

# Buddhist and Christian diplomacies pursuing peace amidst the Second World War

Official communications between Thailand and the Vatican

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This article discloses and analyses a selection of letters, reports, and official missives exchanged between the Holy See and the governments of Thailand during the Second World War. The collected documents are kept in the Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, in Rome, and contain evidence of the attempts made by the two diplomacies, one Christian and the other Buddhist, to establish a dialogue and find a solution to the pressing problems that were complicating the country's already difficult situation during the world conflict. A beneficial solution to these problems was found by Thai diplomacy, based on a considered interpretation of Buddhist teachings and their fundamental tolerance, and by the Vatican, which not only recognised the value of this different religious thought but also Thailand's complex position within the balance of powers in Southeast Asia in the mid-20th century.

**Keywords:** Buddhism; Thailand; Christianity; Vatican; World War 2; Religious Dialogue.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

During the last three years, I was fortunate and privileged to be entrusted with the task of studying and cataloguing several Buddhist Manuscripts in the Pali language from central Thailand, kept in the Vatican Library. Consequently, I developed a genuine interest in the circumstances of the arrival of

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those codices to Rome and the related history of the diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Southeast Asian countries, particularly the Kingdom of Thailand.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, I started studying the massive collection of official documents exchanged between Bangkok and Rome, which are nowadays contained in the precious folders of the Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In the first phase of the survey, I decided to confine my scrutiny to the twentieth century, while in my most recent inspections, I focused on documents that date back to the XVII Century. The results of the entire research will be published in forthcoming articles.

Hitherto, among those interesting records, minutes, letters, and notes, I could not detect any report of donation or acquisition of sacred texts. But something drew my attention in the collection of documents from the XX Century:<sup>3</sup> I came across a significant emergence of grave records issued during the Second World War. This exchange of communications and missives was carried on between different members of the Siamese Government and the members of the clergy living in Thailand, together with the Vatican administration in Rome. The topics discussed in these records and the sharp intensification of urgency conveyed by their words reveal the devastating and universal human suffering during those troubled years.

In this article, I offer an annotated selection of the documents I have found, translated from Thai, French, and Italian. It is clear to me that, beyond Thai governments' political calculations and possible internal divergences of opinion among the different components existing in the Catholic Church's complex world, the dialogue between Siam and the Vatican was able to prevent additional tragedies and deaths by disentangling the many complications that the fluctuating phases of the World War brought. I am convinced that the religious substratum of these discussions was crucial for the dialogue to become fruitful and lead to mutual understanding. Indeed, it is undoubtedly true that the Thai people had accepted Christianity with the usual Buddhist inclusivity, and their tolerance perfectly fits the most profound Christian teachings. The respect that Thai Christians continued (and continue) to have for Buddhism significantly demonstrates this. Representatives from both sides, possessing refined political wisdom and statesmanship, could not ignore this attitude of manifest openness and

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<sup>2</sup> In all the documents I analysed, written approximately 80 years ago, the Italian word for Thailand follows the correct official international spelling, i.e. "Thailandia," and not the erroneous "Tailandia," with unaspirated and unvoiced dental "t" used in Italian dictionaries and standard wording until a few years ago.

<sup>3</sup> Nuova Serie (anni 1923-1958) (henceforth: NS), vols 1486, 1544, 1545.

acceptance: the Vatican allowed Thai Catholics' veneration of Buddha as a "teacher," and the Siamese government accepted the presence of Catholic priests, albeit increasingly "indigenous."

Unfortunately, we will never know how many lives this dialogue and encounter between Buddhist and Christian diplomacies saved, but I assume the number is large.

## 2. Growing concerns

The global hostilities of the Second World War assumed a peculiar form in Thailand, marking a watershed and plunging the country into a more central position in world strategies.

The Second World War proved to be a boundary between eras. The memory of an absolute monarchy faded. The great households disintegrated. The old colonial powers retreated. The liberal nationalist ideas of the 1920s and 1930s were first pushed aside by the militaristic nationalism of the wartime era, then crushed by the anti-communist fervour in the aftermath. (Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit 2014<sup>3</sup>: 164–165).

Alongside enduring the disruptions caused by the tragic events of the global conflict, Thailand faced internal political challenges characterized by efforts to steer the country's framework towards a more nationalist trajectory.

Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, who served as Thai prime minister between 1938 and 1944 and, later, between 1948 and 1957, "saw the war as an opportunity to restore all of Thailand's lost territories, which had been a dream of Thai rulers since Chulalongkorn. He intended to construct a Greater Thailand that would encompass all areas inhabited by the Thai race" (Strate 2015, 66).<sup>4</sup>

Even the very change of the country's name from "Siam" to "Thailand," which occurred under his premiership with the support of Wichitwathakan—an admirer of Mussolini on whom he wrote a laudatory study (Baker, Pasuk Phongpaichit 2014:<sup>3</sup> 126-128)—must be placed in this context of territorial expansion and intense nationalism. The reinvigorated sense of pride of the country combined with other historical and political elements such as the political closeness to Japan (and thus also to the other "Axis Powers," i.e. Germany and Italy) pursued in those years, the expansion of Japan itself in Asia, and the French domination of Indochina, made the presence of Catholic missionaries in the country problematic to say the least: "[w]ithin the National Humiliation narrative, the Church was more than a foreign religion; it was a symbol of imperialism" (Strate 2015: 92).

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<sup>4</sup> A short and clear description of the nationalist phase of Thai history can also be found in Terwiel (2005: 271–278).

I will not elaborate here on the history of Christianity (Catholic and Protestant) in Thailand nor on the political situation of this country between 1940 and 1945, the years in which the documents I present in this article were issued: an exhaustive discussion of them would require more space. The final bibliography lists several modern studies, analyses, and careful investigations, which will be helpful to offer a vivid historical image of Thailand during those difficult years. This article is a documental contribution to a better comprehension of that part of Thai history. The well-kept material of the Archives effectively evidences how sophisticated, complex, and fecund the communication between the Catholic Church and the Thai governments was in those years, firmly aimed to achieve better stability in that region and the safety of many Thai people.

The predominant number of documents in which priests clearly expressed concern about Thai Catholic people living in Thailand are dated from 1940.<sup>5</sup> These apprehensions gradually escalated until a grounded sense of worry for the lives of priests—mostly belonging to the French clergy—and Thai Christian people also became widespread. Undeniably, all these vicissitudes were associated with the Franco-Thai War (October 1940 – January 28, 1941).

Furthermore, the Catholic Church stated its concerns not only for those forms of violence but also for the number of Christian Thai people who decided to convert from Catholicism to Buddhism. A letter sent by Monsignor Gaetano Pasotti<sup>6</sup> to the *Délégation Apostolique en Indochine, Hué (Annam)* [Apostolic Delegation in Indochina, Hue, Vietnam] revealed the attempts to promote conversions of Thai air force aviators from Catholicism to Buddhism (NS vol. 1486: 495). Mgr. Pasotti translated into Italian articles from unspecified Thai newspapers published in September 1940: in those lines is written that Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, Minister of war, congratulated one state aviator on his conversion to Buddhism and wished him all blessings from the “three holy things” for his military career and private business.<sup>7</sup> The Thai government considered these conversions spontaneous decisions, while the ecclesiastics suspected interference of the Thai government that was ready to offer

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<sup>5</sup> Catholic missions were objects of attacks, and sometimes even onslaughts, in many colonies. In Vietnam, for example “[i]t was not until the 1840s that the protectorate of the Catholic missions drove France to significant political and military involvement in eastern Asia. For the next two decades, anti-Christian violence witnessed the killing of tens of thousands of Vietnamese converts, as well as the imprisonment, torture, and execution of missionaries” (Daughton 2006: 63).

<sup>6</sup> Gaetano Pasotti was an Italian Catholic bishop (appointed April 7, 1941). He was Superior of the Ratchaburi mission and remained at the head of that mission even when it was elevated to “apostolic prefecture” (1934) and then to “apostolic vicariate” (1941).

<sup>7</sup> “Il Ministro della guerra intende di congratularsi con lui et gli augura tutte le benedizioni della – Tre Cose Sacre – perché la sua carriera militare e i suoi affari privati abbiano buon successo.” Probably the “three holy things” are the Three Buddhist Jewels, *Triratna* (in Thai รัตนตรัย), i.e. the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha.

rewards and help to the converted. Cardinal Francesco Marmaggi's unbiased explanation of this problem at the beginning of his Report is particularly clear.<sup>8</sup>

The positions expressed in the documents I present here seem particularly valuable because they do not deny the presence of problems but reveal a sincere intention to unravel the skein of that intricate circumstance. On the 25 January 1941, Mgr. Pasotti wrote a letter to Plaek Phibunsongkhram in which he showed great understanding and diplomatic openness, and the Thai government responded with public announcements, demonstrating a lucid willingness to dialogue: the Vatican and the Thai government were, beyond doubt, trying to avoid more significant conflicts. Mgr. Pasotti's words are both an acknowledgement of the various existing problems (showing concerns for any sort of violence, not only against Christians but also against Buddhists) and a masterly diplomatic endeavour to interact with the Thai government in a receptive manner.<sup>9</sup>

*Copy of letter addressed to Plaek Phibunsongkhram, Chief of Ministers [25 January 1941].*

Your Excellency,

[...]

1. *Killing of the Phras* [Buddhist monks, Bhikkhu or Phra Bhikkhu, พระภิกษุ]. This was reported on the radio and in the newspapers, and it was with deep sorrow that we heard this news. We say to you at once: We Catholics condemn this attack with all our might. Life is sacred, and God's commandment is categorical: Do not kill. [...]

2. *Desecration of the Buddha's statue and Pagodas*. We strongly condemn such desecration.

3. *Doubt about the loyalty of Thai Catholics*. I know I am touching on a very sensitive issue. I simply say that if they are faithful to the teachings of their religion, they cannot but be good citizens. They know that they must love their country, a love of predilection, and they still know that Authority is sacred. God has instituted the existing Authorities, so whoever resists power resists the divine institution. This is Catholic thinking. Individual infidelities are possible in all classes of people to whatever religion they belong. However, we think that the faults of individuals cannot be attributed to a doctrine or an entire mass, just as a whole army cannot be condemned [235] if some soldier is vile and treacherous.

4. *For a Catholic Church ruled by Thai clergy*. This corresponds perfectly with the mind and directives of the Vatican, and there are examples in Japan, China, India, Africa, etc. In Japan, for example, the Archbishop is Japanese. If Your Excellency believes that my humble work, even if it has no official character, may be helpful to you, I place myself at your complete disposal to communicate to Rome your and your government's wishes. I can assure you that they will be taken into the warmest consideration.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix at the end of the article.

<sup>9</sup> Some concepts and words used by Mrs Pasotti might appear incompatible with the modern idea of state and nation, but we have to contextualise his letter, insert it into that problematic historical moment, and fathom its real goals.

5. *Buddhism and Catholicism*. Having come to Thailand a dozen years ago, I have made it my duty to study Buddhism in its theoretical part and observe it in the people's daily lives. I do not only admire all that is good and great in Buddha's morals, but I can also assure you that I have always had great respect – and wanted others to have it too – both for the glorious traditions of the Thai people and for each of them, whatever their religious beliefs. Especially being the latter, as Your Excellency rightly wrote in the instruction sent to all the Governors of the different Changvats [provinces, จังหวัด] on 15 September B.E. 2482 [C.E. 1939], a personal affair and one of conscience. Differences in religion must not imply antagonisms or divisions of hearts in any way; everyone can follow any religion, either because that religion is practised by the more significant part of the people in which he lives or because of his personal convictions. Even with Phras we have always had respect and cordial relations.

The Bangkok Chronicle of 18 December 1940, in the article “Thailand religious tolerance,” among others, wrote: “In presenting Phra Buddha or the Image of the Lord Buddha at any ceremony, we carry [236] no idea of idol worship as pagans. Phra Buddha represents only the symbol of the Great Master [...]” In this regard, I would like to express my own personal idea: conceived in this manner, the worship of the Buddha cannot present difficulties for a mutual understanding. In this sense, [analogous], delicate, and vital issues were studied in Japan and China with the highest understanding by the Vatican and the governments of those countries. The conclusions arrived at were that they satisfied national needs and aspirations with the duties of a good Catholic. [...] [237]

*Reply from Direk Jayanama, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand [17 February 1941].*

[...] He [the Chief Minister, i.e. Plaek Phibunsongkhram] has understood your intentions very well, as well as your spirit of friendship for the Thai race and the Buddhist religion. And for this, he thanks you very much. As for the religious movements of these days, they must be ascribed to this: undoubtedly, several of those who profess the Catholic religion have tried to betray the Thai race as a consequence of the fact that French Fathers have been (are) too busy with politics. On the other hand, His Majesty the King, the leader of us Thai, is a Buddhist, and we therefore wish to follow in his footsteps. Be that as it may, His Excellency the Chief Minister thanks you immensely for all the good you have done to aid the Thai people (NS, vol. 1486: 234–237).

On the Thai side, an emblematic action aimed at seeking dialogue with the Catholic Church is a leaflet issued in 1941 (just two weeks after Mgr. Pasotti's letter), in all likelihood, with the government's consent. It was named “Religious Freedom (อิสระทางศาสนา):<sup>10</sup> this is the voice of Justice, this is the voice of Humanitarianism, this is the voice of Constitution, this is the voice of the Leader of the country,” in which we find some fundamental statements.<sup>11</sup> The quotations we find on the first page of this

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<sup>10</sup> The most used spelling is ศาสนา (*sāsana*).

<sup>11</sup> The leaflet was published on the 8th of February 1941 [2484] by Udomphan Publication, Samut Songkhram. It contains passages extracted and reprinted from the book (จาก หนังสือ) รัฐธรรมนูญแห่งราชอาณาจักรสยาม พร้อมด้วยคำอธิบายโดยย่อของสำนักงานโฆษณาการ พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๐ [2480] [*The Constitution of Thailand, along with a brief description by the Advertisement Office, 1937*]. Concerning the freedom of religious cult, only a few months later (15 October

document—clearly intended to spread a message of social stability based on the legal and constitutional acceptance of all religious beliefs within the Kingdom—are taken from Thailand’s first Constitution, promulgated in 1932. The quoted parts come, in particular, from the prologue to the Constitution, “General Provision” (บททั่วไป), Section (มาตรา) 1, and from the Second Chapter (หมวด), “Rights and Duties of Siamese People” (สิทธิและหน้าที่ของชนชาวสยาม), Section 13. The first article of the 1932 Constitution guarantees the protection of every citizen based on the principle expressed in the same constitution “regardless of origin or religion” (ไม่ว่าเหล่ากำเนิดหรือศาสนาใด). The leaflet explains that Thai people can profess Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Section 13 focuses on the freedom of religious worship related to any creed. This freedom is clearly stated and can only be restricted because of possible public order (ความสงบเรียบร้อย) and morality (ศีลธรรม) infringements.

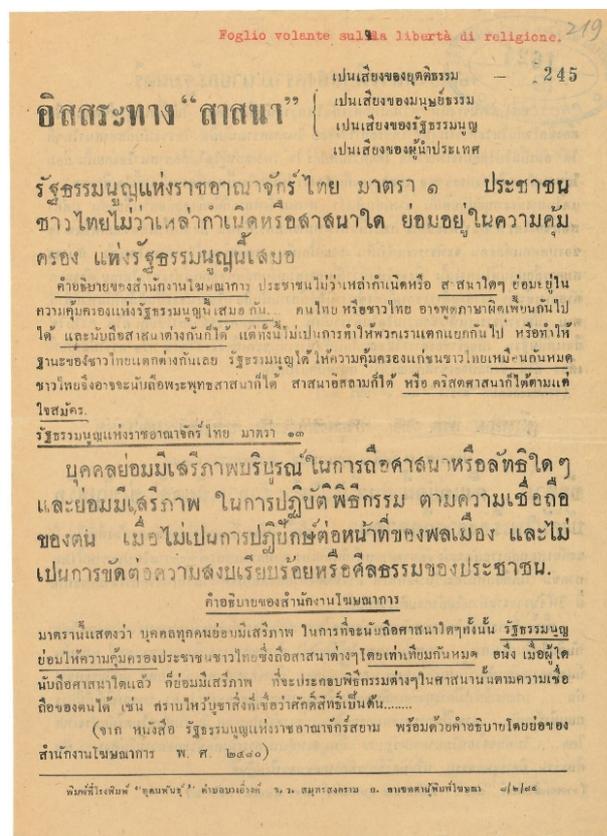


Figure 1. Leaflet 1941, NS vol. 1486, f. 245r (courtesy Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples)

1941) an article appeared in the “Bangkok Times,” in English, which quoted the words said by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab in 1928: “The attitude of this country from time immemorial has been that of complete toleration of the freedom of religious thought. The State religion has always been Buddhism, but the state does not interfere with its people in the matter of faith” (NS, vol. 1486: 360).

Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram and Police General Adul Aduldejcharat formulated more pragmatic and practical assessments on the second page of the leaflet.

Truthfully, differences in religious beliefs should not cause conflict or disagreement among people. Everyone has the freedom to follow any religion, either by tradition or by personal choice. Because if someone does not follow any religion, it is not in accordance with public opinion, and it shows that they lack moral restraints. However, in practice, I believe that all religions essentially teach the same principles. The value and appropriateness of the teachings of any religion depend on each individual's personal judgment and perception. When one recognises the genuine goodness in any teaching, it is appropriate to adopt and practice it. This should not be seen as being fickle or inconsistent in any way. For example, we may read a book by an author we do not respect or even dislike. If we find something valuable in his/her writing, it is appropriate to remember and apply it. Dismissing the entire content just because we dislike the author is not wise and might even be considered narrow-minded.<sup>12</sup> [Plaek Phibunsongkhram]

*Clause Three:* From this day forward, all disparagement, threats, or coercion regarding religious beliefs will be halted. This responsibility falls upon the local police, who are tasked with vigilant observation and management of this directive, executing their duties diligently and appropriately as each case may require, as strictly outlined in this proclamation. There is to be no bias or exemption for any individual. Should there be any obstacles or doubts regarding the implementation of this proclamation, an immediate report should be made to the Police Department.

The reason for this is to support the government in revising the national borders between Thailand and French Indochina. Some groups have exceeded their bounds with excessive aggression, and others have fragmented into factions and individuals, engaging in conflict, disparagement, and threats against each other. In some cases, corruption has been intertwined with personal gain and, in others, covert harm. These actions could potentially disturb international relations, especially with countries friendly to Thailand. They are not aligned with the government's policies and could represent a cause of unrest, violating ethical and humanitarian principles and the proper conduct expected of civilised people.<sup>13</sup> [Adul Aduldejcharat]

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<sup>12</sup> หนังสือพิมพ์ตำรวจ เล่ม ๕ หน้า ๓๔ [from the newspaper *Police*, vol. 9: 34].

<sup>13</sup> จากหนังสือพิมพ์ นิกอร์ วันอังคาร ๔ กุมภาพันธ์ พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๔ หน้า ๒ [from the newspaper *Nikorn*, Tuesday, February 4, 1941, p. 2].

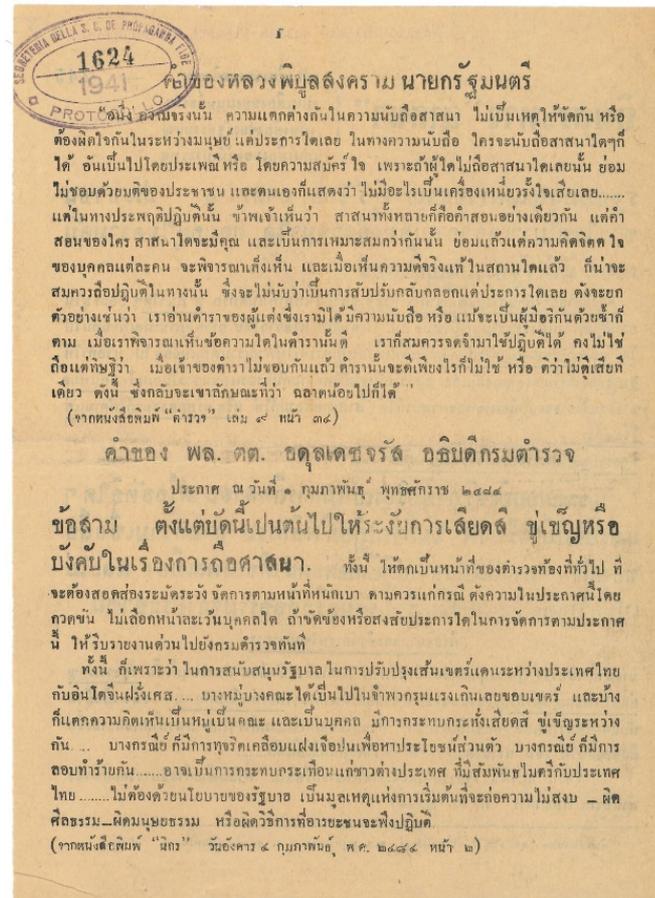


Figure 2. Leaflet 1941, NS vol. 1486, f. 245v (courtesy Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples)

The leaflet’s text clearly discloses the attempt, if not to eliminate, at least to reduce additional social conflicts by implementing a substantial wise tolerance in respect of the various religious traditions. This effort was produced not only by legitimate political expediencies but, I believe, also by the natural Buddhist attitude to receptiveness. The same perspective appears in the diplomatic actions of the Catholic Church, which, with great care and not a few difficulties, pursues the goal of averting violence and deaths while maintaining intact the fabric of diplomatic relations both internally, in the complex system of missions, and externally, with the political governments of the various countries in which it operates.

The action of the notorious “Thai Blood Party (or “Thai Blood Group,” *Khana Lueat Thai* [คณะเลือดไทย]) made this dialogue much more complex in those years, and many of the persecutions

continued.<sup>14</sup> The vital need to “replace the French clergy with Italian and German priests” became increasingly urgent, and this occurred because “the dependence of the Thai Catholics on the Apostolic Delegation in Indochina appears unwelcome to the Thai Government, both for fear of French interference and because it diminishes the prestige of the independent Thai government.”<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Two cornerstones of dialogue: Indigenous Vicariate and the Buddha as a “Great Master”

Two solutions, undoubtedly decisive, were devised by the representatives of the Catholic Church to find a definitive end to the pressing problems of that tumultuous period. The first was of a social nature and envisaged leaving the conduct of the Church in Thailand in the hands of Thai priests and prelates, thus giving the government and the Siamese citizens the possibility of feeling the Catholic faithful closer to them and building a relationship of deep trust. The second was more theological in nature, aimed at solving the complicated problem of worshipping the Buddha that continued to be performed even by Catholics. The fact that the Buddha had never been considered a “god” but, at least according to the observations that were spread in those years, instead as a “venerable master” allowed the Catholic Church to accept Buddhism substantially as a “philosophical-moral” tradition, and at the same time allowed the Thai Christians (at least the Catholic ones) a peaceful existence, thus being able to perform the ordinary devotional acts towards the “Master” Buddha serenely, without causing any doctrinal diatribes.

The plan to detach Thailand from the Apostolic Delegation of Indochina and form an autonomous Delegation, which did not happen until 1957 (Filipazzi 2006, 182–183), combined with the idea of increasing the number of “indigenous” priests to the point of appointing a Thai Bishop, was clearly the way forward. However, these structural changes in the Thai Church had to take place gradually, as harmoniously as possible, without social and political traumas, to avoid internal problems within the Church and unnecessary conflicts with the Thai government that would have created dangers to people’s lives. This is not the place to deal with such a complex subject, in which Vatican diplomacy

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<sup>14</sup> “At the hands of the ‘Thai Blood Party,’ however, persecution continues. Bangkok Vicariate only. In the meantime, in addition to the closure of thirteen schools, two Catholic churches were destroyed, seven closed, two threatened, and two indigenous priests were sentenced on a pretext to two years in prison, while two others are on trial” (“Per opera ‘Thai Blood Party’ tuttavia persecuzioni continuano. Solo Vicariato Bangkok nel frattempo oltre chiusura di tredici scuole due chiese cattoliche sono state distrutte sette chiuse due minacciate due sacerdoti indigeni condannati con un pretesto due anni prigionie e altri due sono sotto processo”). From a telegram dated 23 May 1941, by Mgr. Pasotti, sent through the Italian Embassy to the Cardinal Secretary of State (NS, vol. 1486: 179).

<sup>15</sup> From the same document quoted in the previous footnote (NS, vol. 1486: 179).

showed all its skill and wisdom. I will limit myself to saying that significant admonitions to adopt a more cautious approach to the problem came from Cardinal Pietro Fumasoni Biondi, in a letter to Cardinal Luigi Maglione, in which he pointed out that if Mgr. Pasotti had advised against the return of the French priests to Thailand—precautionarily removed from the country to avoid significant problems for them—he himself could have appeared as a “tool” in the hands of the government (NS, vol. 1486: 180–181). But, on the other hand, another factor seemed to be evident not only in Vatican circles but also to the representatives of the Kingdom of Italy in Thailand: the possibility of Mgr. Pasotti being stripped of his position as *de facto* representative of the Church in Thailand to give this position back to a French member of the Apostolic Delegation of Indochina, namely Mgr. Drapier, would have been viewed not benevolently by the Thai government (NS, vol. 1486: 436).<sup>16</sup> For political reasons, the latter preferred to collaborate with Italian missionaries and would have seen the confirmation of Mgr. Pasotti’s presence as a “gratifying appreciation by the Holy See of the international importance of Siam and its position of autonomy” (NS, vol. 1486: 436). A clear explanation of these events can be found in Cardinal Marmaggi’s report.

The political problems were enormous, and the leaders assigned to make decisions had to balance multiple factors (military alliances, future political scenarios, civilian safety, the balance of power within the various countries and the Catholic Church itself, etc.), which often changed abruptly. But the central point remained to safeguard people’s lives, and from what we read in the available documents, this urgency always remained the fundamental prime objective.

Regarding the problem of the veneration of the Buddha, as we have already seen above, the solution was to accept this cult also within the religious life of a Thai Catholic, in view of the fact that the Thais did not consider the Buddha as a “god” but as a “great teacher of life” who had divulged in his “teachings profound moral truths [...] and truth, wherever it is found, deserves honour because all truth is a gift from God.”<sup>17</sup> This allowed Thai Catholics to be entirely within Buddhist society without denying their religious beliefs. It also allowed the Catholic Church not to be perceived as a “foreign entity” in the country but as a fully accepted and respected religious tradition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In NS (vol. 1486: 450) we find a note dated 1942 from the Sacra Congregazione De Propaganda Fide, in which it is said that Mgr. Drapier is back in Indochina as Apostolic Delegate, but the Thai authorities do not recognise him anymore.

<sup>17</sup> Mgr. Pasotti’s words (NS, 1544: 770–771).

<sup>18</sup> On this very complex topic and on its history, which can be traced back to the sixteenth century in China, see also Moffet (2005: 602): “When Gützlaff, the first Protestant missionary, stepped ashore in Siam in 1828 he found that Roman Catholics had been intermittently at work there for three hundred years, since 1567 and perhaps even earlier. But in the 1700s, the after-effects of the China rites controversy brought persecution of Christians to Buddhist Siam. As the missionaries to China had been expelled for refusal to honor Confucian rites, so now Siam expelled French priests for refusing to honor Buddhist

#### 4. Successful colloquies and synergies

While the fate of the Second World War was unfolding, not without further tragedies, and while Thailand was going through one of the most complex periods in its history, with heavy uncertainties about possible alliances and the unpredictable consequences that these political agreements could have caused in the country, a glimmer of reconciliation seemed to be opening up, at least within the problems that had developed between the Holy See and the Thai government. It goes without saying that the dialogue between the two diplomacies indeed cannot be separated from the events that the entire world was experiencing in the meantime, immersed in the last year of that horrible war. However, over and above political and strategic considerations, I believe that the almost total end of the violence directed towards Christian communities and the general social instability caused by it can be counted as one of the most important successes of the Vatican and Thai diplomacies, united in the search for a peaceful *modus vivendi*, which was able, even though still within a world conflict, to lay the foundations for future coexistence in a global context radically changed by the events of the war.

The words spoken by Pridi Phanomyong, regent of King Ananda Mahidol, at the celebration of the new Cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Khuang Aphaiwong, were memorable and constituted the fulcrum around which a sense of mutual trust was rebuilt. The speech was delivered in Bangkok on 8 August 1944 and was published on the front page of the Bangkok Chronicle on 9 August 1944, in English translation. Here is the section that most relates to the subject of this article:

[...] Furthermore, as His Majesty, the King is the upholder of religion, I would also appeal to the Government to uplift the religion the people profess. As the majority of the people of our country are Buddhist, His Majesty the King, who is the upholder of the Buddhist Faith, has lifted the Buddhist religion to ever-increasing glory. Moreover, I would also ask you to bear in mind that the people of many provinces also profess the Islam Faith, while a certain section embrace Christianity or other religions. The Constitution grants liberty of religion and freedom of worship, and since, under the Constitution His Majesty the King is the Upholder of religion, I would ask you to endeavour to assist other religions as may be possible. Such assistance is not contrary to Buddhist principles which lay stress on generosity. In fact, it would be considered an act of charity to assist the people of other creeds to enjoy the same religious rights under the constitution. I would, therefore, appeal to the people, irrespective of creed, to always have the welfare of the country foremost in mind. Finally, I pray that your sincere intention and your fidelity to Country, Religion, King and Constitution will watch over and protect you from all dangers. May you be physically and spiritually strong to carry on the work of administration for the happiness of the people, and may the sovereignty of the Thai nation be perpetrated throughout all ages. [...]

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state ceremonies. All missionaries were expelled in 1779, but were recalled by the king a few years later in the interests of establishing better trade relations with the West.”

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Figure 3. Article on Bangkok Chronicle, NS vol. 1544, f. 744 (courtesy Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples)

Regent Pridi Phanomyong’s words clearly assumed greater importance than all previous declarations, even if supported by the constitutional charter. The Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok, Mgr. Pasotti, immediately sent a telegram to Cardinal Maglione in Rome, informing him of this positive advancement in diplomatic relations with the Thai government. Mgr. Pasotti added that, in an audience with the Regent (probably held on 16 August), the latter expressed a high esteem for the Holy Father, giving Pasotti a very good impression (NS, vol. 1545 : 353–354).

August 8 Regent Thailand Pridi Phanomyong addressed Thai Government touching religious question too. Stop. After references Buddhist religion added quote I would also ask you bear mind people many provinces also profess Islam while certain section embrace Christianity other Religions. Stop. Constitution grant liberty religion Freedom whorship.

P2/60

And since under Constitution His Majesty the King is Upholder religions I would ask you endeavour assist other religions as may be possible. Stop. Speech published all newspapers Bangkok Chronicle

commented this will bring good cheer hearts those although not Buddhists nevertheless good thl. Stop. Received audience Regent 16. Stop. Very good impression. Stop. He showed high esteem Holy Father. Pasotti.

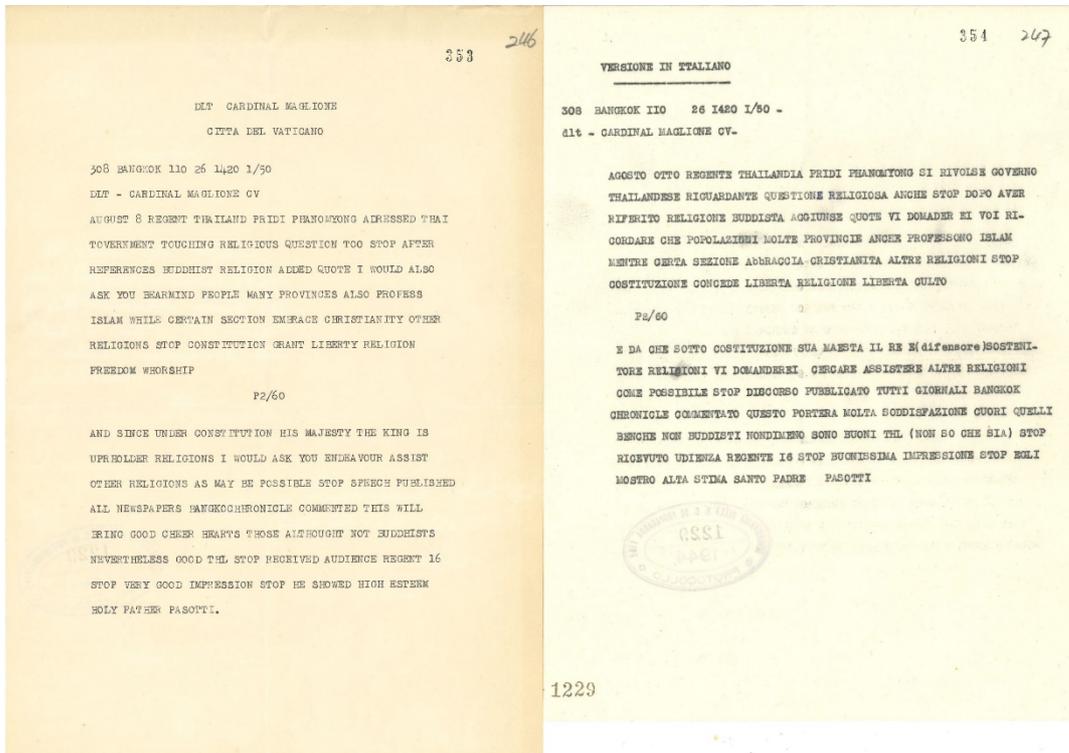


Figure 4. Pasotti's Telegram, NS vol. 1545, ff. 353–354 (courtesy Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples)

Mgr. Perros sent a second telegram to the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, Mgr. Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, who signed and forwarded it on 8 September 1944 to the Secretary of Propaganda Fide, Mgr. Celso Costantini. The text confirmed the excellent outcome of the meetings and the new course of relations initiated by Pridi Phanomyong and Gaetano Pasotti.

His Excellency Pridi, Regent of Thailand, after having proclaimed religious freedom testified with the Prime Minister great benevolence towards the Catholic mission in a special audience to the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok and missionaries with mention and sympathetic wishes for His Holiness Pius XII response of the holy father to the regent would be welcome as happy prelude later results. Perros (NS, vol. 1545: 184).





Figure 6. Pasotti’s Telegram, NS 1544, f. 720 (courtesy Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples)

### 5. Francesco Marmaggi’s report

The final report by Cardinal Francesco Marmaggi, published in May 1944, offers a vivid summary of all the events that happened during the Second World War in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries. Nevertheless, he also gives a very objective description of Thailand’s vicissitudes during those years. Marmaggi was not able to include the positive conclusion of the diplomatic dialogue that occurred in December 1944: however, his description of the situation is crucial for our comprehension of the historical events. We notice a sort of empathic understanding of Thai and, more generally speaking, Asian people’s political and social problems. This seems to be a hidden leitmotiv during the entire report, but in a couple of passages, it manifests itself absolutely clearly. He expresses the idea that we can remove any form of hostility and have a productive dialogue only if Westerners offer “facts” to Asian people, without biases and self-interests. The problems were caused by foreign political interferences and not “on a religious ground;” for this reason, the dialogue can be created and consolidated mainly on this very ground. Another crucial point of Vatican policy in these lands was the Catholic Church’s profound determination to form a vicariate administrated by Thai priests, called “indigenous ecclesiastical circumscription,” leaving aside any Western presence.

The translation of the first chapter of the Report is offered here: it is an important historical contribution to the comprehension of the relations between Thailand and the Vatican. The emphasis on specific sentences (marked by italics) is mine (see Figure 7).<sup>19</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

Thailand, immersed in the Second World War, experienced, perhaps more than other countries, the contradictions of a period when alliances changed very often, resulting in rapid metamorphosis of the idea of “friendly” and “unfriendly” nations. In this context, additional animosities arose. They were undoubtedly linked to the global conflict but also had an independent nature because they were essentially based on the concept of freedom of religion. These hostilities could have resulted in even more profound forms of violence, which would have been difficult to control and could even have extended far beyond Thailand. The documents that I have summarily analysed here, substantiated my contention that the Vatican and Thai diplomacies were able to base their pre-eminent dialogue precisely on their own religious traditions and, on this basis, were able to find common ground. Many problems were if not entirely solved, at least understood and appeased. This openness and ecumenism were vigorously pursued within the Vatican, but a significant portion of the members of the Thai government was also firmly convinced that further unrest and conflict ignited by divergences due to different religious beliefs would not be tolerable. Thailand became a sort of laboratory for the coexistence and the development of the dialogue between Buddhists and Christians, which continues to be vital and fruitful today.

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<sup>19</sup> Francesco Marmaggi, *Sulla costituzione di un vicariato indigeno nel Thailand e nomina del Vicariato Apostolico (con cartina geografica). Relazione con sommario*, Sacra Congregazione “De Propaganda Fide,” No. 9, maggio, Rubr. 18/5 – prot. n. 593/44, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1944, pp. 1–12 [Francesco Marmaggi, *On the Establishment of an Indigenous Vicariate in Thailand and Appointment of the Vicar Apostolic (With Map). Report with Summary*, Sacred Congregation “De Propaganda Fide,” N. 9, May. Rubr. 18/5 – prot. n. 593/44, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Vatican City 1944, pp. 1–12.]. NS, vol. 1545, pp. 118–125.

## 7. Appendix: First chapter of the final report by Francesco Marmaggi

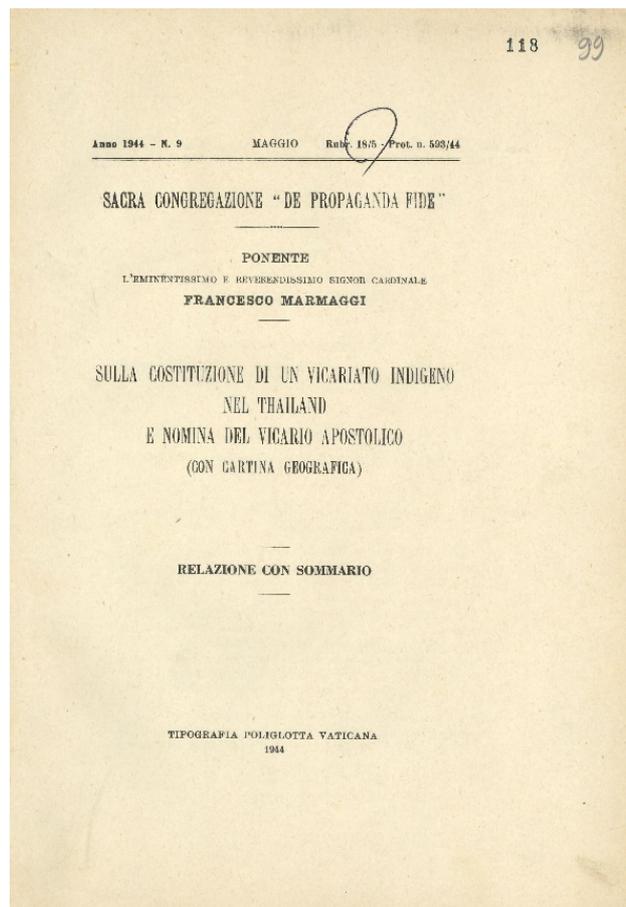


Figure 7. Cover page of Marmaggi's Report, NS 1545, f. 118 (courtesy Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples)

### The present situation of the Catholic Church in Thailand: The nationalistic spirit in the Far East in our times

1. – The situation of the Catholic Church in Thailand (Siam's official name since 24 June 1939) had become increasingly complex over the last decade. In the second half of 1940, it worsened rapidly until, in the last months of the year, it became outright persecution, although nothing official had been decreed against the Church, which therefore remained legally free to exercise its activity. *The movement arose against the French missionaries out of political circumstances, but in reality, it involved the Catholic Church as such.*

2. – One would not fully understand the events in Thailand if they were not set in the general situation in the Far East. [2]

Throughout the Far East, the nationalistic spirit, which had never died out and had even had violent outbursts in the past, has been increasingly consciously asserting itself, especially since some forty years ago: that is, since the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905).

The victory of an Asian nation against a powerful European empire (or one that claimed to be so) was seen as a victory of Asia against Europe. The Asians, for whom the incontestable superiority of European and Western power in general, at least if not of civilisation, was an unquestionable truth, had a revelation of their own strength and felt they could triumphantly and effectively oppose their ancient civilisations to Western civilisation. *The European War* of 1914-1918, the political events and economic/racial conflicts of the post-war period, and now the present world conflict, especially following Japan's entry into the war (8 December 1941), contributed for various reasons and in multiple ways to give the nationalistic spirit the character of an active anti-foreigner movement. We could say that Eastern civilisations have moved from the defensive to the offensive or, if you prefer, from passive to active defence.

Christianity has been regarded as a foreign religion peculiar to the West, which, therefore, has nothing to say to Eastern peoples and can only distort their actual energies. Hence, the struggle, more or less open according to place, is against it. The West can keep its Christianity; for the East, eastern religions.

It seems appropriate to note that such hostility is much more a feeling than a rationally founded persuasion. This must, of course, also be said of similar moods in Western nations. But it is more particularly true of the East.

[This hostility seems stronger in Asia] first of all because the intimate interpenetration of sentiment with reasoning activities constitutes, in the unanimous opinion of all experts of Oriental [cultures], a common characteristic of the entire East in general, albeit with profound differences from people to people. And then, the hostility towards the West is nourished by accumulated resentments [3]—*unfortunately not always unjustified*—of national and racial pride. In terms of history and culture, the roots of those peoples lie in a glorious past, and it must also be admitted that their suspicious *mistrust towards foreigners did not arise without a cause*.

Arguments, even the most correct ones, do little or nothing to effectively combat this widespread feeling of hostility precisely because it is, above all, a feeling. *Only facts, which, together with absolute*

*disinterest, concretely demonstrate trust, esteem and respect for these peoples, can succeed in producing a gradual change of spirits.*

As far as the work of the Church is concerned, missionaries in recent years have placed ever sharper emphasis on the urgent need to reach out to the Eastern soul with an open heart. The erection of indigenous ecclesiastical circumscriptions meets the most genuine tradition of missionary activity from its origins, and it is by now unanimously considered one of the indispensable means to win the trust of the peoples to whom the Gospel is proclaimed and to dispose them to accept it favourably. This is especially true in the East. Although, even in recent times, there has been resistance that has not yet entirely disappeared, it can nevertheless be said that this [reluctance] has not been directed against the principle [of having indigenous ecclesiastical circumscriptions], apart from what may have happened sometimes in the past. Today [that principle is] recognised by all as incontestable. *Nor have [these reluctances] taken as their reason or pretext an alleged congenital inability of some races to govern themselves.* [These reluctances] were based – or are still based – only on an insufficient preparation of the indigenous clergy. There was a request for more time, but nobody denied that that was the goal.

The Holy See acted with circumspect prudence but also with resolve. And in particular circumstances, it has proceeded, even if all the conditions that would generally be required were not yet in place. Such was, for example, the case in Japan. [In this country], between the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941, all the districts were entrusted to the national clergy: [this was considered possible because], even though they were too few to carry out the missionary programme in full, [4] they indeed were well prepared in mercy and knowledge.

3. – It would seem that even for Thailand, the problem of whether, where, and to what degree to erect an indigenous ecclesiastical circumscription objectively presents itself as a matter of extraordinary circumstances, at least in part. Since the EE. VV. Rev. can judge it with ample knowledge of the facts, an attempt will be made here to set out, as clearly as possible, the various complex aspects resulting from the documents in possession of this Sacred Congregation.

### **The political situation in Thailand in its reflection on the religious situation**

4. – The common anti-foreigner sentiment in the Far East may help to understand Thailand's hostile attitude towards the Church. However, to explain how this hostility manifested, it is also necessary to remember the particular political moment the nation is going through.

King since 1935 is Ananda Mahidol (พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรเมนทรมหาอานันทมหิดล พระอัฐมรามาธิบดินทร). Born in 1925, he has not yet actually assumed power. He has lived in Switzerland (in Lausanne) for several years

to complete his education there. Since 1938, the Head of Government in Thailand has been HRH Prince Aditya Dibaya Abha [*sic* – Aditya Dibabha, อาทิตยที่พธอกา]. However, the actual authority was, and still is, practically exercised by the Minister-President, Col. Luang Pibula Songgram [*sic*, Plaek Phibunsongkhram, แปลก พิบูลสงคราม], head of the exclusive military circle. His attitude in domestic policy proved to be that of a driven nationalist and, in foreign policy, that of an irredentist. The Decree of 23 June 1939, by which it was stipulated that from the following day, 24 June, the official name of Siam would be “Thailand,” was intended precisely to proclaim Siam’s aspirations to all territories inhabited by “Thai” peoples, the Siamese themselves being part of this group. In the “White Paper,” published by the Ministry of Propaganda on 12 November 1940, those aspirations were specified as territories with an area of 467,500 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 3,840,000. Nevertheless, for the time being, they did not claim to achieve that much. [5]

In reality, if one were to literally take the “Pan-Thai” assumption that underlies the new name “Thailand,” these [territories] would not be Siam’s only aspirations.

In fact, the “Thai” group (whether one can properly speak of a sufficiently identified race is disputable), originating in China, has ramifications from the south of the Malay peninsula to Kuangsi [prob. Guangxi, 广西壮族自治区, เขตปกครองตนเองกว่างซีจ้วง] and Hainan Island [海南島, เกาะไหหลำ], passing through Siam, Burma, Laos and Upper Tonkin [東京 Đông Kinh, ดั่งเกี้ย]. However, to our knowledge, nothing concrete has been manifested by the Thai government so far. We mention it here only because it may serve to understand the state of mind better.

5. – The persecutory acts against the Catholic Church coincided with a manifestation of irredentism, i.e. the tension between Thailand and France.

On 12 June 1940, France and Thailand concluded a non-aggression treaty. [In this accord], among other provisions, they stipulated mutual respect for territorial integrity. The pact was ratified by the Thai Parliament on 13 August 1940 and, on the 19th of the same month, by Marshal Pétain [Henri-Philippe-Omer Pétain], Chief of the French State (1940-1944).

However, before ratifications were exchanged, the Thai government declared in September that the pact’s entry into force was conditional on France granting certain territorial advantages. France objected, which caused acts of war (from 3 January 1941, when Thai troops crossed the border).

On 20 January 1941, Japan offered its mediation, which was accepted by both sides on the 24th, when an armistice was signed. It was extended several times when it expired and lasted until March. On 11 March, France accepted the conditions set by Japan, ceding part of Indochina’s territories to Thailand.

6. – In September 1940, the first signs of the fight against the Church began. The press published that two (or three) Catholic officials had abjured [6] their religion to switch to Buddhism and that the Minister of War had declared himself willing to favour such acts.

From 15 October, the then Apostolic Vicar of Laos, Mgr. Gouin (who had resigned in 1943), who had his usual residence in Nong-Seng (*sic*, Nong Saeng, นองแสง, Nakhon Phanom province, จังหวัดนครพนม) in Thai territory (on the right bank of the Mekhong River [*sic*, Mekong River, แม่น้ำโขง], the border with French Indochina) was kept under military surveillance.

On 28 November, the episcopate was invaded by the police, and on the 29th, he was imprisoned. On the same day, after being exposed to ridicule in a cage with two missionaries, he, two missionaries, and an 82-year-old nun were put in a boat and sent to French territory. Then, the other French missionaries and nuns followed the same fate.

In the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok, the hostile acts began around the same time (20 November) and became more decisive at the end of the month and in December. Practically all the French and religious missionaries had to leave Thailand's territories: only in the Apostolic Vicar remained a few missionaries, confined to Bangkok, with no possibility of exercising their ministry (*Somm.*, no. IV). Hostilities were less violent in the Apostolic Prefecture of Rajaburi [*sic.*, Ratchaburi, ราชบุรี] (from April 1941 Apostolic Vicariate), entrusted to the Italian Salesians. As in other parts of Thailand, pressure to abandon their religion was put on Catholics with threats and dismissals. However, the missionaries were, with only a few exceptions, respected.

It is not the case here to detail the events of the persecution. For more detailed information up to December 1941, Propaganda issued a note to the Secretariat of State, which is reported in *Somm.*, n. IX, to serve as a reminder of the situation. [The document was delivered] through Monsignor Apostolic Nuncio of Italy to the Minister of Thailand at the Quirinal Palace.

On the whole, it can be said that the persecution was markedly violent in the territories of the Apostolic Vicariate of Laos, bordering Indochina, even with the shedding of blood. [And it can also be said] that the fight against the Church had an explicitly anti-French character. [7]

7. – After the peace between Thailand and France, persecution took a less violent course. The French missionaries and nuns from the Apostolic Vicariate in Bangkok have been able to return and appear to have resumed the exercise of their ministry. It seems that the teaching brothers of French nationality have also returned and, according to news from the French Embassy, have been able to reopen their

schools. What is sure, in any case, is that, at least until about the middle of 1943, Catholic schools could not be reopened in various parts of the Vicariate.

The French missionaries and nuns who had to leave the Thai part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Laos remained in Indo-Chinese territory. Here, the indigenous clergy carries out the ministry with the help of the Salesians. In the southern provinces, there is relative calm; in the north, however, persecution continued until last year. In the Apostolic Vicariate of Rajaburi, there was a moment of turmoil following the Italian armistice of 8 September 1943. All or almost all the Italian Salesians, both those in the Rajaburi Vicariate and those stationed in other Thai territories, were interned. After a short time, however, they were freed indeed as a consequence of the establishment of the Italian Republic [*sic.*, he probably means the “Italian Social Republic,” 1943-1945]. As far as we can assume, they can now exercise their ministry without any particular difficulty.

Nevertheless, the hostility against the Catholic Church continues in different forms, but always actively. Thus, for example, giving news about the territory of Chantabun [*sic.*, Chanthaboon, จันทบุรี, Chanthaburi, จันทบุรี] (south-eastern part of his Vicariate), Mgr. Perros, the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok, reported that the Christian schools were closed. The Christian pupils obliged to attend pagan schools, had been harassed to join their fellow pupils in acts of homage to Buddha [*sic.*, Buddha]. Only after their firm resistance, encouraged by their parents, could they now limit themselves to passively attending school events of pagan worship without any trouble (*Somm.* n. XIX). Moreover, according to the information given by Monsignor Pasotti (February 1943), any path to public employment seems to be permanently barred for Christians. [8]

The anti-Catholic struggle seems to be specially promoted by the “Thai Blood Party [or Thai Blood Group, คณะเลือดไทย]:” an association that is not officially recognised, and perhaps on occasion disavowed by the government, but instead covertly supported by it. In some places, it has used an exaggerated form of boycott against all Catholics (*Somm.*, n. VI). What and how extensive its activity is today is unknown to Propaganda; probably, given the clandestine nature of the movement, not even the missionaries on the ground know exactly. However, everything makes one think it continues as much and more than before. *Indeed, the political moment, with the alliance between Thailand and Japan and the nationalistic-racial ideas preached in all tones in the Far East, is not such as to favour feelings of tolerance.*

### Suspicious against Catholic Missions for serving as an instrument of political penetration

8. – In Thailand, the anti-Catholic movement is based not only on anti-foreigner sentiment in general but also on a more specific accusation: the Catholic Missions are allegedly an instrument of French political penetration.

The grave misunderstanding between the Catholic Church and France, between the Catholic religion and the French religion (which in other places and at other times might perhaps not have created such serious inconveniences), [developed] in a nation bordering on French territory [and] aroused by its rulers and intellectual class to vast irredentist aspirations and suspicions towards France of devious intentions, lends itself very effectively to casting the Catholic Missions and the faithful followers in a bad light and under suspicion. As mentioned above, the last persecution claimed to be nothing more than a legitimate defence against an invading foreign nation, and the Catholics were accused of being the homeland's destroyers, belonging to the 'fifth column' in the service of France.

It was precisely on these accusations, and not on religious grounds, that the condemnation of certain priests (at least five) was based, one of whom was sentenced to hard labour for life, another to 15 years. [9]

The misunderstanding seems to be widespread and to find much credence among the Thai people: this is at least the impression one gets both from the reports of Mgr Pasotti (*Somm.*, n. II, VII) and from the memorandum of Fr Eylembosch (*Somm.*, V), as well as from the news about the persecution given by the Apostolic Vicars of Bangkok and Laos and by Mgr Apostolic Delegate of Indochina (cf. *Somm.*, n. III, IV).

It is not the case here to examine – nor would one have sufficient elements to do so – whether it was propagated in good or bad faith. Nor is it the intention to judge whether and to what extent French missionaries may have contributed with some unwise attitude to creating and maintaining it. Regarding the present question, what is of interest seems to be mainly the statement of fact.

*Nor do we want to derive any argument of unfavourable judgment for the French missionaries from the fact that similar accusations have not been raised against the Italian Salesians, for it is evident that their respective positions are different. The Salesians have only been in Thailand since 1927, while the French have been working there for three centuries. They belong to a distant nation and, until recently considered, also because of its good relations with Japan, a friend or sympathiser; they work in territories far from the centre, while the French Missions include the capital and the area on the Indochina border.*

### Political interferences

9. – The latest events of the Catholic Missions in Thailand, the Propaganda's measures, and the projects to face the difficulties arising from the persecution and to clear up misunderstandings, were followed with manifest interest by the French Government and, with more caution, by the Italian Government.

The French Government intervened with the Holy See on two issues (*Somm.*, nos. X, XI, XII, XIII): (a) an extraordinary assignment given to Mgr Pasotti; (b) a project to erect an indigenous Mission with a centre in Bangkok.

We believe it is opportune to make quick mention of this, as it may illuminate the general situation. In a telegram that reached Propaganda on 8 March 1941 [10], Mgr Drapiel, Apostolic Delegate of Indochina, proposed, given the circumstances created by the persecution, that Mgr Gaetano Pasotti, Apostolic Prefect of Rajaburi, be promoted to the episcopate.

At an audience on 3 April 1941, the Holy Father deigned to elevate the Apostolic Prefecture of Rajaburi to the rank of Vicariate and appoint Mgr Pasotti as Apostolic Vicar with episcopal status.

In a telegram dated 7 April 1941, Archbishop Pasotti was instructed to “consider the affairs of the Missions provisionally with these ecclesiastical Superiors; and, if necessary, with the civil authorities in the name of the Missions themselves.” Furthermore, in a letter dated 23 April, he was told to act as Apostolic Administrator “*sede plena*” for those Thai territories where the Ordinaries were prevented from exercising their jurisdiction.

*Moreover, in the same letter, he was told: “Above all, you should study whether, where, and how to establish an indigenous Mission. It is unquestionably a matter of urgency.” This contributed to the discontent of the French government because Monsignor Pasotti proposed, as will be seen below, the erection of an indigenous Vicariate with its centre in the capital, Bangkok, the seat of a French Vicariate.*

*Signs of dissatisfaction began to arrive from the French Embassy to the Holy See in August 1941: it was requested that, as the situation had now been clarified, the assignment given to Mgr Pasotti to provide for the Missions of Thailand should cease as circumstances required (Somm., n. X).*

By telegram of 19 December 1941 to Mgr Pasotti, Propaganda approved the idea he had expressed that the indigenous Vicariate should have its centre in Bangkok; and Mgr Pasotti drew up a plan to this effect in agreement with Mgr Perros. The essential elements of it were telegraphed to Propaganda on 17 March 1942 (*Somm.*, n. XV).

*However, in the meantime, in notes dated 9, 18, and 31 March, the French Embassy raised objections about Monsignor Pasotti's activities in Thailand and the planned transfer of Bangkok to an indigenous Apostolic Vicar.*

Propaganda then proposed to the Secretariat of State to [11] have Mgr Drapier himself judge whether he should resume his office for Thailand (*Somm.*, n. XIII). The Secretariat of State declared itself favourable to the idea; therefore, on 13 April 1942, Mgr. Drapier was asked to telegraph whether it would be possible for him to resume his office in Thailand; if so, he was asked to make arrangements with Mgr. Pasotti and Mgr. Perros is for erecting an indigenous vicariate, possibly with its centre in Bangkok.

On 22 April 1942, the following reply reached Propaganda: «Crois possible reprendre charge Thailand. Étudierai avec Vicaires Apostolique<sup>20</sup> question en cours conformément volonté Saint-Siège.» [Believe it is possible to resume taking charge of Thailand. I will study with the Apostolic Vicars current question in accordance with the wishes of the Holy See.]

On the same day, Propaganda sent Mgr Pasotti the following telegram: “If Mgr Drapier will be able to resume his office in Thailand, Your Excellency will refer any assignment to him and give him appropriate information.”

Mgr Drapier went to Bangkok, it seems, at the beginning of July for a short visit, promising to return for a more extended stay.

At this time, the Italian Embassy to the Holy See also intervened with a “Memo” transmitted for inspection by the Secretariat of State to Propaganda on 31 July (*Somm.*, no. XV). Basing himself on the news received from the R. Minister of Italy in Bangkok, the Italian Ambassador reported: “Mgr. Drapier had not found Mgr. Pasotti in Bangkok, on a visit to the Missions in the interior. The Salesians informed the Thai Government of the transfer of Mgr. Pasotti’s appointment to Mgr. Drapier, and for his part, the latter informed the same Government that he had appointed Mgr. Pasotti as his permanent representative.” In a written note, the Thai Government replied to *the Salesians* [italics by the author] that they could not take note of the communication made to them. The Italian Royal Minister in Bangkok [12] had contacted the Thai Foreign Minister to clarify the situation.

Several considerations followed, tending to show that it was opportune to give the post back to Mgr Pasotti, who was a grateful person to the Thai government, while with Mgr Drapier, as a Frenchman and an Apostolic Delegate based on French territory, they did not want to have any relations.

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<sup>20</sup> The Apostolic Vicars of Rajaburi, Bangkok and Laos. The Apostolic Vicar of Laos had also put forward the idea of an indigenous Mission. This will be mentioned below.

Actually, as Propaganda pointed out to the Secretariat of State, a rather strange state of affairs had arisen: Mgr. Pasotti, a Holy See appointee (as the Thai government had at least recognised him as such), had become Mgr Drapier's representative to a government that remained intensely hostile to France despite the officially concluded peace. Moreover, this government hardly understood what an "Apostolic Delegate" was because, in Thailand, the Apostolic Delegate never had a residence or a conspicuous position.

This state of affairs has remained unchanged since then.

Nor have there been any other direct interventions by the Governments of France and Italy.

As for the French government, it should be noted that it had no further reason to appeal to the Holy See, having seen its wishes fulfilled. In fact, Archbishop Drapier resumed his office in Thailand, and Propaganda in November 1942 allowed, taking into account the wishes of the French missionaries, that Bangkok be left to them for the time being, and the indigenous mission project be prepared for another suitable area.

As will be said in the following paragraphs, a further examination of the situation led Propaganda to return to the project of an indigenous Apostolic Vicariate with its centre in Bangkok.

### Biographical data

Prince Aditya Dibabha (พระเจ้าวรวงศ์เธอ พระองค์เจ้าอาทิตย์ทิพอาภา) (Bangkok 27 July 1900 – Bangkok, 19 May 1946).

General Adul Aduldejcharat (อตุล อตุลเดชจรัส, Bangkok, 28 June 1894 – Bangkok, 17 December 1969).

H.M. King Ananda Mahidol (พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรเมนทรมหาอานันทมหิดล พระอัฐมรามาธิบดินทร) (Heidelberg, 20 September 1925 – Bangkok, 9 June 1946 [Reign: 2 March 1935 – 9 June 1946]).

Cardinal Celso Benigno Luigi Costantini, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (1935–1953), (Castions di Zoppola, 3 aprile 1876 – Roma, 17 ottobre 1958)

H.R.H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (สมเด็จพระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ) (Bangkok, 21 June 1862 – Bangkok 1 December 1943).

Professor Dr Direk Jayanama, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand (1935-1946) (ดิเรก ชัยนาม, Phitsanulok province 18 January 1905 – Bangkok 1 May 1967).

Father Antonin-Fernand Drapier (Creuë-en-Woëvre, 28 April 1891 – [n.p.] 30 July 1967).

Cardinal Pietro Fumasoni Biondi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Roma, 4 September 1872 – Roma, 12 July 1960).

Monsignor Ange-Marie Gouin (Les Épesses, 1901 – Le Landreau, 1975).

Luang (หลวง) Khuang Aphaiwong (other spelling: Kuang; Abhaiwong or Abhaiwongse [หลวง อภัยวงศ์], Battambang [ทับตัมบง]/Phra Tabong [พระตะบอง], 17 May 1902 – Bangkok, 15 March 1968).

Cardinal Luigi Maglione, Secretary of State (Casoria, 2 March 1877 – Casoria, 22 August 1944).

Cardinal Francesco Marmaggi (Roma, 31 August 1876 – Roma, 3 November 1949).

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, Substitute for General Affairs, Pope Paul VI (Concesio, 26 September 1897 – Castel Gandolfo, 6 August 1978).

Mgr. Gaetano Pasotti (Pinerolo, February 5, 1890 – Bangkok, September 3, 1950).

René-Marie-Joseph Perros (Guewenheim, 12 March 1870 – Bangkok, 27 November 1952).

Marshal Henri-Philippe-Omer Pétain (Cauchy-à-la-Tour, 24 April 1856 – L'Île-d'Yeu, 23 July 1951).

Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (แปลก พิบูลสงคราม, Nonthaburi, 14 July 1897 – Sagamihara [Japan], 11 June 1964).

Professor Dr Pridi Phanomyong (ปรีดี พนมยงค์, Ayutthaya, 11 May 1900 – Paris, 2 May 1983).

Major-General Luang Wichitwathakan (หลวง [จิตร] จิตรวาทการ; 金良) (Udhai Thani, 11 August 1898 – Bangkok, 31 March 1962).

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