



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE TO THE HOLY SEE\***

Thursday 16 December 1999

*Mr Ambassador,*

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Singapore to the Holy See. I ask you to convey my cordial greetings to President S. R. Nathan and the Government, and to assure them of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the people of Singapore.

As we prepare to enter a new millennium, the international community faces many challenges. You have mentioned the need for a deep commitment to peace, particularly in the face of conflicts which arise on account of differences of race or religion. In this regard, your country has a significant role to play in your region, given its long experience of the harmonious coexistence of a variety of cultures and religious traditions, a feature which impressed me deeply during my brief visit in 1986.

The good relations between religious believers in your country testifies to the truth that mutual respect and esteem is an essential condition for promoting and consolidating social harmony. During my visit to Singapore, I gave voice to this conviction in the National Stadium: "True peace begins in the mind and heart, in the will and soul of the human person, for it proceeds from genuine love of others. Indeed it is true to say that peace is the product of love, when people consciously decide to improve their relationship with others, to make every effort to overcome divisions and misunderstandings, and if possible even to become friends" (Homily, 20 November 1986, No. 8). What a difference it would make to relationships between nations and groups in society if everyone committed themselves to peace in this way!

A welcome feature of international relations in recent times has been the growing concern to ensure the development of poorer societies through financial and technical assistance, and other programmes aimed at fostering a spirit of economic initiative at the local level. In this regard, the Holy See has sought many times to draw attention to the burden of external debt, which compromises the economies of whole peoples and hinders their social and political progress. While international financial institutions have made serious attempts to secure a coordinated reduction of debt, continued cooperation between richer and poorer nations is required so that the most fragile societies can develop their full potential.

Your country's well-developed economy places it in a position to be of great assistance to the other nations of South-East Asia, through various forms of cooperation and assistance. This assistance is a concrete expression of the growing sense of interdependence among nations, and of the need to promote greater solidarity at the international level. It is my hope that joint initiatives between Singapore and the Holy See will continue to grow and expand, and I ask you to convey my gratitude to your Government for what it has already helped to accomplish through this cooperation. Singapore's commitment to these programmes is an investment in the long-term progress of the societies and cultures of South-East Asia, and is based on awareness that authentic development is not simply economic but must be rooted in recognition of the inalienable dignity and rights of the human person. Respect for the essential moral dimension and ethical imperatives of development is the key to authentic human progress, constituting the only viable foundation for a world truly worthy of the human family.

The Church works for the development of peoples not because she has particular technical solutions to offer, but because she has a responsibility to expand her religious mission to the various fields in which men and women strive to attain the always relative happiness which is possible in this world, in line with their dignity as persons (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41). Although the Catholic community in Singapore is small in number, its members play their part in cooperation with their fellow citizens in promoting the good of society. In this regard, I thank you for your kind words of esteem for the Church's work of education and training in your country. Catholic education has a long tradition of pedagogical wisdom, attention to the needs of children and young people, and ability to anticipate the new needs and problems which arise with changing times. This tradition enables Catholic schools to make an effective contribution to the personal development of the young and to the progress of the nation. Apart from imparting knowledge and technical skills, Catholic educators are committed to giving their students a sense of their own dignity as human persons and an understanding of their transcendent vocation. Authentic education ought always to take account of the human person's transcendent nature and final end, and serve the good of the social community to which the person belongs; it should be a training in the exercise of the rights and duties in which the young person will, as an adult, have a share.

Mr Ambassador, I offer you my good wishes as you begin your mission, and I am confident that through your efforts the bonds of friendship between Singapore and the Holy See will be further

strengthened. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Singapore I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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*\*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXII, 2 p.1188-1190.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 17.12.1999 p.6.

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