



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR RONARONG NOPAKUN,
AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND***

Thursday, 20 May 1999

Your Excellency, It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Vatican today and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Thailand. I am grateful for the greetings which you have expressed on behalf of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and I gladly reciprocate with my warmest good wishes for the health and happiness of Their Majesties and of the Royal Family, and with my prayers for the peace and prosperity of the entire nation. I take this occasion to affirm once again my own great esteem for the Thai people and for your country's rich spiritual and cultural heritage. You have mentioned the bonds of friendship and cordial relations which have existed for many centuries between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Holy See. Christian missionaries first came to your country early in the sixteenth century. In 1669, during the reign of King Narai the Great, the first Vicariate Apostolic was established in the sacred city of Ayudhya. The city subsequently became an important centre for contacts between Christianity and Buddhism. Despite later setbacks, a growing desire for closer ties between Thailand and the Holy See in modern times led to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1969. I had the great joy of experiencing at first hand the kindness and the profound human values of the Thai people during my visit in 1984. Buddhism, the religion of the vast majority of your fellow-citizens, has profoundly shaped Thai society and culture, and has created a climate of tolerance and religious freedom of which you are rightly proud. The ancient and venerable wisdom contained in your country's religious traditions, as well as the contribution of other religious groups, has been of inestimable value for the life of the nation. In every society, the religious dimension is of profound importance, since it emphasizes the superior values stemming from the dignity of the human person, and it acts as a force for the promotion of justice, solidarity and peace. As such, religion provides a firm foundation for rejecting any narrowly materialist or utilitarian understanding of development. The dangers of conceiving social progress without reference to the transcendent value and character of the human person are all too evident. As I had occasion to write in my Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: "When individuals and communities do not see a rigorous respect for the moral, cultural and spiritual requirements, based on the dignity of the person and on the proper identity of each community, beginning with the family and religious societies, then all the rest - availability of goods, abundance of technical resources applied to daily life, a certain level of material well-being - will prove unsatisfying and in the end contemptible" (No. 33). This

understanding of the human person guides the efforts of the Holy See in its activities in the international sphere. With all men and women of good will, it takes part in initiatives aimed at ensuring a secure future for everyone, a future based on a culture of human rights and on solidarity which transcends all frontiers. On the threshold of the Third Millennium, there is an urgent need for the international community to take steps to strengthen the structures which will guarantee genuine peace between nations and ethnic groups. Efforts in this direction can only succeed “when the promotion of the dignity of the human person is the guiding principle, and when the search for the common good is the overriding commitment” (*Message for the World Day of Peace 1999*, No. 1). For its part, the Catholic community in Thailand, though small in relation to the followers of other religious traditions, enjoys the benefits of the religious freedom of which His Majesty as “Upholder of All Religions” is the guarantor. Catholics share wholeheartedly in the life and concerns of the nation, having the progress and development of society very much at heart. Their specific contribution is inspired by the conviction that economic, political and social progress must always go hand in hand with a commitment to religious and moral truth. In carrying out her spiritual mission, the Catholic Church is committed to the promotion of justice, compassion and respect for others. Your Excellency has referred to the Church’s contribution in the field of education, health and social services. This involvement is based on her Divine Founder’s command to love our neighbour as ourselves, and on her belief that human life in all its stages is sacred and of inestimable value. In her educational activities, the Church is convinced that the all-round formation of young people, who represent the future of the nation, is crucially important. Education must help them to discover the spiritual dimension of life and to learn the supreme values which will uphold the social fabric of the country in the future. There is no doubt that an appreciation of moral values and an attitude of respect for human dignity and human rights are as important as, if not more important than, any knowledge or skill imparted. Mr Ambassador, I am confident that in the fulfilment of your mission you will contribute all your personal qualities and energies to further strengthening the ties of friendship already existing between Thailand and the Holy See. I assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia will always be willing to assist you as you carry out your duties. Upon yourself, upon Their Majesties the King and Queen, and upon all the Thai people I cordially invoke abundant divine blessings.

* *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXII, 1 p.1045-1048.

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