

TASKS OF THE PARISH MOVEMENT AND THE CLERGY IN HELPING IMMIGRANTS TO INTEGRATE ON THE PARISH LEVEL IN ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES

by Reverend Robert J. Fox (United States)

There might have been some question about it years ago but today Yorkville is unmistakably a part of New York City. For decades it harbored thousands of German immigrants and at their hands was fashioned into a replica of the homeland in every possible detail. Today it bears the earmarks of that era but the substance is gone. The German language has largely yielded to English, the styles are American and, while the German kitchen endures in the local restaurants, it is equally adept at preparing American dishes. The parishes in the neighborhood have followed the same trend. During the great immigration, some of them were national parishes staffed by German-born priests, German was the vernacular tongue, German were the hymns, the decor of the Church and the rest. Today the Churches too bear the earmarks of that era, but all parishes are territorial and as American in essentials as any in the city. This is the pattern along the lines of which the integration of immigrants has occurred in the Archdiocese of New York, in the United States, and in other Anglo Saxon countries. It was a gradual process, paradoxically beginning with segregation and resulting in integration only in the second, third, and succeeding generations. However, there is currently in effect today in the Archdiocese of New York a thoroughly different parochial approach to immigrants and integration which I should like to bring to your attention for your interest and for your analysis. In short, the approach may be referred to as one of immediate integration of immigrants into existing territorial parishes. In part, this approach is in effect because circumstances thrust it upon us; in part, it is due to the courage with which the hierarchy accepted and analyzed those circumstances and the dedication which the clergy and laity have brought to the program formulated.

The immigrants I speak of are not truly immigrants in the technical sense. They are residents of Puerto Rico who, by virtue of the island's political association with the United States, are actually United States citizens. However, differences in language and cultural background justify referring to their moving to New York as an immigration in the wider sense of that term. Actually there had been a colony of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York for several decades prior to World War II. The Church's efforts to meet the needs of these predominantly Catholic people had followed the traditional pattern of a few specialized centers whose services and native Spanish speaking clergy attracted the immigrant. The close of World War II saw a dramatic increase in the annual rate of immigration from the island to the mainland. In actual figures, the annual average of immigration to the continental United States from Puerto Rico was 1,986 for the period 1909-30, 904 for the period 1931-40 and 18,794 for the period 1941-50. However, the year 1946 saw a total of 39,911 Puerto Rican immigrants to the United States of whom 37,900 or 95% remained in the port of entry, New York City. This high rate of immigration has continued to

the present although the percentage of those who remained in New York has gradually decreased until it is now estimated at 60%. From this more recent and larger immigration has arisen the challenge of immediate integration to which I have referred. (1)

Several factors contributed to the decision by the Archdiocese that immediate integration in existing territorial parishes was necessary if the greatest number of immigrants were to be best served. First among these factors was the dispersal that occurred as a result of the increased rate of immigration, in which the immigrants scattered beyond the areas of concentration to almost every area of the city. It was clear that the existing resources could not meet the need and, at the same time, it seemed clear that the establishment of national parishes was not the answer. To adequately serve the number of immigrants, several such parishes would have to be established in many cases jeopardizing already existing parishes by absorbing one third and in many cases one half of the parishioners in the area.

Another factor was the scarcity of native priests in Puerto Rico which would have made it impossible to staff national parishes. While it would have been possible to call upon additional Spanish speaking priests from other parts of the world, the urgent need for such priests in Latin America coupled with their lack of identification with either the culture particular to Puerto Rico or that of the United States militated against such a move. Finally there existed the conviction that since the Puerto Rican people were already citizens of the United States and anxious to be accepted and treated as such their adjustment to the New York parochial life and customs would be hastened by a much more positive approach to integration.

Two key factors mark the program which resulted from this decision :

1.— In the apostolate to the Spanish speaking immigrants, existing territorial parishes are being used rather than establishing national parishes or centers.

Of course, modifications have been introduced to these territorial parishes consisting of transitional programs of services in Spanish and including the religious practices and customs traditional in Puerto Rico. Despite their wide dispersal throughout the city, Puerto Ricans strive for some of the benefits of the immigrant community by clinging fast to traditional customs, music, foods and their native language. Without these, the impact resulting from the clash of cultures would overwhelm them. The same holds true for the Church whose meaning would be lost without such transitional programs.

2.— The key personnel in the apostolate are New York born parish priests specially trained for this work.

Such training began on a small scale with a voluntary seminar in the Spanish language in the major seminary of the Archdiocese. The next step saw two of the participants in this seminar, upon ordination, assigned to parochial work in Puerto Rico for a full year. In the three succeeding years, two priests from each ordination class were similarly assigned. In 1956, when the immigration had continued at a high rate and the need for increased numbers of priests became clear, one half of the ordination class was assigned for the summer months to the study of Spanish at the Georgetown University School of Languages. Be-

(1) Source : A SUMMARY IN FACTS AND FIGURES :

1.— Progress in Puerto Rico; 2.— Puerto Rican Migration, New York : Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Dept. of Labor, Migration Div., Jan. 1959

ginning in 1957 and continuing to the present, about one half of the priests in each ordination class have been assigned for a three month program of language study at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico and parochial experience on the island.

Increasing experience with these training programs indicated that, while ability to communicate in Spanish is important, it is actually secondary to a deeper communication predicted upon an identification with the person and the culture of the Puerto Rican immigrant. Values can be expressed in words but they are not thereby assimilated and appreciated. Customs can be explained but their meanings are not thereby fully comprehended. Hence more and more the focus of such training centered upon enabling the priest, while ever retaining his own cultural values, to practise the poverty and detachment required not only to appreciate but actually to assimilate to whatever degree possible, the cultures of the people with whom he was to work. The Model proposed for this effort was the Incarnate Son of God Who, while never ceasing to be God took to Himself a human nature in the fullest measure possible. Of course, the success of such an effort varies with the ability and spiritual preparation of each candidate. However, when it is successful to any degree at all it enables a priest to work with people rather than with problems, with conviction rather than with condescension. In short, there is no necessity for him, in answer to his own needs, either to see only the faults or only the virtues of the people to whom he gives himself.

Each year as these priests complete their training, they are assigned to parishes where representative members of Puerto Rican immigrants reside. Their work is essentially missionary since a great majority of the immigrants, while Catholic by baptism and by conviction, lack instructions and the other sacraments. They work in the face of intense proselytizing efforts on the part of Protestant groups. The challenge of integration is not simply that of meshing two groups of parishioners nor is it simply an introduction to new religious customs and practices. In many cases it involves instilling a sense of the obligation of Sunday Mass in people for whom Mass had been available only once a month for generations. Often it means interpreting the necessity and sanctity of the sacrament of matrimony to people for whom the acceptability of consensual unions began centuries ago with the shortage of priests and has continued to the present. Yet, though the task is missionary, the priest can count upon many resources not available, at least not in similar quantity, to the missionary. In most cases there is the parochial school staffed by religious sisters many of whom have also participated in training programs established for them both in New York and in Puerto Rico. Similarly he can look to the high schools, hospitals and charitable agencies and institutions of the Archdiocese all of which have been urged to send religious and lay personnel to the training programs mentioned above. Many of these facilities, in keeping with Archdiocesan policy, have taken care to hire proportionate members of professional native Puerto Rican personnel.

However, while it is an asset to the priest that the missions have come to the missionary, it is also a challenge. Only a minority of the parishes are thoroughly Spanish speaking. The great majority are made up of two groups, Puerto Ricans and native New Yorkers. The latter, of course, are themselves the offspring of immigrants and, though in most cases they are third and fourth generation, they bear traces of the nationalism and insecurity instilled in their forebears by the adversities of immigration. Often the priest's missionary endeavours with the Puerto Rican immigrants in his parish are undertaken under the critical eye of some native parishioners who, already hostile to the immigrants for civic, social and economic reasons, see further cause for resentment in the priest's efforts to initiate services in Spanish in their parish church. Again,

among some, resentment grows in those parishes where the priest decides to attempt integration of the parish societies and social affairs. In the case of such clashes, and they occur to one degree or another in almost all of the parishes in question, the priest himself is the focal point of the clash, belonging as he does in fact to both groups. With few exceptions, the priests engaged in this work have actually come to be considered by their Puerto Rican parishioners as their priest in every sense of the word. On the other hand, except in cases of unusually intense hostility, the native parishioners do not reject him, because he is one of them. To so act as a buffer and as a source of cohesion requires patience, suffering and tact, but at least in the person of the priest we find source of integration not be found in the traditional approach to immigrants. At present, there are already many indications of at least what can be called the beginning stages of such integration within the parish. Usually only one of the Sunday Masses is set aside for Spanish speaking parishioners. Recently arrived immigrants invariably restrict their attendance to this Mass. However, often after only a year's residence in the city, they attend other Masses where no Spanish is spoken. The children of immigrants feel free to attend these other Masses without the stigma of abandoning the Church of their parents. Where parish societies are integrated, the societies sometimes alternate between Masses. In some cases, parish social affairs and outings are integrated with some degree of success. In such cases, the groups tend to stay to themselves but the fact that they participate in the same affairs is another step toward integration.

I have said that the priests in this work have been for the most part, extraordinarily successful in winning the affection and loyalty of the Puerto Rican parishioners. This is true because he truly identifies himself with both cultures and thus embodies within himself what they are as Puerto Ricans and what they want to be as New Yorkers. It is also true because most of these priests have been sensitive to the needs and attitudes of the immigrants. To give an example, the average Puerto Rican is not aware of parish lines. Once he establishes a relationship with a priest he seeks to return to him even though he may have moved his residence to the neighboring parish. Moreover many immigrants see in the priest their liaison with the immigrant land and he is the first person sought in welfare, legal, housing and all sorts of other problems. By accepting these roles, many times at great sacrifice to themselves, the priests have greatly enhanced their position among their people.

While the parish priests must be considered the key factors in this program of immediate integration, significant contributions have been made to the program from other quarters. In Puerto Rico an office directed by a Redemptorist priest stationed on the island attempts to inform immigrants of the parish in which they will reside in New York before they actually leave the island. The parish to which they are immigrating is also informed. The Archdiocese has appointed a priest to the position of Coordinator of Spanish Catholic Action. His responsibilities lie principally in the areas of community relations, propaganda and the coordination of parochial programs.

In the past few years, largely through his efforts, the general attitude of the community increasingly reflects the gains being achieved on the parochial level. Finally there are a number of native Spanish speaking priests, religious and secular, either permanently assigned in the Archdiocese or there for the purpose of study who are working in conjunction with the native parish priests. The combined efforts of the native priest and the native Spanish priest has proven to be most successful in many parishes.

This in brief is the challenge facing the Archdiocese of New York and the program which has been devised to meet it. Its magnitude can be somewhat appreciated by a brief reference to statistics. It is estimated that one out of

every three Catholics in the urban area of the Archdiocese is Spanish speaking and at present there are over 250 Spanish speaking priests in the Archdiocese. Briefly, stated the program of the Archdiocese is an attempt on the part of an immigrant diocese to train its religious, laity and especially its priests to fully identify themselves with the culture of the immigrant group so as to be able to present the Church in terms that will be most meaningful to them. New York is not the only diocese facing this challenge nor the only one using this approach. It has been discussed here today solely because it is best known to the speaker.

At this early stage it is difficult to make a comparative evaluation between this approach on the part of the Church to immigrants and the more traditional that has been used in the past. Yet it seemed important that this experimental approach be brought to the attention of the delegates to this Fourth International Catholic Migration Congress and thereby be recorded in its proceedings. For even if it fails to achieve successful integration to the extent hoped for it at least represents an effort on the part of the Church to resist the natural tendency to apply patent solutions to problems with changing circumstances. Instead it is hoped that the Church is acting courageously in devising a fresh approach geared to meet those circumstances.

Summaries — Résumés

LES TÂCHES DES MOUVEMENTS PAROISSIAUX ET DU CLERGÉ POUR AIDER LES IMMIGRANTS À S'INTÉGRER SUR LE PLAN PAROISSIAL DANS LES PAYS ANGLO-SAXONS

par le Rév. P. Robert J. Fox

Le conférencier s'est basé avant tout sur les méthodes appliquées dans le diocèse de New-York en matière d'intégration religieuse des immigrants.

Au cours des dernières années, le nombre des immigrants portoricains arrivant aux États-Unis s'est sensiblement accru. Le Rév. P. Fox explique comment ces immigrants sont intégrés dans des paroisses territoriales de New-York déjà existantes, plutôt que dans des paroisses spéciales de langue espagnole.

On mit en oeuvre un programme tendant à former des éléments religieux et laïques familiers avec la culture des immigrants afin de leur permettre de transmettre le message de l'Eglise d'une manière plus proche pour les nouveaux arrivants. Plus de 250 prêtres du diocèse de New-York sont formés à la langue espagnole ou de langue espagnole. On commença par un séminaire volontaire en espagnol au Grand Séminaire de New-York, puis deux prêtres furent envoyés à Porto-Rico pour une année de travail paroissial et cela se répéta pendant trois ans.

Parfois, on enregistre des sentiments d'hostilité ou de méfiance entre les nouveaux arrivants et les paroissiens locaux. C'est alors que le prêtre joue le rôle de médiateur et de lien entre tous, tâche qui exige de la patience et du tact. Dans ces programmes d'intégration le prêtre est l'élément central qui coordonne l'action de tous.

DIE AUFGABEN DER PFARRORGANISATIONEN UND DES KLERUS BEI DER INTEGRATION DER EINWANDERER IN DER PFARRE IN ANGELSÄCHSISCHEN LÄNDERN

von Pater Robert J. Fox

Der Vortrag gründet sich hauptsächlich auf die Methoden die in der Diözese New York bei der religiösen Eingliederung der Einwanderer angewandt werden.

Im Laufe der letzten Jahre hat die Zahl der in die Vereinigten Staaten kommenden Einwanderer aus Porto Rico beträchtlich zugenommen. Pater Fox zeigt wie diese Einwanderer in die schon bestehenden Ortspfarran von New York integriert werden und nicht in spezielle Pfarren spanischer Sprache.

Ein Programm wurde aufgestellt mit dem Zweck, sowohl Geistliche wie Laienpersonen heranzubilden, die mit der Kultur der Einwanderer vertraut sind, um ihnen so zu ermöglichen, den Neuankömmlingen die Botschaft der Kirche auf unmittelbare Weise zu verkünden. Mehr als 250 Priester der Diözese New York sprechen Spanisch. Zuerst wurde ein freiwilliges Seminar in spanischer Sprache im Grossen Priesterseminar von New York gegründet; daraufhin wurden 2 Priester nach Porto Rico geschickt, um dort ein Jahr Pfarrarbeit zu verrichten, und dieses Experiment wiederholte sich während drei Jahren.

Öfters kommt es zu unfreundlichen Handlungen und Misstrauen zwischen den Neuankömmlingen und den örtlichen Pfarrmitgliedern. In solchen Fällen spielt der Priester die Rolle eines Mittlers und Verbindungsgliedes zwischen allen, eine Aufgabe die viel Geduld und Taktgefühl erfordert. In diesem Integrationsprogramm bildet der Priester den Mittelpunkt für die gesamte Koordinationsarbeit.

LA LABOR DE LAS OBRAS PARROQUIALES Y DEL CLERO PARA AYUDAR A LOS INMIGRANTES A INTEGRARSE EN EL PLANO PARROQUIAL, EN PAÍSES ANGLOSAJONES

por el Revdo. Robert J. Fox

En la diócesis de Nueva York se lleva a cabo una labor de aproximación al inmigrante y de asistencia a la integración, cuyos distintos matices explica el orador en su discurso.

Los inmigrantes de Puerto Rico llegan a los Estados Unidos en número creciente durante los últimos años y, en una gran proporción, se instalan en Nueva York. Se van integrando en las parroquias territoriales existentes, en lugar de hacerlo en parroquias especiales de habla española. El programa pretende que tanto los religiosos como los seglares se identifiquen con la cultura del grupo inmigrante con el fin de la Iglesia se presente a éste en términos más significativos para los recién llegados.

Más de 250 sacerdotes de la archidiócesis son ahora de lengua española. En los comienzos se constituyeron grupos de estudio los seminarios de la Archidiócesis, en lengua española en Dos sacerdotes fueron después a Puerto Rico para realizar la labor parroquial durante un año y en tres años sucesivos se ha venido repitiendo esta medida.

Algunas veces se ha advertido cierta hostilidad y resentimiento entre los nuevos inmigrantes y los feligreses nativos y en estas ocasiones el párroco ha actuado de mediador y de vínculo de cohesión, lo cual es una labor que requiere paciencia, resignación y tacto. El párroco es la clave de este programa de integración inmediata, pero la labor de los feligreses es muy importante.