



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. BARRY DESKER
NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 13 December 2007*

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you as you begin your mission and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Singapore to the Holy See. I am grateful for your kind words and for the greetings you bring from President Sellapan Ramanathan. Please extend to him my respectful good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and prosperity of all the people of your nation.

For over twenty-five years now, the Holy See has enjoyed excellent diplomatic relations with Singapore, and looks forward to strengthening them further in the years ahead. As one of the most developed countries in South-East Asia, Singapore has a significant contribution to make to the economic and social advancement of the region. While many parts of South-East Asia continue to suffer from the effects of poverty, crime, and political unrest, Singapore, as a prosperous, well-ordered and democratic country, gives an important lead that can offer hope and inspiration to others. The Holy See is eager to continue working with your Government in order to promote the well-being of the region and the resolution of conflicts.

Economic success, however, needs a firm ethical grounding if it is to bring lasting benefits to society. Indeed the needs of the person must always be placed at the heart of economic enterprise, since, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, the human person is “the source, the centre, and the purpose of all economic and social life” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 63). Likewise, an authentic democracy is not merely the result of a formal observation of a set of rules, but is “the

fruit of a convinced acceptance of the values that inspire democratic procedures: the dignity of every human person, the respect of human rights, commitment to the common good” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 407). For this reason I encourage your Government in its efforts to involve all citizens and groups to participate in political and social life, for the promotion of those authentic values that lie at the heart of a healthy society.

While Catholics constitute only a small percentage of the population of Singapore, they are happy and willing to play their full part in national life and to contribute to the common good. One particularly important way in which they do so is through the witness of marriage and family life. As the natural community in which human social nature is experienced, the family makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the good of society. Indeed, a healthy state of married and family life is the best guarantee against the damaging effects of individualism or collectivism, because “within the family the person is always at the centre of attention as an end and never as a means” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 213). For this reason, I am confident that your Government will wish to continue safeguarding the vital part played in society by the institution of marriage and by the family.

In championing human rights, the Church is especially concerned to defend the universal rights to life and to religious freedom (cf. *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, 4). The right to life, from conception to natural death, is the first among rights, and the condition for all others. Moreover, the effective recognition of the right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom is one of the most serious duties of every community that truly wishes to ensure the good of the individual and of society. Your Government is known for its commitment to initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue, respect and cooperation between different religious groups, of particular importance in view of the diverse ethnic and religious affiliation of your population. Be assured that the Holy See is also willing to work with your Government in this area in order to promote common objectives.

Recent years have seen a tragic escalation in international terrorism, often linked to religious motives, and South-East Asia has not been spared the effects of this disturbing development. The Holy See firmly rejects the manipulation of religion for political purposes, and especially the attempt to justify violence in this way. This new threat to world peace calls for a renewed commitment on the part of States to the implementation of *international humanitarian law* (cf. *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, 14). The support shown by your Government for global peace-keeping initiatives is a sign of Singapore’s firm resolve to contribute to this worthy goal. The Catholic Church shares the concern of all those who seek to limit the suffering caused by armed conflict, and to promote the peaceful coexistence of peoples and nations.

Your Excellency, I pray that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will further strengthen the fruitful relations between the Holy See and your country. I assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always ready to offer help and support in the fulfilment of

your duties. I invoke upon you, your family, and all the people of Singapore God's abundant blessings.

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