

Rome, July 24, 2019

To the kind attention of Msgr. Pierangelo Sequeri
President, Pontifical Theological John Paul II Institute

cc: His Excellency Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia
Grand Chancellor, Pontifical Theological John Paul II Institute

Rev. Msgr. Sequeri,

In the last few hours, many students have expressed to us their immense concern about the sudden publication of the new statutes and the new ordinance of studies of our Institute, along with the sad news of the dismissal of two professors whose academic chairs play a central role in the formation offered by the Institute. In view of the growing concern, and in order to fulfill our duty as representatives, we turn to you, as President of the Institute, and therefore also as guarantor of the continuity of our Institute's studies and of the rights of its students.

Saddened and disconcerted by the way in which we have been notified about the crucial changes that affect us directly as students, we would like to begin by expressing our greatest concern: the loss of the formational approach and, therefore, of the identity of the Pontifical Theological John Paul II Institute. This formational approach, in any case, was the main reason why most students (and their superiors) chose this Institute for their education.

The Identity of the John Paul II Institute

Given that already in the very first article of his motu proprio *Summa familiae cura*, Pope Francis himself expresses his desire to preserve John Paul II's original inspiration, that is, his unique proposal of teaching in the Church,¹ it is astonishing that in the new ordinance of studies there is no mention of the theology of the body; there is no course dedicated to this topic nor to any of the teachings of John Paul II. Rather everything seems to be reduced to the introductory course "La *Communio personarum...*". Thus, the following questions arise:

1. How will this identity, which is the center of John Paul II's teachings, be specifically safeguarded?
2. How to avoid that the "dialogue with other disciplines" – which among other things is already found in the old curriculum – becomes a mere clash of diverse viewpoints on the same subject without internal unity, as is typical of the interdisciplinary studies of most secular universities?

¹ "It will therefore be essential that the original inspiration that gave life to the former Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family continue to bear fruit in the broader field of activity of the new Theological Institute, effectively contributing to making it correspond fully to the current demands of the pastoral mission of the Church." Pope Francis, Motu proprio *Summa familiae cura*, 08.09.2017

3. Why should one continue studying at the John Paul II Institute if it does not seem to propose anything new with respect to what can be found in the curricula of secular universities and what is oftentimes offered there in more attractive and efficient ways?

On the other hand, John Paul II, in his *motu proprio Magnum Matrimonii Sacramentum*, paragraph 8, expressed his intention that the Institute be “entrusted to the special patronage of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Fatima.” We are well aware of the intimate relationship that our Institute has always had with this Marian invocation ever since the attack of May 13, 1981. This is why we believe that it is crucial that this Institute, re-founded by Pope Francis in order to improve and strengthen it, be consecrated to Our Lady of Fatima.

The Chair of Fundamental Moral Theology

At the center of our concern about the identity of the Institute is the suppression of the chair of fundamental moral theology. We know the importance that St. John Paul II attributed to the study of human action, as can be seen from the fact that he had entrusted this chair to the first president, cardinal Carlo Caffarra. Moreover, the activity of this chair, in particular in the Research Area established by Cardinal Scola, has been praised directly by Benedict XVI. For this reason, the motivation officially given to justify the suppression of this chair is incomprehensible: it was argued that the chair of fundamental moral theology belongs to the first cycle of theological studies. If this is the reason, then why is there still a chair of theological anthropology, and why is there even a new one of fundamental theology? Msgr. Melina’s courses did not in fact only deal with the general principles of fundamental morality, but they were intimately linked to conjugal and family morality, as we have been able to experience in the teachings we have received from him. Moreover, why does this impediment suddenly appear to be so insurmountable if this chair has been operative for thirty-eight years?

In this sense, as students, we want to emphasize the importance that this chair has had for us: without doubt it is one of the greatest novelties and riches that, until today, the Institute has offered to the Church and society. In a world where everything seems to be divided between a relativistic or legalistic vision of ethics, the vision taught by the Institute allows us to understand morality as a path of fullness and meaning for the human being, where people are responsible for their actions while, at same time, always counting on the help of grace and of the virtues that help them live a good life. This conception of morality, in which holiness is at the center, allows us to respond with hope to many difficult cases within marriages and families.

The Dismissals of Our Professors

As for the unexpected dismissal of two of our professors at the Institute, Msgr. Livio Melina and Father José Noriega, we are concerned and alarmed by several issues:

1. by the sudden and for us incomprehensible way in which two professors were dismissed for no real reason, two professors who have great prestige not only within the Institute but who represent an international point of reference, as is demonstrated by their long academic careers. In the case of Prof. Melina in particular, his dismissal

means not recognizing any of his merits after thirty-two years of teaching, twenty-eight years of which as a tenured professor, and many years as President of our Institute, which under his leadership has seen its expansion throughout the world.

2. by the fact that these dismissals weaken one of the Institute's formative pillars, as are fundamental moral theology and special moral theology.

3. by the fact that two months before the start of the new academic year 2019/20, with the curriculum already made known by the Institute itself last June and with many students already having registered for it, we are now notified of the immediate dismissals of Msgr. Melina and Prof. Noriega. Each of them offered each year a mandatory course, an optional course and two study seminars, and they are each directing many theses still in progress. In addition, Prof. Noriega directs with great success and recognition the Institute's academic journal *Anthropotes* along with the Institute's editorial projects.

4. by the fact of not having considered the high esteem that both professors enjoy among the students, as is evidenced by the professor evaluation forms and by the number of students who each year choose them as moderators of their thesis.

About the New Ordinance of Studies

Given the above, and after having examined the document published yesterday, July 23, on the Institute's website, we ask for a clear answer on the following matters:

1. What will happen to the other academic offerings of our Institute such as: the Special Cycle of the Master in Sciences of Marriage and the Family, the second level Master in Bioethics and Formation, the Master in Fertility and Conjugal Sexuality, and the Master and Diploma in the Pastoral Care of the Family?

2. Will those who have chosen Prof. Melina or Prof. Noriega as moderators be guaranteed the opportunity to complete their thesis with the same moderators?

3. What will be guaranteed to those who have already enrolled in the courses or seminars held by Prof. Melina or Prof. Noriega?

4. Although the academic chairs of Prof. Melina and Prof. Noriega have been eliminated, there is the course "Moral Theology of Love and Family." Why can't the two professors teach theology in this course?

5. The published Ordinance of Studies limits itself to naming the courses, with titles that do not say much about their content. We ask that the content, the bibliography and the names of the professors who teach each course will be published, so that students can discern in an informed manner whether or not they want to follow the new curriculum.

6. Optional courses are mentioned, but their titles do not so much as appear.

7. The uncertainty generated by these changes is so great that some students, who have already paid their tuition fees, want to know about the modalities for having their fees refunded in case the situation is not clarified or the response given does not satisfy the students' requests.

Our Rights as Students

Article 89, §1, of the new Statutes guarantees that “students enrolled while the previous Ordinance of studies was in force may choose to continue the educational path foreseen by it.” Paragraph §2 says “The old curricula will lose their validity three years after the approval of the new Ordinance of studies.” However, two professors who hold fundamental chairs within the old Ordinance have been dismissed. How do you, as President, intend to ensure the respect of the Statutes that have entered into force and the students’ rights?

In this sense, we ask you:

- to guarantee the continuity of Professor Melina’s and Professor Noriega’s teachings for three years, which is the period of transition provided by the statutes, and to guarantee this continuity either with regard to their courses that had already been approved for the academic year 2019/20 as with regard to their work as moderators. Otherwise, Article 89 governing the transition would be violated.
- to guarantee, for at least the same period, the continuity of the teaching of all our professors who have been present up to now, both tenured faculty and full-time or part-time non-tenured faculty.
- to reconfirm Professor José Granados as Vice-President for at least the next three years of transition, so that also in this way the students can be guaranteed the continuity with the “far-sighted intuition”² of the Institute’s founder, St. John Paul II, which has been reconfirmed by Pope Francis.

Even if it is not directly connected to our academic curriculum, we also ask you to guarantee the continued employment of all the non-teaching, administrative staff of our Institute: they too, for years have been allowing us every day to study seriously and serenely in a family spirit and in an atmosphere of welcome and unity.

Finally, we would like to emphasize once again that the student body has decided to turn to you, Msgr. Sequeri, both for the trust that so far has been placed in you as a man of proven academic reputation, and for your role as President, and therefore as the guarantor of the continuity of the John Paul II Institute’s legacy and as the guarantor of the students’ rights.

We would be grateful if you could give us an exhaustive and truly timely response to what has been requested in this letter, so that we students can decide and organize our academic and personal future accordingly, in concordance also, where necessary, with our superiors.

We thank you for your attention. May God bless you and may Saint John Paul II direct your steps.

Marc Adrien

Representative of the Licentiate and Doctoral Programs

Nicole Haddad

Representative of the Master Program

² Cf. Pope Francis, Motu proprio *Summa familiae cura*, 08.09.2017.