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Letter to Card. Sebastiano Baggio, President of the Pontifical  
Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

**Missionaries of the Same Language and  
Mentality as the Immigrants**

*Card. Agostino Casaroli*  
*Secretary of State*

28 September 1982

Your Eminence,

[981]

As we approach the celebrations for “Migrant’s Day”, which the Episcopal Conferences of the various countries will arrange during the new liturgical year, the Supreme Pontiff would once again like to send his personal message of encouragement and incitement. Therefore, through the authority of Your Eminence, I address this message to our men and women, to lay collaborators and to all those who move and work in the vast world of emigration.

Conscious of the various problems that affect this human phenomenon and aware of [982] the frequent gravity of these problems, the Holy Father would like to stress some aspects that concern the specific finality of the ecclesial presence of the structures and organism for the pastoral of emigration, by emphasizing the provident function for which they are destined in the present context of the migratory movement, tested as they are by real experience.

His Holiness wishes above all to confirm what he asserted in his Encyclical [983] *Laborem Exercens*: every effort must be made to ensure that the sad, but under certain aspects necessary, phenomenon of emigration for work “ does not cause greater damage in the moral sense, indeed so that, as far as possible, it should even bring a blessing into the personal, family and social life of the emigrant, as far as both the country in which he arrives is concerned, and also the homeland he is leaving ” (no. 23).

Even though this appeal is destined principally to those who have the power to [984] remedy the evils that have their origin in an emigration that is in some way forced, it must find a generous echo both in the Churches they are leaving and in those where they are arriving. This must be in relation to the religious and moral needs of the emigrants as well as to those necessities that concern the whole of their human and social condition.

Although considerable progress has been made in the juridical recognition of the [985] rights of the migrant, there is still the tendency to see him principally as an instrument of production and, what is more, to see him with the negative connotation of foreign competition.

This is a deformation of the concept of worker, largely due to the basic anomaly - [986] formerly denounced by John XXIII in "Pacem in Terris" - that obliges work to go in search of capital, while precisely the opposite should occur. In this way there is a strengthening of the unjust presumption that the migrant worker has been given everything for the simple fact that he has been offered an opportunity to work, even though the conditions of his, always more or less traumatic, transplantation in a foreign land, his privations and his family problems, his indispensable needs as a man in the full sense of the word, are neglected.

Therefore, this basic principle must be re-affirmed once again: "the hierarchy of [987] values, the profound sense of the work itself demand that capital must be for work and not work for capital" (Laborem exercens, no. 23). During his Pastoral visit to Leghorn on 19th March this year, the Holy Father again said, "the world entrusted to man by the Creator always and in every part of the earth, and in the midst of every society and nation, is the 'world of work'. World of work' means at the same time 'human world'" ("L'Osservatore Romano", 21 March 1982, p. 2).

Of this world those who emigrate, like other workers, are protagonists in the full [988] sense of the word. The Churches of the countries of immigration must make every effort so that they may be truly recognized as such. They must be the first to feel solidarity for these less fortunate brothers, and must work ceaselessly, as they laudably do, so that the Christian mentality of the "heartly welcome" (cf. Paul VI, Populorum Progressio, no. 69) may take root in the mind of the people, and flower in practical acts of justice and equity.

It is not lawful to separate Christ from the world of work, nor to separate Him from [989] the world of emigration.

The knowledge of this imperative is like the pole-star of those who work, with [990] genuine and conscious vocation, in the migratory pastoral. Their zeal constantly translates into reality the affirmation contained in Laborem Exercens: " Christ belongs to the world of work; He shows recognition and respect for human work; one may say even more: He looks with love on this work, on its various manifestations, seeing in each one a particular line of man's likeness to God, the Creator and Father" (no. 26).

Pastoral action among emigrant workers tends to make them inspire their life with [991] the light, example and the love of Christ; it encourages them to see work not as an impediment or an excuse that absolves them from the practice of their religions and from the profession of their faith, but as a way of strengthening and illuminating their Christian life; this will help to maintain their legitimate pride in their cultural identity, which, when it is dutifully conserved as the appropriate vehicle for the expression of faith, becomes also an incentive for them to understand, respect and value the identity of others, in a truly Catholic vision.

A climate of mutual acceptance between immigrants and inhabitants of the area [992] allows a deeper catechesis of work and mutual enrichment. Since it favours the establishment of fraternity, friendship and solidarity, that climate makes easier and more fruitful the discourse on the paternity of God and on the Christian vision of

work, understood as the harmonious continuation of the creative action of God, in union with Christ. In this perspective, from being a simple source of earnings, work is transformed into a means of friendly and fraternal ties, a source of relief in the sufferings and disappointments which, aggravated by the fact that they cannot provide for their families who are often far away, may cast emigrants into dejection and depression.

It is in fact in the family that the emigrant worker finds his proper fulfilment. No matter how it is touched by the migratory event, the family is the privileged object of the maternal solicitude of the Church. It is to the family that the Supreme Pontiff has dedicated His message for the “Migrant’s Day” for the last two years or so, while eminent pastors of the Churches of immigration, gathered in the Synod of Bishops, have not failed to expound the drama of the families of emigrants and the other still more tragic drama, of refugee families. [993]

From the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*, promulgated by Pius XII on 1st August 1952 (AAS 44 [1952], pp. 649-704) to the subsequent pontifical interventions up to the present day, a considerable patrimony of doctrine and of practical directives has been offered, in keeping with the duty of all those who, on any level, work in this pastoral. [994]

In the context of the natural right to emigration, the Instruction *De pastoralis migratorum cura*, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops on 22nd August 1969, makes its own the conciliar affirmation according to which "in decisions affecting migrants their right to live together as a family must be safeguarded" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 11), and it emphasises how one must take account of the needs of the family "above all as regards the house, the education of the children, the conditions of work, social security and taxation" (no. 7: AAS 61, [1969], p. 617). [995]

A special call with regards to this recurs in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*: "The families of emigrants", observes the Supreme Pontiff, "must be able to find their homeland everywhere in the Church. And this is a deeply rooted task for the Churches, since it is a sign of unity in diversity" (no. 77). In this way families can more easily develop their prerogative of "domestic church", realize that relationship of solidarity and of communion with other families, which becomes particularly fertile if it is strengthened by faith which instills an awareness of the love of Christ and of His providence. [996]

It is this awareness, in the end, that makes individual migrant families into true Christian communities, a living and vital part of the Church in which they have their abode. [997]

The local Churches concretely realize the Church’s image through the articulation of the parishes, which “in a certain way represent the visible Church as it is established throughout the world” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 42); they are “God’s family” (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 6), a “brotherhood animated by one and the same spirit” (*Lumen gentium*, no. 28). [998]

Beyond the territorial disposition and in harmony with it, the Holy See has met the specific needs of migrants—as it has done with other groups of believers who are not able to use even partially the instruments of the ordinary pastoral—with institutions of a personal radius and character. Since the promulgation of *Exsul Familia*, such are the personal parishes and missions with the care of souls, whose aim is to offer the non-indigenous faithful of the place, “whether they be immigrants or just in transit, a pastoral care corresponding to their needs and not inferior to that of the other faithful of the diocese” (AAS, 44 [1952], p. 692). In harmony with the directives of the II Vatican Council (cf. *Christus Dominus*, nos. 16, 18, 23), the above-mentioned Instruction *De pastoralis migratorum cura* repropose the same organisms as bearer structures and adds to them the “simple mission” and the office of “Missionary Vicar”(nos. 3941: AAS 61 [1969], pp. 633-635). [999]

Undoubtedly it is extremely difficult to attune territorial needs to personal ones. It is precisely for this reason that the programme provided for the pastoral care of emigrants in its various alternative formulas has been entrusted to the generous collaboration of the Church of arrival - directly responsible - with those of departure. This collaboration is destined to give abundant fruits. [1000]

Personal parishes and missions with the care of souls become ecclesial communities of easier articulation and amalgamation for individuals, families and groups. In the parishes, associations and specific movements, of various different natures, may then polarize, supported by priests, religious men and women and lay people from the emigrants’ Countries or, in any case, people acquainted with their language and mentality, in connection with the local pastoral. In every parish in fact “the Church of Christ is truly present and operative” (*Christus Vominus*, no. 11), and it helps the need for community life to express itself in organizations modelled on those of the distant homeland and willing to adapt to the environment. [1001]

The already age-old experience in the field of migrations attests that the typical phenomenon of the gathering together in associations springs in some way from the community nucleus that is the first to assert itself and tends to rely on it. [1002]

In the present historical moment of migratory reality the associations may turn out to be of considerable and sometimes determinative importance with regard to the efficaciousness of the pastoral action. [1003]

The Supreme Pontiff is deeply interested in the associations and movements that pursue apostolic ends or in various forms cooperate in the mission of salvation. So also he is proudly concerned with those that are distinguished for their character of promotion and defence of the rights of workers. [1004]

The Christian vision of man, of life and of history must exercise its beneficial influence on the workers’ effort for solidarity, above every frontier, and it must contribute to that “civilization of love” which Paul VI, whom we remember with affection and veneration, assigned as a binding plan to humanity now marching in the midst of formidable problems towards the conclusion of the second Christian [1005]

millennium.

At the end of these reflections I would like to express the confidence of the Supreme Pontiff that those who are devoted to the apostolate in the field of emigration may be nourished by it so as to fortify their missionary spirit more and more and intensify their provident activity His Holiness likewise expresses his hope that in every country affected by the movement of migration, the sacred Pastors will not cease to favour, with all means possible and with exemplary solicitude, an adequate presence of missionaries of the same language and mentality as the immigrants, according to the forms proposed and warmly recommended by the Apostolic See. [1006]

With this confidence and hope, the Holy Father, affectionately close to the anxieties, to the just aspirations and to the sufferings of his dear children who people the roads of emigration, and in particular way to the sufferings of those who bear the heaviest burdens, imparts to all his heartfelt Apostolic Blessing, and prays that divine favours may be bestowed upon them. [1007]

May I take this opportunity to renew my deep respect and veneration.

Your devoted servant in Jesus Christ,

**Agostino Card. Casaroli**  
Secretary of State

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Source: *Letter Signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State for Migrant's Day: "Missionaries of the Same Language and Mentality as the Immigrants."* On the Move, 14:40 (1984): 143-150.

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