



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
A S.E. IL SIGNOR TIIT MATSULEVITS,
NUOVO AMBASCIATORE DI ESTONIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE****

Sabato, 28 agosto 1993

Mr. Ambassador,

It is a great joy for me to receive from your hands the Letters by which His Excellency Mr. Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia, accredits you as his Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. In this I see a welcome confirmation of the sincere, mutual respect and strong friendship which have existed between the Holy See and your homeland since the Holy See's recognition of the new Republic on 10 October 1921 and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1933.

Even though these relations had their beginning in the most remote times, when Estonia was still essentially a part of Livonia, this marked the beginning of an exemplary dialogue between the Holy See and Estonia. The Catholic community although always few in number, experienced freedom in pluralism amid the denominations strongly rooted in Estonian soil. In 1924 the first Apostolic Administrator of Estonia was named, His Excellency Archbishop Antonio Zecchini, who since 1922 had served as Apostolic Delegate for the Baltic countries.

In 1931 the German Jesuit, Father Edward Profittlich, was named Apostolic Administrator. He took Estonian citizenship and was later appointed titular Archbishop of Hadrianopolis in Haemimont. His pastoral activity, acknowledged by all was marked by an ecumenical spirit ahead of its time in intensive and fraternal dialogue between the Christian Churches; it was interrupted in 1941 as a result of the foreign occupation of the country the previous year.

From that time on, as the horizons of independence darkened and Archbishop Profittlich went on to suffer martyrdom (his ultimate fate is still a mystery for the Catholic Church and his family),

there was later an interruption in the dialogue which, thanks be to God, can now be resumed. The appointment of an Apostolic Nuncio in Tallinn in the person of Archbishop Justo Mullor Garcia, who is also Apostolic Administrator ad nutum Sanctae Sedis in Estonia, accompanied by Your Excellency's appointment as Ambassador to the Holy See, show that this dialogue is full of promise.

The visit which I shall shortly make to the capital of Estonia is intended to be an exchange of friendship and mutual goodwill. At present I can take pleasure in the thought that I too shall have the long awaited opportunity to visit the city of Tallinn, so laden with history, and to see its equally distinctive silhouette with the steeples of the churches in which the people pray, alternating with the watchtowers from which for many centuries Estonians sought to interpret the signs of hope or anxiety coming from the Baltic.

The Pope too is preparing to admire that cityscape, which embraces a complete history and represents a strong desire for ecumenism. He is preparing most of all to meet a people who preserve the traditions of a country that is as open to faith and freedom as it is to the sea and to the extensive dynamics of work and human interchange.

I am particularly pleased to think of the exchanges which, in addition to my meeting with the President of the Republic, to whom I ask you to convey my deferential greeting, I will have with all the Christian communities, beginning, of course, with the Catholic one. In the Churches of Saints Peter and Paul and of Saint Nicholas, as well as in the impressive square that in the middle of the old town keeps watch over the nation's history, I shall pray in communion with Estonians for Estonia. I shall speak to the Estonians about what is in my heart and in so many of theirs, and about the purpose of my mission. We will speak about Christ's message and the immeasurable possibilities offered to all those who, like your fellow citizens, seek a lasting peace based on truth and justice.

The course of historical developments has always led to the fact that various ethnic minorities live together in a State. The Church has always emphasized the view that a modern society with a mature recognition of human rights is distinguished by the fact that all citizens can live together in peace and trust, and that ethnic, cultural and religious minorities are guaranteed the full, unhindered exercise of their rights. The Church cannot cease recommending true harmony and peaceful coexistence among the citizens of a society because we are all sons and daughters of our one Father in heaven and have received salvation and redemption from the same Christ (cf. Message for World Peace Day, 1 January 1989).

I am aware of the sufferings which the people of Estonia have had to endure, even in the most recent past and of the hopes which they have for the future. I am also aware of the changes by which you seek to achieve the goal of an improved standard of living, as well as the problems that can slow down this process: the presence of foreign troops in the nation's territory; the

relationships with ethnic and cultural minorities that, due to historical factors, are numerically significant, the introduction of a new economic system with its simultaneous advantages and risks, tensions of various origin which affect the institution of the family; the increasing openness to tourism and the exchange with geographically and culturally distant lands; the new trends in culture and behaviour which compete for the not always prudent, but ever generous acceptance of young people.

Mr Ambassador, I express my fondest wishes for the proper solution of these and other problems which I remember in my prayer in Rome and will also be included in the prayer which I will offer God in Tallinn. In its own way and with the cooperation of Estonian Catholics the Holy See is committed to offering its active participation in seeking effective and lasting solutions for the good of all involved.

With these sentiments I wish Your Excellency a fruitful mission filled with God's rich blessings.

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