



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr Margus Laidre,
AMBASSADOR OF ESTONIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 11 January 1997

Mr Ambassador,

It is a pleasure for me to extend a cordial welcome to you as I accept the Letters of Credence by which President Lennart Meri has appointed you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Estonia to the Holy See. I am profoundly grateful for his greeting and I reciprocate with the assurance of my prayers for the well-being of all Estonians.

I continue to treasure the memories of my Pastoral Visit to Estonia and the other Baltic Republics in 1993, shortly after the lamp of freedom had been lit anew and national independence restored. In this century Estonians have survived the struggle against two totalitarian systems hostile to their political, economic, cultural and religious interests: the regime inspired by Nazism during the Second World War and then, in the long post-war period, a communist dictatorship marked by militant atheism. As Your Excellency has so poignantly recalled, the nation emerged victorious from these great trials thanks to the heroic sacrifices made by countless citizens, even to the point of martyrdom. For my part I renew my gratitude to almighty God that those sufferings have helped to give birth to a new climate of hope in Estonia. Truly, “the effective will for national independence and the desire to experience the value of genuine freedom are now beginning to bring forth fruit in the life of individuals and of the entire civic community of your country” (*Departure Speech*, Tallinn, 10 September 1993).

The journey from oppression to liberty is an arduous one. An essential aspect of every such pilgrimage of freedom is the need to come to terms with the heavy burdens bequeathed by history. Tyranny can continue to leave its destructive mark upon society in the form of fear, suspicion and division — within families and communities, and between religious and ethnic groups. In my [Message for the 1997 World Day of Peace](#), I urged all men and women of goodwill to refuse to remain prisoners of the past and to look instead with hope to the future. Respect for the fullness of truth calls even those who have been gravely wronged to a “healing of memories” which is concretely expressed in the offer of forgiveness. If a

spirit of reconciliation is to imbue national and international life — a necessary precondition of true peace — individuals and peoples must re-examine past offences “with a new attitude”; they must learn “precisely from the experience of suffering that only love can build up, whereas hatred produces devastation and ruin” (*loc. cit.*, n. 3).

A nation’s authentic development can be gauged by the degree to which its citizens are willing to be judged by the truth and its ethical demands. Part of Estonia’s precious heritage of Christian values is the conviction that an inseparable connection exists between freedom and truth in political, economic and cultural life. Only the acknowledgment of transcendent truth can guarantee the inviolable dignity and rights of every human person (cf. [Veritatis splendor](#), n. 99). Respect for the free exercise of these fundamental human rights must be the hallmark of every democracy established on the rule of law. When different peoples live in the same territory, as is the case in Estonia, particular care must be taken to ensure that the rights of ethnic and religious minorities are always safeguarded. Indeed, “respect for minorities is to be considered the touchstone of social harmony and the index of the civic maturity attained by a country and its institutions” ([Message for the 1989 World Day of Peace](#), 12).

Mr Ambassador, you have mentioned the new challenges which Estonia faces as it seeks a more worthy standard of living for all its citizens. Catholic social teaching recognizes the positive role played in a nation’s economic life by the free market, private property and personal creativity. But today a great danger must also be acknowledged: the so-called “idolatry” of the market. This occurs whenever an economic system based on unbridled capitalism dictates policies which plunder natural resources, disregard the dignity of workers, undermine the family as society’s basic unit and foster a consumer culture in which “having” is more important than “being”. Leaders who wish to act ethically must bear this in mind and examine market forces, ensuring, if necessary, that they are corrected in the name of the principles of natural law, social justice, human rights and the common good. The Church offers the rich patrimony of her social doctrine as a resource and guide to your nation as it seeks to advance along the path of solidarity and justice. This doctrine especially stresses the importance of a practical concern for the poor, the marginalized and the suffering.

The approach of the Third Millennium is spurring believers in your country to an ever more intense commitment to “the full and visible communion” of all Christians ([Ut unum sint](#), n. 95). I wish to confirm the conviction which I expressed in my address at the Lutheran Church of St Nicholas in Tallinn: “The quest for unity represents an authentic service rendered to the modern world. Achieving the communion which is hoped for among all believers in Christ can represent, and certainly will represent, one of the greatest accomplishments of human history” (10 September 1993). I am confident that, with God’s grace, an ecumenical springtime in Estonia will bear fruit in continued prayer together, fraternal charity and joint undertakings for the promotion of social and cultural life. The Catholic faithful in your country, while few in number, are ever ready to contribute to the task of building Estonia’s future.

Mr Ambassador, I express the fervent hope that the bonds of friendship which characterize the cordial relationship between the Holy See and the Republic of Estonia will be strengthened. As you begin your mission I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always offer you ready assistance as you carry out your responsibilities. Upon yourself and upon all the beloved people of Estonia I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XX, 1 p. 65-68.

L'Osservatore Romano 12.1. 1997 p.6.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.3 p.4.

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