



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mrs. MARY SEET-CHENG
NEW AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 28 October 1993

Your Excellency,

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. With heartfelt gratitude for the warm greetings which you have brought from your Government and people, I ask you to convey to President Ong Teng Cheong and your fellow-citizens my cordial good wishes and prayers for their peace and well-being.

Your Excellency has referred to your Government's commitment to improving the quality of life of its citizens. This noble objective, beyond economic plans and technological projects, is first and foremost an ethical endeavour, for if initiatives aimed at political and economic advancement are to achieve their authentic purpose they must serve the integral development of every person and of the whole person (Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1987*, 5, 8 December 1986). In Singapore, people of various languages, races and religions live and work together in harmony. The unity of the human family, which takes its origin from the one God and Creator, and the inalienable dignity of each of its members are the fundamental principles which give rise to the mutual respect of men and women of different traditions and which sustain them in advancing the life of the nation out of the resources of their own particular heritage (Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1989*, 3, 8 December 1988). A genuine spirit of tolerance and mutual respect will ensure that every group can make its own contribution to the common good. By this "exchange of gifts" the nation is enriched.

Building a just and peaceful society requires a wholehearted commitment to the principle of religious liberty, which is the cornerstone of the entire structure of human rights. Freedom to seek

the truth and freedom to profess one's religious convictions – rights recognized and guaranteed by your Constitution, and protected by your juridical structures – are the sure guarantee that other fundamental rights will not be ignored and that efforts to ensure the well-being and progress of the national community will be profoundly motivated and generously sustained.

In this context I appreciate Your Excellency's expression of esteem for the contribution which the Catholic Church makes to the life of the Republic of Singapore. While the Church always gives priority to her spiritual aims, it is also true that her religious mission "produces a function, enlightenment and resources which can be of service in constructing and strengthening the human community in accordance with the divine law" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 42). Both the teaching and ancient practice of the Catholic Church lead her to alleviate the plight of those in need and those who are suffering in so many different ways (Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 31). Through her network of schools and social assistance programmes, the Church – through her priests, religious and laity – will continue to work for the well-being of all citizens, especially the younger generation – your country's greatest resource.

The cooperation of the Republic of Singapore and its neighbouring States is an indispensable condition for friendly co-existence in the region and, as a consequence, for furthering the cause of world peace. As I had occasion to remark during my Pastoral Visit to your country in 1986: "Peacemaking is a task that is never finished, but always in progress, always in need of being confirmed and strengthened" (John Paul II, *Eucharistic Celebration at the stadium of Singapore*, 8, 20 November 1986). The foundation of peace is justice and its expression is international solidarity. The increasing gap between rich and poor, even within economically developed nations, is becoming more marked and presents an ever increasing threat to peace. To allow situations of extreme poverty to persist creates social conditions which breed resentment and division, destroying any hope for social harmony and world peace. As I noted with grave concern last year: "*This is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore*, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community" (Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1993*, 1, 8 December 1992). I express the hope therefore that the Republic of Singapore will be a convinced champion within the international community of a more just and more equitable sharing of the world's resources among the members of the one human family.

In offering my good wishes at the beginning of your mission, I take this opportunity to assure Your Excellency of the readiness of the Offices of the Holy See to assist you in your work. Upon yourself and upon all the citizens of the Republic of Singapore I cordially invoke abundant divine blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVI, 2 p.1146-1148.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1993 p.907-908.

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