

Summit set hefty agenda for future talks

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The historic summit meeting between Pope John Paul II and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev Dec. 1 set a meaty agenda for church-state talks in the 1990s.

That agenda includes establishment of diplomatic relations, religious freedom for Catholics and a papal visit to the Soviet Union.

At the first encounter between the supreme leaders of the Catholic Church and Soviet Union, both men made clear that they wanted dialogue and mutual respect to replace confrontation and ideological rhetoric as the foundations of their new relationship.

The attitude was symbolized by Gorbachev's pledge to guarantee religious freedom in the Soviet Union and a papal pledge to support the Soviet president's reform program, called "perestroika," as long as it respects human rights and helps ensure world peace.

The meeting at the Vatican also showed Gorbachev's high regard for the role of the pope as a stabilizing moral force in world affairs. The Polish pope and the Russian president are both Slavs who see the world from the perspective of Eastern Europeans.

The visit to the pope was sandwiched between Gorbachev's call during a Nov.

29-Dec. 1 visit to Italy for a major meeting next year to redefine European security issues in the wake of crumbling support for communist governments in East Europe and the Soviet leader's Dec. 2-3 summit with President Bush to symbolically end the Cold War and promise cooperation on world issues.

Gorbachev "sees the role which the Holy See can play in bringing about a world in which there is a greater possibility of peace, of the development of peoples, a greater solidarity among nations," said Archbishop Edward I. Cassidy, deputy Vatican secretary of state, Dec. 2.

"He appreciates the role the Holy Father has played in Eastern Europe, especially in helping bring about those developments in a peaceful, a patient way, by always making clear the principles upon which developments should take place," said Archbishop Cassidy.

The archbishop said the next steps needed were establishment of an official Soviet-Vatican negotiating channel and passage of a Soviet freedom-of-conscience law. These will set the framework for resolving church-state problems, he added.

While the pope and Gorbachev met in private for 76 minutes to establish overall guidelines of Soviet-Vatican relations, Archbishop Cassidy was part of a parallel meeting of their top aides to discuss speci-

fic issues.

Leaders of the delegations at that meeting were Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

The pope and Gorbachev exchanged public speeches at the end of their private session.

Gorbachev said the meeting opened the door to future diplomatic relations by reaching "agreement in principle to give official status" to their contacts.

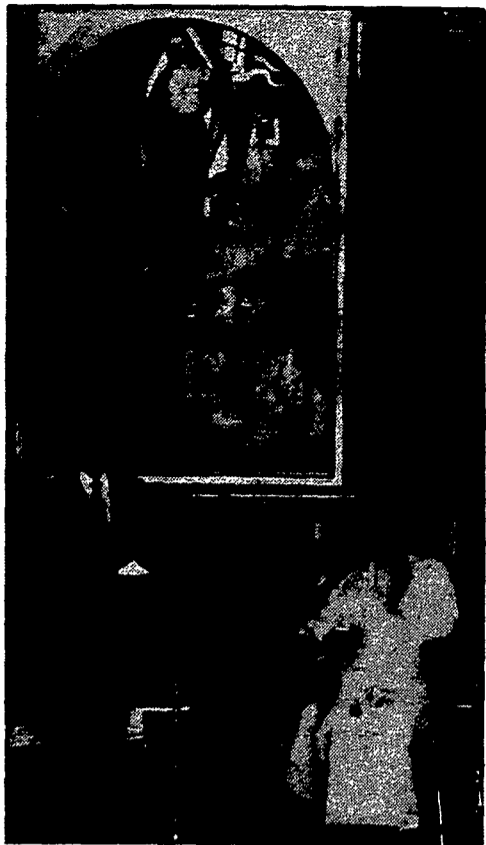
Diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Moscow were broken in 1917 when the Communist Party came to power, pressing its belief that an atheistic political system was the wave of the future and that religion was a relic of the past.

Today, however, Soviet believers "have a right to satisfy their spiritual needs," Gorbachev said.

"Shortly, a law on freedom of conscience will be adopted in our country" and church-state problems are being handled "in a spirit of democracy and humanism and within the framework of perestroika," he added.

Gorbachev spoke after the pope asked for a law "to guarantee to all believers the

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Pope John Paul II and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met on Dec. 1 to discuss diplomatic relations and religious freedom in the Soviet Union.



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