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Questa mattina, alle ore 11.45, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale della Thailandia, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, per la Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum" e rivolge loro il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

"Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth" (cf. *Ps* 104:30). With these words of the Pentecost antiphon I cordially welcome you, the Bishops of Thailand. I thank Bishop Phimpisan for the kind sentiments expressed on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and assure you of my prayers for yourselves and all those entrusted to your pastoral care. Your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* is an occasion to strengthen your commitment to make Jesus increasingly visible within the Church and known in society through witness to the love and truth of his Gospel.

The great feast of Pentecost which we have recently celebrated reminds us that the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world and prompts us to bring Christ to all peoples. In your country this mission of the small Catholic community is undertaken within the context of relationships, most especially with Buddhists. In fact, you have readily expressed to me your great respect for the Buddhist monasteries and the esteem you have for the

contribution they make to the social and cultural life of the Thai people.

The coexistence of different religious communities today unfolds against the backdrop of globalization. Recently I observed that the forces of globalization see humanity poised between two poles. On the one hand there is the growing multitude of economic and cultural bonds which usually enhance a sense of global solidarity and shared responsibility for the well-being of humanity. On the other there are disturbing signs of a fragmentation and a certain individualism in which secularism takes a hold, pushing the transcendent and the sense of the sacred to the margins and eclipsing the very source of harmony and unity within the universe.

The negative aspects of this cultural phenomenon, which cause dismay to yourselves and other religious leaders in your country, in fact point to the importance of interreligious cooperation. They call for a concerted effort to uphold the spiritual and moral soul of your people. In concordance with Buddhists, you can promote mutual understanding concerning the transmission of traditions to succeeding generations, the articulation of ethical values discernable to reason, reverence for the transcendent, prayer and contemplation. Such practices and dispositions serve the common well-being of society and nurture the essence of every human being.

As shepherds of small and scattered flocks, you draw comfort from the sending of the Paraclete, who advocates, counsels and protects (cf. *Jn 14:16*). Encourage the faithful to embrace all that begets the new life of Pentecost! The Spirit of truth reminds us that the Father and the Son are present in the world through those who love Christ and keep his word (cf. *Jn 14:22-23*), becoming disciples sent forth to bear fruit (cf. *Jn 15:8*). The outpouring of the Spirit is therefore both a gift and a task; a task which in turn becomes itself an epiphanic gift: the presentation of Christ and his love to the world. In Thailand, that gift is encountered particularly through the Church's medical clinics and social works as well as through her schools, for it is there that the noble Thai people may come to recognize and know the face of Jesus Christ.

Dear Brothers, you have rightly noted that Catholic schools and colleges make a remarkable contribution to the intellectual formation of numerous young Thais. They should also make an outstanding contribution to the spiritual and moral education of the young. Indeed, it is for these crucial aspects of the formation of the person that parents – whether Catholic or Buddhist – turn to Catholic schools.

In this regard, I wish to appeal to the many men and women religious who diligently serve in Catholic institutions of learning in your Dioceses. Theirs should not primarily be a role of administration but of mission. As consecrated persons they are called to be "witnesses of Christ, epiphany of the love of God in the world", and require "the courage of testimony and the patience of dialogue" serving "the dignity of human life, the harmony of creation, and the peaceful existence of peoples" (*Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, 1-2). It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that Religious remain close to the students and their families, most especially through their classroom teaching of the catechism for Catholics and others interested, and through moral formation and care for the spiritual needs of all in the school community. I encourage Congregations in their commitment to the education apostolate, confident that fee structures will be fair and transparent, and trusting that schools will become increasingly accessible to the poor who so often long for the faithful embrace of Christ.

A fine example of the proclamation of the mighty works of God (cf. *Acts 2:11*) is the service undertaken in your communities by catechists. They have embraced with great zeal and generosity Saint Paul's burning conviction: "woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor 9:16*). This task cannot, however, be left to them alone. It is the ministry of your priests to "announce the divine word to all" and to "labour in preaching and teaching" (*Rite of Ordination*, no. 102). This fundamental priestly role which, to be effective, requires a sound philosophical and theological formation, cannot be delegated to others. Rather, when well-trained catechists work together with their parish priests the branches of the vine bear much fruit (cf. *Jn 15:5*). To this end, your own reports allude to various kerygmatic tasks requiring attention, including the formation of spouses who are not Catholic and pastoral solicitude for the many Catholic individuals and families who in moving from rural parts to the cities risk losing contact with parish life.

Lastly, dear Brothers, I wish to express my appreciation for the efforts of the entire Catholic community of Thailand to uphold the dignity of every human life, especially the most vulnerable. Of particular concern to you is

the scourge of the trafficking of women and children, and prostitution. Undoubtedly poverty is a factor underlying these phenomena, and in this regard I know much is being achieved through the Church's development programmes. But there is a further aspect which must be acknowledged and collectively addressed if this abhorrent human exploitation is to be effectively confronted. I am speaking of the trivialization of sexuality in the media and entertainment industries which fuels a decline in moral values and leads to the degradation of women, the weakening of fidelity in marriage and even the abuse of children.

With fraternal affection I offer these reflections, wishing to affirm you in your desire to receive the Spirit's flame so that you may with one voice proclaim the Good News of Jesus! To you all, and to your priests, religious, seminarians and lay faithful, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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