



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE WORLD CONGRESS ON MIGRATION

15 March 1979

Dear Brothers,

Dear Sons and Daughters,

Dear Friends,

I thank you for your invitation. I have examined the subject of your Congress and of the various interventions on the agenda. Need I tell you that I am very sensitive to the pastoral problems that you study: how to ensure to Catholic communities of emigrants the ecclesial assistance, and in particular the priestly ministry, which they need? As you know, I have visited Polish communities abroad quite often: there is a whole interesting and delicate apostolate to be promoted in this area. And more generally, we must ask ourselves: what attitude must the local Church take with regard to migrants whoever they may be?

1. Because emigration is a massive phenomenon of our time, a permanent phenomenon, which is even assuming new forms, and which concerns all continents, and nearly all countries. It raises serious human and spiritual problems. It is a test, that is, a risk and a chance, for the immigrants and for those who receive them. Yes, it involves for the former a serious risk of uprooting, dehumanization and, in some cases, of dechristianization; for the latter a risk of withdrawing, of stiffening. But it also implies a chance of human and spiritual enrichment, opening, welcoming of foreigners, and mutual renewal thanks to this contact. And for the Church, it is an invitation to be more missionary, to go to meet the foreign brother, to respect him, to bear witness, in this context, to her faith and her charity, and to accept the other's positive contribution. Does the Church grasp this chance? From the first centuries, hospitality deeply characterized all ecclesial communities. The Church, which wishes to be catholic, that is, universal, finds again there a fundamental characteristic of her mission.

2. An indefatigable effort must therefore be made to drive home to the Churches of origin and the host Churches the needs of migrants. Do the Churches of origin take enough care to accompany their "diaspora", to prepare "missionaries" for them, and to sustain them? And do the host Churches, sometimes very pressed, pay enough attention to the presence of migrants? Do they take the means that this apostolate requires? Do they see to it, particularly, that priests, religious, and laity dedicate themselves in priority to these environments, which are often relegated to the fringes of society?

3. Let us make it quite clear: the apostolate of migrants is not just the work of these detached "missionaries": it is the work of the whole local Church, priests, religious and laity; it is the whole local Church which must take migrants into account, and be ready for welcome and for mutual exchanges. In particular, when it is a question of promoting the integration of foreigners, of providing for their human needs and their social advancement, of allowing them to exercise their temporal responsibilities, priests have not to take the place of laity of the host country, nor, on the other hand, these latter the place of the immigrants. But the "missionaries" still play an essential part, precisely to educate both sides to their own role, and they have a special contribution to make for the religious vitality of the communities of migrants. Their task is, moreover, a difficult one and your world Congress was right to stress the formation and duties of these "missionaries".

4. In fact, they must first be linked with the sensibility and language of the migrants. If they are their compatriots, that is, of course, easier; but they cannot be content either to transplant, purely and simply, the methods and means of apostolate of their country of origin, nor to make a clean sweep of them. Continuity and adaptation are necessary. Their pastor's heart must consider emigrants in the different dimensions of their complex life. On the one hand, they must help them to safeguard, let us rather say strengthen, their religious, family, and cultural values when they are the fruit of Christian generations, for they may well be shaken, without really being replaced. On the other hand, they cannot forget that these emigrants are now also marked by their host country, where, moreover, they have a part to play. The relations established between adults in the environment of work, and even more perhaps at school and in their free time for their children and young people, the media of communication which they see locally, such as television, call forth new questions, of course, in them, even a new mentality, with a new need of expression or participation. The apostolate must help them to cope with all this, to integrate the "new" harmoniously without neglecting the "old". The priest, or rather the priests, who are called to work in a team, with religious and laity, must be both prudent and open, at the meeting point of these two cultures, especially to prepare the new generations that remain in the host country. This shows the necessity of balance in these missionaries—human balance, spiritual balance—and also the necessity of their preparation, their ongoing formation. They must remain, above all, men of God and apostles, to permit emigrants to live their faith fully, with all its consequences.

I conclude here these few considerations, which the whole Congress enables you to study more deeply with Pastors and experts who are well informed about these questions. Methods and

means have their importance, but what is determinant, in short, is the pastoral soul, enlightened zeal, faith, and charity, of all those who have a responsibility with regard to migrants. They must commune with the spirit of our one Pastor, Christ Jesus, whom we all seek to serve. May he enlighten you and strengthen you who work on the Commission for the Apostolate of Migrants and Tourism or in liaison with it. May he sustain the zeal of all those who, beyond this Congress, work daily at the base, in direct service of migrants, becoming "everything to everyone", like the Apostle Paul. I bless them in the Lord's name, and I willingly bless you.

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