



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mrs. AIJA ODINA,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 28 October 1993

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Latvia to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words recalling my recent Pastoral Visit. I am deeply grateful to Almighty God who granted me the opportunity to visit Latvia, to express my deep affection for its people and to offer encouragement at this significant moment in the nation's history. With vivid memories of the gracious welcome accorded me by President Guntis Ulmanis, I ask you to convey to him my sentiments of esteem and goodwill.

The normalization of diplomatic relations between Latvia and the Holy See is an occasion of particular happiness, for it signifies the resumption of a respectful dialogue which began over 70 years ago and was interrupted only when your country lost its freedom at the time of the Second World War. The joy at Latvia's restored independence is tempered by the memory of trials endured, by the consequences of long years of oppression and by the challenges which the nation presently faces. Nevertheless, the rebirth of independence is surely an incentive to all Latvians to cooperate in promoting their country's development and well-being in a spirit of generous commitment to the common good.

During my Pastoral Visit, I emphasized the importance of your nation's cultural patrimony as a source of inspiration for building a society marked by harmony, cooperation and authentic progress. In fidelity to its history as a meeting-place for different peoples, ideas and traditions, Latvia can "offer its own special contribution to peace and development, and will be able to do so if

it can express its rich heritage of religious and social values, enhanced by the sacrifice of so many men and women who paid for it personally" (John Paul II, *Address at the international airport of Riga*, 4, 10 September 1993). The Christian faith which first reached your nation through the preaching of Saint Meinhard was an essential element in the formation of its culture and identity. Today too the Gospel can provide new inspiration as Latvia faces the future with hope and determination.

In meeting the challenges of the present, the sons and daughters of your country are called to "redeem themselves from their distressing negative experiences... with an overwhelming wave of good" (Ibid. 3). Having experienced the emptiness and oppression of systems of thought and of social structures which leave no room for God and the divine law written on the human heart, Latvians know that openness to spiritual values represents an indispensable condition for putting their new-found freedom at the service of their own authentic development. By renewing their spiritual resources, your fellow-citizens will have the strength to protect and promote the family as the basic cell of society; to face the difficulties of moving from one political and economic system to another; to build harmony between the diverse cultural groups living within the national borders; and to foster reconciliation with former enemies.

It is my hope that the normalization of diplomatic relations between Latvia and the Holy See will contribute to this process of renewal. Freedom to carry out her spiritual mission enables the Church to cooperate in the formation of a sound and spiritually vital society. While respecting the legitimate autonomy of civil society, the Church's "contribution to the political order is precisely her vision of the dignity of the person revealed in all its fullness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 47). For this reason, I assure Your Excellency of the readiness of Latvia's Catholics to cooperate in a spirit of unity and brotherhood with all the social and religious elements of your nation in the great task of rebuilding society. They are eager to offer this contribution together with their brothers and sisters of other Christian confessions.

Your Excellency, I repeat today the promise which I made at the conclusion of my [Pastoral Visit to Latvia](#): "I shall... keep at heart the troubles with which your country is fraught, and I assure you that I shall beg God to give you the necessary far-sightedness, wisdom and courage to face them" (John Paul II, *Address at the international airport of Riga*, 4, 10 September 1993). With good wishes to you as you begin your diplomatic mission, I assure you of the ready cooperation of the Offices of the Holy See in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon yourself and all the beloved people of Latvia I invoke God's blessings of prosperity and peace.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVI, 2 p. 1163-1165.

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