



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
au Président de la République d'ESTONIE,
S.E.M. Lennart MERI****

Jeudi, 15 septembre 1994

Mr. President,

1. I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to you on the occasion of your first official visit to the Apostolic See. Together with you, I greet the members of your entourage and the entire nation that you represent.

Today's meeting refreshes my memory of the brief, intense visit I made to Estonia on the 10 September last. I once again wish to express my sincere gratitude to you for the warm welcome and hospitality which were offered to me during my stay in the capital, Tallinn. The impressions and sentiments felt during that last stage of my historic journey to three the Baltic republics even today find a deep echo in my heart and in those of all who accompanied me.

2. After the painful period of suffering marked especially by the denial of basic human freedom, the Estonian nation is now living in a climate of moral and civil rebirth. In this context of rediscovered confidence and effective commitment to the common good, a significant contribution is offered by the good relations existing between the Catholic community and State institutions, relations that are marked by respect and co operation on the basis of regained religious freedom.

The cordial understanding that exists between the Catholic Church and the State certainly constitutes an important premise on which together we can build the common good for the benefit of all citizens. In this regard, the caring and respectful approach of the civil authorities to the small but fervent Catholic community is a reason for great satisfaction.

The climate of reciprocal openness and co operation between the Church and the State will

greatly contribute to encouraging the quest for satisfactory solutions also with regard to issues that still require further study and investigation. For example I note with satisfaction how this cordial understanding is making the negotiations for the return of buildings confiscated during the recent totalitarian regime productive. I hope that negotiations will continue in the direction that has been taken; and indeed, that the desire for dialogue and understanding shown up to now and which has animated the negotiations in this sensitive area, may be strengthened, as well as in others existing between the Parties.

3. I hope that the solutions reached will, among other things, enable the Catholic community to join in the general effort to promote the country's progress.

Following the directives that emerged from the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church intends to co operate to the best of her ability with all members of society, to reinforce that freedom and peace which have been achieved thanks to the sacrifice and contribution of every citizen. As I stated on my arrival in the capital, Tallinn, «the desire of the Successor of Peter and of those who comprise the Catholic community is to help guarantee Estonia a future of harmony, peace and progress, a future of fellowship and solidarity, within the heart of an international society which aspires increasingly to respect and interdependence in freedom» (L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 15 September 1993, p. 14).

4. Mr. President, thanks to the harmony that exists between them, the various Christian confessions present in your country also help to encourage a climate of peace and co operation. The ecumenical meeting held in the Church of St Nicholas, in which I had the joy to take part during my previously mentioned Pastoral Visit, was an eloquent sign of the commitment of all those who profess a common faith in Christ to seriously continue on their journey towards full unity.

Their witness to Gospel values helps keep alive the memory of the great cultural and human patrimony that Christianity historically offered to the civilization and progress of the Baltic people, especially to Estonians. Catholics intend to intensify this journey of reconciliation and peace, in the face of current challenges, by seeking every just solution for healing the still gaping wounds in people's minds. They are the sad legacy of the long winter of totalitarian oppression.

5. Mr. President, I would like to add a word about Estonia's geographical location, on an important route between Eastern and Western Europe and a place of cultural and religious dialogue between the different peoples of Europe. In this regard, my sincere wish is that the tension and conflicts may be completely overcome once and for all, leaving room for a generous exchange between the many cultures for the sake of their mutual enrichment. May the rediscovery of common Christian roots, the inviolable heritage of every nation of the old continent, become the starting point for renewed dialogue and closer co-operation between Eastern and Western Europe.

With these sentiments, as I again express my deepest gratitude to you, Mr. President, and to all who have accompanied you on this official visit, I invoke God's blessing on Estonia, on its inhabitants and on its journey towards a future of freedom and progress.

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