



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE SLOVAK DELEGATION*

Friday, 24 November 2000

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to welcome you at the conclusion of the formal signing of the basic agreement between the Holy See and the Slovak Republic on several matters regarding relations between the Church and State.

I extend my cordial and respectful greeting to you, Mr Prime Minister, whom I thank for the kind words that you addressed to me in the name of the President of the Slovak Republic as well. I also greet the Vice-President of the National Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the other authorities of the delegation. My greeting is extended to you, Your Eminence, to the Apostolic Nuncio, to the Bishops present, as well as to your entourage and to the representatives of the press and media.

The moment we are marking is of considerable importance for the legal status of the Church and her institutions *vis-à-vis* the State. With this new international agreement the Church in fact is guaranteed the free exercise of her mission, particularly regarding worship, pastoral care, teaching and other aspects of ecclesial life.

I am convinced that the new climate created by the agreement will promote an ever better understanding between the State authorities and the Church's Pastors, all to the advantage of the nation's common good.

How can we fail to see, for example, the importance of an understanding for the formation of young people, who represent the future of the Church and of society? Nor should we forget the impact made on the authentic progress of society by protecting the cultural heritage, in which such

a large part is played by the religious values that form the foundation on which the rich tradition of the Slovak people has developed.

Mr Prime Minister, as I entrust you with the task of bringing my respectful and cordial greeting to the President of the Slovak Republic, I assure you of a special prayer for the beloved Slovak people, on whom I invoke abundant favours from God. I entrust all the faithful to the protection of Our Lady of Sorrows, venerated with special devotion in the Basilica of Sastin.

I accompany these sentiments and wishes with a special Blessing, as a pledge of my affection and my constant remembrance.

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