

# Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

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**SPEECH BY BG (RES) GEORGE YONG-BOON YEO, MINISTER OF STATE  
(FINANCE) AND (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AT THE ST JOSEPH'S  
INSTITUTION'S PRIZE AND SPEECH DAY (1989)  
ON SATURDAY, 7 OCTOBER 1989 AT 4 PM**

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## Ora et Labora (Pray and Work)

I remember as a student at SJI, when the school was still at Bras Basah Road, the chapel was always crowded at recess time before school exams. Interestingly, the chapel was more crowded than at other times. It was not only Catholic students who prayed. Non-Catholics did too. I shall be surprised if students today are much different.

There's nothing wrong in turning to God when we are in difficulty. It is only natural. Of course prayer alone is not a substitute for hard work. God helps those who help themselves. But work by itself is also not enough because man is a spiritual animal. We are different from the other animals.

Wherever human beings are to be found, in whatever period of history, there is always religion, religion in one form or another. Man must not only work, he must also pray. I am not talking about prayer in the narrow sense of saying, for example, the "Our Father" or the "Hail Mary". I am referring to a certain humility before the processes of the universe, a certain acknowledgement that, despite all that science can discover or technology can invent, there are many things which we will never understand, many things we can never control. We must beware of the arrogance of science, of both the physical and social sciences, which seek sometimes to reduce human beings and

human morality to matters of economics and expediency. The spiritual and moral dimension is absolutely fundamental to the phenomenon of man. This is not the viewpoint of Christianity alone. It is the viewpoint of all religions, of all who fear God.

Hence we must never forget our school motto 'ora et labora' which reminds us to pray as we work.

The Communists deny the existence of any God. That is what atheism means. But they have failed utterly. There is a spiritual vacuum which Communist leaders try to fill by making gods out of their leaders. In the Red Square in Moscow and the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the dead bodies of Lenin and Mao Zedong were embalmed and put in glass caskets for people to see. The mausoleums are like cathedrals. Visitors file in with great solemnity like pilgrims honouring the relics of saints. It is all very pathetic. Now a ear drops off and must be sewn back on. Now an arm rots and must be repaired. Stalin was also embalmed but after he was denounced by Khrushchev in 1956, his body was removed and buried. At least he could now rest in peace. Like Lenin and Mao, the body of Ho Chi Minh is also on display, in Hanoi. Both Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh were adamant when they were still alive that their corpses should not be preserved. But their wishes were not fulfilled because, having banished religion, the Communists needed substitutes. But however hard they try, the atheists are unable to get rid of religion. Now religion is coming back in a big way to Russia, China and Vietnam.

Singapore has a secular government but we are not an atheistic state. The Government does not favour or disfavour any particular religion. It is neutral. This is an important principle because all the major religions of the world are represented here. It is easier to maintain

religious harmony by separating religion from the State, by separating religion from politics. So the Government is secular, but it is certainly not atheistic.

Indeed the moral and spiritual development of Singaporeans is a vital part of our overall national life. How can we be proud of ourselves if we are only economic animals without any sense of compassion or humanity? How can we be a great people if our attitudes are completely amoral or immoral? No society can progress very far without a soul. As our alma mater teaches us as individuals to pray and work so must we as a people learn to pray and work.

To work is to do our very best, to make the most of the talents God has given us, to pursue excellence. To work is also to compete in the marketplace, to be economically productive.

To pray is to understand our limitations, to show concern for others, to share each other's joys and sorrows. It is also to be tolerant of those who are different from us, including those with different religious beliefs.

Just as it is not enough to work, so it is not enough to pray. We must do both. Ora et labora. Pray and work. Then we will be able to set our successes and failures in perspective, and live our lives with a sense of proportion. Only then, in 'life's earnest battle', can we be a people 'valiant and true'.

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