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TIONS IN THE INTEGRATION OF

IMMIGRANTS

by Prof. Frans van Mechelin (Belgium)

Some Tasks of Catholic Organizations in the Integration of Immigrants

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In examining the tasks which face Catholic organizations seeking to facilitate the integration of immigrants into a new life, we should not fail to focus on the crux of the whole integration problem. There is no denying the fact that the crux of the problem is the social adaptation. This is one of the fundamental themes of the modern disciplines of sociology and psychology, and it not only determines human relations but also figures as cause or consequence of economic and professional adaptation.

Adaptation is not essentially different whether it involves an immigrant or any other man facing a deep and radical change in his living conditions. Even the jobless, the disabled, the aged, to limit ourselves only to these categories of persons, face serious and difficult demands of adjustment. Essentially the problem is the same, though

there is a difference between categories, and between all such categories and immigrants. The difference is one of circumstances and degree of change.

The most important factor in every situation of adaptation, one that makes adaptation possible or at least easier, is a person's acceptance of the new situation into which he is going to be integrated. Nothing will be so destructive of the psychological poise of the individual than trying to escape from the new situation, however difficult or uneasy it may be. No disabled person will ever arrive at a satisfactory human or vocational integration if he does not accept this handicap, nor will an immigrant find a place satisfactory for himself as well as for the community if he does not come to an acceptance within himself of his being an immigrant.

This acceptance is essentially an inner attitude of the mind. Even people who are driven from one country to another must go through a very personal struggle for acceptance of the fact. The immigrant will either be progressively assimilated

by his new environment, or he will remain stubbornly opposed to every innovation in his life, in which case he will remain unhappy even if he happens to reach a satisfactory material position. (Though as a matter of fact, if he does not sufficiently accept his new situation, he will hardly be able to attain a satisfactory material position.)

On the other hand, it should also be emphasized that in cases of what is called "free" immigration, the acceptance of the new environment will be of different degrees. The very fact that so-called free emigration can never be considered voluntary in the full sense of the term is the reason for this. Whatever may be our outlook on the matter, geographical displacement will always be based on compulsion. This compulsion usually lies in the practical impossibility of finding a job in one's own country, or at least a job which enables a man to value himself and to support his family. In such a migration the decision to leave one's country may be free, but the impossibility of staying ho-

me and holding a job worthy of a man renders the decision practically unfree.

Since every migration is based on a certain compulsion, though it may not be a physical one, every immigrant is bound to arrive at full acceptance of his new environment.

There can be a difference in acceptance when settlement in another country is permanent and when it is temporary. When an emigrant leaves with the intention of working abroad for a while and then coming back home with a certain amount of money with which to take his chance again, his situation is entirely different from that of an immigrant who knows that he has blown up his last bridge behind him. The Italian workers who come by the thousands to Belgium are generally the first kind of migrant. They usually stay only for a time in the new country, but even so, they can only overcome the difficulties of adaptation by arriving at an acceptance of the new situation. Moreover, it is all the more important because a stay that was in-

tended to be temporary is often prolonged once, twice, or more, and may eventually become permanent.

Yet whatever may be the situation, acceptance is the crux of the complicated problem of adaptation which is bound to confront an immigrant. To promote an inner attitude of acceptance of the new situation will be the major task of assistance organizations.

This task mainly involves the organizations of the immigrant's country of origin. Before making the serious decision to move in search of a new life in another country, the immigrant must be prepared not only from a material or technical point of view, but mainly from the socio-psychological point of view.

Generally he lacks inner preparation, because he has no clear perspective of the problems and their causes, and because technical or professional training and material preparation are more often than not considered sufficient. Of course the training is necessary and facilitates full integration, but

it is not enough. Such training must be supplemented and reinforced by a well-rounded preparation of the whole man, a human preparation, which will be the foundation on which inner acceptance can be built. For satisfactory integration, the psychological preparation is all-important. It should be a major concern of Catholic organizations assisting migration. It should not be ignored that if a Catholic immigrant fails to adjust, his faith is seriously jeopardized. Transplanting a man to a new environment is in itself a danger to his faith, perhaps as a consequence of the removal from the social pressures of the traditional group, the family or community which provided the social incentive for religious practice. Without this familiar structure, this framework, a man's religion is endangered. This is true even as far as international migration is concerned; a rush to the city gives rise to the same problems, though perhaps not to the same extent as those resulting from international migration. Even for internal migration movements, however, Catholic organizations should be prepared to follow up the migrants

wherever they move.

The follow-up, of course, is paramount necessity when migration abroad is involved. The preparation to be given emigrants before their departure by the Catholic organizations should not be simply technical, since other organizations can do as good a job in this field. The Catholic organizations should emphasize the inner preparation and the psychological training for acceptance. The inner preparation does not involve merely an explanation of the dangers and difficulties which immigrants have to face, but rather first of all provision of a moral and psychological foundation which will enable the individual to take the decisive step.

It is of utmost importance that the attention of the immigrant be drawn to the existence in the country where he is going to live of a different scale of values. This does not mean that the migrant's own values and principles have to be minimized, and it should be stressed that there are

essential features in common which link all apparent differences. Emphasis on common ties, even though he does not see them at once, reinforces an immigrant's confidence and faith. His attention should be drawn to differences in mentality, habits and customs. He should be aware that ^{he} has to accept changes and differences not merely to succeed, but because they make up the specific pattern of life in the place he has chosen to live.

The immigrant should be informed that the receiving country does not too appreciate his coming, though he may be direly needed as a unit of manpower. He should know that he will meet some groups - even very strong ones - in that country, which may be against immigration as a matter of principle. And the hostility may be even stronger if there already exist minority groups to which the immigrant will belong, or if, in the new society, there is a premium on certain linguistic, ethnic or racial qualities. The immigrant should be prepared not to be accepted by some groups and not

always keep him under their wing; fraternal feeling is soon forgotten, and his attitudes and habits may early become the butt of jokes.

How much better it is for the immigrant to know all this before leaving! He is better able to arm himself against disappointment and not take the first hurts too hard. If he is to be made aware of the difficulties that await him, he must be positively and realistically prepared for the shocks in advance.

II

When social integration is in question, it is meant in a broad, general way. the adaptation of a man to a new situation takes place over a more or less prolonged period of time. Adaptation comes about through a progressive lengthening of the old ties, an increased feeling of removal from the old country and of adjustment to the new. From a period of assimilation the migrant passes to integration after a prolonged period which is determined by individual differences.

In his new environment the immigrant will have to go through a period of transition which will be easy painful the extent he receives moral support from others. Very often this period of transition will determine the degree to which ultimate integration into the new environment will be satisfactory. The attitude towards a new situation is often based entirely on first impressions, and when this is so, the attitude is difficult to change.

The action of specialized organizations during this period of transition is crucially important. Upon arrival, the immigrant should be "adopted" by an organizations which can re-create for him a little bit of the atmosphere of his home country. The same organizations should provide the same help, as we see the problem, when migrations within a country are concerned, especially for the movements of country people to the cities. It cannot be denied that the lack of Catholic organizations doing such work has resulted in a weakening of religious practice and faith.

Some people have suggested that these organizations could easily be replaced by individuals of good

will who would promote the integration of immigrants by incorporating them into their own families. This method proved to be a failure, for the good will of the adopting families, and there is much of it on their part, was nevertheless not sufficient to resist the daily difficulties which result from the fact that the immigrant is away from his homeland. Moreover, the good will often vanishes when the idealism wears away as a result of the friction of differing characters and situations.

Hence the absolute need for specialized organizations dealing exclusively with the creation of a familiar atmosphere that will help facilitate a migrant's transition from old to new. The personnel of such organizations - from directors to ordinary staff - should be a mixture of persons from the emigration country and the country of adoption. Like locks which allow ships to pass with facility from one body of water to another though they are on different levels, these organizations must try to channel the immigrant through a smooth transition from an old and well-known way of life to a new and unfamiliar one.

These organizations should be patterned after immigrant's clubs, where entertainment and an introduction to the new culture are provided, and where the women and the children can join groups to arrange attractive family celebrations. It is important that the climate of the old country be re-created, and the language plays an important part in this. Some national groups are conscious of the fact that "language is all the people". Moreover, language gives full expression to national consciousness. Since language is essentially social, it will be the strongest tie with the old country.

Care should be taken during this period of transition to preserve the national spirit, and to this end, the native language of the immigrants should be used for any entertainment planned by the organization. The national language should always be on the tip of the tongue. It is essential that immigrants be allowed to practice their religion, too, in their own language. This has proved to be one of the strongest methods of saving the faith of immigrants. When sermons in the immigrant's own language are not possible, as, for example, when

immigrants are a very small minority, some occasional special sermons should be arranged. Very often these will be the only direct contact the immigrants have with the culture and culture-bearers of the country of origin.

To achieve the psychological transition, club activities should be held alternately in the immigrants' own language and in the language of the immigration country. Unless this is done, withdrawn minority groups will persist in impenetrable communities, and contacts with the new country will be cut to a minimum. This would immediately give rise to hostility on the part of the local population and to a minority problem with all its evil consequences.

It is fact that these organizations, in cooperation with other clubs or organizations, may also offer the occasion for some cultural instruction. They can provide the immigrants with a better knowledge of the language of the country, the customs of the people, and even vocational training.

arrived
In any case, the matter of welcoming the newly-immigrants is important, and a warm reception in a club equally so during the early period of contact with the new country. Even though gradually the immigrants fall away from the clubs and attend fewer and fewer of its activities, there is no harm done, for the purpose of such clubs is primarily to provide help during the period of transition. Nor does it mean that the ties are not strong between the clubs and the earlier, well-settled immigrants.

III

It should be emphasized that the individual aspects of psychological adaptation of the immigrant are very narrowly tied up with the sociological aspects of community values and collective integration. First of all, individual adaptation is largely facilitated if group immigration is promoted. Within any given group, members back and support each other. Hence the value of the clubs during a migrant's period of transition. Though personal

contacts must not be neglected, collective ones ^{far} will prove to be more effective. Group discussion techniques, which the organizations should make a special effort to develop, will bring direct results.

Just as any individual will use the framework provided by a group as his point of reference, an immigrant needs to feel that round about him of this ^{some} fellow countrymen are facing similar problemes. The examples set by others, their difficulties, failures and happinesses will guide him more easily through the difficult transition period of social and psychological adaptation to the unfamiliar environment.

Aside from this operational, sociological interaction, a more profound dimension exists. The arrival of immigrants brings a very real and acute problem to the receiving country. Maintenance of its own culture is the major task of every community, and immigrants of another culture and another language je opardize the homoge-

neity of the culture of the receiving community. Moreover, minorities are an everlasting source of friction and of grievances even when by and large they have accepted the language of the majority.

In this respect, the organizations have an important task. They must help the immigrants make the choince between the two cultures and the two languages. There is no other approach to the problem. Indeed, we do not know whether the culture e and language of the country of adoption are of objectively higher value than those of the immigrant's lands of origin. And the problem becomes more acute as the numbers of immigrants increase. What will happen when Europe is united and migration becomes far easier? Another problem is that of making the necessary choice between adopting the new citizenship or remaining an alien, a "stranger to the country."

These question need clear answers, especially when a choice between old and new culture and language

is concerned. The answer depends on the circumstances, and these are rarely twice the same. And in any case, the organizations have to play a responsible role in helping immigrants make the choices and in finding and preparing the means which will make this choice become reality.