’s people, a proposal of human and humanizing beauty for all.

9. Faced with this renewed mission of theology, the Pontifical Academy of Theology is called to develop, in its constant attention to the scientific nature of theological reflection, transdisciplinary dialogue with other scientific, philosophical, humanistic and artistic knowledge, with believers and non-believers, with men and women of different Christian denominations and different religions. This will be able to happen by creating an academic community of shared faith and study that weaves a network of relationships with other formative, educational and cultural institutions and is able to penetrate, with originality and a spirit of imagination, into the existential places of the elaboration of knowledge, professions and Christian communities.

10. Thanks to the new Statutes, the Pontifical Academy of Theology will thus be able more easily to pursue the goals that the present time requires. Accepting favorably the vows that have been addressed to me to approve these new norms, and indulging them, I desire that this egregious seat of study may grow in quality, and therefore I approve, by virtue of this Apostolic Letter, and in perpetuity, the Statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, legitimately drawn up and newly revised, and I confer upon them the force of Apostolic approval.

All that I have decreed in this Apostolic Letter *motu proprio* given, I order to have stable and lasting force, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on the 1st day of November in the year 2023, Solemnity of All Saints, the eleventh of the Pontificate.