



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 18 May 2001

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you today and to receive the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Estonia to the Holy See. I thank you for your gracious words and for the greetings which you bring from President Lennart Meri, and I ask you to convey to His Excellency, to the Government and to the people of Estonia my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and prosperity of the nation.

I have cherished memories of my visit to your land in 1993. In welcoming you today, I would like to return to themes which I addressed in Tallinn and which have become still more pertinent in the meantime. It is clear, as you have said, that both Estonia and Europe as a whole have come to an important point of their history. The future will greatly depend upon the effective construction of a culture of human rights which embraces individuals, families and peoples, since each of these is a vital element in the structure of human well-being and freedom, such that if any one of them is disregarded the whole suffers.

In the first place, the rights of individuals must be recognized and protected, for unless the fundamental rights of every person, from the greatest to the least, from the strongest to the weakest, are accepted as transcendent and inviolable, prosperity will be illusory and the foundations of society unsound. To claim that these rights are transcendent is to say that they have their source in God, in whose image the human person is created, and are not conceded as a privilege by any human authority. Therefore, the function of human authority is to provide whatever protection is needed to ensure that this truth is respected.

Yet individual rights, if left in a vacuum, degenerate into a false culture of freedom set against the common good, and this cannot be the way forward for society. Individual rights must serve the common good, and vice versa. This means that the next step in shaping a culture of human freedom is unconditional respect for the rights of the family.

Very rightly, Mr Ambassador, you have asked how we should educate the young in order to inculcate in them a sense of "life's real and eternal values" and awaken in them "a new understanding of charity". The question is vital, and the answer is not simple. But it is clear that the prime hearth of that education must be the family, which is why I have written that "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86). The task of rebuilding the moral and spiritual fabric of society now appears more complex than it did ten years ago. Economic reconstruction remains important of course, but unless it is accompanied by a rebuilding of the values which ensure sound family life, new forms of materialism will inevitably follow. If Estonia can work effectively for an economic development which goes hand in hand with promotion of the family, then it will grow in the moral stature essential for the well-being of its own citizens and for the building of a better Europe and a better world.

The culture of rights which must ground development embraces not only individuals and families, but also peoples. The health of the international community is evident in the way it respects the rights of less powerful peoples and smaller nations. Throughout your history, the rights of the Estonian people have often been disregarded. Happily, these rights have been reclaimed in more recent times, so that once again Estonia stands in the community of peoples as an independent nation, with a distinctive culture which is an enrichment for all. As you have said, Estonia can now "view the world in broader terms", no longer constrained by the desperate struggle to survive, but looking to give and receive within a community of nations in which the rights of all peoples are recognized and protected.

In speaking to the world of culture in Tallinn on 10 September 1993, I stressed the need for freedom to be linked to solidarity, and national identity to a culture of dialogue. What needs to be recognized is that the true and rightful identity of a people is perfectly compatible with an openness, in which differences are accepted as a source of mutual enrichment, and in which tensions are resolved not through conflict but by negotiation based upon mutual respect and concern for the truth of the issues involved. Given recent developments in your country, which, as you say, has sought "to establish firm and fair democratic structures", there is every reason to hope that the future of Estonia will be bright. That is my prayer for the nation, and I assure you that the Catholic Church in your land, though small in numbers, will continue to help build a future worthy of the noble Estonian people.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your commitment to the diplomatic task which you begin today will help to strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation between Estonia and the Holy See. I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will be ready to assist you in

the fulfilment of your duties. With every good wish for the success of your mission, I invoke the blessings of Almighty God upon you, your family and the people of your beloved land.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXIV, 1 p.995-997.

L'Osservatore Romano 19.5.2001 p.7.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 23 p.6.

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