

*Approval of the Charter and By Laws of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for
Marriage and Family Sciences.*

Comment of the President, Reverend Monsignor Pierangelo Sequeri.

The contribution of theological research to Christian culture—and to human culture as a whole—cannot be seen only as a principle. The quality of its contribution— of thought and research, of formation and guidance— must be appreciated in practice, in understanding the faith, as well as the reality that faith is able to call forth and spread.

Today, the “principle of reality” must be considered a crucial issue for the seriousness and rigor of “thinking about faith.” The famous Thomistic adage, which boldly directs the inmost knowledge of faith toward the realistic purpose of knowing (*fides non terminatur ad enuntabile sed ad rem*, faith is not directed toward a formulation but rather to a reality) has never been so relevant. The understanding of faith and the understanding of reality live in close symbiosis, or they do not live at all. In this sense, theology does not withdraw in any way from the purpose of its research, which is shedding light on reality—the reality made known by revelation received in faith, culminating in the reality of Jesus Christ, and the reality disclosed in the dynamism of all creation in the world and in human history, both of which, in the Jesus Christ, event recognize their roots in the intimacy of God's love and in the promise of their total redemption in the womb of God. The intimate union of faith and reality, which provides the horizon for a theological ministry that is directed toward uniting the awe-filled contemplation of God's handiwork with the serene joy of evangelizing the human creature, is also the fundamental axis of the openness to dialogue and of the critical discernment with which theology is active within the various forms of human knowledge about reality and the meaning of things and of life. This orientation, followed openly and transparently, honors the non-ideological, non-self-referential quality of theological endeavor, while still allowing it freedom to remain strictly consistent with the witness to truth that faith commits it to. “The renewal of schools of theology comes about through the practice of discernment and through a dialogical way of proceeding capable of creating a corresponding spiritual environment and intellectual practice..... A dialogue capable of integrating the living criterion of Jesus' Paschal Mystery with that of analogy, which discovers

connections, signs, and theological references in reality, in creation and in history.” (Francis, Address to the Theological Faculty of Naples, 21 June 2019).

The approval of the Charter of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences inaugurates and supports the new operational phase of its adaptation to these criteria that inspire the believing intelligence and Christian culture that are required of ecclesial mission in a changed era. The basic outline of this adaptation, together with the coordinated discipline that provides the structure for its institutional operations within the variety of academic forms that, within the Church, are dedicated to the research and formation of Christian thought, were set out in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* of Pope Francis. The possibilities for renewal that have been entrusted specifically to our theological institute are contained in the *Motu proprio Summa familiae cura*, as later expanded upon in the allocutions addressed, at various times, to the leadership and to the entire community of the Institute.

What are the guidelines for renewal that, subsequently, will define the new structure? First, the expansion and strengthening (with new chairs and additional new teachers) of the two “poles” that give life to the specific mission originally entrusted to the Institute: namely, its theological-pastoral activities and its activities that are anthropological-cultural. The first pole will be substantially expanded through systematic emphasis on deepening the theology of Christian faith, of the ecclesiology of the community and of the Gospel mission, of the anthropology of human and theological love, of the global theological ethics of life, of spirituality and of the transmission of faith in the secular city. The second pole, in particular, will be broadly reshaped to respond to the exigencies involved in updating study and dialogue within Christian culture and thought in the areas of comparative law (religious and civil), of the sociology of economic, political and technological change in the community; of the role of the family in human formation, and in the structure of intermediate bodies concerned with the ethical and affective integration of society.

The two poles will be redesigned in a way that fully harmonizes them within a framework of unified Christian research and formation of the highest level. At the same time, their organization will allow them to pursue specialized curricula leading to degrees in the two distinct areas, with appropriate academic recognition and the possibility of targeted participation within the

ecclesiastical and civil institutions of various countries. In this context, a carefully studied selection of complementary courses will also be made available, entrusted to specialists of recognized high standing (at our main campus or affiliated with qualified university departments, particularly at the Pontifical Lateran University, our principal corresponding institution).

The new John Paul II Institute thus intends to honor the profound, and always valid, commitments expressed in the founding traditions that have preceded it, pursuing with ever greater determination the new global role required by its theological and cultural mission. The Institute intends to do this, as a first step, by not only confirming but also by growing, in quantity and quality, its international capabilities. It will also develop a capacity for inter-communication—theological, cultural and academic—on a global scale, both through the further strengthening its faculty, which will be able to enrich a research community that is entrusted with the mission of interacting, in a spirit of cooperation and without any hint of timidity, with the widest academic horizons and the liveliest intellectual forces; and as well through the establishment of specialized and varied courses of formation, with a view to taking greater advantage of the different approaches and goals of the students, within their local churches and in the light of the Church’s universal mission.

Our hope, obviously, is to win the confidence of the Pastors of the Church and thus to support their ministry to their faith communities in this delicate and strategic aspect of the communication of the Catholic faith and the interpretation of human reality. Our commitment, moreover, intends to honor to the fullest our special title of “Pontifical,” that is, closely linked to the supreme and universal ministry of the successor of Peter. The trust that the Pope Francis has bestowed on us, and in many ways has renewed, is a recognition, and certainly not a secondary one, of our commitment to faithful service to a Church that has been authoritatively encouraged to leave behind any fearful self-referentiality in order to witness to an evangelical truth that is preached with joy. We are convinced, with the humility and firm certainty that our faith gives us, that the Spirit has in store great treasures of wisdom for the Lord’s disciples who are carrying out the mission that will evangelize our present age.

Pierangelo Sequeri

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