

2005

Message

Migrations: A Sign of the Times

For the 92nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2006)

Benedict XVI

18 October 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

[1792]

Forty years ago the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was closed, whose rich teaching covers many areas of ecclesial life. In particular the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* made a careful analysis of the complexities of the world today, seeking the ways best suited to bring the Gospel message to the men and women of today.

To this end the Council Fathers in response to the appeal of Bl. John XXIII undertook to examine the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel so as to offer the new generations the possibility of responding adequately to the eternal questions about this life and the life “to come and about just social relations” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4). [1793]

One of the recognizable signs of the times today is undoubtedly migration, a phenomenon which during the century just ended can be said to have taken on structural characteristics, becoming an important factor of the labour market worldwide, a consequence among other things of the enormous drive of globalization. [1794]

Naturally in this “sign of the times” various factors play a part. They include both national and international migration, forced and voluntary migration, legal and illegal migration, subject also to the scourge of trafficking in human beings. [1795]

Nor can the category of foreign students, whose numbers increase every year in the world, be forgotten. [1796]

With regard to those who emigrate for economic reasons, a recent fact deserving mention is the growing number of women involved (“feminization”). In the past it was mainly men who emigrated, although there were always women too, but these emigrated in particular to accompany their husbands or fathers or to join them wherever they were. [1797]

Today, although numerous situations of this nature still exist, female emigration tends to become more and more autonomous. Women cross the border of their homeland alone in search of work in another country. Indeed, it often happens that the migrant woman becomes the principal source of income for her family. It is a fact that the presence of women is especially prevalent in sectors that offer low salaries. If, then, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, this is even more so in the case of women. [1798]

The most common employment opportunities for women, other than domestic work, consist in helping the elderly, caring for the sick and work in the hotel sector. These, too, are areas where Christians are called to dedicate themselves to assuring just treatment for migrant women out of respect for their femininity in recognition of their equal rights. [1799]

In this context it is necessary to mention trafficking in human beings - especially women - which flourishes where opportunities to improve their standard of living or even to survive are limited. It becomes easy for the trafficker to offer his own “services” to the victims, who often do not even vaguely suspect what awaits them. In some cases there are women and girls who are destined to be exploited almost like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry, too. [1800]

Though I cannot here closely examine the analysis of the consequences of this aspect of migration, I make my own the condemnation voiced by John Paul II against “the widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality” (*Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, 29 June 1995, n. 5). This outlines a whole programme of redemption and liberation from which Christians cannot withdraw. [1801]

Speaking of the other category of migrants - asylum seekers and refugees - I wish to underline how the tendency is to stop at the question of their arrival while disregarding the reasons for which they left their native land. [1802]

The Church sees this entire world of suffering and violence through the eyes of Jesus, who was moved with pity at the sight of the crowds wandering as sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mt 9: 36). Hope, courage, love and “creativity” in charity” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 50) must inspire the necessary human and Christian efforts made to help these brothers and sisters in their suffering. Their native Churches will demonstrate their concern by sending pastoral agents of the same language and culture, in a dialogue of charity with the particular Churches that welcome them. [1803]

In light of today’s “signs of the times”, particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of foreign students. Thanks among other factors to foreign exchange programmes between universities, especially in Europe, their number is growing, with consequent pastoral problems the Church cannot ignore. This is especially true in the case of students coming from developing countries, whose university experience can become an extraordinary occasion for spiritual enrichment. [1804]

As I invoke divine assistance on those who, moved by the desire to contribute to the promotion of a future of justice and peace in the world, spend their energies in the field of pastoral care at the service of human mobility, I impart to all as a sign of affection a special Apostolic Blessing. [1805]

From the Vatican, 18 October 2005

Refugees 2006. *People on the Move*, 37:99 (2005): 57-58.
