

1983

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

Migrants' Situation a Challenge to Christian Vocation

Card. Agostino Casaroli
Secretary of State

11 August 1983

Your Eminence, [1008]

The approach of the liturgical Advent and, with it, the celebration of "Migrants' Day" in the local Churches, provide the Holy Father with the much desired opportunity of sending, as is his custom, to all those who are variously involved in migration, a message which he knows is awaited and will be gratefully welcomed.

This year the Supreme Pontiff cannot but refer to the Extraordinary Jubilee of the Redemption, which the Catholic family is fervently living throughout the world. [1009]

First in the preceding announcement of this extraordinary event, and then in the Bull of Indiction, His Holiness has affirmed that, due to the transforming power of the Redemption, the Jubilee "must be none other than an ordinary year celebrated in an extraordinary way" (Speech of 23 December 1982, n.3; Bull *Aperite Portas Redemptori* n.3). He illustrated, together with its spiritual significance, also its human dimension, especially with regard to the many men and women, sisters and brothers, who suffer, referring particularly to their unhappy inheritance of privation, anxiety and pain, a situation that can leave no one indifferent (cf. Speech, n. 6) because it must be seen in the light of the Redemption, to which all are called to give their own contribution of participation and love. [1010]

It is above all from this point of view that Migrants' Day assumes a special meaning in the climate of the Jubilee Year. [1011]

2. The Supreme Pontiff is confident that his call to spiritual and moral renewal in this time of grace will find a deep response in the hearts of all Catholic emigrants, in their families and in their parish and missionary communities. [1012]

The ecclesiastical institutes envisaged and recommended by the Holy See for the specific pastoral care of migrants will certainly make every effort to ensure that the Jubilee spirit imbues all levels of the migrant reality. They will also not neglect to stimulate and encourage any lay efforts for this purpose, especially those of an apostolic and educational nature, whose contribution is considered, as is every other ecclesiastical activity, to be in its own way indispensable. [1013]

Looking with love on the migrant world, recalling its aspirations, its problems and its bondage, the Holy Father particularly desires that from the Year of the [1014]

Redemption a new and effective pledge of fraternity should arise. From this point of view, his message is addressed not only to the emigrant groups, but also to the communities, especially those of Catholic and Christian tradition, in which the emigrants have become incorporated.

3. In spite of great progress achieved in the relations with brothers of different origin, there persist in many places, and often in troublesome forms, negative phenomena which are usually described with the unhappy word “xenophobia”, a word alien to the biblical and Christian language, in which the exact opposite “philoxenia” is repeatedly exalted, in the sense of open and cordial hospitality. [1015]

Saint Paul speaks of it in a commanding statement: “If any of the saints are in need, you must share with them; and you should make hospitality your special care” (Rom 12:13). The same concept is expressed by Peter in a most lively and practical statement: “Welcome each other into your houses without grumbling” (Pt 4:9). In the Letter to the Hebrews it is underlined that a mysterious design may be hidden in this brotherly behaviour: “And remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:2). In this quotation the Greek text specifically means hospitality as welcoming strangers. [1016]

The absurd concept expressed in the term “xenophobia” is a direct contradiction of the Christian sentiment. From the prejudiced mentality which it expresses – based first on egoism and then on jealousy, or rather the fear that the man coming from outside, even though desired and requested for some material services, could alter or endanger the identity of the host society-attitudes of difference are developed capable of becoming real hostility and quite often processes of rejection, however disguised. [1017]

For Migrants’ Day in this Jubilee Year the Holy Father urgently invites the Christian communities involved in the migration phenomenon to meditate deeply and seriously on the evangelical needs of their immigrating brothers. They should examine with extreme sincerity the quality of the fraternity of their welcome. They should try to discover clear and suitable means from any suggestion of compromise, capable of assuring the penetration into all sectors of society, especially those of culture and work, of the Gospel mentality of hospitality towards those who, born under another sky, belong to another ethnic and national stock. [1018]

The immigrant dimension therefore presents a challenge, which Christians above all must consider to be a test of the authenticity and truth of their vocation. It must find a place in the ordinary catechesis, aimed at developing the great message of the beatitudes and the entire teaching of Christ, who wished to identify himself also with the stranger. This message remains completely valid in the conditions of the industrial life typical of our times. While many external circumstances change, man continues to be the bearer of a dignity which God loves because it derives from his own very image, and to which he reserves the fruits of the Redemption carried out by Christ, and continually applied by the Church. [1019]

The migrant fact must be continually analyzed in the perspective of the divine plan of Redemption, which cannot fail to promote the dignity of man, with the [1020]

recognition of the sacred and inviolable rights which spring from human nature.

5. If we then emphasize the aspect of reconciliation proper to the Jubilee spirituality, we cannot escape from the imperative which Saint Paul, valiant upholder of the universality of the Redemption, proclaims in a hymn of joy. These phenomena are radically contrary to the Gospel teaching and also to the sense of universality which, in today's world, distinguishes ever more sharply the effort to weave reciprocal relations among peoples. [1021]

In nations tormented by these troublesome manifestations, the Catholic Bishops have not failed to take a definite position with repeated warnings, often in praiseworthy solidarity with representatives of non-Catholic creeds and denominations. Warmly appreciating these interventions, His Holiness desires to lend further weight to them with his word as universal pastor. He wishes therefore to declare once more that it is not enough to stigmatize and fight every xenophobic tendency. It is necessary to build up fraternity positively. It is necessary to make this sense of brotherhood ever more solid at the grassroots level, working tirelessly to illuminate consciences with the light of the Christian message. [1022]

Before the wonder of the union which springs from the peacemaking virtue of the Blood of Christ: "He has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, that is hostility... later he came to bring the good news of peace, peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near at hand" (Eph 2:14, 17). [1023]

From this lofty vision the Apostle draws the necessary conclusion that there be no longer strangers or even guests, being all united in brotherhood in a single citizenship "of the saints and part of God's household" (ibid., 2;19). [1024]

The Holy Father is aware of the complex problems which arise in real life situations, beginning with those which occur at the level of faith. He reaffirms, however, that an atmosphere of real life situations, beginning with those which occur at the level of faith. He reaffirms, however, that an atmosphere of real fraternity is indispensable to their solution, indeed it is the only means through which solutions complying with charity and justice can be reached, so as to give a more human aspect to modern migration. [1025]

Universal brotherhood must be the object of communal prayer, which gives strength to every good human aspiration. His Holiness expresses the desire that in the Jubilee celebrations adequate space be assigned to the theme of universal fraternity as the object of an individual and collective examination of conscience, and as a gift to be fervently sought from the Lord for the good of all migrants, especially the poorest and those most in need. [1026]

Entrusting Your Eminence with this heartfelt message, the Holy Father is happy to give his special Apostolic Blessing to all those who, in every continent and nation, make up the migrant family, assuring them one more of his sincere regard and fatherly affection. [1027]

I remain,

Devotedly yours in Christ,

Agostino Card. Casaroli

Source: *Letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State, on behalf of John Paul II, to the resident of Pontifical Commission for Migrants: "Migrant's Situation a Challenge to Christian Vocation."* OR-EE (September 26, 1983): 10.
