

An Apostolic Letter issued *motu proprio* of Pope Francis by which are approved new statutes for the Pontifical Academy of Theology.

1. If theology is to be enhanced in the future, it is not enough to repeat the formulae and acts that derive from the thinking of past times. Its vocation is located in the present time in order to interpret prophetically and in new ways which look forward into the future. Beneath the light of Revelation, theology has to face the profound cultural changes [of our time], conscious that: 'What we are living through is not simply an time of change, but a change of epoch.'<sup>1</sup>

2. The Pontifical Academy of Theology, which began under my processor, Clement XI, in the early eighteenth century, was canonically established by the letter *Inscrutabili* of 23 April 1718. During its centuries-long existence it has always given physical expression to the need to place theology at the Church's and the world's service, changing when necessary its own structure and expanding its purposes. Beginning with the need to give a theological formation to ecclesiastics in situations where there was a dearth of suitable institutions, it changed to become a group of scholars called upon to examine in a profound way various pressing theological issues. My predecessors, therefore, updated its statutes [from time to time] in order to promote this process: examples of this would be the Statutes given by Gregory XVI on 26 August 1838, and those approved by St. John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Inter munera academiaram* of 28 January 1999.

3. After nearly five [*sic*] years<sup>2</sup> it is now time to revise these norms in order to make them more appropriate for the mission that our time sets theology. A Church that is synodal, missionary and 'going outwards' ought to have a corresponding theology that is 'going outwards.' We wrote about this to the teachers and students in the Letter addressed to the Great Chancellor of the Catholic University of Argentina: 'You must not be satisfied with a kind of classroom theology. Your thinking must have its location on the very edges of the earth. ... ... Because good theologians, just like good pastors, smell the people and the street and, by their thinking, they pour oil and wine on the wounds<sup>3</sup> of human beings.' However, being open to the world, to the human being in the experience of humanity's existential condition: its situations, wounds, provocations and abilities, should not be reduced to 'rules for action' which are exteriorly adapted to new situations, rather theology must rethink its method and its ways of investigation – in the way that is indicated in the *proemium* to the apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*.

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<sup>1</sup> Address to the Roman Curia, 21 December 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Both Italian and Latin texts are explicit: 'after five years' – whether this refers back to another unmentioned text of 2018 or is a blunder for twenty-five years and referring to the 1999 document just mentioned is unclear.

<sup>3</sup> The image is taken from the Parable of the Good Samaritan at Lk 10:34; the image's origin is not mentioned in the text.

4. Theological enquiry is called to a paradigm shift: it is to change to a model of ‘animated cultural change’<sup>4</sup> which is, above all, its genuine calling when it is based in its own proper time. This means being able to read and interpret the Gospel in the conditions that now prevail and in which men and women live their everyday lives in the variety of their locations, cultures and societies. Meanwhile, with its eyes formed on the exemplar of the incarnate eternal Logos, theology enters into the culture, worldview, and religious tradition of each people. From this starting point, theology cannot but develop towards a culture of dialogue, encountering differing traditions and differing ways of thinking, and of encountering the differences between the Christian confessions and the differing religions. And, it needs to speak openly with everyone, whether believers or non-believers. Dialogue is, indeed, needed between the human race and [in relation] to the whole of creation; and here lies a particular task of theology ‘to uncover the trinitarian traces, that the universe in which we live is “a context of relationships” where “every living being tends toward another.”’<sup>5</sup>

5. This approach necessitated and defines, from the epistemic perspective, theology’s status, which is urged not to bind itself in its own inclinations which leads to segregation and lightness, but to hold its need to be inserted in the web of knowledge alongside, from the very beginning, other disciplines and sciences. Theology must take this transdisciplinary approach, namely interdisciplinarity in a strong sense. This is distinct from multi-disciplinarity (i.e. interdisciplinarity in a weak sense) which seeks a better understanding by looking at some issue under many different headings, but where these remain complementary and separate. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, is an approach to understanding that seeks ‘situating and stimulating all disciplines against the backdrop of the Light and Life offered by the Wisdom streaming from God’s Revelation.’<sup>6</sup> From this arises theology’s arduous task to use well the new categories that are derived from other forms of thought in order that the truths of faith may be understood and communicated, and that teaching of Jesus be handed on, in today’s languages from a new critical consciousness.

6. Dialogue with other sciences is, without doubt, a dialogue within the ecclesial community and carries with it an awareness of the essential synodal and communal dimensions of doing theology: the theologian must experience the fraternity and communion in the service of evangelization and in order to access all hearts. Just as we said to theologians in the speech to the members of the International Theological Commission, 24 November 2022: ‘Ecclesial synodality therefore 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.’<sup>7</sup> So it is of weighty significance that there are places, and indeed institutions, in which theologians can live and experience collegiality and theological fraternity.

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<sup>4</sup> *Laudato si’*, 114

<sup>5</sup> *Veritatis gaudium*, Proemium, 4a.

<sup>6</sup> *Veritatis gaudium*, Proemium, 4c.

<sup>7</sup> The translation of this sentence is taken from the Vatican website’s version of this speech:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/november/documents/20221124-cti.html> .

7. Lastly, the necessary rational status of theology should not obscure its sapiential aspect, as was explicitly mentioned by St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 6). For the same reason, Blessed Antonio Rosmini thought that theology was an excellent example of ‘intellectual love’ which was directed towards Wisdom while seeking to have a critical understanding of all the sciences. Thinking about Wisdom intrinsically leads to a ‘solid circle’ with truth and love held together in such a manner that it is not possible to know truth while neglecting love. ‘For this reason, one without the other, and vice versa, is not found; and so the person who has this truth has the fulfilling compliment of love, and the person with love has the compliment of truth.’<sup>8</sup> Scientific reason must broaden its boundaries in the direction of wisdom, and must not dehumanize and impoverish itself.<sup>9</sup> In this way, theology is able to give something to the debate of ‘rethinking thinking,’ showing itself to be truly a critical knowing just as it is sapiential knowing, not abstract and ideological, but spiritual and made with bent knees, pregnant with adoration and prayer; at once a transcendent knowing and one tuned to the people’s voice. Theology is to be of the people, mercifully open to the wounds of the human race and of creation, and also woven into the contexts of human history, to which it bears witness to the hope of the fulfilment of all in the last times.

8. Theology, taken as a whole, ought to have a pastoral ‘stamp’ – and this should not be limited to some of its particular parts. Avoiding an opposition between theory and practice, theological enquiry must strive for an inductive approach as it develops its own work, taking as its beginning the diversity of contexts and situations that people face, allowing itself to engage with the seriousness of reality, in order to discern the ‘signs of the times’ in the salvation-bearing event of God-Love, communicated and announced in Jesus Christ. Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to give priority to the knowledge that comes from the common sense of people, which is itself a theological source, in which live many images of God, often not corresponding to the Christian face of God which is always and only love.<sup>10</sup> Theology is for the service of the Church’s evangelization and transmission of faith, so that faith becomes culture, that is, the thoughtful ethos of the people of God, an offering of the human and humanizing beauty in everything.

9. With this renewed theological mission, the Pontifical Theological Academy, in its scientific theological enquiry, is to build a transdisciplinary dialogue with other sciences, philosophies, and with the humanities and arts, with both believers and non-believers, with men and women of different Christian confessions and with different religions. This will only come about by its being an academic community of shared faith and enquiry that weaves a network of relationships with other institutions of formation, education, and culture, and one that is able to engage with what is new and

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Degli studi dell’Autore*, nn. 100-111.

<sup>9</sup> This sentence in Latin (*Viae ratio suos fines in sapientiam versus amplificare debet, ne humanitatem amittat fiatque inops*) is bordering on the meaningless; so here recourse has been made to the Italian (*La ragione scientifica deve allargare i suoi confini nella direzione della sapienza, per non disumanizzarsi e impoverirsi*) which clearly precedes the Latin.

<sup>10</sup> The Italian text is the basis for translating this sentence.

ingenious in those existential places where the knowledge, both of the professions and Christian communities, comes into being.<sup>11</sup>

10. With these new Statutes, the Pontifical Academy of Theology will more easily pursue the tasks required in this present time. Having received the wishes that have been addressed to me to approve these new norms, and granting them, we wish that this eminent seat of learning may grow in quality, and so we approve, by this Apostolic Letter, in perpetuity the Statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, legitimately made and newly revised, and we give them the force of apostolic approval.

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

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

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<sup>11</sup> This sentence can only be construed by seeking guidance from the Italian text (*Ciò potrà avvenire creando una comunità accademica di condivisione di fede e di studio, che intessa una rete di relazioni con altre istituzioni formative, educative e culturali e che sappia penetrare, con originalità e spirito d'immaginazione, nei luoghi esistenziali dell'elaborazione del sapere, delle professioni e delle comunità cristiane*) to illuminate the Latin (*Id fieri poterit cum academica communitas fidei inquisitionisque participandae efficiatur, quae necessitudinum rete instituat cum aliis formationis, educationis cultusque institutionibus, atque ex novitiate ingenioseque exsistentiae loca ingredi valeat scientiarum, artium et christianarum communitatum conficiendarum*).