

7 Σεπτεμβρίου 2013

By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew At His Meeting with the Prime Minister of Estonia, His Excellency Andrus Anip (September 5, 2013)

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Your Excellency, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia,

The Old Testament Book of Proverbs tells us: “Where there is no guidance, a nation falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.” (Prov. 11.14) This means that “safety” or “salvation” – which is to say, prosperity and peace – may be found wherever there are many counselors and many advisors.

We find ourselves for the third time in your beautiful country and ascertain its progress in peace, democracy and freedom, as well as the overall prosperity and rise of our beloved Estonian people. We especially rejoice at our meeting today with Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister, and we thank you for the assistance and support that you offer H.E. Metropolitan Stephanos to fulfill his ministry and service of the small Orthodox flock in your land and more broadly of the Estonian people.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, which ninety years ago granted and some sixteen years ago renewed the status of autonomy for the Orthodox Church of Estonia, expresses its fervent gratitude for your attention and special concern from the earliest times of the liberation of Estonia to this day for this Church and its survival, as well as for its handling of trials and assaults with ulterior motives and aims. We congratulate and thank you sincerely because you exercise the foremost responsibility of governing your nation "with many advisors," with the "contribution and consultation of many others," namely your colleagues in Government. This is precisely why you are successful in every domain of public life and demonstrate for those near and afar the progress of your people, witnessing to the efforts of your government to serve society as a whole and its manifold needs.

In the current assessment of human affairs, the prevalent perception is that "spiritual" matters are characterized as "eternal," while "secular" matters as merely "temporary." Indeed the latter are sometimes even silently and reservedly marginalized as if they were of secondary importance. However, a deeper, more sensitive and vigilant analysis of matters reveals that there is no "spiritual" issue that confronts humanity, which does not also have a "secular" basis; nor again is there any "secular" matter, which does not have eternal consequences. In any case, this is why our God, who was without beginning, became human - namely, in order to acclaim and proclaim the relationship and interdependence of heaven and earth, spirit and matter, soul and body, as well as sacred and secular.

All of this renders very clear the close connection between the work and responsibility of spiritual and political leaders alike, which in turn signifies the divinely-inspired and mandatory cooperation and solidarity between the two, since the human person is indivisible, unable to be separated into spiritual and material, but rather comprising a unified "image of God" in the world. This is why humanity must serve every need and inclination with the same dedication.

The perspective, then, of the human person as created "in the image and likeness of God" is what inspires, as we know, the legislation of your country and the general mentality of its people. It is also the reason for the exemplary service and

cooperation between the Estonian State and the Orthodox Estonian Autonomous Church, which continues for ninety years without interruption – despite the forced “exile” for a period of time – its contribution to the Orthodox faithful of this nation. We recognize and honor this cooperation, while at the same time congratulating you for this, on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as well as personally during this festive occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the Church’s autonomy and the ninety-fifth anniversary since the independence and liberation of Estonia, despite the brief “intervals” of foreign “occupation,” which we mentioned earlier. Our presence here is to celebrate these occasions with you and the entire Estonian people.

Permit us, Mr. Prime Minister, to thank you especially for the protection and support of the vigilant defender of our great and sacred traditions, namely the Orthodox Autonomous Estonian Church, which has been also demonstrated in the way that your esteemed government has handled the matter of compensation for ecclesiastical property lost during times of difficulty and atheism. Your stance on this matter is founded on historical justice. The chosen manner of managing and resolving this issue can surely be improved; however, it proves the attention of the Estonian government to the principles of justice and the progress of history, which are so critical for Church and State alike. We are particularly touched and grateful, as the spiritual father and Patriarch of the Estonian Orthodox, by the concern of the Estonian government for the social security of our nuns by assuming responsibility for half of the due expenses, as well as for the nuns of the sister Catholic Church.

This attention to the continuance and consequence of Estonian history is also manifest in the fact that your nation, as an equal and full member of the European Union, expresses its undivided solidarity and support for the lands and peoples of the European south, which are experiencing turmoil, as a result of the financial crisis.

Before concluding, Mr. Prime Minister, allow us to return to our opening quotation from the Book of Proverbs, in order to underline that the worthy government of your nation “with many counselors” is evident and clear in the contribution of Your Excellency and your distinguished colleagues.

In expressing our gratitude, commendation and great satisfaction to Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister, for the splendid work performed by you and your distinguished colleagues in governing Estonia during the present critical moment of world history, we bless you and your endeavors for the benefit and progress of your nation, while also wishing you, as well as your esteemed coworkers, family and the entire blessed Estonian people sound health and spiritual growth.



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