



The Holy See

*DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II AL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA CECA, S.E.M. Vaclav HAVEL **

7 marzo 1994

Mr. President,

1. With great pleasure I welcome you today to my residence, which of course you have visited before; indeed, I have pleasant memories of our meetings over the past years, which have always been marked by great warmth.

But today's official visit is your first as President of the new Czech Republic, after the steps leading to the historical separation of Bohemia-Moravia and Slovakia, a division that took place in an exemplary, peaceful way.

I therefore offer you my most cordial welcome, and I beg you to convey my greetings and my sincere regard to all your fellow-citizens.

2. On 1 January the new Czech Republic completed its first year of existence. On 26 January 1993 you had been elected to the highest responsibility as Head of State.

In many respects this was a positive year for the nation. It has played an ever increasing role in the sometimes agitated scene of international life, with the characteristic gifts that have always distinguished the Czech Moravian spirit: tenacity, patience, endurance in the face of adversity, attachment to their own traditions and calm openness to what is new. The Republic has proved a trustworthy and sincere partner to other nations; indeed, it has been welcomed with general approbation in the close exchange of international relations. In this network of prudent exchanges, the cultural and moral prestige it acquired in the world during the dark years of the persecution has been invaluable; this prestige has continued to increase since the appointment of the first Federal President.

The Czech Republic has also achieved undeniable domestic progress, even amid difficulties that it would be shortsighted to overlook. Its progress in the areas of welfare, the economy, the introduction of the free market, foreign investment and tourism is there for all to see. Of course there is a price to pay for these achievements, nor should one forget the danger, especially for the new generations, that the permissive mentality hedonism and easy profits could introduce into civil society, with repercussions that could be fatal for the future.

However, the strong, generous temperament of the Czech people possesses the antibodies to protect it from such risks. Constant appeals from the Church to vigilance and the duty to react calmly and decisively are not lacking. At this point, I am pleased to recall that in your message last August to the young people in Velehrad who were spiritually united with me in Denver for World Youth Day, you too, Mr. President, forcefully emphasized the primacy of the spirit over the ephemeral, of being over having, as well as the fragility of a way of life that is based only on the mirage of money.

3. With a view to the future at this time of delicate transition, it is necessary to refer constantly to the precious spiritual and religious heritage that has made the land of Bohemia and Moravia great. The common heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius is a reliable reference point so that the flame of the only worthwhile and durable ideals in human life may always be kept burning brightly.

The two brothers from Thessalonica, those incomparable missionaries of the Christian faith, were also men of culture. They contributed to giving the Slav peoples a common linguistic heritage and as a result, an undeniable identity of civilization, as they brought together elements of earlier historical, ethnic, and social traditions. In this respect they were also close to the Czech soul, which in them finds its fondness for the values of culture and religion clearly defined.

These values were later put in an attractive light by the saints who form a brilliant constellation in the country's history. The aspiration to the truth and authenticity of the Christian faith, precisely in their land, emerged clearly in Ludmilla, Wenceslaus, Adalbert, Hroznata, Agnes and John Nepomucene. In some way, over and above his doctrines this same yearning also spurred the reforms of Jan Hus, with an outcome that was unfortunately ill fated for both the Church and the nation. Contemporary studies on his figure will offer a positive constructive view of the problem that so disrupted the country's history.

This wealth of spirituality and Christian culture is at the root of your history. I fervently wish that the beloved peoples of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia may always consider this heritage of theirs as precious in their sight because it contains their greatest riches, faced as they are by the disintegrating urge of the irreligious and immanentist mentality that is inherent in certain trends of Western thought.

4. I also hope, Mr. President, that deep wisdom and a decisive will may inspire the State

authorities to solve the problems still outstanding. I am referring to the issues of religious teaching in the State schools, of spiritual care of the sick in hospitals and prisoners in the jails, and especially the pastoral care to which the military are entitled.

I would particularly like to recall the topic of the restoration of property unjustly confiscated by the atheist regime from the Catholic Church, as well as from other Christian denominations and from our Jewish brothers and sisters. Of course, it will not be possible to follow criteria of complete fairness by simply returning to the pre communist situation. But I do hope that as soon as possible an equitable solution may be found to this problem which is preoccupying the political and parliamentary forces, the Episcopate of the Catholic Church and public opinion itself.

In expressing this hope, the Church is guided by her wish to see the effective exercise of religious freedom guaranteed. She does not ask for privileges, but demands respect for the room she needs to satisfactorily carry out activities of evangelization and human development for the benefit of all society.

5. Mr. President, at the end of your visit, I again express my good wishes for you personally and for your tireless activity on the international scene, reminding you of the urgent priority of safeguarding spiritual values, so as not to fall back into civil and social chaos, or, worse still, into the most terrible blindness for man which prevents him from seeing the light of freedom, dignity and truth.

Through you I greet the individual members of your entourage, and I also convey my respectful greetings to the authorities of the Parliament, the Government and the Judiciary. In you, I greet all the beloved peoples of the Czech Republic across their magnificent land, dotted with picturesque historical castles, famous abbeys and marvellous churches, celebrated shrines, erected to the patron saints — among whom during this International Year of the Family, I would like to recall the Shrine of Blessed Zdislava, in Jablonné — and especially those dedicated to the glorious Mother of God: Svatá Hora, Stará Boleslav, Kájov, Filipov, Hostýn and many others.

May the Czech Republic always prosper on the path of mutual understanding, genuine progress and true peace.

This is the heartfelt wish that I address to you, Mr. President, and to the entire nation S Pánem Boheim!

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