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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SEMINAR ON "BEING AND
BECOMING" PROGRAMME FOR PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS AT TEMASEK
JUNIOR COLLEGE ON MONDAY, 5 DECEMBER '83, AT 9.00 AN

I am very pleased to be present at your seminar for principals and teachers on the Being and Becoming Programme.

Starting in Jan 1984, the religious knowledge subjects Bible Knowledge, Islamic **Religious** Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Hindu Studies, Sikh Studies and Confucian Ethics will be taught to pupils in Sec. 3. Except for Confucian Ethics which will be introduced as a pilot project in 15 schools, the other subjects would be taught in all our schools. There has already been some experience in the teaching of Bible Knowledge and Islamic Religious Knowledge subjects. These two subjects have been available as 'O' level papers for some time. But with the other three subjects, this will be the first time that they are being taught as classroom subjects.

The reasons why the Government has decided to introduce religious knowledge subjects at Sec. 3 and Sec. 4 have been explained before. But it is worthwhile reminding ourselves why religious knowledge subjects are being offered, at the eve of their wide-scale introduction in 1984. First, it is the Government's belief that a knowledge and understanding of one of the great religions would provide a moral foundation for our students and future citizens. Through the study of one of the religious knowledge subjects, they would come to a better appreciation of

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the origins and the precepts of the religion which has profoundly influenced the **civilisations** and cultures of which we are a part. Hopefully, such a study will give the students a historical perspective as well as an understanding of the moral principles which have shaped our society. The example of the founder of the religion, the parables and stories would provide vivid lessons for the students. Coming after eight years of moral education classes, six in primary school and two at Sec. 1 and 2, religious knowledge should provide a fitting complement to what has been taught in the subject Moral Education.

I want to take this opportunity to assure parents that in introducing religious knowledge subjects at Sec. 3 and 4, the Government has no intention that anyone should be converted to one religion or another. This is why the course is called religious knowledge and not religious instruction. The subjects are study subjects and are taught according to a well laid out syllabus and can be offered as 'O' level examination subjects. For the same reason, there will be no prayers, meditation or any form of religious practices or worship allowed in the classroom during the teaching of the subjects. No religious objects or artifacts may be brought into the class room. No teacher will be allowed to use the class room periods for proselytising or evangelising. All the teachers will be regular school teachers. We have briefed all our secondary school principals to ensure that the guidelines I have mentioned are adhered to.

May I now turn to the subject of Moral Education which is the reason why you are all here today. I asked Dr Balhetchet if he could draw from the past two years' experience of having introduced the Being and Becoming programme the lessons which make the teaching of moral education more effective in some schools and less so in others. From his observation which I agree with, the most

important factor is the support, or the lack of it, of the Principal. If the Principal believes in the importance of moral education and sees to it that it is properly taught and given due importance in the class room, the teachers will take their cue from the Principal and also accord the subject attention. The students will respond and thereby benefit from moral education classes. Thus the attitude and interest of the Principal is crucial. He does not have to teach the subject. But he must set the tone by the importance he attaches to the subject.

We have long **recognised** language and mathematics as two of the Basics in school. They are the skills on which the learning of other subjects depend and they are important for living. Moral education is also one of the Basics. In its widest sense, it has to do with the character and behaviour of the person, whether he will turn out to be a good and useful person or one who will become a source of trouble for others and for himself. You will agree that moral education is a vital basic. Apart from the class room teaching of the subject, there are many ways in which moral education can be imparted in the school context, e.g. through ECA, uniformed groups, student councils and projects, community service by the students, etc. **Notwith-** a
standing these, class room teaching of moral education must be given its priority. **It** is an important channel of imparting moral education. **It** must be done as well as possible. a

On that note, I have pleasure now in declaring your seminar open and to wish you a stimulating time in it.

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