



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr JOZEF DRAVECKÝ
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 13 September 2007*

Your Excellency,

I am very pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to the Holy See. I thank you for the cordial greetings which you have brought to me from President Gašparovič, and I ask you kindly to convey to him my own respectful greetings, together with my prayerful good wishes for the well-being and prosperity of the Republic. Indeed, the bonds uniting the Bishop of Rome to the people of your country stretch back to the time of Saints Cyril and Methodius, and your presence here today is but another example of the mutual respect and affection the Holy See and Slovakia have for one another.

Next year will mark the Fifteenth Anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See. This cooperation has been especially fruitful in recent years, as evidenced by your Government's ratification of two of the four items contained in the Basic Agreement signed in 2000. I am grateful for Your Excellency's reassurance that the Republic is committed to fulfilling the other two points of the Basic Agreement regarding conscientious objection and the financing of Church activities. In this regard, I reaffirm the Holy See's readiness to assist you and your colleagues in whatever way possible to bring these important matters to a successful conclusion.

A key approved item of the Basic Agreement, as noted by Your Excellency, concerns education. It is important that States continue to guarantee the Church the freedom to establish and administer Catholic schools, affording parents the opportunity to choose a means of education that fosters the Christian formation of their children. As they grasp Christian teaching, young people appreciate

their personal dignity as creatures made in the image and likeness of God (*Gen 1:27*), and thus recognize a purpose and direction for their lives. Indeed, a solid education that nourishes all the dimensions of the human person, including the religious and spiritual, is in the interest of both Church and State. In this way, young people can acquire habits that will enable them to embrace their civic duties as they enter adulthood.

The combined efforts of Church and civil society to instruct young people in the ways of goodness are all the more crucial at a time when they are tempted to disparage the values of marriage and family so vital to their future happiness and to a nation's social stability. The family is the nucleus in which a person first learns human love and cultivates the virtues of responsibility, generosity and fraternal concern. Strong families are built on the foundation of strong marriages. Strong societies are built on the foundation of strong families. Indeed, all civic communities should do what they can to promote economic and social policies that aid young married couples and facilitate their desire to raise a family. Far from remaining indifferent to marriage, the State must acknowledge, respect and support this venerable institution as the stable union between a man and a woman who willingly embrace a life-long commitment of love and fidelity (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 40). The members of your National Council are engaged in serious discussions on how to promote marriage and foster family life. The Catholic Bishops, too, in your country are worried about increases in the rate of divorce and the number of children conceived out of wedlock. Thanks to the efforts of the Council for Family and Youth, the Conference of Bishops has expanded educational initiatives that raise awareness of the noble vocation to marriage, thus preparing young people to assume its responsibilities. Such programmes open the door to further collaboration between Church and State and help to ensure a healthy future for your country.

As the Republic strives to achieve social progress at home, she also looks beyond her borders towards the wider international community. The rich cultural and spiritual heritage of Slovakia holds great potential for revitalizing the soul of the European continent. Your Excellency has drawn attention to the heroic sacrifices made by countless men and women in your nation's history who, in times of persecution, laboured at great cost to preserve the right to life, religious liberty, and the freedom to place oneself at the charitable service of one's neighbour (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 28). Such essential values are imperative to building a peaceful and just European Union. I am confident that the celebrations marking the 1150th Anniversary of Saints Cyril and Methodius will renew Slovakia's vigour to bear witness to these timeless values. In this way, she will inspire other member States of the European Union to strive for unity while recognizing diversity, to respect national sovereignty while engaging in joint activity, and to seek economic progress while upholding social justice.

Your Excellency, I am confident that the diplomatic ties between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See, which already enjoy a spirit of goodwill and mutual esteem, will continue to support the integral development of your nation. I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are eager to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. With my sincere good wishes, I invoke upon

you, your family and all the beloved people of the Slovak Republic abundant divine blessings.

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