

# WORLD & NATION

## Pope travels to Slovenia, beatifies Bishop Slomsek

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

MARIBOR, Slovenia — The countries of the former Yugoslavia must nurture their cultural identities without trying to strangle the languages and cultures of other groups, Pope John Paul II said.

During a Sept. 19 trip to eastern Slovenia, the pope beatified a 19th-century Slovenian bishop and offered him as "a model of authentic patriotism."

Bishop Anton Martin Slomsek of Maribor, the pope said, "cared for the Slovenian language, called for appropriate social reforms (and) promoted the cultural elevation of the nation."

"He did this without ever giving into sentiments of myopic nationalism or self-centered opposition to the aspirations of neighboring peoples," the pope said.

"Gazing at the beloved region of the Balkans unfortunately marked in these years by struggles and violence, by extreme nationalism, by crude ethnic cleansing and by wars between peoples and cultures, I want to offer to all the testimony of the newly beatified," Pope John Paul said.

"He showed that it is possible to be sincere patriots and, with equal sincerity, to live together and cooperate with people of other nationalities, cultures and religions," the pope said.

"May his example and, above all, his intercession obtain solidarity and authentic peace for all the peoples of this vast area of Europe," he prayed.

Bishop Slomsek promoted use of the Slovenian language and preservation of Slovenian culture when his country was under Austrian rule in the mid-1800s. While

he did not support revolution, he started Slovenian schools and wrote books, poems and songs in Slovenian.

According to the Diocese of Maribor, the bishop's most widely recognized and distributed work was "Blaise and Agnes at Sunday School," a combination catechism and handbook for good citizenship for elementary school children.

Pope John Paul beatified the bishop during a Mass on an open field near the tiny Betnava Castle. Although the city of Maribor has fewer than 150,000 residents, more than 100,000 scarf- and flag-waving people greeted the pope at the Mass.

The pope's 9½-hour visit to the northernmost of the former Yugoslav republics focused on making culture and faith healthy parts of social life, rather than motives for division.

"Culture is the soil from which a people can draw the elements necessary for its growth and development," the pope said at the Mass.

He said the attachment of Slovenia's 2 million people to their language and culture was a determining factor in their finally winning independence in 1991 after a short-term occupation by Yugoslav forces.

Pope John Paul's message in Slovenia, a predominantly Catholic country, also included a plea that religion not be pushed to the side of national life.

The family, the school, the church and the government must unite their resources to educate the young and encourage all citizens to work for the common good, he said.

Visiting the Maribor cathedral in the afternoon and greeting priests, religious and laity participating in a national synod, the



Pope John Paul II waves to a crowd as he arrives in his popemobile for Mass in Maribor, Slovenia, Sept. 19. The pontiff beatified 19th-century Slovenian Bishop Anton Martin Slomsek during a day-long visit to the eastern part of the country.

pope told them not to be afraid to demand the freedom and space they need to spread the Gospel message.

"If, as citizens, Christians have an obligation to contribute to the good of all society, as faithful they have a right not to have their legitimate activities blocked," he said.

The key role Catholicism has played in the history of the nation and the fact that some 80 percent of Slovenians profess Catholicism means that the government must take its concerns and requests seriously, the pope said.

The Catholic Church in Slovenia has protested government plans to introduce a generic "religion and ethics" curriculum in the public schools, while blocking priests, religious and lay people from teaching the

classes.

Church-state talks also are taking place on the subject of the return of church property confiscated by the communists — mainly forests that belonged to monasteries — and on the status of marriages. Continuing a practice introduced by the communists, church weddings are not recognized under current Slovenian civil law.

Before leaving Slovenia, the pope met briefly at the airport with Slovenian President Milan Kucan.

Deputy Prime Minister Marjan Podobnik told reporters he thought the papal visit would "energize" the process of resolving church-state differences.

"Solving these problems is in the interest of Slovenia," he said.

## SOA sentences overturned

ATLANTA (CNS) — The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta has overturned the sentences of five protesters convicted in two separate 1997 actions at the U.S. Army's School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga.

The three-judge panel ruled Sept. 2 that U.S. District Judge J. Robert Elliott, who presided in both trials, had erred in ordering consecutive instead of concurrent sentences after the protesters' second conviction.

By the time the ruling was handed down, all but one of the five had served more than the time stipulated in the new ruling.

Three of the prisoners had been released by Sept. 14. They are:

- Franciscan Sister Marge Eilerman, 62, of Booneville, Ky., who was serving 14 months in a federal prison in Lexington, Ky.

- Mary Trotochaud, 48, of Atlanta, who was serving 14 months in a federal prison in Alderson, W.Va.

- Ed Kinane, 54, of Syracuse, N.Y., who was serving 16 months in a federal prison in Pennsylvania.

Jesuit Father William Bichsel, 71, of Tacoma, Wash., was to be released Sept. 27 from a federal prison in Sheridan, Ore. Elliott had sentenced him to 18 months.

The last of the five who appealed — Kathleen Rumpf, 48, also of Syracuse, who served 12 months in a federal prison in Texas — was released in July before the appeals decision was handed down.

After the ruling, attorney Peter Thompson of Minneapolis, who represented the five, said in a statement from SOA Watch, "The courts are finally joining the people on this issue."

SOA Watch organized the protests at which the arrests were made.

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