



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR IVAN REBERNIK
AMBASSADOR OF SLOVENIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 16 September 2006

Mr Ambassador,

The cordial and solemn act of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Slovenia to the Holy See recalls the thousand-year-old relations between the Successor of Peter and the beloved People whom you are representing here. Welcome, Mr Ambassador.

I am sure that the sentiments you recalled in your words to me reflect the deep convictions of your compatriots with regard to the Pope. I take note of these genuine feelings and express my grateful appreciation to the Authorities who have accredited you, and especially to H.E. Mr Janez Drnovsek, President of the Republic.

The Republic of Slovenia, of its own accord, encourages a fruitful and constructive dialogue with the ecclesial bodies present on its territory, recognizing their positive contribution to the life of the Nation. This confirms that the Catholic traditions, which have always been a feature of the Slovene People, are a precious treasure to draw from in order to express the deepest and truest identity of that noble Land.

It is within this framework that cordial relations between the Slovenes and the See of Peter have developed: the good bilateral relations you appropriately chose to mention still testify to them today.

The power of the Gospel has been active in Slovenia since the earliest centuries of Christianity, as the presence of Saints such as St Victorinus and St Maximian shows. Their witness contributed to

strengthening the Christian faith among the peoples in the seventh century, who found a home in present-day Slovenia.

Moreover, how could one fail to think of an outstanding Bishop such as Bl. Anton Martin Slomsek, who in more recent times furthered the national reawakening by carrying out valuable work as an educator of the Slovene People?

Christianity and the national identity are certainly closely connected. It is therefore natural that there should be deep harmony between the Bishop of Rome and the noble People who find in you today a representative and a voice of their own.

The Agreement between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See on the Legal Status of the Roman Catholic Church of 14 December 2001 was a fruit of this intense and constructive dialogue, uninterrupted by the grievous events of the century just ended.

It was an important concordat, whose faithful application can only strengthen reciprocal relations and collaboration for the promotion of the person and the common good (cf. Art. 1), with respect for the legitimate secularity of the State.

However, as you appropriately pointed out, there is a record of the existence of as yet unresolved "open questions" that are awaiting an appropriate solution.

Aware of the Slovenians' esteem and affection for the Pope, I am certain that their representatives at a political level will be able to interpret their traditions, sensitivity and culture. Indeed, the Slovene People are entitled to affirm and to assert the Christian soul that forged their identity and engraved it in the context of a Europe whose deepest roots draw strength from the Gospel seed, which for almost 2,000 years has been growing on the Continent.

Leaders today face the task of identifying appropriate methods for involving the new generations in the knowledge and appreciation of the values of the past, enabling them to bring the rich legacy they have inherited into the millennium that has just begun.

Consequently, they must be put in a position to acquire practical and specific knowledge of the cultural, ethical and religious foundations on which the Nation has been built down the centuries.

In fact, it would be a truly shortsighted policy not to encourage young people's openness to knowledge of the historical roots from which flows the sap that will guarantee the Nation new and fruitful seasons.

In this regard, the question of their instruction, also concerning the religious values shared by the majority of the population, should not be shirked if one wants to avoid the gradual erosion of the

most specific traits of the national features. At stake is the respect for the freedom of citizens itself, over which the Republic of Slovenia watches attentively and which the Apostolic See also desires to be fostered in the spirit of the above-mentioned Agreement.

Moreover, this is also the experience of other Peoples on the Continent, especially the Slavs. Aware of Christianity's importance for their social identity and of the valid contribution that the Church can make in this area, they have not undervalued the duty of assuring, also by means of legislation, that the rich ethical and religious patrimony continues to bear abundant fruit for the young generations.

May the dialogue initiated in this context between the civil and religious Authorities in Slovenia - I willingly express this wish in the present circumstances - lead to that just and sincere understanding whose need is felt! It will not fail to benefit those whom, although in a different perspective, both Church and State feel duty bound to render a service.

I can assure you that the Catholic Church will not fail to collaborate with the State in sincerity and cordiality, without demanding privileges for herself but rather advancing proposals which in her eyes can contribute to the common progress of the Nation.

As I express the wish that the cordial relations between Slovenia and the Holy See will continue to develop on the solid lines that have guided them until now, I confirm to you the esteem and support of myself and of my Collaborators in the Roman Curia in the fulfilment of the lofty mission entrusted to you.

I corroborate these sentiments by invoking an abundance of divine Blessings upon you and upon your loved ones.

**L'Osservatore Romano* n. 43 p. 4.

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