



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR PRIIT KOLBRE,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 12 December 2003 Your Excellency, It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Estonia to the Holy See. I would ask you kindly to convey to His Excellency Mr Arnold Rüütel my appreciation of his good wishes, which I warmly reciprocate, and to assure him and the people of Estonia of my prayers for the nation's well-being. Ten years ago I embarked on my "pilgrimage of peace" to various Baltic nations including your own beloved country, where I thanked God that "the lamp of freedom" had been lit anew. That visit remains vivid in my mind and I gratefully recall the warmth and hospitality with which I was received by civic and religious leaders alike. The Church's diplomatic relations form a part of her mission of service to the whole human family. Her heartfelt desire to foster fruitful relations with civil society is anchored in her conviction that the hope of building a more just world – a world more worthy of man – cannot ignore an understanding of man's supernatural vocation. The Holy See's diplomatic activity seeks therefore to promote an understanding of the human person who "receives from God his essential dignity and with it the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness" (Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, No. 38). From this foundation the Church applies the universal values pertaining to truth and love to the vast array of cultures and nations that constitute our world. As Your Excellency has observed, the arrival of the Catholic Church in Estonia dates back to the twelfth century. Together with other Europeans, Estonians rightly understand that the truths and values of Christianity have long been the foundation of the very fabric of European society. This heritage does not, however, belong just to the past. It is a project always in the making. It is therefore imperative that as the nations of Europe move towards a new configuration, Christianity's perennial proclamation of the truth should be recognized and reclaimed. It is in recovering Europe's true identity, upon which its freedom and democracy are founded, that the genuine progress of its cultural and civic institutions can be assured (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, No. 109). The people of Estonia know only too well that, when the treasure of the Christian faith is repressed or even denied, authentic social development founders and the vision of a society marked with hope fades. In the wake of a tragic period of fear and intimidation in European history, when the supremacy of force prevailed, the Christian faith proposes its Gospel of life assuring a future of hope and freedom, a future in which the supremacy of love and truth will prevail. No human folly or shallow sense of inclusiveness can be allowed to deny future generations this path to genuine personal fulfilment and sustainable solidarity between peoples, rooted in the hope that "does not disappoint" (*Rm 5:5*). In this regard I am confident that the Government of Estonia will support the efforts of the Holy See to ensure that the Treaty of the

Constitution of Europe will recognize Christianity's place at the heart of the Continent's life and future. As Estonia continues to engage in the delicate but profoundly satisfying task of forging its national spirit there is much for which to be grateful. Freedom of thought and expression, now enjoyed by your citizens, is the condition for the search for truth which defines the human person. The experience of history teaches us however that the journey from oppression to liberty is arduous. It is often marked by hollow promises of hope and the lure of false forms of freedom detached from an essential link with truth. The passing of an era of repressive political ideology must not be allowed to usher in one of destructive secularist ideology. The human person – the one who seeks truth – is also the one who lives by belief (cf. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, No. 31). It is to believing communities then that political and civic authorities can turn with confidence for a commitment to the humanization of society, by shaping a European social order respectful of every man and woman and thus in accordance with the common good (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, No. 117). There is no doubt that one of the greatest needs in Estonia today is to ensure that the sacred institution of marriage, willed by God in the very act of creation, with its concomitant of stable family life, is affirmed and supported. Both civic and religious leaders of all denominations must work together towards this end. Many cultural, social and political factors are in fact conspiring to create an increasingly obvious crisis of the family. The tragedy of divorce desolates family life and harms communities and individuals, especially children. The scourge of abortion, in addition to violating the essential dignity of human life, often causes untold emotional and psychological pain to the mother who herself is frequently a victim of circumstances contrary to her deepest hopes and desires. Faced with these afflictions, I again remind civil leaders that they have a duty to make courageous choices to protect life through legislative measures (cf. Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, No. 90) and to uphold the values and demands of the family through effective social policies. I also appeal to the Christian community of Estonia to bear steadfast witness to the sublime beauty of the intimate communion of life and love which defines the family and brings joy to human society. Members of the Catholic Church, though few in number in your country, will continue to pray and work for the continuing development of the Estonian people and nation. I thank you for your gracious words of appreciation for what the Church is achieving through her humanitarian organizations, notably *Caritas*, in bringing a spirit of hope and practical assistance to vulnerable groups. Her mission of service to all peoples, particularly the poor and marginalized, stands at the heart of her witness to Christ's all-encompassing love. Mr Ambassador, during your term as Estonia's representative to the Holy See the various departments of the Roman Curia will do all they can to assist you in the discharge of your duties. I offer my best wishes for the success of your endeavours to strengthen the cordial relations already existing between us. Upon you, your family and all your fellow citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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