



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND*

Monday, 1 February 1971

Mr. President,

The words Your Excellency has just addressed Us have found a deep echo in Us, and your visit – the first visit of a Finnish President to the Vatican – is welcomed by Us with great joy. So it is from the bottom of our heart that We greet in you a statesman who has succeeded so well in coping with his responsibilities as regards the peace and prosperity of his country, and, beyond your person, the whole noble Finnish people.

We would like to take advantage of this meeting to manifest in the first place the deep esteem and benevolent sympathy that We feel for your dear compatriots. We know, in fact, the passionate attachment of your populations to their motherland and its traditions, defended so courageously and so proudly in the course of history, for rightful independence. We appreciate their taste for nature, a nature which has lavished its most magnificent spectacles on your country, with its lakes, forests and mountains, a nature, too, which knows the rigours of a cold climate and long inter nights, but also the incomparable play of the polar light. We appreciate all the cultural, poetic and musical heritage that this love of Finland has brought forth and which has made it known and loved throughout the world. Nor can We fail to stress also the hospitality, the desire for opening and human contacts, the spirit of tolerance manifested by the children of your country.

What is more – and Your Excellency has expressed it delicately – We feel near the Finnish people, whose civilization has developed in a living unity with Christianity, since the time when St. Henry the bishop brought the Gospel there, at the cost of his life. Today, it is true, many Finnish Christians are separated from the Catholic Church, but they remain, nevertheless, brothers for us, steeped in the sources of the Word of God and the grace of baptism, and with whom We desire, on the day, when the Lord permits, full communion of ecclesial life.

The Catholic community itself is a very small one in your country. But Your Excellency has been so kind as to stress its vitality and its contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of the country. We are grateful to you for this delicacy and We express our satisfaction at the friendly relations that have been established between the different Christian denominations, as well as with the other religious communities, hoping that they will be intensified in mutual respect, for their common good, and in order that they may all collaborate wholeheartedly together to promote the human and moral greatness of your country.

You spoke to Us also of your concern for European peace and security. Is there any need to tell you here again the interest – which You have just emphasized – of the Holy See in your initiatives, determined as it is to believe against the whole world in peaceful means of settling differences and overcoming conflicts, in order to establish security in justice, in respect of the dignity and rightful independence of each partner, and also in their necessary solidarity? For Us, it is our conviction, this commitment to peace is a requirement of the charity that urges Us towards all men and, as such, it has a special place in our apostolic mission.

It is in this spirit that the Holy See, as You know, maintains fruitful diplomatic relations with your noble country and We are happy to stress this today in the presence of its President. Expressing our best wishes, We gladly implore the abundance of divine Blessing on Your Excellency – who has honoured Us with this visit – on the persons accompanying you, and in particular on the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Ambassador, as well as on the whole Finnish people.

*ORa n.6 p.3.