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Audience with Members of the Pontifical Academy of Theology

At 12.10 today, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Members of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, on the occasion of the Ninth International Forum of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, entitled *I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth* (Pontifical Lateran University, 25-26 January 2018).

The following is the Pope's address to those present during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Cardinals,
Venerable Brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood,
Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you, and I thank the President for the words he has addressed to me. The celebration of an anniversary is always a moment of joy, of thanksgiving for what has happened in the past and, at the same time, a commitment to the future. This also applies to the *Pontificia Academia Theologica*, which this year celebrates three centuries since its institution, which took place on 23 April 1718 with *Breve* on the part of Pope Clement XI.

Three centuries of life certainly constitute a significant milestone, but they must not be an occasion for looking at oneself narcissistically, nor to look nostalgically at the past. Rather, they represent the stimulus for a renewed awareness of your own identity and for a re-launch of your mission in the Church.

The Pontifical Academy of Theology has known, in its history, various changes of structure and organization to meet the ever new challenges posed by the different social and ecclesial contexts in which it has found itself operating. Indeed, it originated in the intentions of Cardinal Cosimo de' Girolami as a place for the theological formation of the clergy at a time when other institutions were deficient and inadequate for this purpose. However,

when the change in the historical and cultural situation no longer required this task, the Academy assumed the nature – which it still possesses – of a group of scholars called to investigate and explore theological themes of particular relevance. At the same time, in the composition of the body of the members, a balance was established between the members operating in Rome and those working elsewhere, which still today distinguishes the particular Catholic and international dimension of the Institution.

Beyond the various changes, however, there is a constant element that characterizes the Academy: being at the service of the Church with the aim of promoting, soliciting and supporting in its various forms the intelligence of faith in the God revealed in Christ; faithful to the teaching of the Church and open to the demands and challenges of culture, it is a place of exchange and dialogue for the communication of the Gospel in ever new contexts, letting itself be stimulated by the urgencies that arise from suffering humanity to offer the contribution of believing thought, incarnated and fraternal: the *Forum* on creation that you are currently holding also drives you in this direction.

Then there is another aspect that since its origin has characterized your Academy: its link with other Roman university and educational institutions, from the ancient “La Sapienza” University of Rome, to the Schools of the Roman Seminary and what later became the Pontifical Universities of Rome.

The continuous contact, in a relationship of mutual cultural exchange, with these institutions and with many religious congregations to which its members belonged and belong, have ensured that the Pontifical Academy of Theology has never considered itself an isolated and autonomous entity, but has instead played its role as part of a web of relationships which has enriched all interlocutors. Looking at this past, the Academy is still called today to perceive its identity not from a self-referential perspective, but as a promoter of an encounter between theology, philosophy and human sciences, so that the good seed of the Gospel may bear fruit in the vast field of knowledge. Finally, the need for ever-closer collaboration between Roman ecclesiastical university institutions demands that the Theological Academy not be estranged, but rather be able to place itself in fruitful dialogue with each of them in order to foster common, coordinated and shared work.

With these prospects for the future, and assuring you of my prayer and my closeness, I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing. Please do not forget to pray for me.
