



The Holy See

*Discours au Président de la République de SLOVÉNIE,
S.E.M. Milan KUCAN**

19 février 1993

Mr. President,

1. I bid you a most cordial welcome and thank you for the kind words you addressed to me.

Your visit today gives me special pleasure, not only because it is the first which a Head of State of a free and independent Slovenia makes to the Apostolic See, but also because it expresses and corroborates the ancient bonds of faith which tie the majority of the Slovenian people to the Catholic Church.

The Slovenian people, heirs of a thousand year old history with not a few difficulties, today are living in a period of great expectation and hope. For many centuries, although vigorously defending their own cultural identity, they remained in the shadow of larger states; today, however, they come to the attention of the international community with their specific political and institutional physiognomy.

Doubtlessly, Slovenia has not come to this historic appointment unprepared. If it has chosen the none too easy path of complete autonomy, confronting notable problems of the juridical, social and economic order internally and internationally, it has done so because it knows it can invest in this new path the resources of a mature political capacity, combined with the awareness of its culture, piety, art and traditions, in short, that patrimony of values which mould a nation even before its juridical and political order.

Yours is a choice which the Church considers with respectful appreciation. National identities per se constitute a great asset and, perhaps even more so, in a world such as ours, called to an ever closer cooperation in the greater closeness of peoples.

2. Furthermore, as we can see from its present constitution, Slovenia knows that national autonomy is an important value, but not an absolute one. All too often in ancient and modern history, up to our very day, patriotic sentiments have degenerated into closed and aggressive nationalism, the presage of tears and blood.

This, therefore, is a decisive challenge for the historical period in which humanity is living. In order not to repeat the errors which in the past have sadly weighed upon European and world history, we must forcefully emphasize that, over and above national interests, there are human persons and their inalienable dignity, and that over and above the particular traditions of individual human groupings, there is a universal community which is to be built in justice, solidarity and peace. «Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and still more of the human family as a whole» (Gaudium et spes, n. 26). By forgetting that and growing distant from this vision of human history, there is the risk of reviving dangerous scenes of fratricidal fighting, such as those which are sowing death in the Balkan regions and in other parts of the world.

Mr. President, I would like to express my appreciation for the choices which have distinguished the policy of Slovenia in its debut as an independent State. It has set off with determination on the path of peace and international cooperation. Its political profile is that of a juridical, social State (cf. art. 2 of the constitution). The plan it has set for itself is that of building a society where human rights are respected and basic freedoms are guaranteed, where no one will lack what is necessary for a life with dignity, where ethnic minorities are cared for and appreciated, and in which each person will be allowed to make his contribution to the harmonious development of the nation in a democratic and peaceful exchange.

3. However, as experience shows, even the realization of such a well ordered plan is not without difficulties and obstacles. Therefore, the good will of all is required, as well as a sense of the common good; in particular it demands the harmonious cooperation of the country's social and cultural forces, which must feel called to make an effective contribution to building a new State, although with respect for each one's specific area.

The Church is ready to do her part. Her availability is in line with the direction taken 30 years ago by the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, which describes her role in society in the following manner: «Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to her was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction and vigour to establish and consolidate the human community according to the law of God» (n. 42).

Slovenia, which has sanctioned the separation of State and religious confessions in its constitution (cf. art. 7), knows it can count on the active cooperation of the Catholic community, which does not claim privileges of any kind nor wants to invade areas which do not belong to it. When the Church

makes use of the faculties sanctioned by juridical agreements within the scope of the laws in effect, her only goal is the freedom to proclaim the Gospel. The space she asks for is not that of power, but rather of service, because her purpose is to help people encounter God. She reveals the secret of unity to families and to young people the deep meaning of life; she draws near to the sick and reaches out to the poor; she wants to teach peace and instil such a spirit in every expression of the nation's life; she wants to convince people of the urgent need for solidarity and the sacred value of every human life.

This, Mr. President, is the special contribution which the Church wants to offer to the nation whose highest representative you are. She rejects political ambition, but wants to make her commitment to evangelization and the use of the pastoral structures she possesses redound to the common good of all the inhabitants. Among these it gives me special pleasure to mention her cultural and educational institutions, beginning with the renowned Theological Faculty of Ljubljana.

4. In conclusion, the wish which I make in thanking you for your visit is that the perspective of mutual respect and cordial cooperation will be further strengthened in relations between the Church and the Slovenian State, overcoming any eventual problems through a peaceful, constructive dialogue. I ask you, Mr. President, to convey these sentiments of mine to your people. Through the moral contribution of the Christian community, may Slovenia overcome the inevitable difficulties of today's «rebirth» and achieve ever loftier goals of true democracy and civilization.

Upon the entire Slovenian people I invoke God's assistance and the protection of the Blessed Virgin, assuring you of my fervent prayer that the scourge of war remain far from Slovenia. I join in the chorus of prayer of believers asking the Lord that an honourable and just peace may soon come to the whole Balkan region.

I accompany these wishes with my Blessing.

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