



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR WALTER WOON,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE**

ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE**Friday, 12 December 2003* Your Excellency, I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Singapore to the Holy See. I thank you for the kind greetings you have expressed on behalf of President S. R. Nathan and the Government and people of Singapore, and I ask you kindly to convey my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the nation. Your presence here today takes my thoughts to the visit I was privileged to make to your country in 1986. The time I spent in Singapore allowed me the opportunity to experience at first hand a culture shaped by the influence of so many different ethnic and religious groups, which have for years lived in harmony with one another. Singapore has been greatly enriched by its variety of cultures and peoples and should take pride in its tradition of respect and esteem for this patrimony. In fact, your country's commitment to encouraging an authentic spirit of unity in diversity has made a significant contribution to the region and you can rightly claim that it is one of the most developed in Asia. Although Singapore is small in size and population, it nevertheless plays an important role in the area, often acting as a bridge of cultural exchange between East and West. In order for authentic globalization to be achieved, governments and peoples should encourage cultural diversity, at all times ensuring that it remains grounded in the moral principles and values which govern human behaviour and relationships. Singapore has demonstrated its dedication to these precepts by the ongoing commitment to religious tolerance, which it has enthusiastically fostered since independence. It is to be hoped that the harmony which has traditionally prevailed among the followers of the various religions in Singapore will continue and grow even stronger. This is especially important today, as moments of recent tension and tragic incidents in your region have challenged the mutual respect which is basic to the peaceful co-existence of all peoples. In accordance with your best traditions, there is a need for continued dialogue, understanding and cooperation among the followers of the various religions in order to ensure that all people work together for a civilization built upon the universal values of solidarity, justice and freedom. Singaporean society is permeated by a deep appreciation for the importance of the spiritual and transcendent dimensions of human life. This has contributed to a recognition of the need to develop a culture in which "people live together" always avoiding the temptation to become a society which rejects, marginalizes, uproots or oppresses others (cf. Encyclical Letter *Evangeliium Vitae*, No. 18). This fundamental responsibility towards our brothers and sisters is a characteristic of social interaction which must be exercised at both national and international levels. Your country's resolve to assist those beyond its borders is evident in the impressive international support which you offer. In fact, our shared commitment to the less fortunate is one of many areas which unite Singapore and the Holy See in our desire to serve the common good. An example of this cooperation can be seen in our joint efforts to form young professionals from poor countries in the region through the Singapore-

Vatican Third Country Training Programme, initiated five years ago. Education is a key to sustained development. I am therefore hopeful that our attempts to train young people as conscientious and honest citizens will not only benefit their individual countries but will also assist Asia and the entire global community. Responsibility for the well-being of others extends to all sectors of life. In this regard, I am aware of the significant contributions your country has made, especially in the spheres of science and technology. The ability to serve humanity through these is a gift demanding great respect. At no time can governments support initiatives which threaten the sanctity of human life for scientific or economic gain. "The great moral challenge facing nations and the international community in relation to development is to have the courage of a new solidarity, capable of taking imaginative and effective steps to overcome both dehumanizing underdevelopment and the 'overdevelopment' which tends to reduce the person to an economic unit" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 32). For this reason, proper judgment and prudent deliberation concerning the control of these fields is essential. Such discussions should include the different religious traditions which play a significant role in the life of your nation. These groups make an essential contribution to the genuine progress of society by drawing attention to the most profound human questions and values and by giving the spiritual and moral direction which must always accompany scientific and technological advances. Even though the Catholic Church in Singapore is relatively small, her members are proud contributors to the country's political, cultural and social development. At a time when your nation and much of Asia are attempting to rethink past policies concerning family life and demographics, Catholics have much to offer. As I stated in 1986, "Families have a unique place in the Church as a community of life and love. While being a communion of persons in dialogue with God, they have an important role in society. They must remain open to the larger community, so that the loving concern they show in their homes may be extended to others for the betterment of all" (*Homily in Singapore*, No. 9). A firm commitment to a culture of life and a culture of the family is an essential building block to the social fabric of every country and a requirement for long-term success. Mr Ambassador, it is my hope that, as you take up your new responsibilities, the bonds of friendship between the Holy See and Singapore will be increasingly strengthened. You can be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in fulfilling your mission. Upon yourself and the beloved people of your nation I invoke abundant divine blessings.

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