



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr PANG ENG FONG,
AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 11 January 1997

Mr Ambassador,

I welcome you to the Vatican and am pleased to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Singapore to the Holy See. Your presence here today and the kind greetings you have conveyed from President Ong Teng Cheong evoke vivid memories of my visit to your country 10 years ago. The warmth and hospitality of your fellow citizens remain etched in my mind. I ask you to assure the President, Government and people of my prayers for their well-being and prosperity.

You have referred to the rich diversity of peoples and cultures present in your Republic. Indeed, Singapore is manifestly conscious of the need, in a pluralistic society, for the legitimate aspirations, traditions and beliefs of people of different backgrounds to be accorded full respect. Only mutual acceptance and sincere dialogue among all sectors of society can sustain the work of maintaining peace and harmony. Genuine harmony requires the effective recognition and safeguarding of the dignity and rights of all members of society as the fundamental criterion of policy and action, with special openness to and support of the neediest: the poor, the sick, the young, the old, the labourer, the immigrant.

Your country, with its well-developed economy, is particularly well placed to be of assistance to other nations in South-East Asia by co-operating with them and assisting them in their own social development, and by enlisting in this task other economically advanced nations whose friendship and shared traditions dispose them to working towards this end. We are speaking here of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations. This awareness in turn leads people to change for the better the attitudes that define each individual's relationship with self, with neighbour, with even the remotest human communities, and with nature itself (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 38). It is in this spirit that regional agreements and accords promote the common good and encourage that initiative and farsightedness which can help to resolve tensions; it is in this spirit that the sharing of technology and information truly helps to improve the quality

of life for all.

Peoples and nations strive for progress as something desirable and indeed necessary. Progress, however, must never be solely measured in merely material terms. The Church, in fulfilling her universal mission, constantly reminds people that there can be no authentic human progress without an increase in respect for the ethical imperatives deriving from the human dignity of each individual, imperatives founded on human nature itself, and which precede economic, cultural and political considerations. It is in fact these moral principles which constitute the only viable foundation for building a world truly worthy of the human person, a world of justice and peace. In this regard, the effective pursuit of peace consists, in a very specific way, in teaching the younger generation to act justly, and in helping it to find its happiness in acts of compassion and concern for neighbour.

I am grateful for your words about the role played by members of the Catholic community in Singapore in the field of education. The Church considers her educational apostolate to be an essential element of her religious mission. Of course, she wishes to carry on this work in harmony with others who are active in the same field. Co-operation between Church and State is of great importance in advancing the intellectual and moral training of citizens, who will then be better enabled to build a truly humane society.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission to the Holy See will strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship between us. You can be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the discharge of your duties. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Singapore I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XX, 1 p. 56-58.*

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