

1985

Address

The Pope Feels in His Duty

Given in the Hall of Consistories

John Paul II

17 October 1985

My Lord Cardinal, dear brothers and sisters,

[1060]

1. The Pope feels in his duty to welcome in the best manner possible, in his home, those who are so deeply concerned with the welcome of strangers, of migrants. In the course of these study days, your World Congress of the pastoral of emigration is seeking to get to the roots, not only of the problems of welcoming, but also of the integration of migrants. I trust that your fraternal exchanges, your clear analyses of the situations, your evangelical reflections and your theoretical and practical orientations may serve as a stimulant for all those, priests, religious and laity, who contribute to this integration in the Church and in society.

As you know, as part of my responsibility, I am very anxious to ensure that everyone should fit wholly into the unity of the Church which is respectful of diversity. I am happy therefore to offer you my encouragement and to touch on certain aspects which could throw additional light on the complexity of your labours.

[1061]

2. It has been your wish to develop the idea that the ecclesial integration of immigrants is the exercise of an essential right which relates to liberty and personal fulfilment. I myself said in the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*: “Man has the right to leave his country of origin for various motives—as also to return there—and to seek better conditions of life in another country” (n. 23). This experience can only be positive if the emigrant—for reasons of work—benefits from an economic, social and ecclesial integration which allows him worthy conditions of life and progress, whilst at the same time respecting his personality and his roots. The whole problem, therefore, is knowing how this “right” can be exercised.

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3. But before going on, I would draw your attention to other aspects of the question, so that everything might be considered in a just, balanced and realistic manner.

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In itself, such an emigration often constitutes a drama; it is a trial, one could even say, under certain aspects, an evil, a necessary evil. This is true for the person who emigrates and for his family which generally goes through a difficult phase, with all the risks of uprooting; it is true for his own country deprived of a subject who enriches its life, its culture, its drive. In itself, one would be tempted to wish that migrants might be able to return freely to their own fatherland.

[1064]

Even more so, if it is a matter of refugees who have had to undergo displacement to flee from fear, from war, from injustice or from ideological oppression, the best solution - as I have already had occasion to say - is, over and above the praiseworthy and necessary efforts for integration, voluntary repatriation with the guarantee of security (cf. discourse at Yaounde, 12 August 1985, n. 12; cf. also the address to the Diplomatic Corps, 15 January 1983, n. 6). [1065]

Therefore one cannot, a priori, consider all emigration as a positive fact, to be sought or promoted. [1066]

Another remark of a general character is that, in this field as in others, one cannot speak of “right” for the migrant or for the receiving country, without speaking of “duties”, of reciprocal duties. And if the receiving country should assume its duty of helping migrants to live - above all when it is a matter of granting them the right of asylum which is a strict right - it can appeal to the solidarity of other countries, so as not to be alone in having to carry the cost which would be beyond its own resources and would imperil the common good of its own subjects which is its first duty. [1067]

But these considerations having been ventilated in order to keep the argument at a responsible level, it remains true that emigration, especially for reasons of work, is an ever more extensive phenomenon in our modern societies, a phenomenon, destined without doubt to increase since the search for work or better living conditions involves the need to move from one place to another. At the same time one is witnessing the permanent nature of the emigrants’ situation: most of them, and above all those of the second generation, want to remain in the country where they have finally found security in a fuller life than in their country of origin. This implies that they should be able to fit in to their new place, to integrate the best way possible. And this has been the object of your deliberations. [1068]

Yet again, some good can be extracted from the trial of emigration: the advance towards a society that is culturally more rich in its diversity and, let us hope, more open in its fraternal relations. It seems in effect that, in the technically advanced countries, there is a movement towards pluri-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. In this sense, migration can even be an opportunity for progress. But under what conditions? [1069]

4. What you are looking at are precisely difficulties of integration, the obstacles it encounters and the temptations that may arise on either side. Just as it is necessary to avoid the possibility of migrants living totally alongside other people, forming a world apart, neither must they let themselves be “assimilated”, absorbed, to the point of being dissolved into the surrounding society, renouncing their original riches, their identity. Everything must be done so that they may participate, with their own heritage, in the common cultural, spiritual and human good of the national community which they have joined. This pre-suppose openness, mutual respect, dialogue, exchange and participation among all the partners. [1070]

Those who welcome them should be attentive not only to the needs but also to the personality of the migrants; they must understand the demands of sharing and [1071]

respect, banishing all spirit of self-sufficiency pride and egoism, reminding themselves that all goods have a universal destiny, that all workers and their families have the right to the same guarantees offered by the law. This spirit of equity is all the more necessary when the rejection of the stranger is a strong temptation at a time when the industrialised country is experiencing a major economic crisis, involving unemployment, especially if a racist ideology, seeks to justify this instinctive protective action.

Those who arrive in a new country have, for their part, to overcome innumerable handicaps among which are frequently those of language, cultural uprooting, precarious living conditions and administrative measures. Neither must they give into the temptation of closing in on themselves in a “ghetto” kind of life in a sort of isolation or inferiority complex. At the same time, they should demonstrate peacefully, their fidelity to their origins, and especially their fidelity to their faith. [1072]

5. In all this, the Church has a leading educative role to play amongst the people, the leaders and the structures of society, in order to enlighten public opinion and stimulate consciences. But she herself must be bear witness to the quality of integration that she practices in her own bosom. Is she not the “sacrament of unity”, welcoming diversity in unity, giving testimony to the reconciliation that Christ obtained through his cross. More fully than other social groups, Catholic communities should experience this dynamic of fraternal unity and respect for differences. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, they should work ceaselessly to build up a people of brothers, speaking the language of love, to be a ferment in the construction of human unity, of a civilization of love. [1073]

May pastors work to this end. May they constantly appeal for and educate to dialogue, fighting against the weight of mentalities and habits that are contrary to this way of welcoming the “brother stranger”. Certainly, the Church has foreseen the stages and links in the process of this ecclesial integration: personal parishes, chaplaincies, missions cum cura animarum. These stages are often necessary; however, the risk must be avoided of closing them, in on themselves and thus damaging the indispensable exchanges. But also, in the name of unity, one must not precipitate certain legitimate evolutions which need time; this would be to deprive oneself of the patrimonies which should enrich and fecundate a common way of existing, the art of “living together”. [1074]

6. As for migrants for whom there can be no immediate question yet of ecclesial integration, let the Church, mother and educator, remind all of the right which is theirs to wish to remain themselves in the new conditions of living, equally bound to others by their common purpose, not being reduced to the simple role of tools of production, taking part in the social life of the nation and even, in certain instances, in its political life. There is a lot to do so that migrants may benefit from a statute giving them the right to live their originality in the context of national solidarity. This is more complex and more authentic than a simple provision for “naturalization”. [1075]

7. On all these points the Church will make herself the voice of those who have no voice, the good samaritan attentive to the difficult situations, not content with [1076]

paternal gestures, but helping migrants to assume responsibility for themselves. She will be the image and the leaven of a fraternal community.

It is your honour to participate in a special way in this, leading your brothers and sisters and the Christian communities in an examination of conscience and an action which respond to the avowal of Jesus: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt 25, 35). I trust that you will not be content with removing the obstacles or with whatever has to be done, but that, humble and aware of the vastness of the task, you may not fail to bring into relief the magnificent efforts that have already been attempted or made in many places, so as to encourage them. Is not this the best way of stimulating the desired integration. [1077]

I implore for you and those you represent, the graces of illumination and of the strength of the Holy Spirit and, with all my heart I bless you.

Source: *Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II given in the Hall of Consistories*. *People on the Move: A Compendium of Church Documents on the Pastoral Care Concern for Migrants and Refugees* (1988): 43-45.
