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Message from the Rector of the Jagiellonian University
on the Celebration of the 625th Anniversary
of the Faculty of Theology in Krakow

Distinguished Colleagues,

the celebrations of the 625th anniversary of the Faculty of Theology in Krakow invite us to take stock: to look into the more distant and more recent past and draw some, even if brief, conclusions. However, they also bring an opportunity for deep reflection on the relationship between Jagiellonian University and the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, which benefits from the illustrious traditions of Krakow's Faculty of Theology.

It must be strongly emphasized here that the relationship between the two centers of learning has invariably been a cordial one, regardless of the external conditions that have not always been favorable. These unfavorable circumstances were especially related to the actions of the communist authorities, which – starting in 1950 – made persistent efforts to expel theological studies from the oldest Polish University (these actions were all the more disgraceful as during the infamous Sonderaktion Krakau, whose victims were prominent members of the Krakow academic community, primarily affiliated with the Jagiellonian University, the Faculty of Theology lost more than half of its staff). This communist government achieved its goal on August 11, 1954, with a Resolution of the Council of Ministers (No. 594), which mandated that the Faculty of Catholic Theology be separated from Jagiellonian University and incorporated into the structure of the Theological Academy in Warsaw. This decision – which was unilateral and, moreover, contrary to the will of the members of the *Almae Matris Cracoviensis* academic community – was overtly political. For the communist regime, it was probably not without significance that the “reorganized” faculty had for centuries been the cradle of the Polish intellectual elite, who often joined the ranks of the Catholic Church. Karol Wojtyła, for example, received his doctoral degree there (an entry in the graduation book was made under the date December 16, 1948).

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It should be recalled that the Faculty of Theology in Krakow – founded through a bull of Pope Boniface IX, announced on January 11, 1397 – was established as the fourth faculty of Krakow's *Studium Generale* (after the faculties of liberal arts, medicine and law that had already been instituted in 1364), which makes it the oldest institution of its kind in Poland. Perhaps the best evidence of its rank and profound influence on the development of European culture and civilization was the fact that the luminaries affiliated with it were involved in Christianizing the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or in the deliberations of the 15th-century Councils of Constance and Basel. Thus, they not only built the foundations of Polish theological thought, but also took an active part in the life of the Catholic Church, contributing to its traditions for centuries.

Theology was long considered the queen of sciences (therefore, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of Pope Boniface IX's decision for Polish statehood; the *Studium Generale*, founded in Krakow, was granted the same rights as the famous Parisian Theological Faculty). As a humanities scholar, I used to say on various occasions that those who wanted to pursue theological studies used to have to first graduate from the Faculty of Liberal Arts. Although today we live in a completely different world, the paths of theological sciences still continue to cross with those of other sciences. Proof of this, for example, is the versatile activity of Father Professor Michał Heller, a prominent scholar founder and long-standing director of Krakow's Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Research, who has contributed over the years to bringing together the communities of Jagiellonian University and the Pontifical University of John Paul II through his work to break down the divisions between different fields of knowledge and science.

For many years, I have also witnessed wonderful cooperation between historians, philologists and art historians of the two universities, which has yielded such fruits as jointly organized research sessions or publications in renowned journals and publishing houses. These very brief examples prove that, despite the political ruling of 1954, relations between scholars representing the two institutions are still strong. They speak to the close ties linking the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow with the oldest Polish University, where the Faculty of Theology was born.

I am convinced that the 625th anniversary of the establishment of the Faculty of Theology in Krakow, which we celebrated on January 17, 2022 in the Auditorium of the Collegium Novum of Jagiellonian University, has brought the scholars from the two centers even closer, though they may represent diverse – and seemingly not always commensurate and congruent – views of reality. I am also convinced that the ties between them have become even stronger. For me, as the Rector of the ancient Jagiellonian

University, this is a cause for satisfaction and pride, since the Pontifical University of John Paul II, continuing the centuries-old traditions of the Faculty of Theology in Krakow – which is invariably one of the most eminent centers of Polish theological thought – is among the very small group of thirty universities from around the world entitled to use the name Pontifical.

Distinguished Colleagues,

on the occasion of the 625th anniversary of the establishment of the Faculty of Theology in Krakow, I would like to ask the entire academic community of the Pontifical University of John Paul II to accept the warmest congratulations and words of utmost appreciation. I would also like to wish all members of the University Community many further successes and achievements in research, teaching and administrative pursuits.

Prof. Jacek Popiel

