

ON ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS

QUAM AERUMNOSA

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on December 10, 1888.

To Our Venerable Brothers the Archbishops and Bishops of America.

Venerable Brethren, Greeting and the Apostolic Blessing.

How sad and fraught with trouble is the state of those who yearly emigrate in bodies to America for the means of living is so well known to you that there is no need of Us to speak of it at length. For the evils which press about them are witnessed by you close at hand, and more than once in your letters to Us, many of you have mournfully referred to the matter. It is, indeed, piteous that so many unhappy sons of Italy, driven by want to seek another land, should encounter ills greater than those from which they would fly. And it often happens that to the toils of every kind by which their physical life is wasted, is added the far more wretched ruin of their souls. The very first voyage of the emigrants is full of perils and hardships, for they fall for the most part into the hands of avaricious traders, whose slaves they in a manner are, and thrown together by droves in the narrow spaces of the ships, with but slight clothing, they are gradually driven into depraved habits. When they reach the lands for which they are destined, ignorant as they are of the language and the place, and hired out for daily labor, they fall into the hands of the dishonest, and into the snares of those more powerful men to whom they enslave themselves. Even those who by their industry are able to provide the wherewithal of life by continually mixing with men who value everything by profit and worldly advantage, they learn to toss aside by degrees the high aspirations of humanity and to live the life of those who place all their hopes and desires upon this world. Then the troubles of ambition are on all sides in their path, and the deceits of sects, which in these countries are widespread in their hostility to religion, pull down many into the path that points to ruin.

2. Among all these evils, however, that is by far the most calamitous which, among so many men, and in so wide and difficult a country, renders it not as easy as it should be to obtain the saving assistance of God's servants who are unable to speak to them the word of life in the Italian tongue, to administer the sacraments, or to uphold by the aids whereby the soul is raised to the desire of heavenly things, and the life of the spirit is strengthened and nourished. Hence in many places very few are consoled by a priest in death, and many are deprived of baptism at birth; and there are many whose marriage is not blessed by the lawful ceremonies of the Church, and hence a young generation is born like their fathers, and on every side by man's forgetfulness Christian morality is killed and all that is most wicked grows rank.

3. Considering these things with care, and sorrowing over the wretchedness of so many men, whom We saw to be wandering like sheep on steep and difficult places without a shepherd, and at the same time calling to mind the charity and teaching of the Eternal Father, We considered it to be Our duty to hasten, with all the help in Our power, to prepare healthy pastures, and by every possible exertion to advance their salvation and their good. And We did so with the greater goodwill because the love for men who spring from the same race as ourselves makes Us more zealous for their benefit, and We had the certain hope that your zeal and assistance would never be wanting to Us. Wherefore We ordained that in the Sacred Council of Propaganda this matter

should be discussed, and We issued commands that when the remedies had been carefully inquired into and well weighed, by means of which these evils might be crushed, or a least alleviated, the most opportune should be laid before Us, both questions being at the same time carefully considered, namely, the salvation of souls and the lessening of the material distress of the emigrants as far as possible. Moreover, as the principal cause of the growing ill lay in this, that these unhappy men were without the help of a priestly ministry by means of which the grace of heaven is given and increased, We determined to send from Italy to that land many priests to console their countrymen in their own tongue, to teach the faith and the obligations of the Christian life, which were unknown or neglected, to administer to them the saving sacraments, to spread among the rising generation religion and charity -- in fine to help all of every class, by word and work, and to assist them by all the duties of the priestly office. And for the fuller and more convenient accomplishment of this, We founded, by Our letter of December 15th, last year, sealed by the seal of the Fisherman, the Apostolic College of Priests in the Episcopal See of Placentia, under the care of the Venerable Brother John Baptist, Bishop of Placentia, in which ecclesiastics, stimulated by Christ's love, might be practiced in those duties and that discipline by which they might well and worthily fulfill Christ's mission among the scattered sons of Italy, and become fit dispensers of God's mysteries.

4. Among the students of this college, which We wish to be considered a seminary for God's ministers for the assistance of Italians dwelling in America, We desire youths born of Italian parents even in your country to be received, provided they are called and desire to fulfill the Lord's ministry, so that when they have become priests they may go forth, under your pastoral authority, to fulfill all the duties of the Apostolic ministry as far as there is need for it. Nor do We doubt that these will be received by you with fatherly affection, and will obtain the necessary faculties for the sacred ministry to their countrymen, to exercise them under the instruction of the parish priest; behold they come to you as helpers, that, under the authority of each of you in whose diocese they are working, they may give their best aid in the holy warfare. In truth, in the beginning their help will not be so large as the needs of the occasion demand, nor will it be possible, from the numbers and necessities of the faithful, to appoint priests in separate remote districts for the cure of souls. Wherefore We consider it the wisest course that, in the dioceses where the Italians are most numerous, there should be communities of priests who may go forth and journey in the surrounding districts and arrange touring missions. But on what system or in what special places this can be done, it will be for your prudence to decide. All these things which We considered to be a duty of our Apostolic care We have commanded to be made known to you by this letter. But if any one of you shall learn -- either by his own instinct and judgment or from the united counsel of brethren--anything in addition which We may do for the comfort and profit of these men, you will be doing a favor to Us if you make it known to the Sacred Council of Propaganda.

5. And from this work which We have undertaken for the good of many souls deprived of every consolation of the Catholic religion, We promise the most abundant fruits, especially if, as We trust, We are assisted in its growth by the zeal and assistance of those of the faithful whose means equal their piety. Moreover, We pray to the good God Who wishes all to be saved and to arrive at the knowledge of truth, that He may look graciously upon those beginnings, and may give a successful increase; and We very lovingly grant the Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of Our most devoted affection to you, Venerable Brethren, and to all the Clergy and Faithful whom you rule.

Given at Rome at St. Peters, December 10th, 1888. The 11th year of Our Pontificate.