



The Holy See

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

Castel Gandolfo - Friday, 30 August 1996

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It is a great joy for me to welcome you, *the members of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand*, on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit to the Apostolic See, faithful depositary of the preaching and supreme witness of the Princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul. I am convinced that our meetings of these days will further strengthen the bonds of unity, charity and peace which bring us together in the communion of Christ's Body - the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. In particular I wish to thank *Cardinal Michai Kitbunchu* for the cordial greetings which he conveyed on behalf of the priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful of the Church in Thailand.

From my Pastoral Visit to your country 12 years ago I retain vivid memories of your people's courteous hospitality and enterprising vitality, their spirit of tolerance, their unbounded generosity to refugees and strangers, their ethnic and cultural richness, and their profound religious sense. *With joy I remember the warm welcome of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej*; and on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his accession to the throne I wish to acknowledge his role in guaranteeing Thailand's tradition of religious freedom and his promotion of the lofty ideals of social justice and solidarity.

2. Dear Brothers, reflecting on your ministry I cannot but recall what the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught so incisively, namely that the Church is "missionary by her very nature" (*Ad Gentes*, 2). Still fresh in the memory of your particular Churches is the evangelization accomplished in a spirit of generosity and self-renunciation by the first missionaries and sealed by the blood of the Seven Martyrs of Thailand. These noble beginnings cannot but stimulate you to *renew and invigorate the work of evangelization among the Christian faithful*.

In fact, as the dawn of the Third Millennium breaks upon us, the Church turns her eyes with special attention to Asia, "towards which the Church's mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37) . Today this missionary endeavour has to be carried out primarily by Asians themselves. Having received the faith from dedicated missionaries, Thai Catholics are called to bear witness to the Gospel before new sectors of society, especially tribal peoples and the poor, migrants and refugees, as well as workers and professional people. With you I am deeply grateful for the priests of the *Thai Missionary Society* - itself a maturing fruit of the *plantatio Ecclesiae* - who are now spreading the Good News both within your country and abroad. Through you I also urge consecrated men and women, who "have a special share in the Church's missionary activity, in virtue of their interior consecration made to God" (John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 77), to make new efforts to assist the growth of God's Kingdom in Thailand and beyond. Zeal for this *pressing evangelical effort* must be conveyed to all young men and women in houses of formation, fostering in them a generous and courageous commitment to the task of spreading the Good News.

3. As servants of the Spirit of Truth, who brings to remembrance all that Christ has taught his Church (cf. Jn. 14:26; 16:13), Bishops must see to it that their people are formed in a *thorough and systematic knowledge of Jesus' person and message*, a knowledge which will enable them to communicate to others the unfathomable riches of salvation (cf. Eph. 3:8) with joy and conviction, and with a readiness to give an account of the hope that is in them (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15). One of the great blessings bestowed on the universal Church in recent years has been the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and I gladly encourage your Conference in its desire to prepare a translation so that its doctrine will enliven the faith of your people.

Through you I send a special greeting to all *catechists* - parents, lay men and women, and religious - who give so generously of themselves in bringing Jesus Christ, the "one Mediator between God and men" (1 Tim. 2:5) and the hope of humanity, to children, young people and adults "in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life" (John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 18). Their apostolate is indispensable to the growth of Dioceses, parishes and Christian families. Centres of catechetical formation, programmes of doctrinal and spiritual renewal, and constant personal encouragement are invaluable means of educating all those responsible for handing on the faith. I pray that the catechists in your local communities - obedient to Christ as their Teacher (cf. Mt. 23:8) - will, with your support, by word and deed, faithfully transmit the living Gospel, the very person of Jesus who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6).

4. Your local Churches are blessed with lay men and women who are deeply faithful to Christian life and to the celebration of the Liturgy with dignity and prayerful solemnity. At the same time the laity require your help in order to carry out their *specific mission in the temporal order*, a mission which involves many of them in helping migrants and refugees, the homeless, those suffering from AIDS, and the women and children gravely offended in their human dignity by a veritable industry

of sexual exploitation. Likewise, *young people's restless search for meaning in life*, their desire for close communion with God and with the ecclesial community, and their enthusiasm in volunteer service to those in need is a challenge to all pastoral workers. Thai youth "ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society " (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 46).

It is however through the *family*, which is the foundation of society and the first cell of ecclesial life, that lay people fulfil their primary vocation. For this reason the family deserves your attentive pastoral care, especially where it is *threatened by a growing materialism and a consumer attitude*, foreign to the traditional values of Thai culture and often promoted by outside institutions. The result is the advance of a "contraceptive mentality" which not only contradicts the full truth of conjugal love but also leads to a more ready acceptance of the terrible crime of abortion. (cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 13) To offset this grave threat, every Diocese should develop a programme for the family apostolate which will help parents and children to live their vocation according to the mind of Christ.

A specific problem which you are facing in the care of families involves *interfaith marriages*. Couples in these situations often require special assistance. Preparation for marriage, which is "above all the task of the family" (John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 16) but which also calls for the help of priests and other ministers, should ensure that there are proper pastoral safeguards for the faith of the Catholic partner and its free exercise, above all with regard to the duty to do everything to ensure the Catholic Baptism and education of the children of the marriage (cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 78). Authentic interreligious dialogue and understanding within families is not furthered by religious indifferentism but by love for the truth and by sincere mutual respect.

5. The Church in Thailand is rightly proud of the contribution made by its *Catholic schools* to the advancement of ecclesial and national life. The Second Vatican Council describes the principal aims of schools under the Church's care: that Catholic children will be "gradually introduced into a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, ... that they may be trained to conduct their personal life in righteousness and in the sanctity of truth ... and devote themselves to the upbuilding of the Mystical Body" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2). I am sure that you will always be close to those who devote themselves to this apostolate, that you will make every effort to maintain and strengthen the Catholic identity of the Church's schools, and that you will seek ways to open their doors more widely to the less advantaged members of the Catholic community and of society at large. This is an important way of putting into practice the Church's preferential option for the poor.

The mission of the Church in Thailand is likewise being advanced by your Conference's growing involvement in the field of *social communications*. With great joy I have learned that you have assumed responsibility for transmitting television programmes which are a vehicle of evangelization This presents you with new and challenging opportunities, and every effort needs to be made to train the faithful to make appropriate use of the media as an instrument of the

"civilization of love".

6. As your quinquennial reports show, your particular Churches are blessed with many candidates to the priesthood and consecrated life. In particular I join you in giving thanks to God on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the *Lux Mundi*, the National Major Seminary, for all that has been done there to prepare priests who will be ever "holy and blameless" in God's sight (cf. Eph. 1:4). It is important for families and parish communities to pray ardently for an increase in vocations, and for you *personally to be involved in the entire process of your seminarians formation*, assigning exemplary priests to this task, even when this entails making sacrifices in other areas.

Even in the years following ordination, especially in the first years, efforts must be made to help priests maintain the habits of discipline, prayer and apostolic zeal which they learned in the seminary. The *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, issued with my approval by the Congregation for the Clergy, should guide you, individually and through the Episcopal Conference, in your efforts to renew the mind and heart of priests committed to the Church's mission. May priests never think of themselves as mere caretakers of ecclesial institutions but as "living instruments of Christ the eternal Priest" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12), in preaching the word, celebrating the sacraments, and spreading God's Kingdom. In addition, the personal relationship between a Bishop and his priests, the Bishop's "fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9) in serving the People of God and proclaiming the Gospel *ad gentes*, shows the ordained ministry to be truly "a collective work" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17). This sense of fraternal cooperation is heightened by the *effective implementation of the various structures of ecclesial communion* called for by the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law. Thus will the Diocese show itself to be truly a family, a community of persons in which everyone - clerical, religious or lay - places his or her charisms at the service of the whole Body of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11).

7. While safeguarding the rightful autonomy of the *Institutes of Consecrated Life* established in your Dioceses, you can help these institutes to fulfil their particular mission by giving them due consideration in pastoral planning (cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 48-49). Continue to encourage Superiors to discern carefully the suitability of candidates seeking admission and, especially in institutes of diocesan right, assist them in providing a solid spiritual, moral and intellectual formation both before and after the profession of the evangelical counsels. I take this occasion to appeal to all the consecrated men and women of Thailand to meditate prayerfully and at length on the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Vita Consecrata*", and to accept it as a *providential gift to the Church of our day*. They should joyfully look to the future, where the Spirit is leading them, with resolute fidelity to the charism of their call and with complete dedication to the One in whom they have placed their trust (cf. 2 Tim. 1:12). In the midst of God's people may they ever bear witness to "the primacy of God and of eternal life" (John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 85), and to the truth that in Christ Jesus "the Kingdom of God has come near" (Lk. 10:9)!

I wish to express particular appreciation to the women religious in Thailand who are completely devoted to the *contemplative life*, with the hope also that a contemplative community of men can soon be established. By their witness to the traditions of Christian asceticism and mysticism, contemplatives make a very valid contribution in a silent but effective way to interreligious dialogue (cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 8). By sharing their experience of affective prayer, meditation and contemplation, they help to forge closer bonds between the followers of Christianity and Buddhism, while opening the way for greater co-operation in the promotion of integral human development. In this context *the Church's social doctrine is also a bridge linking Christians and Buddhists*. May you and your fellow citizens of other religious traditions work together with mutual respect and understanding to defend human life and dignity, support the family, and promote justice and peace in society, co-operating in every way possible to build a society ever more worthy of the human person.

8. Dear Brothers: during my Pastoral Visit to your nation I shared with you the hope that the mystery of Christ would be made known "in the very values that characterize your Thai culture" (John Paul II, *Address to the Clergy, Religious and Laity in the Cathedral of Bangkok, Thailand*, 7, [11 May 1984]). The Church's mark of catholicity means that the Gospel is to take flesh in every people's culture, and the Gospel message ought always to be preached in a way that is accessible to a people's particular genius. *The necessary and arduous task of inculturation* signifies neither syncretism nor an accommodation of truth. Rather, it implies that *the Gospel has the inner power to penetrate the very heart of a culture* and become incarnate in it: the Good News takes the many positive values found in different cultures and assumes them into the mystery of salvation, purifying, elevating and transforming them in the light of divine Wisdom (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 17). I pray that Almighty God will give you the gift of discernment, enabling you to encourage wisely and judge prudently this process of inculturation, a process which must be increasingly fostered if the Church is to be ever more firmly planted in Thailand.

9. The approach of the Third Millennium is inspiring the whole Church to turn with greater fervour to her Lord and to *share more fully in the accomplishment of his redemptive mission*. As Pastors we have a unique responsibility in carrying out this sacred trust. At the Last Supper Jesus invited his Apostles into friendship with himself (cf. Jn. 15:13-14) and sealed this intimacy with the gift of the Eucharist. He continues to draw us, Successors of the Apostles, into communion with him, so that we in turn will lead many - those already belonging to the flock and those still far off - to him who is "our peace" (Eph. 2:14). I pray that the Great Jubilee in Thailand will truly be a "year of the Lord's favour" (Is. 61:2; cf. Lk. 4:19) for which each particular Church will prepare a spirit of conversion and with a renewed commitment to evangelization. May Mary intercede for the people whom you serve with zeal and devotion, and lead all of you to her Son who is "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn. 1:9). With warm affection for the People of God in Thailand, whom I bear in my heart and daily recall in my prayers, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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