



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador de la República Federal CHECA y ESLOVACA,
Excmo. Sr. Don Frantisek X. HALAS**

21 de diciembre de 1990

Mister Ambassador,

1. Our meeting for the presentation of the Letters by which you are accredited to the Holy See by His Excellency Mr. Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, is an event which I welcome with joy. You are being received at this time when relations between your country and the Apostolic See, which had been interrupted for a long time, are being restored. Your country's return to freedom and democracy has happily permitted the re-establishment of the ancient bonds between the peoples of Bohemia and Slovakia and the centre of the Catholic Church.

You have delicately emphasized, Your Excellency, the specific nature of these bonds, given the nature of the mission of the Holy See, which desires to play its role in the international community in complete fidelity to the spirit of the Gospel, in love for people who are open to the transcendent dimension of their destiny.

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2. You have mentioned the significance of the pastoral visit which I had the honour to make to your country in April last year. Indeed, the reception which I received in Prague, Velehrad and Bratislava allowed me to appreciate the great fidelity of these peoples to Christianity, their desire to express their faith without obstacles, and to express clearly their belonging to the great community of believers. Rest assured that in my heart's memory the recollection of that visit to

your homeland is ever alive, and with great emotion I recall the meetings, the moments of intense communion which I had with the bishops, the priests and religious, the Catholic faithful, and the entire population.

3. Now the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic is undertaking the renewal and strengthening of its institutions; it is working for the improvement in the standard of living of its citizens. Catholics are resolved to do their part in the immense task which must be directed to the common good. In that which concerns her own religious mission, the Church wants to have the room that she needs to offer the people who count on her the service which it is her vocation to fulfil. She does not ask for privileges, she wants to develop freely her activities, convinced that her place in society is not only based on an inheritance from the past, but also on an inspiration that is still alive in the hearts of our contemporaries.

Thus a trusting dialogue between the Church communities and the government authorities will allow the resolution of the problems which remain after the difficulties which have marked recent decades. Well-integrated into society, these communities need to have adequate means for their mission. In this regard, it is desirable that we may soon see the resolution of the problems regarding the restitution of Church property. It is not only a question of the Church's institutions receiving their legitimate patrimony; it is a question of their being able to develop their own life, to place themselves at the service of others, particularly through educational and charitable activity.

4. In relations with the States, the Holy See seeks in all circumstances to support the good of the person, the person in all his or her dimensions, the person who is free to lead his or her life according to the principles dictated by conscience and faith. Therefore in the concert of human rights which the contemporary world is striving to recognize and defend, religious freedom has a position at the forefront. In the name of this basic freedom the Church respects the convictions of persons who do not share her faith and expects equal respect from them for the various aspects of her activity, including their public manifestation. It is thus that the Church asks to be able to give her members a spiritual and moral formation consistent with their faith, to train her clergy and designate her bishops, to organize religious education among children and young people in collaboration with their families, to find expression in the mass media and to have the publications which she deems useful.

I have no doubt, Mister Ambassador, that the government which you represent here is ready to grant the Church the concrete conditions for the free exercise of her mission in the various fields which I just mentioned. I was gratified to hear you give the assurance that, on both parts, goodwill will be able to resolve whatever difficulties may still exist.

5. As a pilgrim to Velehrad on 22 April, I had the joy of recalling in that great place the work done on behalf of the Slav people by the two great apostles, Cyril and Methodius. They are beacons for the Church. On the European continent of which, together with St Benedict, they are the patrons,

we want to follow their example to be of service to the whole of society. I was pleased to be able to announce there, at the tomb of St Methodius, the convocation of an important assembly of bishops whose task it will be to give new impetus to the Church's mission in Europe, to her contribution to fraternity and solidarity among the millions of men and women who aspire to develop today the Christian values long rooted in their soil.

Your homeland has a choice place at the centre of this continent. I am sure that it will have a significant part to play in the construction of a community of nations which must protect the dignity and well-being of all its members and work for peace in the whole world.

6. Mister Ambassador, this audience is taking place just a few days before Christmas. At this time my best wishes for your fellow citizens and their leaders are even more ardent. I ask you to assure His Excellency Mr. Vaclav Havel and the Government authorities, as well as all your fellow citizens, of the most amicable sentiments which Peter's Successor has for them.

In all that concerns you, Mister Ambassador, with all my heart I wish you success in your mission and I assure you that you will always find an understanding welcome here. My collaborators are all disposed to listen to you and to facilitate your task.

With fervour I invoke for your country the intercession of the great saints who have marked its history, and I implore God's Blessing for its happiness and prosperity.

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