

is particularly important nowadays, as the Church here has been silenced and yet there is a growing hunger for spiritual values. The Party has nothing to offer, apart from an improvement in the standard of living. The theory of atheism offers no guidelines for life and practical materialism is no longer enough for many people.

This spiritual hunger is confirmed by the many conversions of people who have grown up in atheist families. It is also confirmed by full churches. Despite the intimidation and harrassment, there are churches which are full of young people, even in the towns! This is a common phenomenon. Well, what kind of persecution is that?

But as we have said before, the pressure is applied to the most sensitive and least visible parts of the church. There are not enough churches, however, (especially in the new housing estates), there is a shortage of priests and their sermons are monitored. On the other hand, anyone who goes to church in a town nowadays certainly does not do so out of mere habit or because of social pressure from their neighbours or their grandmother, but from personal conviction and inner need. It is a risk to our careers, but we cannot renounce our encounters with Christ in the Eucharist, or the fellowship of the Church.

Despite the full churches and the selfless work of many priests, the Church has few opportunities of assisting the spiritual growth of its members and little chance of responding to the problems of those who are still seeking. At the same time, the harvest is so plentiful and hopeful—but there are few workers. So laymen have to help the priests as far as they can.

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It is not easy to be a Christian in the midst of unbelievers, to be different from others. It is, therefore, vitally important for us to get to know each other, to meet and encourage each other. Isolation will destroy us. Attendance at Mass alone is not enough, one is just as isolated. We have discovered that we need to know the Holy Scriptures, to learn and pray together, to discuss our faith, grow spiritually, solve practical problems in a Christian spirit, help one another and build up our fellowship. And we have found the means to do this. Even ordinary matters such as a holiday spent with a friend

who has the same beliefs can be important. It is true that we are not entitled to keep ourselves to ourselves and feel better than others. The gifts which we have received must be shared with others, to serve the whole community of the Church and the whole human family.

Perhaps these things are taken for granted in other parts of the world. For us, however, they prove that the Church in Slovakia is alive. It is not dying; it is ever new; it has a future before it.

Our future lies in the young people who have a truly scientific and yet Christian point of view. Our future lies in young Christian families which share their spiritual life and raise children who are prepared to face our contemporary world. For it is in the family that a person's character is formed. Our future lies in small communities of believers—a few people of the same age, with the same interests who try to live their faith fully and so are an example and a help to those around them. Our hope is that Christianity, the midwife of our culture, will go on enriching it now. Thus, perhaps every new Christian song written here is no trifle but a sign of the vitality of Christianity. It fills us with hope that there are still enough people in our nation who are ready to dedicate their lives to the service of the Lord. Our future is also in our Christian movements, whether or not they are well-known. Our hope lies also in solidarity and friendship with believers from other countries. We both realize that the destiny of the Church in different countries is intertwined. The well-being of the Church anywhere in the world is our joy too. Our future is also in ecumenism. At the moment it is in its infancy here. It is growing only from below, through personal contacts, but it is already bearing some fruit. We also place our hopes in the post-Vatican renewal, which has opened up new horizons for the Church; our hope is also in our Pope, who knows the situation in Slovakia well. Our hope is founded on unity with the whole Church, which is itself founded on the Rock and against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail.

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May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!