

“Concerning the Promotion of Theology”

Apostolic letter In the form of "Motu Proprio"
of the Supreme Pontiff FRANCIS

By which are approved new statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Theology

Translated by Daniel Madigan S.J.

1. In order to promote theology in the future, one will not be able to limit oneself to abstractly repositing formulas and patterns of the past. Called to prophetically interpret the present and to see new itineraries for the future, in the light of revelation, theology will have to deal with profound cultural transformations, aware that “what we are experiencing is not simply an era of changes, but it is a change era” (speech to the Roman Curia of 21 December 2019).

2. The Pontifical Academy of Theology arose in the early 18th century under the auspices of my predecessor Clement XI and was canonically established by him with the letter *Inscrutabili* of April 23, 1718. During the centuries of its existence it has constantly embodied the need to place theology at the service of the Church and the world, changing its structure whenever necessary and broadening its scope: from its initial role as a place for the theological formation of clergy in a context in which other institutions were lacking and inadequate for this purpose, to a group of scholars called to investigate and deepen theological themes of particular relevance. This process of change was signalled and promoted by the updating of the statutes my predecessors decided upon: 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 review these norms, to make them more suitable for the mission that our day imposes on theology. A synodal, missionary and ‘outgoing’ church must be characterized by an ‘outgoing’ theology. As I wrote in a letter to the Grand Chancellor of the Catholic University of Argentina, addressing professors and students of theology: “Do not be satisfied with a “desk” theology. It is the peripheries that should be your place of reflection. [...] Good theologians too, like good pastors, smell of the people and the street, and by their reflection they pour oil and wine on people’s wounds.” However, such openness to the world, to human persons in the concreteness of their existential situation, with their problems, their wounds, their challenges, their potential, cannot be reduced to a kind of tactical approach

that in addressing these new situations is only making superficial adaptations to content that are already long fossilized. Rather, this openness to the world must call theology to an epistemological and methodological rethinking, as indicated in the Foreword to the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*.

4. Theological reflection is therefore called to a change of direction, to a change of paradigm, to a “courageous cultural revolution”¹ which forces it, first of all, to be a theology that is fundamentally contextual, capable of reading and interpreting the Gospel in the conditions in which men and women live every day, in varied geographical, social and cultural environments, a theology that has as its archetype the incarnation of the eternal Logos, its entering into the culture, into the world vision, into the religious tradition of a people. Starting from there, theology can only develop in a culture of dialogue and encounter between different traditions and different fields of knowledge; between different Christian confessions and different religions, engaging openly with everyone, believers and non-believers. The need for dialogue is in fact intrinsic to the human being and to the whole of creation, and it is a particular task of theology “to discover the Trinitarian imprint that makes the cosmos in which we live a “network of relations” in which “it is characteristic of every living being to tend towards another.” (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, *Proemio*, 4a).

5. This relational dimension connotes and defines, from an epistemic point of view, the status of theology, which is driven not to close itself in self-referentiality - which leads to isolation and insignificance - but to recognize that it is inserted in a network of relationships, in the first place with other disciplines and other fields of knowledge. This is the approach of cross-disciplinarity, i.e., 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 several points of view, but these points of view remain only complementary and separate. Cross-disciplinarity must instead be thought of as “the gathering and fermenting of all disciplines against the backdrop of the Light and Life offered by the Wisdom streaming from God’s Revelation.” (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, *Proemio*, 4C). From this comes the arduous responsibility theology has of being able to make use of new categories elaborated by other fields of knowledge in order to penetrate and communicate the truths of faith and transmit the teaching of Jesus in the languages of today with originality and critical awareness.

¹ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 114

6. The dialogue with other fields of knowledge evidently presupposes a dialogue within the ecclesial community and the consciousness of the essential synodal and communal dimension of doing theology: the theologian must experience fraternity and communion firsthand at the service of evangelization and in order to reach the hearts of all. As I said to theologians in the Discourse to the members of the International Theological Commission, on November 24, 2022: “Ecclesial synodality needs theologians to do theology in a synodal way, developing their capacity to listen to each other, to dialogue, to discern and to harmonise their many and varied approaches and contributions.” It is, therefore, important that there be places, even institutions, in which to live and experience collegiality and theological fraternity.

7. Finally, the necessary attention to the scientific nature of theology must not obscure its wisdom dimension, as already clearly stated by St. Thomas Aquinas (see *Summa Theologiae I, q. 1, a. 6*). On the basis of this, Blessed Antonio Rosmini considered theology a sublime expression of “intellectual charity,” at the same time demanding that the critical rationality of all fields of knowledge be oriented to the Idea of Wisdom. The Idea of Wisdom internally binds Truth and Charity together in a “solid circle”, such that it is impossible to know the truth without practicing charity: “Because the one is in the other and neither of the two is found outside the other. Therefore, whoever has this truth has along with it the charity that fulfills it; and whoever has this charity has the truth fulfilled”(see *Degli Studi dell’ Autore, nn. 100-111*). Scientific reason must expand its boundaries in the direction of wisdom, in order not to dehumanize and impoverish itself. In this way, theology can contribute to the current debate of “rethinking thought,” showing that it is a truly critical knowledge as far as it sapiential knowledge, not an abstract and ideological knowledge, but spiritual, worked out on its knees, pregnant with adoration and prayer; a transcendent knowledge and, at the same time, attentive to the voice of the peoples, and so “popular” theology, turned mercifully towards the open wounds of humanity and of creation, and inside the folds of human history, to which it prophesies the hope of an ultimate fulfillment.

8. This is the pastoral “stamp” that theology as a whole, and not only in one specialty, must take: without contrasting theory and practice, theological reflection is called to develop itself through an inductive method, which starts from the different contexts and concrete situations in which peoples find themselves, letting itself be seriously questioned by reality, in order to become discernment of the “signs of the times” in the announcement of the saving event of the God who is love, communicated in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must

privilege the knowledge of the common sense of the people which is actually a locus theologicus in which many images of God live, though often not corresponding to the Christian face of God, who is only and always love.

Theology puts itself at the service of the Church's evangelizing transmission of faith because faith becomes culture, that is, the sapiential ethos of the people of God, an offer of human and humanizing beauty for everyone.

9. Faced with this renewed mission of theology, the Pontifical Academy of Theology is called to develop, in constant attention to the scientific nature of theological reflection, the cross-disciplinary dialogue with other forms of knowledge: scientific, philosophical, humanistic and artistic, with believers and non-believers, with men and women of different Christian confessions and different religions. This may happen by creating an academic community sharing faith and study, which might weave a network of relationships with other institutions of formation, education and culture and which would know how to penetrate, with originality and a spirit of imagination, into those existential spaces of the professions and Christian communities where knowledge is created.

10. Thanks to the new statutes, the Pontifical Academy of Theology will thus be able to pursue the purposes that the present time requires. Welcoming the encouragement that I have been given to approve these new norms, and seconding them, I desire that this prestigious place of studies grow in quality and for this reason I approve, by virtue of this apostolic letter, and in perpetuity, the statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, legitimately elaborated and recently reviewed, and I confer on them the force of the apostolic approbation.

Everything I have decreed in this apostolic letter, given *motu proprio*, I order that it have stable and lasting value, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 1 November of the year 2023, Solemnity of All Saints, eleventh of the pontificate.

FRANCIS