

1990

Message

**Proselytizing of Migrants by Sects  
is a Challenge the Church must Meet**

*For World Migrants' Day 1990*

*John Paul II*

25 July 1990

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

[1179]

1. I would like to reflect with you on the occasion of World Migration Day on a problem which is increasingly becoming a cause for concern: so many migrants are exposed to the risk of losing their Christian faith by the work of sects and new religious movements which are continuously spreading. Some of these groups call themselves Christian: others take their inspiration from Eastern religions: others still echo some of the most revolutionary ideologies of our day.

2. While it is hard to pick out a common content which runs through all of them, it is nevertheless possible to identify a general tendency. In these movements salvation is considered to be a prerogative of only a small group, led by superior individuals, who believe they have a special relationship with a God whose secrets only they claim to know. Their search for the sacred itself takes on an ambiguous form. For some of them it is a search for higher values towards which man strives without ever being able to attain them; for others it is situated within the realm of the magical; they try to draw it within their own sphere to manipulate it and make it serve their purposes. [1180]

3. The sects and the new religious movements today place before the Church a noteworthy pastoral challenge both because of the spiritual and social malaise into which their roots reach, as well as because of the religious elements, which they use as instruments. These elements, taken out of their context in Catholic doctrine and tradition, are often employed for purposes far removed from their original scope. The widespread millenarianism, for example, evokes the themes of Christian eschatology and the problems related to human destiny: the desire to give a religious response to political and economic issues unmasks the tendency to manipulate a true sense of God, resulting in fact in the exclusion of God from human life; the almost aggressive zeal with which certain people seek new recruits by going from house to house or stopping passersby at street corners, is a bogus sectarian version of apostolic missionary zeal; the attention shown the individual and the importance given to his or her contribution to the cause and the growth of the religious group does not stem from the desire to make good use of one's own life by feeling useful to the community to which a person belongs, but rather constitutes a deformed expression of the active role which is proper to believers, living members of Christ's body, called to work for the spread of God's Kingdom. [1181]

4. The growth of the sects and new religious movements has marked out certain [1182]

strategic areas in which its efforts are concentrated: among them is the area of migrants. Because of the situation of social and cultural uprootedness and because of the precariousness of their living situations, migrants are easy prey for insistent and aggressive methods. As people who are deprived of their place in the society of their home country and aliens in the society to which they have come, as persons forced often to live outside of the objective order which should protect their rights, migrants pay for their need for help and their desire to escape from the fringes to which they have been relegated by abandoning their faith. It is a price which every person who respects human rights should be careful not to ask of anyone nor accept. Not only is the migrant's human dignity harmed, but injured also is his or her positive and rightful place within the social habitat which accepts the migrant. And when people approach migrants at a time of deep distress to entrap and manipulate them it is certainly not an indication of honesty or sensitivity on the part of those who have a duty to lessen the migrant's trauma and disorientation which result from the impact to a world foreign to their own culture.

5. The new religious movements base their recruiting efforts on two weak points: precariousness and uncertainty. That is what they use in their strategy for making overture. By offering them care and a number of indispensable services they seek to make the migrant abandon the faith which he or she professes and join a new religious group. Presenting themselves as the only ones who possess the truth, they assert that the religion which the migrants belong to is false and demand that the migrant make a sharp and immediate change of course. No one is blind to the fact that this constitutes real and true moral aggression, which is difficult to shake off in a polite fashion, since their ardour and insistence are harrasing. [1183]

6. The teachings of the sects and of the new religious movements, dear Migrants, are contrary to the doctrine of the Catholic Church; thus, to join them would mean to renounce the faith in which you are baptized and raised. The Gospel urges us to be simple as doves, yet it also invites us to be as prudent and shrewd as serpents. The same vigilance which you use in regard to material things so as not to be victimized by the schemes of would-be exploiters, must also guide you against the pitfalls and snares of those who try to undermine your faith. "See that no one deceives you," the Lord warns. "Many will come in my name and will deceive many; ... If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is the Messiah! Look, there He is!,' do not believe it. False prophets and false messiahs will arise" (Mk 13:6-7; 21-22). And He says as well: "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them" (Mt 7:15-16). [1184]

7. Other reasons which can lead to an acceptance of the tenets of these new religious movements are the poor consistency with which many of the baptized live out their Christian commitment and also their desire for a more intense religious life which they hope to experience within a certain sect; this arise when the community which they attend is inactive. [1185]

But it is a trick. One master the malaise mentioned earlier through a genuine conversion according to the Gospel and not by acritically joining groups of this sort which adopt religious rites that cover up the inertia of their hearts by the roar of their words. A serious spiritual renewal is needed and consistent conformity to God's will in following Christ; for contrariwise it is misleading to observe this or [1186]

that isolated and odd precept, upon which one's whole destiny in life and death become dependent.

8. The Church is called to carry out a task of welcoming and of service towards migrants. The condition of uprootedness in which they live and the insensitivity with which their environment reacts to them in fact tend to relegate them to society's fringes. For this very reason the Church has to engage in more intense activity, increase her vigilance, put in motion intelligently and intuitively all the proper initiatives to counteract that tendency and avoid the risks which are its consequence. It is the church's constant task to contribute towards tearing down all the barriers that human selfishness places in the way of the weakest. [1187]

9. The Catholic migrant, whatever his or her destination, is an integral part of the local Church. He or she is an effective member of that Church, with all consequent rights and duties. The welcome which the local Church accords these people is a witness and a proof of her catholicity. In the Church there are no strangers. In fact, through Baptism the Christian is a full-fledged member of the Christian community in the area in which he or she is living. The community must lay claim to them as members, not so much in order to assert its rights but rather to offer a service to the humble. The migrant's difficult situation should open up people's hearts to offer welcome and should prompt them to respond to their needs with greater attention. Their precarious state on which the sects and the religious movements concentrate in seeking to ensnare the faith of migrants must be seen by the Church to be opportunities for giving priority attention and assistance to them. These offers of aid which the migrant often pays for by renouncing the faith, must be offered to him or her by the Church gratuitously and with concern, glad to be of service to Christ Himself. As Jesus is the transparent image of the Father's love, so the Church must be the image of the tender care of the Redeemer; therefore it should be obvious that the community where the migrants alight is a community which can welcome and love them. May the community of Christ's followers never greet them with a long face indicating that they are a bother in the course of one's daily endeavours and duties, but rather greet them with the joyful face of one who has met Christ, whom they had been waiting for and whom they recognized in the face of the stranger. [1188]

10. A commitment to human development is only one of the components of pastoral activity. No less important is the Christian formation through the proclamation of the truths of the faith and the proclamation of those final realities towards which Christian hope is directed. The migrant has the right and the Church has the duty to meet his or her needs in this area as well. This is no ordinary ministry common to the general body of believers, but a specific ministry, suited to the situation of uprootedness typical of the migrants who are forced to live far away from their home communities; a ministry which must take into account their language and especially their culture in which they express their faith; a ministry which, as the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* insists, "must be in proportion to the needs (of the migrants) and no less effective than that enjoyed by the faithful of the diocese" (*Titulus Primus*, pars I). [1189]

11. The faith is one, but the ways of living it can vary according to different cultural traditions. Faith cannot be communicated and developed except through the multiple channels of human culture. To ignore that need and to force migrants to live their faith in unfamiliar ways is to force them into self-emargination, with its [1190]

consequences for and dangers to the faith. That is true not only for individuals, but also for groups, since the communitarian dimension is indispensable to the faith experience. The presence of attractive ethnic communities within which each individual can live and express himself or herself is helpful.

12. The Church has various resources for responding to these pastoral needs. [1191]  
Certainly the most important and the one most recommended is the personal parish on which the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* expresses a positive judgement. “All know the benefit which such parishes, regularly attended by migrants, have offered to souls and to dioceses; all hold them in high and well-merited esteem” we see that personal parishes have aided more than any other initiatives in safeguarding migrants’ faith from the many dangers with which they come into contact. Ethnic communities, formed over time, have made a noteworthy contribution to the renewal and enhancement of the Church as welcomer. Thus one could state that a wise structuring of a ministry to migrants helps confirm the objective capacity of the Local Church to live out Christ’s teachings in their fullness.

13. Dear Migrants, “Stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong” (1 Cor [1192]  
16:13). The exhortation of Paul the Apostle echoes the admonition of the Lord who invites us to base our lives on the solid rock which is He Himself. Salvation is assured by Jesus, the Son of God. Only those who are firmly rooted in Him can bear fruit which resist the erosion of every type of fad, including that of the religious sects. Gratitude for God’s gift expressed by the response of a coherent Christian life, will bring you the additional gifts of communion with Him and perseverance in your faithful Christian commitment. “Whoever loves Me will be loved by My Father: I will love him and reveal Myself to him” (Jn. 14:21) and “For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich” (Mt 25:29). To the extent that you move forward in living the Christian life, you will increasingly shelter yourself from the traps which life in wait for your faith.

May the Virgin Mary whom you have learned to know and love since childhood [1193]  
within your families and to whom you have certainly had recourse many times during difficult moments watch over you and help you to journey with courage, fidelity and consistency along the path of Christian perfection begun at Baptism.

I bless all of you with all my heart in the name of the Most Holy Trinity: Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit.

From the Vatican, 25 July 1990, the twelfth year of my Pontificate.

**Joannes Paulus PP. II**

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Source: *Pope John Paul’s Message for World Migrant’s Day “Proselytizing of Migrants by Sects is a Challenge the Church Must Meet.”* OR-EE (August 6, 1990): 1, 11.

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