

1950

Pastoral Letter

On Immigration

Archbishops and Bishops of Australia

January 1950

At a recent important Meeting the assembled Archbishops and Bishops of Australia [2742] agreed to set before our people by means of a Pastoral Letter, certain pressing matters connected with Immigration. And, now that we are at the threshold of a New Year, it would seem it is a most fitting time to speak of new and mighty developments for our young land.

Under the Scheme of Mass Migration, so vigorously carried out by the previous [2743] Federal Government, and expected to be continued no less vigorously by the present Government, our population has now passed the eight million mark. In another three years or so it will reach ten million. Whilst in less than another forty years it will have grown to twenty million souls.

Such a spectacular growth of population, whilst truly necessary and most beneficial [2744] for our under-populated country, carries with it great responsibilities for all, and, for our Catholic people, added burdens as well.

Since the future of the Church is in Her children, therefore must every endeavour be [2745] made to give our thousands of new children that Christian education in our own Catholic schools that is at once the strength and the glory of the Australian Church.

Schools, Churches, Orphanages, Hospitals and every kind of Catholic Institution [2746] will have demands made upon them and these demands will have to be met by the enlargement of present buildings and the erection of many new ones.

All this will take heavier toll of our energy and our means. But what a God-given [2747] opportunity is thus presented us in our time to spread the Kingdom of Christ within this Continent that was once called the land of the Holy Ghost.

Demand will be made also, and especially, upon our youth and upon their spirit of [2748] renunciation and self sacrifice. Priests, Brothers and Nuns will have a wider field than hitherto for their unquestioning and untiring labour in the vineyard of the Lord.

In the inscrutable ways of Divine Providence, Australia becomes today, a sanctuary, [2749] a shelter, a home for thousands of the homeless, stateless, persecuted peoples of the old world.

History repeats itself to show again the divine character of God's Church. For when [2750] She is attacked, suffers and is driven from one land, She sets forth for new lands,

and, with perennial life, gains in the New what She lost in the Old.

To the thousands of new Catholics, seeking home and shelter in our Land, the welcoming hand of their fellow-Catholics and brothers in Christ must readily be extended. Patience, kindness, sympathy and practical help must be rendered to all unfailingly and in God's Name. [2751]

Our Holy Father, the Pope, speaks of this as a call for Christian charity, the response to which, shall inspire hope in His heart — the sorrowing heart of the Common Father. [2752]

Great generosity and true unselfishness, then, must be the guiding lights to our people in their unremitting aid to our New Settlers, who would build a home beneath the Southern Cross. [2753]

By genuine friendliness, helpful advice and warm endeavours towards happy social intermingling shall they make more easy and happy the assimilation of our New Settlers into a way of life that is Catholic and Australian. [2754]

Though accommodation may be desperately short everywhere, yet it is here too, and, especially, that there is given a wide field for the practice of true, indeed, heroic unselfishness. [2755]

Let our Catholic people vie with each other in helping those who come amongst us, and of whom, many suffered much for the cause of Faith and Freedom. At long last the dream of reunited family-life seems possible of realization for these stricken, harassed ones. Help them that they may know again in this life the joy of reunion and the comfort and warmth of home. [2756]

Others there are who, coming from the lands of the ancestors of most of us, would start a new life here and give to their children the prospect of prosperity, just as our ancestors gave us the possibility of growing and prospering in this rich young land. [2757]

For the want of a nominator many such prospective New Australians are delayed in coming here. Like those from Europe they have much to give us and we need them. Let us, each and every one, see what we can do to nominate New Settlers. Let us, in each locality, investigate the avenues of employment so that openings shall be found for the many splendid young people who will be brought here under the Government's scheme of unnominated group migration. [2758]

To the young and the not so young of the Mother Countries, to all of all lands who seek the security and freedom that Australia offers, let us be generous. And once they are here let us seek to make them feel at home. We shall kneel beside them in the Church and approach with them to the Altar rails. Let this Holy Bond unite us with them not only in the common participation of the sacred privileges of our mutual Faith, but again outside the Church door, at our parish functions, in their homes, and in ours. Let us greet them, welcome them, share with them and bear with them. [2759]

To sum up - let every Catholic regard it as a solemn duty to help in the placing and absorbing of immigrants into our community and in making them feel at home amongst us. [2760]

In particular -

* Have sympathy towards them: do not think or speak of them as foreigners; they are now true Australians who are prepared to love Australia as their new Country and Australians as their new fellow-citizens.

* Remember that their language difficulty may be a handicap, but should not be a barrier between them and us. Help them to overcome their difficulty and have patience with them in their efforts to learn.

* Be tolerant of their customs which differ from our own. In time they will learn our ways and adopt them. Help them to understand our customs.

* As some of them move from place to place or come to the Parish before the Pastor may know, introduce them to the Parish Priest as soon as possible.

* Be on the alert for strangers coming to the Parish Church and make it your business to speak to them and make them feel welcome.

* Inform your Parish Priest or local immigration committee of openings for employment and/or of accommodation available.

The future of Australia, the plight of Europe's homeless peoples, the needs and aspirations of our kinsmen abroad, all are a challenge to our patriotism, our charity, our catholicity. [2761]

Let us give of our best. We shall be enriched for our hospitality. We shall show gratitude to God for His wondrous gifts to us, of Faith, of Freedom, of Unconquered Homeland. [2762]

Source: Archives of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), Canberra, Australia.
