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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis to Thailand and Japan (19 to 26 November 2019) – Meeting with Leaders of other Christian confessions and other Religions at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

Meeting with Leaders of other Christian confessions and other Religions at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

In the afternoon, after leaving the apostolic nunciature, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok where, at 3:20 local time (9:20 in Rome) he met with leaders of other Christian denominations and other religions.

Upon arrival the Pope was welcomed at the entrance of the University Auditorium by the archbishop of Bangkok, His Eminence Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, the president of the University, Dr. Bundit Eur-arporn, the president of the University Council and two students who brought him a floral tribute.

Pope Francis greeted the eighteen religious leaders individually. The president of the University then addressed a brief welcome to the Holy Father and gave him a gift.

After a greeting from Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut, president of the Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, and the performance of a hymn, the Holy Father delivered his speech.

At the end, after the final hymn and before leaving the Auditorium, the Pope posed for the group photograph with the religious leaders. He then transferred by car to the Cathedral of the Assumption in Bangkok for Holy Mass with young people.

The following is the address given by the Pope during the meeting with religious leaders:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence,
 Your Excellencies,
 Distinguished Representatives of the different Religious Confessions,
 Representatives of the University Community,
 Dear Friends,

Thank you for your warm welcome. I am grateful to Bishop Sirisut and to Dr Bundit Eua-arporn for their kind words of introduction. I am grateful as well for the invitation to visit this renowned university and the students, instructors and staff who enliven this place of study. I am also grateful to them for granting me this opportunity to meet representatives of the various Christian communities and the leaders of other religions, who honor us by their presence. I thank you for coming and I express my deep esteem for the precious cultural heritage and the spiritual traditions to which you are heirs and witnesses.

One hundred and twenty-two years ago, in 1897, King Chulalongkorn, for whom this university is named, visited Rome and met Pope Leo XIII in audience, the first time that a non-Christian Head of State was received in the Vatican. May the memory of that significant encounter, as well as that of his reign, whose virtues included the abolition of slavery, challenge us, in our own time, to pursue the path of dialogue and mutual understanding. And to do so in a spirit of fraternal solidarity that can help end the many present-day forms of slavery, especially the scourge of human trafficking.

The need for mutual respect, esteem and cooperation between religions is all the more pressing for humanity today. Our world faces complex challenges such as economic and financial globalization and its grave consequences for the development of local communities; rapid advances in technology – which seemingly promote a better world – and the tragic persistence of civil conflicts, whether these involve movements of migration, refugees, famine or outright war. Then, too, there is the degradation and destruction of our common home. These challenges remind us that no region or sector of the human family can look to itself or its future in isolation from or immune to others. All these situations require us to be bold in devising new ways of shaping the history of our time without denigrating or insulting anyone. Long gone are the days when when an insular mode of thought could determine an approach to time and space and appear to offer a valid way of resolving conflicts. Now is the time to be bold and envision the logic of encounter and mutual dialogue as the path, common cooperation as the code of conduct, and reciprocal knowledge as a method and standard. In this way, we can provide a new paradigm for resolving conflicts and help foster greater understanding and the protection of creation. In this regard, religions, like universities, have much to offer, without having to renounce their specific character and special gifts. Everything we do in this regard will be a significant step towards guaranteeing younger generations their right to the future, while serving the cause of justice and peace. Only in this way will we provide the young with the tools they need to be in the forefront of efforts to create sustainable and inclusive lifestyles.

The times in which we live summon us to build solid foundations, anchored on respect for, and recognition of, the dignity of persons, the promotion of an integral humanism alert to and concerned for the protection of our common home, and a responsible stewardship that preserves the beauty and richness of nature as a right fundamental for existence. The great religious traditions of our world bear witness to a transcendent and widely shared spiritual patrimony that can make a solid contribution in this area, if only we are able to encounter one another without fear.

All of us are called not only to heed the voice of the poor in our midst: the disenfranchised, the downtrodden, the indigenous peoples and religious minorities, but also to be unafraid to create opportunities, as is already quietly occurring, to work hand in hand. For our part, we are asked to embrace the moral imperative of upholding human dignity and respecting the rights of conscience and religious freedom. We need to create spaces where we can let in a breath of fresh air, in the certainty that all is not lost. For “human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning” (*Laudato Si'*, 205).

Here in Thailand, a country of great natural beauty, I would like to highlight one distinctive feature that I consider

crucial and in some way a part of the wealth that you can “export” and share with other parts of our human family. You show esteem and concern for your elders, respecting them and giving them an honored place; this is a great value. This ensures that you preserve the roots necessary so that your people do not lose their bearings by following certain slogans that end up emptying and mortgaging the soul of new generations. In addition to a growing tendency to discredit local values and cultures by imposing a unitary model, “we see a tendency to ‘homogenize’ young people, blurring what is distinctive about their origins and backgrounds, and turning them into a new line of malleable goods. This produces a cultural devastation that is just as serious as the disappearance of species of animals and plants” (*Christus Vivit*, 186). I express my hope that you will continue to assist young people to know the cultural heritage of the society in which they live. Helping the young to know the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to interact with their elders, is a genuine act of love towards them, for the sake of their growth and the decisions they are called to make (cf. *ibid.*, 187).

This entire approach necessarily demands the involvement of educational institutions like this university. Research and knowledge can help to open new paths for reducing human inequality, strengthening social justice, upholding human dignity, seeking means for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and preserving the life-giving resources of our earth. I express my appreciation to the educators and scholars of this country who work to provide present and future generations with the skills and especially the wisdom, rooted in that of their ancestors, that will enable them to play their part in promoting the common good of society.

Dear friends, all of us are members of the human family. Each person, in his or her own way, is called to be actively and directly engaged in building a culture founded on the shared values that lead to unity, mutual respect and a harmonious coexistence.

Once again, I thank you for your invitation and your attention. I offer my prayerful good wishes for your efforts to serve the growth of Thailand in prosperity and peace. Upon all present, upon your families and those whom you serve, I invoke every divine blessing. And I ask you please to pray for me.

Thank you.
