



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF SLOVAKIA
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 19 December 2002

Madam Ambassador,

1. This is an especially pleasant meeting for me today as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. As I thank you for the courteous expressions on your own behalf and on that of the highest State authorities, I desire to recall my recent meeting with the Delegation of your country, led by H.E. President Rudolf Schuster, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Independence of the Republic. On that occasion, the exchange of the instruments of ratification took place of the Accord signed in Bratislava last 21 August. The accord regulates religious assistance to the Catholic faithful in the Armed Forces and Police of the Republic.

This was another expression of the cordial relations that exist between the beloved people of the nation you represent here and the Successor of Peter. In fact, the ties between the Bishop of Rome and the Slovak peoples date back to the time when Sts Cyril and Methodius brought the preaching of the Gospel to your country. Since that time, these bonds have been constantly developed and consolidated, despite the historical circumstances that have not always been favourable.

2. As you have observed, the majority of the Slovak people declare themselves to be Christian.

The Gospel in fact, has contributed in many ways to forming their culture and traditions. The Catholic Church, to which many of your fellow-citizens belong, carries out her mission with the full recognition of the sovereignty of the democratic State. Through it she intends to have a cordial and constructive dialogue, respecting the reciprocal areas of responsibility, motivated by the

intention to contribute to the well-being and progress of the nation.

This dialogue is of especial value at this time when, after a harsh period of persecution, Slovakia is flourishing again in freedom, and wishes to make true progress at all levels. It is important in this phase of tempestuous changes that people do not give into false perspectives that are rooted in practical materialism and unbridled consumerism. I am confident that the Slovak people, by drawing from the rich tradition of moral values that has always distinguished them, in the future will know how to deal with the dangers of a modernity that is deaf to the spiritual values.

3. Today the promising prospect of Slovakia's entry into the European Union is underway. I am certain that this event will make a very important contribution of culture and values to the new Europe, helping to consolidate the "common home" of the continent. The long process of development which the country has undergone in the past 10 years, despite the complex problems, is a guarantee of its harmonious integration in the concert of European nations, with mutual advantages. The solution of age-old difficulties will be facilitated by this prospect. How can we fail to see in this event an opening for the new generations, coming to the fore in your country, a concrete opportunity to employ their energies better to promote the common good? This is also my most fervent hope, as I think back to the enthusiasm with which, on many occasions, multitudes of young Slovaks have expressed to me not only their joy, but their anxious expectations for their future. Strengthened by a sound Christian formation, they will be able to bear a convincing witness to the Gospel values among their peers on the continent, showing the dynamic fruitfulness of these values for building a society in which justice, solidarity and peace prevail.

4. The society of the future will be founded on the young people. It is therefore necessary that the State meet their needs, offering them the indispensable support for their formation and for their subsequent admission into the world of work. In this context, no less important is the common concern to encourage the formation of new and stable families based on marriage and open to life. The Church will certainly not fail to make her own contribution in her own field.

This was one of the intentions of the Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the Slovak Republic, signed in 2000. I am confident that the new atmosphere created by this understanding will foster a better collaboration between the authorities of the State and the Pastors of the Church, the better to serve the common good of the nation.

5. Madam Ambassador, in communicating to you my reflections, I offer you my very best wishes for the important mission that has been entrusted to you. I assure you, on behalf of my collaborators, of the most open and constructive availability; here you will always find a friendly atmosphere.

As I ask you to convey my respectful esteem to the President and to the government authorities, I

gladly invoke an outpouring of divine favours upon you and your work, as I impart a special Blessing to the entire Slovak people, whom I feel so close to my heart.

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