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AD THEOLOGIAM PROMOVEDAM (On Promoting Theology) – English Translation

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of the Supreme Pontiff Francis

AD THEOLOGIAM PROMOVEDAM
(On Promoting Theology)

With which the new statutes of the Pontifical
Academy of Theology are approved.

1. To promote theology in the future, we cannot limit ourselves to abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes from 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 change, but a change of era” ([Address to the Roman Curia](#) of 21 December 2019).

2. The [Pontifical Academy of Theology](#), founded at the beginning of the 18th century under the auspices of Clement XI, my predecessor, and 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 training 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 delve into theological themes of particular relevance. The updating of the Statutes, desired by my Predecessors, has signalled and promoted this process: recall 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 five decades, the time has come to review these norms, to make them more suitable for the mission that our time imposes on theology. A synodal, missionary, and “outgoing” Church can only correspond to an “outgoing” theology. As I wrote in the [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, even smell of the people and the street and, by their reflection, pour oil and wine on the wounds of humanity.” Openness to the world, to humanity in the concreteness of its existential situation, with its problems, wounds, challenges, potential, cannot, however, be reduced to a “tactical” attitude, extrinsically adapting now-crystallized contents to new situations, but must urge theology to rethink epistemologically and methodologically, 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 being a

fundamentally contextual theology, capable of reading and interpreting the Gospel in the conditions in which men and women live daily, in different geographical, social, and cultural environments, and having as an archetype the Incarnation of the eternal Logos, its entry into culture, into the worldview, and the religious tradition of a people. Starting from here, theology can only develop in a *culture of dialogue* and encounter between different traditions and different knowledge, between different Christian denominations and different religions, openly engaging with everyone, believers and non-believers. The need for dialogue is, in fact, intrinsic to the human being and to the entire creation and it is the peculiar 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 towards something else’” (Apostolic Constitution [Veritatis Gaudium](#), Proem, 4a).

5. This relational dimension connotes and defines, from an epistemic viewpoint, the status of theology, which is driven 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 of all with other disciplines and other knowledge. This is the approach of *transdisciplinarity*, that is, interdisciplinarity in the strong sense, as distinct from multidisciplinary understood as interdisciplinarity in the weak sense. The latter certainly favours a better understanding of the object of study by considering it from multiple viewpoints, which, nevertheless, remain complementary and separate.

Transdisciplinarity should, instead, 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 the Revelation of God” (Apostolic Constitution [Veritatis gaudium](#), proem, 4c). This leads to the arduous task for theology of being able to make use of new categories developed by other knowledge, 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 forms of knowledge evidently presupposes dialogue within the ecclesial community and awareness of the essential *synodal and communal dimension of doing theology*: the theologian cannot help but experience friendliness and communion firsthand, at the service of evangelization and to reach the hearts of everyone. As I said to theologians in the [Address to the Members of the International Theological Commission](#), 24 November 2022: “ecclesial synodality therefore commits theologians to do theology in a synodal form, promoting among themselves the ability to listen, dialogue, discern and integrate the multiplicity and variety of instances and contributions.” It is therefore important that places exist, including institutional ones, in which to live and experience collegiality and theological alliance.

7. Finally, the necessary attention to the scientific status of theology must not obscure *its sapiential dimension*, as already clearly stated by St. Thomas Aquinas (see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 6). Therefore, Blessed Antonio Rosmini considered theology a sublime expression of “intellectual charity,” and called for the critical reason of all knowledge to be oriented towards the idea of wisdom. Now the idea of wisdom holds truth and charity together internally in a “solid circle,” so that it is impossible to know the truth without practicing charity: “because one is in the other and neither of the two exists outside the other. Therefore, whoever has this truth has with it the charity that fulfils it, and whoever has this charity has the truth fulfilled” (see *The Author’s Studies*, nos. 100-111). Scientific reason *must broaden its boundaries in the direction of wisdom*, so as not to

dehumanize and impoverish itself. In this way, theology can contribute to the current debate of “rethinking thought,” showing itself to be *a true critical knowledge as sapiential knowledge*, not abstract and ideological, but spiritual, developed on one’s knees, pregnant with adoration and prayer; a knowledge that is transcendent and, at the same time, attentive to the voice of the people, therefore “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 an ultimate fulfilment.

8. It is about the pastoral “*stamp*” that theology as a whole, and not just in one particular area, must take on: without opposing theory and practice, theological reflection is urged to *develop using an inductive method*, which starts from the different contexts and concrete situations in which people are inserted, allowing themselves to be seriously challenged by reality, 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, first and foremost, priority must be given to *the knowledge of people’s common sense*, which is in fact a theological place in which many images of God live, often not corresponding to the Christian face of God, only and always love. Theology places itself at the service of the Church’s evangelization and the transmission of faith, so that faith becomes culture, that is, the wise *ethos* of the people of God, 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 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 can happen by creating an academic community for sharing faith and study, which weaves a network of relationships with other training, educational, and cultural institutions and which knows how 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 be able to more easily pursue the objectives that the present time requires. By favourably accepting the vows that have been addressed to me to approve these new norms, and by supporting them, I desire that this esteemed seat of studies grows 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 drawn up and revised again, upon which I confer the force of Apostolic approbation.

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

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

FRANCIS

English translation from the [Official Italian](#) by Catholic theologian Christopher Evan Longhurst, S.T.D.
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