

## **By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew At His Meeting with the President of Estonia, His Excellency Toomas-Hendrik Ilves**



Your

Excellency,

In visiting on our Apostolic journey the most holy daughter Orthodox Autonomous Church of Estonia, coming as do from Constantinople, where the holy and sacred treasures of the Orthodox people are preserved and the truth of the Sacred Gospel of Christ is proclaimed to the entire world, we personally feel special sentiments of joy and honor upon encountering the first representative of the free and democratic Estonian Nation, namely Your beloved Excellency, the successor of historical personalities that have consumed themselves with serving the ideals of liberty, peace and cooperation among people; the successor also of the unforgettable President Lennart Meri, who personally requested the Ecumenical Patriarchate to restructure the autonomy of your local Orthodox Church, which had been dissolved in an un-canonical manner and which this year celebrates the ninetieth anniversary since its guidance into a self-administered Church. This is

precisely the reason that we have come to celebrate and honor together.

We still retain very vividly our recollection of the wonderful, essential and productive visit by Your Excellency to the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, during the month of April, 2010, while we also appreciate and honor your recognition of the contribution by the Mother Church to the glorious, courageous and even martyric Estonian nation by means of its small local Orthodox Church.

This our third visit to Estonia coincides with this specific anniversary of the bestowal, in accordance with the sacred canons and tradition of the Orthodox Church, of the status of autonomy upon your local Orthodox Church, which was forced into temporary inactivity by difficult circumstances, but which today is living its ecclesiastical autonomy at its prime, under the enlightened ministry of its First-Hierarchy, His Eminence Metropolitan Stephanos of Tallinn and All Estonia, always for the benefit of the entire Estonian people.

The local Orthodox Estonian Church – in an autonomous manner serves the Orthodox faithful here with self-sacrifice and Christian zeal, depositing its witness and proclaiming the truth, namely the leader of our faith, our crucified and risen Jesus Christ. We confess this Lord as “coming down from heaven and assuming flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and becoming human, being crucified for our sake under Pontius Pilate, suffering, being buried, and on the third day arising.” Incarnation, cross, passion, burial and resurrection are simultaneously divine and human actions, all of which our Lord Jesus Christ endured for our salvation and deification. At the same time, throughout their history, nations and peoples undergo incarnation, passion, trial, cross and sometimes death, to the point of obliteration. Nevertheless, when there is courage, endurance, patience, faith and struggle for truth, then resurrection is not afar, because behind every effort to blur or conceal the truth – sometimes even within ourselves – revelation always follows. For nothing so contributes to the exercise of evil than the conviction that there is no other world than the one we see and no judgment for our actions or concern, about how to render our life productive.

The Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, rejoices and delights when it observes its daughter Church of Estonia achieving great things and conducting itself in accordance with the directive and mandate of the Patriarchal and Synodal Tome of recognition in 1923 and renewal in 1996 of its autonomy.

Therefore, by struggling with “the weapons of truth,” by solely proclaiming Christ’s love, and by supporting its faithful flock, the daughter autonomous Estonian

Orthodox Church is working within the context of the lawful order of Estonia, in the midst of conflicts and challenges, primarily resulting from nationalistic motives and a tendency for the prevalence of the strongest. Yet, in this way, the Estonian Orthodox Church is demonstrating the value of service, especially the value of self-sacrifice. Truly, however, “a broken spirit and humble heart God will not despise.” And God has not despised, but rather He has redeemed, as He knows how to honor those who believe in Him and show patience.

Nonetheless, Your Excellency, we rejoice for another reason, too. For we find ourselves in the beautiful and glorious country of Estonia during the ninety-fifth anniversary since the establishment of its God-protected State, whose contemporary historical journey coincides in many ways and is identified with the history and adventures of the canonical autonomous Orthodox Church here.

This historical development and joint excursion, despite its particular difficulties and conflicts, proves the diligence, struggle, progress and aptitude toward the ideals of the Estonian people, who, through its enlightened spiritual and political leadership, has succeeded in participating in the European Union and been worthy of achieving wonders, while establishing its future on stable foundations, respecting its environment and the value of the human person, advancing in faith, love, humility, patience and truth toward virtue and praise.

We pray that Your beloved Excellency, dear Mr. President, and through you the entire blessed Estonian people will celebrate in glory and commemorate in honor the hundredth anniversary of your State’s independence.

Be strong and courageous in the name of the Lord and the might of His power. Amen.

Text No. 1