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Letter of the Holy Father to the Catholic Community of Viet Nam on the occasion of the adoption of the Agreement on the Status of the Resident Papal Representative and the Office of the Resident Papal Representative of the Holy See in Viet Nam

To the Catholic Community of Viet Nam

on the occasion of the adoption

of the Agreement on the Status of the Resident Papal Representative

and the Office of the Resident Papal Representative

of the Holy See in Viet Nam

Dear brother Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and faithful of the People of God in Viet Nam: may the grace and peace of God be with you all. Let us give thanks to God with joy, for God's love is eternal and faithful forever.[1]

It is my desire to send you this Letter, on the occasion of the adoption of the Agreement between the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the Holy See concerning the Status of the Resident Pontifical Representative in Viet Nam. The faith of the Catholic Church in your country was born and grew over many generations rooted in the commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37-38). Indeed, love is the measure of faith, and faith is the soul of love, never forgetting that love for God and neighbour are two sides of the same coin.[2]

As a sign of the good relations that have marked recent years, together with the hope that the Pontifical Representative will be a bridge in order to advance reciprocal relations, I was pleased to welcome Mr Vo Van Thuong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on an official visit to the Vatican on 27 July last. This meeting holds special significance in the process of strengthening relations between the Holy See and Viet Nam. Regarding the Vietnamese people, Saint John Paul II remarked that everyone knows and appreciates your courage in working, your tenacity in difficulties, your sense of family and the other natural virtues to which you

bear witness.[3]

On the basis of the reciprocal trust built up step by step over the years, which was strengthened by the annual visits of the Holy See's Delegation and the meetings of the Viet Nam-Holy See Joint Working Group, both sides have been able to move forward together and further progress will be possible, recognizing convergences and respecting differences. Moreover, the participants were able to walk together, listening to each other and arriving at a mutual understanding. Although each of them came from different backgrounds and experiences of life, it did not prevent them from seeking together the best way forward for the good of the Vietnamese people and the Church.

Recalling the description contained in the Letter to Diognetus, a text of the second century after Christ, Christians, who are in the world but do not belong to the world, are marked by the practice of charity, implementing the Gospel in the heart of the nation and accompanying it in its efforts towards a balanced social and economic development. Consequently, the Catholic faithful, by building up the Church through shared pastoral cooperation, and by imbuing daily life with the message of the Gospel, live out their own identity as good Christians and good citizens. In this regard, the Catholic faithful can foster dialogue and engender hope for the country whenever conditions favourable to the exercise of religious freedom are implemented.

You are daughters and sons of the Church and at the same time citizens of Viet Nam, as Pope Benedict XVI recalled in 2009 when addressing the Vietnamese Bishops: "The Church invites all her members to be loyally committed to building a just, supportive and fair society. Her intention is certainly not to replace government leaders; she wishes only to be able to play a just role in the nation's life, at the service of the whole people, in a spirit of dialogue and respectful collaboration".[4]

Today, more than ever, we need the concrete practice of charity, that is, the firm decision in favour of men and women, which was accomplished at Easter and through the Church is continually made present throughout history, for "in all places and circumstances, Christians... are called to hear the cry of the poor".[5] This spirit has always enlivened the Catholic community in your country and led it to offer its own positive and meaningful contribution in serving the people, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, the Church in Viet Nam, with the encouragement of each Bishop and of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference, has proven to be a leaven in society, accompanying it in its development and contributing to its progress as faithful, responsible and credible believers.

Your Bishops recalled all this in their Pastoral Letter issued this year, which focused on fostering participation in the life of the community through mutual love, sincere listening and acts of charity, shown also towards those who do not share the same faith, and in caring for the most vulnerable and most in need.

Dear brothers and sisters of Viet Nam, the Catholic faithful, ever ready to respond effectively to the daily needs of others and to participate in the building up of the common good in every area of the country's social life, are called to carry out the teaching of Jesus to be "the light of the world and the salt of the earth" and to "let their light so shine before others that they may see their good works and give glory to their Father in heaven" (*Mt 5:16*).

Sixty years ago, addressing the whole world in order to plead for a common effort for peace, Saint John XXIII wrote: "We are hopeful that, by establishing contact with one another and by a policy of negotiation, nations will come to a better recognition of the natural ties that bind them together as men and women. We are hopeful, too, that they will come to a fairer realization of one of the cardinal duties deriving from our common nature: namely, that love, not fear, must dominate the relationships between individuals and between nations. It is principally characteristic of love that it draws men and women together in all sorts of ways, sincerely united in the bonds of mind and matter; and this is a union from which countless blessings can flow".[6]

I ask God to enlighten and guide you, so that, in your lives and in your relations with the civil Authorities and with every person, without distinction of religion, race or culture, you may know how to bear witness to the love and charity of Jesus Christ, for the glory of God.

In concluding this fraternal Letter, it is my hope that you, dear Bishops, priests, consecrated men and women and lay faithful, will be courageous in following the example of Christ. May Our Lady of La Vang accompany you and through her maternal intercession, may our merciful Father bless and grant abundant graces to the whole Catholic Church in Viet Nam, as well as the Nation and the beloved Vietnamese people.

FRANCISCUS

From the Vatican, 8 September 2023,

Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

[1] Cf. *Angelus*, 10 November 2013.

[2] Cf. *Angelus*, 26 October 2014.

[3] Cf. John Paul II, *Radio Address to the People of Viet Nam*, 10 May 1984.

[4] Benedict XVI, *Address to Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, Ad limina Visit*, 27 June 2009.

[5] *Evangelii Gaudium*, 191.

[6] John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 129.
