



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THAILAND
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Friday, 24 May 1991

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican on the occasion of your quinquennial visit to the Tombs of Saints Peter and Paul. As successors of the Apostles, whose witness to the Risen Lord is the sure foundation of the Church's proclamation of the Gospel in every time and place, you have come to Rome to reaffirm your communion in faith and charity with the Successor of Peter. In greeting you, *I embrace all the Catholics of Thailand*, and I make my own the prayer of the Apostle Peter: "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (*2 Petr.* 1, 2).

I am grateful to Bishop George Yod Phimphisan, the new President of your Conference, for his kind words. I am confident that, following the example of Cardinal Kitbunchu, he will inspire and encourage the work of the Conference in achieving the goals which you have set yourselves in the period of evangelization leading up to the beginning of the third Christian millennium. *The Church in Thailand, though a "pusillus grex", is remarkably well placed to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the heart of Asia*, where so many do not yet know him but yearn for the truths and values of his Gospel. Your recent celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Hierarchy, with the ordination of new priests and a great gathering of the faithful, shows how the Church in your midst is quickly maturing and shines forth ever more fully as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 4).

2. Our meeting today recalls the particular joy of *the Beatification in October 1989 of the seven Thai Martyrs*. Their testimony reveals the unlimited power of God's word to penetrate to the heart

of every human culture, and to find radiant expression in the holiness of individuals and whole communities. By following Jesus Christ in life and in death, the Martyrs not only offered a convincing proof of their deep faith in God's promises. Their sacrifice also revealed that "the word of God is not fettered" (Cfr. *2 Tim.* 2, 9), by any particular language or cultural expression. Rather, the light of the Gospel is meant for every people, and its truth purifies, strengthens and elevates every culture from within (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 13). At the price of their blood, the Martyrs bore eloquent witness to the catholicity of the Church which Christ established to be the universal sacrament of union with God and of the unity of the whole human race (Cfr. *ibid.* 1). They fully confirmed the truth of the words which I addressed to you on another occasion: "In your people Christ has become Thai" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Bancokii, allocutio ad episcopos Thailandiae habita*, 1, die 11 maii 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 [1984] 1383).

3. As Pastors of the Church, it is important for you to discern the signs of God's favour among your people and to seek ways of bringing his gifts to fruition. A clear sign of God's love is the *increase of vocations both to the priesthood and to the religious life*. It is heartening to know of the care which your Conference gives to the Lux Mundi National Major Seminary, your closeness to the Staff and Students, and the efforts made to maintain high standards. All that you do to ensure the adequate formation of the young men preparing for the priesthood in your Seminaries, as well as your pastoral attention to the formation of candidates to the Religious life, constitutes an essential part of your ministry and is an excellent form of service to the Christian community. From your origins as a mission Church you draw increasing awareness of the need to become a missionary Church. Initiatives such as the launching of a Decade of Evangelization and the establishment of a *Thai Missionary Society* to work in the northern region of the country— small like the mustard seed of the Gospel but destined to become a great life-giving tree (Cfr. *Matth.* 13, 31. 32.)— demonstrate the vitality of your particular Churches in responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I pray for the success of these initiatives, in the certainty that despite the difficulties involved the Lord of the harvest will amply repay your patient efforts. Confidence in God's Providence is essential for all missionary activity, for in the end we know that "mission is based not on human abilities but on the power of the Risen Lord" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 23). Its ultimate success will be revealed in ways and at times known only to God himself.

4. A central aspect of the Church's mission, and one of particular importance for your own pastoral ministry, is her relation to other religions. My recent Encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*" insisted that the Church's duty to preach the Gospel to all nations in no way implies a lack of respect for the various cultures or for the good that is to be found in each religion (Cfr. *ibid.* 55). "Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the good of all" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 56). Hence, there is no contradiction between openness to God's truth wherever it is to be found and an acknowledgement that *Christ's gifts*, present in the spiritual treasures of other traditions, *are meant*

to lead back to him, since he remains, in the words of the Council, the one "principle of salvation for the whole world" (*Lumen Gentium*, 17).

Inter-religious dialogue is conducted on a number of levels. Not the least among these, especially in pastoral situations like your own, is that "dialogue of life" in which believers bear clear witness to spiritual values, help one another to live what the Gospel teaches, and collaborate with all men and women of good will to build a more just and fraternal society. By patiently encouraging your people *to show their faith in Christ through solidarity and generous commitment to the good of individuals and of society*, you will be opening doors to other, more formal, avenues of dialogue and cooperation.

5. In your reports on the state of your Dioceses, many of you have stressed that indirect evangelization is the primary vehicle of the Church's missionary outreach. *The lay faithful have an essential role in this regard*. How important it is for the life of the Church that they actively commit themselves to living their baptismal faith, by bearing joyful witness to the demands of the Gospel, and by being ever ready to give an account of the hope that is in them (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 3, 15)! The lay faithful of Thailand can now look to an exemplary patron in Blessed Philip Siphong, for "here was a lay person who was deeply conscious that through Baptism he belonged to Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, and was thus personally called to proclaim the Gospel" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia in Vaticana basilica habita, ob decretos Dei Servis Philippo Siphong et Sociabus*, 4, die 22 oct. 1989: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII, 2 [1989] 990 s).

I can only encourage the praiseworthy efforts being made in your particular Churches to enable the laity to fulfil their Christian vocation, especially in such critical areas as the adequate preparation of young people for the Sacrament of Matrimony and instruction in natural family planning. The counselling of couples entering mixed marriages represents a particular pastoral challenge for the Church in Thailand, and I am confident that it will be addressed ever more effectively on both the local and the diocesan levels. *The family must continue to be a central focus of ordinary pastoral activity*, while special attention should be paid to young people and to their formation as responsible members of society. Your communities' involvement in health-care and in particular of the handicapped and those suffering from Hansen's Disease or AIDS; their generous work among the poor of the slums; their efforts to combat the scourge of drug addiction among the young: all this is inspired by evangelical love and guided by the conviction that human dignity can only be safeguarded by attention to the demands of the human spirit which reaches its full expression in generous self-giving to God and neighbour. I am pleased to note that the newly-established *Human Development Centre* intends to coordinate and promote an incisive response to the many threats against human life in your society.

6. In speaking of the participation of the laity in the Church's mission, I cannot fail to mention the *outstanding contribution of lay catechists* to ecclesial life in Thailand. Their "singular and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church" (*Ad Gentes*, 7),

consists especially in helping others to discover the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which they themselves have found in Christ Jesus (Cfr. *Col.* 2, 3). I ask you to convey to them my own deep appreciation for their work and for their example of dedication to the Church's mission.

The activity of catechists is an extension, as it were, of the pastoral teaching of the Bishops and the local clergy. It is an ecclesial task for which they require adequate doctrinal and pedagogical formation. You must continue your efforts in this regard, and your decision to designate the feast of Blessed Siphong as National Catechists' Day will surely bring spiritual comfort and encouragement to those who have undertaken this difficult and demanding work.

Thailand's Catholic schools too provide a vital service by ensuring the religious education of the young and by forming a committed laity imbued with the spirit of the Gospel. The Church's notable commitment to establishing and maintaining such schools attests to, her conviction that the integral good of individuals and entire communities is promoted by *the formation of consciences and by respect for the dignity and freedom of individuals in their pursuit of truth*. The Catholic view is that parents are the primary and principal educators of their children (Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3). Other bodies, including religious and civil institutions, have the responsibility of assisting them in carrying out this duty and of ensuring the free exercise of their fundamental rights in this area (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a. D. 1991*, III, die 8 dec. 1990: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIII, 2 [1990] 1560 ss). An increasingly effective coordination of these responsibilities, the importance of which has been clearly emphasized in various international Declarations, can come from continued dialogue and cooperation between all involved.

7. I cannot conclude without expressing my concern for *the plight of the refugees and displaced persons who have found a temporary home in Thailand*. The human tragedy involved in this great exodus of individuals and families challenges the entire international community. Their situation of suffering needs to be addressed on a global level, with due attention to all the social and economic factors which have contributed to this "festering wound which typifies and reveals all the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world" (Eiusdem *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 24). The sacrifices and demonstrations of solidarity shown to refugees by the Church in Thailand have been fully in the spirit of the Gospel ideal of the Good Samaritan. In this regard, I am pleased to recall once again the commendable humanitarian efforts being undertaken by the *Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees*. I join you in praying that the exiles and the homeless presently in your country will soon be able to return to a free and dignified life in their native lands.

8. My Brother Bishops, I give thanks to God our Father for the many blessings which he has bestowed on the Church in Thailand through the faithful witness of her clergy, religious and laity. A special word of appreciation is also due to the expatriate missionary personnel who play an important role in many of your pastoral programmes and who represent a special bond of union with the universal Church. I express the hope that their number can be increased so that society

as a whole may benefit from their services.

Let us pray together that all the members of the Catholic community will grow in love of the Saviour, in appreciation of their sublime vocation and dignity as members of Christ's Church, and in their desire to share the joy of the Good News with others. I commend you and the faithful of your dioceses to the intercession of Our Lady of the Assumption, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of consolation and strength in your ministry to God's People.

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