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Press Conference to present the International Observatory on the Family

H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia

Professor José Luis Mendoza Pérez

Dr. Francesco Belletti

At 11.00 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the International Observatory on the Family, an initiative proposed by the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences, in cooperation with the Catholic University of Murcia and the CISF of Milan. Other partners collaborating in the project are institutes and university faculties in Italy, Spain, Finland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the United States of America, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Benin, Kenya and Hong Kong.

The website of the Observatory may be consulted at www.familymonitor.net

The speakers at the conference were: H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences and president of the Pontifical Academy for Life; Professor José Luis Mendoza Pérez, president of the *Universidad Católica San Antonio* of Murcia (UCAM); and Dr. Francesco Belletti, director of the International Centre for Family Studies (CISF).

The following are the interventions:

H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia

Today we officially announce the birth of the International Observatory on the Family: a new initiative of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences, in cooperation with the Catholic University of Murcia and the CISF of Milan.

We do so in relation to what Pope Francis has asked for several times, that is, specific attention to the real life of families, to “the actual situation of families, in order to keep firmly grounded in reality” (*Amoris Laetitia* 6; cf. *AL* 32-39).

He did so first, for example in the cycle of catechesis he dedicated to this them between the two Synods, in which he did not outline an abstract ideal of the family, but instead reinterpreted the daily life of families, demonstrating their richness, facing difficulties, letting emerge the glad news that God offers to each one. In this way, correctly, it is possible to identify the healthy contribution that human sciences offer to the understanding of the experience of the believer, in this specific family situation; for this reason, the John Paul II Institute takes this on board, with its specific qualification as Theological Institute, that is, in perennial dialogue with historicity and its forms.

The Observatory that we present today therefore serves this purpose: to keep our feet on the ground, and thus to serve with greater strength and energy and evangelical passion the love between man and woman, which is entrusted with the sense of history and the destiny of creation.

It is a high calling, in the questions we will face and in the method that will be used.

The first three years will be devoted to the study of family poverty, understood in the dual relational/affective and economic registers. Because if there is an urgency and at the same time a richness as astonishing as the Gospel that reveals it, this is the condition of the little ones, of those who are minor, of those excluded from history, of those not received in the city of men. It is the scene, very current, of the nativity that I hope will find space in all homes in the coming days.

Thanks to the direct involvement of the Catholic University of Murcia, which I want to publicly thank in the person of its president Dr Mendoza, the working method of this observatory will be inclusive and diffuse: all the academic institutions hitherto contacted (about 20 from 15 nations) immediately accepted and others are being added. They will be entrusted with the collection of national data, following the method that Dr. Belletti of the CISF, whom I thank for his professionalism, will present shortly. To these we may add several networks of family-related entities, study centres, and non-governmental organizations. First of all *Caritas Internationalis*: the president Cardinal Tagle and his secretary general Dr. Roy showed immediate enthusiasm about the initiative, and have made available the network of *Caritas* worldwide. A special thanks goes to the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, which has dedicated much energy to the construction of these valuable networks at the service of families.

Thanks also to the above, the Observatory will offer detailed information (a periodical newsletter, website, social networks), with continuous news on the condition of families in the world and on the work in their favour carried out by the various dedicated parties. It is a great task of gathering and re-launching, a network of relationships at the service of this bond as strong as love, as the Song of Songs teaches, and as weak as the human condition we share and recount, that the Son of Man took on, loved and saved.

Professor José Luis Mendoza Pérez

The role of UCAM in the project

The contribution that the UCAM offers to the activity of the Observatory, as a co-founding body, is in perfect harmony with its nature, that is, the increase of higher and the promotion of the human person, the spread of scientific knowledge and the integral development of the members of the academic community. Furthermore, ever since its inception, the UCAM has been an academic institution with a strong vocation for international openness, both in the advancement and spread of knowledge: participation in numerous European and international research projects, a body of teachers from different countries in Europe, and a student body that

includes students from five continents have allowed the UCAM to establish a solid network of relationships with the international scientific community and with numerous academic institutions located throughout the world.

Therefore, we make available to the project the necessary human, logistic and economic resources to create a network of local contacts in the five continents, that is, institutions specialized in scientific research on the family or working daily with or for families, so that they can collaborate in the collection of reliable data on the health and condition of the family throughout the world. Our goal is to coordinate the work of these institutions, acting as a bridge to connect them to each other and to the Observatory, channelling the collected data to the agencies that are responsible for their treatment (the CISF). We offer to act as a link between institutions that are physically and culturally very different and distant from each other, and to collaborate with these institutions to overcome any obstacles, also of a practical nature, that may stand in the way of data collection. The task of coordinating a working group with a potentially very large number of members and, as we have mentioned, with different geographical and cultural origins, is entrusted to the Faculty of Human, Canonical and Religious Sciences. This faculty has a group of translators enabling linguistic mediation, and young researchers trained in universities from different parts of the world.

The network of collaborating entities

The network of local contacts that the Observatory can draw upon to carry out the first research, regarding the way in which relational and economic poverty influences family dynamics, includes institutions from different nations of the world, covering the four cardinal points of the old continent (Spain, Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Czech Republic ...), America (USA, Mexico, Chile, Argentina ...) and Africa, in both French- and English-speaking regions (Benin and Kenya).

However, the list that we have just provided does not include all the local representatives that will participate in our research: indeed, the Catholic University, in recent weeks, has started to establish new collaboration agreements with other training and research organizations specializing in themes linked to the family and located in Central Europe, North America, Australia, the Middle East and the Far East, so the results of the research will allow us to obtain a truly global, as well as reliable, vision of the situation of families throughout the world.

Broadening the horizon of our research will allow us to compare family dynamics in political and cultural contexts that are very distant from each other, with the result of enriching our vision of the multifaceted and complex reality that is the family.

Dr. Francesco Belletti

Operational model and planning 2018-2021

Why an Observatory? Promoting an Observatory means engaging in the implementation of a permanent system of reading, comparing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data, which makes it possible to compare the various national contexts and to follow changes over time.

Why another Observatory? The decision to dedicate an Observatory to the theme of the family is linked to the belief that, despite the presence of a wide range of data, indicators, surveys and monitoring systems at international level, there is still lack of reflection specifically aimed at reading the value of the family in the life of national communities, able to communicate first and foremost to the social and civil community.

The first step: a three-year project on the family and poverty. The 2019-2021 operational plan will focus on the family and poverty, considering the intertwining of these two elements as a global priority. Moreover, the fight against poverty is one of the priority objectives of the international agenda, as is also clear from the 2030

Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations.

Poverty and family relationships. The project aims to analyze the role that family relations play in relation to people's poverty, their ability to be a protective factor, but also the elements of vulnerability in the event of their weakening. In a nutshell, the interpretative model that will be explored can be described as follows: *“The poverty of families depends on a complex system of interactions, in which the resources and fragilities of family relational systems face challenges and opportunities generated by the economic system and (possible) public policy actions (welfare models, policies of solidarity, the responsibilities of public administration at various levels, and the presence of mixed systems of private, public and non-profit organizations)”*.

Operational plan 2018-2021. The project includes a first three-year part (2019-2021), in two phases: the first dedicated to *“family and relational poverty”*, the second to *“family and economic and structural poverty”*. The first summary report will be published in May 2020; the second report is scheduled for May 2021. There will also be two intermediate coordination seminars/expert meetings (one in 2019 and one in 2020) involving all the various national representatives.

Operating model and content. The survey will be carried out in various nations, representative of the different world contexts, and will be implemented through a network of national *focal points*, composed of experts and university centres that in each nation will draw up a “Country Profile” (a grid of questions that are the same for all, but able to encompass the strong heterogeneity present between the different countries), with quantitative and qualitative data, coordinated by a central team operating under the joint responsibility of the three promoting bodies. After the drafting of the “national cases” a comparative report will be drawn up. For the first year in particular (family and relational poverty) the questions will focus on the relationship between the relational quality of the families and the economic subjectivity of the family, educational tasks and the capacity for care and solidarity.

Three transversal aspects. Among the essential cognitive priorities, the role of women, the condition of children, the role of new technologies and the development of digital social networks will remain under permanent observation.
