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Pontifical Letter to the Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences for the inauguration of the “Gaudium et spes” Chair of the same institute

The following is the Letter sent by the Holy Father to the Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences on the occasion of the inauguration of the *Gaudium et Spes* Chair of the same institute:

Letter of the Holy Father

To the Venerable Brother
Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia
Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute
for Marriage and Family Sciences

I send my cordial greetings to you, to the Dean of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences and to all those gathered for the solemn inauguration of the *Gaudium et Spes Chair* of the same Institute.

The date chosen for this academic act recalls 25 January 1959, when Pope Saint John XXIII surprised the Church and the whole world by calling the greatest ecclesial event of the twentieth century: Vatican Ecumenical Council II.

It was precisely at the end of that meeting that the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* was approved. It expressed and gave form to the profound intentions that guided the initiation and development of the Council. In fact, “the Council was an encounter. A genuine encounter between the Church and the men and women of our time. An encounter marked by the power of the Spirit, who impelled the Church to emerge from the shoals which for years had kept her self-enclosed so as to set out once again, with enthusiasm, on her missionary journey. It was the resumption of a journey of encountering people where they live: in their cities and homes, in their

workplaces. Wherever there are people, the Church is called to reach out to them and to bring the joy of the Gospel, and the mercy and forgiveness of God. After these decades, we again take up this missionary drive with the same power and enthusiasm” (*Homily at the Mass for the Opening of the Holy Door*, 8 December 2015).

I am pleased that the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences takes on a special commitment to keep the attention to that conciliar document alive, to further its study, and to make its valuable legacy ever more fruitful.

We cannot forget how dear *Gaudium et spes* was to your Founder, Saint John Paul II. He was a key figure in its drafting, and much of his teaching is rooted in this document.

Here I like to recall his words: “I must confess that *Gaudium et spes* is particularly dear to me, not only for the themes that it develops, but also for the direct participation that I was able to have in its drafting. As a young bishop of Krakow, in fact, I was a member of the subcommittee responsible for studying the ‘signs of the times’ and, from November 1964, I was called to be part of the central subcommittee responsible for drafting the text. It is precisely that intimate knowledge of the genesis of *Gaudium et spes* that has allowed me to fully appreciate its prophetic value and to assume extensively its contents in my teaching ever since my first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*. In it, gathering the legacy of the conciliar Constitution, I wanted to reiterate that the nature and destiny of humanity and the world can not be definitively revealed other than in the light of the Crucified and Risen Christ” (Commemoration of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 8 November 1995: Teachings, XVIII, 2 [1995], page 1053).

The new Chair, which is inaugurated today, fits well within the horizon of your particular academic mission towards marriage and the family. We know very well that it is precisely these fundamental aspects of human existence that were placed by the Council Fathers in first place among “particularly urgent contemporary problems” (*Gaudium et spes*, 46). We can say that, in *Gaudium et spes*, the Church was able to express a profoundly renewed understanding of the Gospel of the family, which, through various stages, led us to the intense Synodal season resulting in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

I am confident that this Chair will help to ensure that your Institute is at the forefront of the new pastoral challenges to which the Christian community is called to respond. The extraordinary anthropological and social importance today assumed by the alliance of man and woman, in order to open a new horizon for human coexistence as a whole, enhances its original vocation to be the interpreter of God’s blessing for the whole of creation. The commitment of reflection and formation linked to this new Chair represents a conquest and a promise for your Institute, and it will be able to benefit the whole Church and also of civil society.

It is particularly important today to generate places of meeting and dialogue – also of high intellectual profile – in which it may be experienced that the ecclesial community is capable of giving flesh and blood to the words with which Vatican II wanted to express its outlook to the people of its time: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts” (*Gaudium et spes*, 1).

On the day when we remember the Conversion of the Apostle Paul, to whom the Lord Jesus entrusted the singular mission of proclaiming the universality of Christian salvation, I hope that this academic initiative will also contribute to making the ever more visible “the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ Who died and rose from the dead” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 36).

I thank all those who are involved in this work and who, in various ways, support it; may the Lord bless you and Our Lady protect you.

From the Vatican, January 25, 2018

