



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA LETTONE,
S.E.M. GUNTIS ULMANIS****

Giovedì, 17 marzo 1994

Mr. President,

1. I am pleased to offer you a cordial welcome on the first official visit to the Holy See of a Head of State of the beloved Latvian nation. With you I greet your wife and the members of your entourage. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for today's meeting, which reminds me of the Pastoral Visit to Latvia that I made last September during my visit to the three Baltic Republics.

Today I again express my heartfelt thanks to you, Mr. President, and to all those who contributed to the success of that historic visit. At this moment I am thinking of all the people of Latvia. I still treasure in my heart their many tokens of warm hospitality offered to me on that significant, unforgettable occasion.

After the severe winter of oppression and totalitarian persecution which caused your people so much suffering, I was personally able to note the signs of a springtime rich in plans and hopes. I observed the rightful satisfaction with your new-found freedom, I saw your harmonious search for civil reconciliation, I admired your unanimously demonstrated commitment to the country's moral and material reconstruction.

As was predictable, the enthusiasm of the first few months after the proclamation of independence was followed by a period of realistic daily effort to face and solve the range of emerging political, social and economic problems. The unanimous and dynamic contribution of the whole nation is now necessary if a decisive start is to be made on the way to genuine economic and social recovery. The Church wishes to co operate actively in this renewal.

On this subject, Mr. President, I am pleased to repeat to you today, in the atmosphere of our cordial meeting, what I said when I was taking leave of the beloved land of Latvia: "In the Gospel, by means of the Church's social doctrine economic, political and social problems can find, certainly not technical solutions, but clear principles from which to draw inspiration, principles to be shared even with those who do not consider themselves Christians or believers" (L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 15 September 1993, p. 13).

2. The Holy See is following with attentive interest Latvia's progress towards a development that takes into account all human dimensions and safeguards the deepest needs of each person's dignity. For your country, it is a question of consolidating the results achieved so far at great cost, defending them from the dangers arising from a false concept of freedom, from the deceptive illusions of fleeting success and from the harmful enticement of easy profits.

If in the past a number of the trials to which the Latvian nation was subjected for many years stemmed from the totalitarian regime, today new risks and threats could emerge in the spread of a hedonistic, consumerist mentality that is eager to adopt false values which in the end are detrimental to the true and integral development of man and society.

In its courageous journey towards social, economic and cultural growth, your nation cannot fail to draw upon the great spiritual heritage which characterizes its origins; a heritage from which the Christian contribution is not absent. The proclamation of the Gospel, which reached this land in the 12th century through the missionary work of the great monk Meinhard, has left its mark in fact on the life and history of Latvians. The seed of Gospel truth, abundantly scattered at that time, is making its effects felt today through the generous witness of different Christian communities who respect one another and are all committed, in accordance with Christ's desire, to bring about effective and full communion.

Just as during the dark period of the nation's oppression and martyrdom Christianity served as a great moral force enlightening and sustaining souls in their resistance to the strong influence of the lack of freedom, to the discomforts and burdens of persecution, so now the Gospel, welcomed and expressed in concrete gestures of Christian living, can make an invaluable contribution to building up Latvia today, on its way to goals of solid progress and true peace. Such a Latvia is absolutely necessary for the good of Europe. The Church is aware of this and is determined to defend its right to exist and develop.

3 Mr. President, in this light I am pleased today to offer you, as the representative of the whole beloved Latvian people, my heartfelt wishes for serenity and success.

Through the loyal efforts of its various social classes, may Latvia continue with determination and courage on the path of its social and moral reconstruction, in harmonious understanding with the International Community.

May Latvia experience a future of peace and fraternal solidarity among all the peoples of Europe!

Mr. President, as my thoughts turn again to my stay in your noble land, I thank you once more for the warm hospitality I was offered on that occasion, and I Invoke upon the beloved Latvian nation the protection of the Blessed Virgin, venerated particularly at the Shrine of Aglona, which I had the Joy of visiting.

May God bless the whole nation which you represent, especially young people and families.

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