



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. RICHARD TÖTTERMAN,
THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF FINLAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 3 October 1988

Mr Ambassador,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Finland to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you have conveyed on behalf of your President, His Excellency Dr Mauno Koivisto, greetings which I warmly reciprocate with the assurance of my esteem and prayerful best wishes.

Your presence and the thoughtful words you have just spoken bear witness to the longstanding ties of friendship and goodwill existing between the Holy See and your country. As you mentioned, the history of Finland is marked by the Christian presence which, to a great extent, has formed the outlook and cultural identity of the Finnish people. I look forward with anticipation to the visit which I propose to make to Finland in June of next year. Not only will it be an opportunity for me to meet the Catholic community which, certainly, is numerically small but rich in faith and good works, but it will also afford me an occasion to strengthen ties of fellowship with the members of the other Churches and communities with which we share real bonds of faith and Christian life. It will enable me moreover to gain a firsthand experience of your country and of its people, whom I hold in profound respect.

Finland today plays a role in international relations which does her honour. The name of your capital City is linked with one of the principal peaceserving Accords of our time: the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975. The thirty-five States which subscribed to that Act committed themselves to a process of consultation

and collaboration, with internationally binding provisions, in matters of security, economy and environment, and the human dimension of cooperation between individuals and peoples. In this way, the thirty-five signatories assumed a certain number of obligations not only in relation to other States, but also with regard to their own citizens, whose specific rights are recognized in the Final Act.

By taking part in the Conference and signing that document, the Holy See expressed its full support for the "Ten Principles" enshrined therein, principles which constitute a kind of "decatalogue" for international relations and conduct. As you know, the Holy See's activity in this field is motivated not by political considerations but by the specific mission with which it is endowed. It is convinced that the spiritual and moral values which it proclaims and upholds stand at the heart of Europe's culture and unity, and constitute the best safeguard of the legitimate rights and fundamental freedoms enunciated in the Helsinki Act. Consequently the Holy See has sought to be actively involved also in the follow-up meetings, including the one presently being held in Vienna, which serve to verify the application of the agreed obligations.

Of special though not exclusive concern to the Holy See is the question of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, which is forthrightly recognized in the Seventh Principle of the Helsinki Accord. In this regard, the Holy See's representatives in the various follow-up meetings already mentioned, seek to bring into focus the need for effective religious freedom such as exists in your country. The principle is set forth in the Constitutions and legal charters of the various States, but its effective implementation leaves much to be desired. The Holy See continues to insist that freedom of religion entails, among other things, that believers be able to organize themselves according to their own structures, to select and train their own religious leaders and personnel, to give and receive an appropriate religious education, and to manifest their beliefs in the realm of public life, also in an associative way and through the use of the means of communication. While much still remains to be done in order to ensure that these rights are fully respected everywhere, it is comforting to note that in the years since the Helsinki Final Act religious freedom is more and more widely recognized as a basic civil and social right, rather than as a mere concession or privilege.

Mr Ambassador, you have reaffirmed Finland's commitment to the aims of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. In this as in other matters there is ample room for collaboration between you, as your country's distinguished representative, and the Holy See. Be assured of my prayerful support and the goodwill of all the Departments of the Roman Curia in the fulfilment of your lofty responsibilities. I wish you happiness in your task and I invoke God's blessings upon you and your family, as well as upon the whole Finnish nation.

*AAS 81 (1989), p.302-304.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XI, 3 pp. 1021-1023.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1988 pp. 868-869.

L'Osservatore Romano 4.10.1988 p.5.

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