

For the Love of Migrants

The Scalabrinian Tradition^{1*}

Abstract

Il capitolo *For the love of migrants* (Per amore dei migranti) è stato pubblicato nel 2008 nel libro *A promised land, a perilous journey. Theological perspectives on migration* (Una terra promessa, un viaggio pericoloso. Prospettive teologiche sulla migrazione), che raccoglie in forma di saggi gli interventi tenuti durante il convegno internazionale su migrazione e teologia presso l'università di Notre Dame negli Stati Uniti nel 2004.

Nel presente testo G.G. Tassello traccia lo sviluppo della tradizione scalabriniana nel campo della pastorale dei migranti. Prima di tutto considera l'originale visione del Vescovo G.B. Scalabrini riguardo al fenomeno migratorio: una lettura di fede che diviene nel tempo anche fonte di ispirazione per l'elaborazione di approcci pastorali innovativi. A partire dal riconoscimento della dignità dei migranti, il servizio nei loro confronti si prefigge di renderli capaci di dare il loro apporto originale ai paesi di partenza e di arrivo. Avere una visione positiva delle migrazioni non significa, però, chiudere gli occhi di fronte alle ingiustizie, ma implica un impegno a tutto campo per la promozione integrale della persona sul piano umano e religioso.

L'autore presenta, quindi, il modo in cui i primi missionari scalabriniani hanno attuato le intuizioni di Scalabrini nel loro impegno pastorale per gli italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America. Gli italiani rappresentavano allora uno dei gruppi di immigrati meno stimati dall'opinione pubblica e dalla stessa chiesa cattolica, in un'epoca in cui prevaleva l'ideologia del nativismo e dell'assimilazione. Se inizialmente Scalabrini aveva pensato a dei missionari itineranti, si rese invece necessario costituire delle parrocchie nazionali che permettessero agli immigrati di scoprire e rafforzare la propria identità culturale e religiosa, in modo da poter compiere un cammino di comunione alla pari con gli altri gruppi etnici all'interno della chiesa locale.

Tale struttura non è che uno dei molteplici modelli pastorali utilizzati dalla congregazione scalabriniana. Il processo di internazionalizzazione dei membri e l'apertura ai più diversi gruppi etnici fanno sì che il pluralismo delle forme di servizio sia parte integrante del loro modo di operare tra i migranti, adattandosi alle diverse situazioni. Nell'ambito della mobilità umana diviene fondamentale, secondo G.G. Tassello, lo sviluppo di una spiritualità e di una teologia delle migrazioni prima ancora della creazione di strutture stabili. Uno dei primi frutti della tradizione scalabriniana è la valorizzazione della diversità nelle relazioni personali, ecclesiali e sociali, in uno spirito di comunione che supera l'uniformità, nella convinzione che le differenze possono essere un dono.

I. Introduction

We Scalabrinians are constantly faced with a dilemma. On the one hand we share a secret desire: to eliminate forced migration as a way of life because it produces devastating effects upon the persons involved and their families. We join forces with men and women of good will who advocate a widespread international solidarity and cooperation, so that no one shall ever again be forced to seek the means of survival in

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another land. We envision a planet in which people will naturally move from place to place, if they so desire, as passports are not God's invention. On the other hand this aspiration encounters many difficulties. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus rightly makes us aware that the poor will always be with us (*Mk* 147). Thus, the retiring age of our religious order is still far away, as the number of migrants throughout the world is steadily increasing rather than diminishing. In fact

“migrations due to political, economic, and religious causes, be they of single persons or of entire communities, can no longer be considered marginal events requiring only emergency intervention. They are now a structural phenomenon involving all nations and effecting far-reaching changes in the social, cultural, religious, and economic life of the nations from where migrants leave and of those who welcome them.”²

In the past, Scalabrinians often thought theirs was a unique charism within the church. But the transformation of an Italian congregation into an international religious community compelled its members to question the originality of their ministry and to seek new bonding values, no longer stemming from a single ethnic group, or even in the care of immigrants per se, as many within the church were paying closer attention to this social phenomenon and were investing personnel commitment and resources in the particular field. Human migrations in fact are a common responsibility for church and society:

“Faithful to its evangelizing mission, the Church, as well as the countries of departure and arrival, shares a common responsibility in promoting new ways for people from diverse origins to come together, while respecting fundamental human rights. This calls for the promotion of mutual acceptance and good will between migrants and local residents alike.”³

2. Searching for a Tradition

Recognizing the broadening of their mission, Scalabrinians have reviewed their specific vocation and mission in the church and society because “what is generic and vague cannot be an authentic gift to others.”⁴ This work in progress is not meant for our religious congregation only. Scalabrinians want to share the results of this search with other persons who are involved with the phenomenon of migration and are striving to persuade people from diverse origins to live together in communion. In other words, we are looking for a spiritual *tradition*. The term is used here in its original meaning: inspirational guidelines handed down to us; a gift we have received as a legacy, to which we adhere with creative fidelity.

2.1 Inspired by John Baptist Scalabrini's Life and Vision

The originator of this tradition is John Baptist Scalabrini (1839-1905), bishop of Piacenza (Italy). A sentence taken from one of his homilies on the role of the bishop will help us grasp his commitment to migrants and his pastoral vision of the

² MISSIONARI DI SAN CARLO – SCALABRINIANI; SUORE MISSIONARIE DI SAN CARLO – SCALABRINIANE; MISSIONARIE SECOLARI SCALABRINIANE, *Traditio Scalabriniana: una traccia da sviluppare*, «Traditio Scalabriniana», 1, 2005, p. 11; see also URL: http://www.scalabrini.org/pt/download/doc_download/154-collana-traditio-scalabriniana-01-giugno-2000 [last accessed March 30, 2015].

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

phenomenon:

“To make every sacrifice to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the hearts of people, to risk his life if necessary for the welfare of his beloved flock, to get down on his knees before the world, as it were, and beg from it, as a favor, the permission to do it some good.”⁵

Analyzing Bishop Scalabrini’s writings and activities, we are met with an original outlook on migration that, in turn, generates an innovative pastoral approach. For Bishop Scalabrini migrants are not merely objects, beneficiaries of charitable deeds we carry out when an emergency situation arises. They are persons with an inner dignity and with rights, sharing the gift of a different culture. We cannot go out to them with the intention of colonizing and assimilating them. Rather we serve them because only when migrants experience acceptance and love will they become a resource.

During his ministry as a priest and bishop, Scalabrini often witnessed the departure of migrants, and was challenged by this reality: “Faced with this lamentable situation, I have often asked myself: how can it be remedied?”⁶ His was not an emotional response, as may happen to those who fall victims of the media system, constantly looking for newer images with a greater emotional impact, to be immediately discarded when more dramatic scenes are portrayed. His approach to human migration was a combination of mind and heart, sentiment and rationality, the way any immigration problem should be tackled.

He was aware that expertise was necessary, and he surrounded himself with competent people. His conferences on migration were the result of study as well as an attentive observation of reality. A famous Italian journalist, not particularly fond of Catholics, defined him as the first European migration sociologist.⁷ Scalabrini’s was not the knowledge of an erudite. He saw the phenomenon, analyzed causes and effects, and then acted. Scalabrini believed in

freedom of emigration, not freedom to coerce it, because, while emigration is good when free, it is bad when coerced. If spontaneous, it is good because it is one of the great laws of divine Providence ruling over the destinies of peoples and their economic and moral progress. It is good because it is a social safety valve. It opens up the flowery paths of hope and sometimes of riches to the poverty-stricken and civilizes people through contact with other laws and other customs. It brings the light of the Gospel and Christian civilization to barbarians and idolaters. It ennobles human destiny by broadening the concept of motherland beyond the physical and political boundaries, making the whole world man’s motherland. If coerced, emigration is bad because it substitutes true need with the fever of instant gain or with an ill-conceived spirit of adventure. Instead of helping and relieving the situation, it becomes an evil and a danger because, by unnecessarily depopulating the motherland beyond measure, it creates more uprooted and disillusioned people. It is bad, finally, because it deviates emigration from its natural channels, which are the most effective and least harmful ones. Experience teaches, in fact, that this kind of emigration is the cause of great evils that can and must be prevented by a provident civil government.”⁸

He advocated the natural right to emigrate, which would later become a component of

⁵ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice: Excerpts from His Writing*, [trans. Gino Dalpiaz], Missionaries of St. Charles Scalabrinians, Oak Park, IL, 1987, 157.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 377.

⁷ Cf. FURIO COLOMBO, *Un vescovo tra gli immigrati: Un precursore della moderna sociologia*, “La Repubblica”, October 14, 1997.

⁸ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice...*, op. cit., pp. 382–383.

the teachings of the Church.⁹ It is partly because of his conversations with the migrants themselves during his frequent pastoral visitations of his diocese of Piacenza that Scalabrini reached this conclusion. He describes one of these dramatic encounters with one of the many people of his diocese who had decided to migrate:

“One day a wonderful man, an exemplary Christian, from a little mountain village where I was making my pastoral visitation, came to see me and to ask for my blessing and a memento for himself and his family on the eve of their departure for America. When I demurred, he countered with this simple but distressing dilemma: ‘Either you steal or you emigrate. I am not allowed to steal nor do I want to, because God and the law forbid it. But in this place there is no way I can earn a living for me and my children. So what can I do? I have to emigrate: it is the only thing left...’ I did not know what to answer. With a full heart, I blessed him and entrusted him to the protection of God. But once more I became convinced that emigration is a necessity, a heroic and ultimate cure one has to accept, just as a sick person accepts painful surgery to avoid death.”¹⁰

It is very clear that at the time of Scalabrini, migration was for many people a matter of life and death, much like it happens today for many migrants and refugees around the world. It represented the only way for these people to support their families and maintain intact their decency and dignity. Therefore, it is not a surprise to hear Scalabrini say that the right to migrate is “a sacred human right”:

“Those who would like to put a stop or a limit to emigration for patriotic or economic reasons and those who, because of a mistaken idea of freedom, want emigration left to itself, without direction or guidance, are either not using their heads or, in my opinion, are reasoning egoistically and insensitively. In fact, by blocking emigration, we are violating a sacred human right; and by leaving it to itself, we are making emigration ineffectual.”¹¹

Faced by this situation Scalabrini decided that as a pastor he could not be silent and still. He had to understand and act in order to protect and lead his flock. So he observed the reality around him, gathered data and facts, discussed this issue with other people, and in this process he realized that there was much confusion about the phenomenon of migration not only among the people, but also among the so-called experts:

“A theoretical debate on whether emigration is good or bad is a waste of time at this point. For my purpose, the important thing is that emigration exists. But during the research I undertook to gather the statistical data and facts for this humble work of mine and also during my conversations with friends, I came to realize that there are a lot of fuzzy ideas in this field, not only among the middle class and among private citizens but also among journalists and public figures. So I came to the conclusion that my observations are not at all out of place.”¹²

Scalabrini breathed the intellectual atmosphere of his time, full of political ideologies and social visions. Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* described the life of people who had moved into the English industrial towns, the exploitations of these immigrant workers, and their abysmal living conditions.¹³ He envisaged a political system to overcome these injustices. Socialists and anarchists were quite active among

⁹ Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, no. 25.

¹⁰ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice...*, op. cit., pp. 379–380.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 380.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 380–381.

¹³ Cf. KARL MARX, *Das Kapital*, URL: <https://archive.org/details/KarlMarxDasKapitalpdf> [last accessed March 30, 2015].

immigrants, hoping to start a new social order by focusing their attention on this special category of people. The First Zionist Congress, held in Basel in 1897, called for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine through the immigration of Jews from many parts of the world. Emma Lazarus's poem engraved on the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty offered a very idyllic view of migration. The Russian philosopher and theologian Vladimir Soloviev spoke at the time of the vocations of nations. It is in this context that we are confronted with the most original trait of Scalabrini's theory on migration that is the providential outlook on this social phenomenon:

"Human beings migrate, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone, and, in so doing, are always the free instruments of divine Providence, which presides over human destiny, leading all people, even through great calamities, to their final goal, the perfection of man on earth and the glory of God in heaven."¹⁴

Because of this belief, in 1887 and 1895 Scalabrini initiated two religious congregations to care for migrants, respectively the Missionaries of St. Charles (priests and brothers), and the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles. In 1892, he had also founded the St. Raphael's Society for the Protection of Emigrants, a lay association. Scalabrini's providential vision of migration did not make him oblivious of the real situation of migrants. He knew how the U.S. Roman Catholic hierarchy and the local Irish American clergy felt about the Italian immigrants. Some American ordinaries nourished strong suspicions about Italian, Polish, and Filipino clergy. They had reached the conclusion that quite a few priests were leaving their countries to escape the consequences of improper behavior there.

Working on behalf of Italian immigrants in North America at the end of the nineteenth century was not a very gratifying experience. A U.S. Catholic newspaper published in Jacksonville, Florida, summed up adequately the general perception of what was then known as "the Italian question":

"The Italians especially are non-assimilative, and some measures should be taken to check the flood of immigration from that country. [...] This country should no longer be the receptacle for the most degraded a vicious of the population of Europe. The American labour market is overstocked to a serious extent, mainly through the importation of cheap labourers from Europe. It is our duty as a nation to take some measures for self-protection and for the protection of our superior civilization from too serious contamination."¹⁵

Italian immigrants reaching the shores of the U.S. were mostly illiterate. People considered them superstitious because of their popular religiosity. Often they were *birds of passage*, a fact that rendered ministry among them even more difficult. Yet Scalabrini was not afraid of investing hope, energy, and human power in people considered hopeless, as God does all the time! They were regarded solely as a cheap labor force. He strived to make them aware of their human and divine dignity. Because the migrants are God's children, he defended their cultural and religious rights. He demanded that their religious practices and their time of adjustment and growth within church and society be respected. By asserting that the Church has a duty to serve them, he was making migrants – let us not forget Scalabrini was a great expert in catechesis – aware of their special vocation within the Church.

After Napoleon Bonaparte's fall, a missionary spirit permeated many dioceses in Europe. The desire to spread the gospel and *convert the infidels* was felt everywhere.

¹⁴ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice*..., op. cit., p. 390.

¹⁵ Quoted in MARIO FRANCESCONI, *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini Vescovo di Piacenza e degli Emigrati*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1985, p. 971 note 18 [translation by author].

The rejection of faith by many intellectuals during the age of Enlightenment and by many workers during the industrial revolution pushed the church to search for new venues and invest in new territories. There were years in Europe in which a new religious congregation, or pious society, was born every week.

Scalabrini was concerned with a seemingly apparent contradiction. The church was investing heavily in the propagation of faith, even though the numbers of conversions to Roman Catholicism were quite limited. At the same time, many millions of Catholic immigrants were left unattended and risked losing their faith. He called for a greater effort in order to preserve their religious heritage. Once he had received a message from a migrant from his diocese that reflected dramatically the spiritual needs of many Catholic migrants: “Tell our Bishop that we always remember his advice. Tell him to pray for us and to send us a priest because here we live and die like animals.”¹⁶ This is why he professed his faith and hope in a church that cannot abandon any of its children, especially those who had to leave their homelands because of poverty and lack of work:

“The Church of Jesus Christ, which has sent her Gospel workers among the most barbarous peoples and most inhospitable regions, has not forgotten and will never neglect the mission God entrusted to her, namely, to preach the Gospel to the children of poverty and labor. She will always look with anxious heart on so many poor souls who, in forcible isolation, are losing the faith of their forebears and, with the faith, every sentiment of Christian and civil upbringing. Yes, where people are working and suffering, there is the Church because the Church is the mother, friend, and defender of the people and will always have a word of comfort, a smile, a blessing for them.”¹⁷

The *salvation of souls* was not a rhetorical platitude for a saintly person like Scalabrini, living at the end of the nineteenth century. When the Bishop of Piacenza founded his first congregation in 1887, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus was in Rome, begging Leo XIII to enter a Carmelite monastery at the age of 15 in order to “save souls.” In his encyclical letter on the education of the clergy in Europe in 1902, Pope Leo XIII stated:

“To work the eternal salvation of souls will always be the great commandment of which it must never fall short, as to faithfully fulfill it, it must never cease to have recourse to those supernatural aids and those divine rules of thought and of action which Jesus Christ gave His Apostles when He sent them throughout the whole world to convert the nations to the Gospel.”¹⁸

Even though Scalabrini used the typical language of the time, saving migrants for him meant showing great concern for their human and religious promotion. To propose a providential outlook on migration in fact does not mean inability or unwillingness on his part to examine reality in all its contradictory elements or remain silent vis-à-vis the injustices perpetrated against migrants. Scalabrini had the courage to tell the president of the U.S. of an incident he had witnessed at Ellis Island, in which a guard had beaten an Italian immigrant unjustly.¹⁹ He sent missionaries to preserve and enhance the faith of migrants. But he also sent them to protect immigrants from the time they left Italy to the time they arrived and settled down in their country of

¹⁶ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice*..., op. cit., p. 377.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 394–395.

¹⁸ LEO XIII, Encyclical *Fin dal Principio*, 1902, no. 3, URL: http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_08121902_fin-dal-principio.html [last accessed March 30, 2015].

¹⁹ This incident is reported in MARIO FRANCESCONI, *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini*..., op. cit., p. 1161.

destination. For him, loving migrants went hand in hand with sensitizing society and local churches to the plight of migrants, denouncing injustices, favoring better legislation, promoting social and religious harmony, and endorsing true Catholic conduct within the faith communities.

2.2 Scalabrini's First Followers in North America

Bishop Scalabrini died in 1905 at the age of 65. At the end of his life he envisioned a long-term strategy on the pastoral care of migrants.²⁰ Only after several decades did his dream become a reality when Paul VI created the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in 1970.

Migrants' urgent needs compelled Scalabrini to gather priests and brothers from many dioceses and congregations and send them to the American continent. He told his priests journeying to the Americas: "Go, the Angel of the United States is beckoning you and presenting you with 500,000 abandoned Italians. Go, the Angels of Paraná, Peru, Argentina, Colombia and other provinces are calling you to their 1,300,000 Italians thirsting for truth."²¹ Certainly, the first Scalabrinian missionaries were not as well equipped as the German priests accompanying their compatriots, or the Italian priests that the Bishop of Cremona (Italy), Geremia Bonomelli, chose for the care of Italian immigrants in Europe. The latter groups of priests were usually very open minded, splendidly prepared on the intellectual level, often sent abroad by the bishop to avoid the danger of being accused of modernism – they were adhering to the tenets of social Catholicism – , which would be sternly and pitilessly fought, by Pius X and his entourage.

The first Scalabrinians were not well accepted by the hierarchy, nor as well organized as the German clergy. Certainly, they were not particularly liked by the dominant Irish clerical elements who considered Italian Catholics turncoats because of their unwillingness to defend the Papal States. They had to minister to Italian immigrants accused of not attending church regularly; but when they did, sometimes they found Irish policemen barring them from entering the main church, sending them to the basement instead. Italian immigrants were apparently unwilling or unable to contribute to the support of the priest and parish structures. Therefore, Scalabrinians assisting these people were judged to be poor administrators, while a sound administration for U.S. bishops was a clear sign of divine benevolence. Scalabrinians were even considered spies of the Vatican: "Some American priests consider the Saint Charles Missionaries in New York as spies of the Holy See and as an active part of the Apostolic Delegation."²² During that time the so-called spy system seemed a rather common practice in church circles. But these priests had met Bishop Scalabrini and had been inspired by his love for migrants. They possessed a true missionary zeal. Their capacity to adapt to the American way of life was quite remarkable. Hence, it happened that "while Bishop Scalabrini had begun with the vision of itinerant missionaries, he had come to accept that parishes provided his missionaries with a foundation that set them free to determine the type of pastoral care the Italians ought

²⁰ See especially the *Memorial of Bishop G.B. Scalabrini on a Commission for Catholic Migrants*, written in Piacenza on May 4, 1905. This document is found in SILVANO M. TOMASI (ed.), *For the Love of Immigrants: Migration Writings and Letters of Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini, 1839–1905*, Center for Migration Studies, New York 2000, pp. 218–230.

²¹ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice...*, op. cit., p. 456.

²² MARY ELIZABETH BROWN, *The Scalabrinians in North America, 1887–1934*, Center for Migration Studies, New York 1996, p. 82.

to receive,”²³ so much so that in the 1930s and 1940s some Scalabrinian pastors turned into strong competitors of their ancient Irish American rivals.

At a time when U.S. nativism and assimilation methods were espoused by many people within the church, the national parish system was considered a necessary instrument in order to balance the search for control and power over the faithful, typical of a certain North American Catholicism. Through the national parish, Italian immigrants would be able to discover and strengthen their identity in order to start a journey of communion with other ethnic groups within the local church. The result would be the construction of a veritable U.S. Catholicism on an equal basis.

If national parishes in the United States played a significant role in the development of U.S. Catholicism, this was not because of the great interest bishops and clergy showed in their regard. The persistence of an “immigrant Catholicism,” as J.P. Dolan calls it,²⁴ was mainly due to priests caring for migrants, who withstood pressure for assimilation considered too often the only plausible pastoral solution and fought bravely against those pastors who regarded migrants simply as potential prey in what looked like a religious safari hunt.

Having been imbued with a providential outlook on immigration, the first Scalabrinian missionaries invested in long-term pastoral care, while many North American bishops and priests thought or hoped Italian migration would be something temporary. It took some time for the missionaries to settle down and establish themselves, as the religious institute was entrusted with Italian national parishes in the US. As all migrants, they had learned the art of survival. However, the passage from solving emergency situations to normalcy constituted a real danger for the Scalabrinian charism. The process of settling down and caring for Italians, and descendants of Italian immigrants, often meant becoming and acting like all the other pastors, and entering the arena of competition. Normalization carried with it the danger of fostering a ghetto mentality. This was not the fault of the parochial system per se: it was a clear sign of a profound crisis of the congregation and it called for a refounding effort. The Scalabrinians had become unable to use the parish as a springboard for living in a creative way and for spreading their charism. The neglect of the founder’s vision had turned them into *generic* priests and brothers. They were running the risk of becoming good ethnic museum curators and preservationists, and not seamen venturing into uncharted waters. They had not yet learned the art of balancing the urgency to reach the frontiers where they could meet and care for the suffering migrant humanity, and the need to run permanent dwellings where one could practice hospitality, begin a new life, cultivate the memory of the exodus in order to help other migrants, and experience fellowship.

What is really unique in this time, that is the 1930s, is the fact that the rebirth of the congregation was financially supported by Scalabrinian missionaries of the United States, and later it was mainly from North and Latin American seminarians that a new vision and role within the church, and a deeper understanding of the charism of the institute, came about. Some of the fundamental moments of this rebirth include: (1) The reintroduction of the religious vows which took place in the Mother House of Piacenza in 1934, giving new missionary and spiritual vitality to the younger members of the congregation. (2) The *aggiornamento* of the Constitutions of the Scalabrinian Congregation, which began with the special General Chapter in 1969–1972 and was ratified with the official approval of the new Constitutions in

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 49–50.

²⁴ JAY P. DOLAN, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1992.

1981. These new Constitutions, inspired by the spirit of Vatican II, extended the missionary outreach of the congregation to all migrants, and not only to Italian migrants and their descendants, and affirmed “the preferential option for those migrants who are more acutely living the drama of migration.”²⁵ (3) The opening in 1987 of *Casa del Migrante* in Tijuana, right at the border between Mexico and the U.S., which began a new way of doing ministry with the migrants for the Scalabrinians in North America, a dynamic and holistic ministry performed in close collaboration with the laity and the NGOs. Until then these missionaries had been working almost exclusively in national and territorial parishes. This pastoral presence at some of the most trafficked and controversial borderlines in our planet (U.S.Mexico and MexicoGuatemala) confirms the option of the Scalabrinians for most vulnerable migrants in their journey toward the U.S.

3. A Tradition in the Pastoral Care of Migrants: A Work in Progress

What are the guidelines that the Scalabrinian community has developed over time and proposes to others Christian ministers so that immigrants may be loved and served as true brothers and sisters? We still have not analyzed systematically and thoroughly our documents and accomplishments. Historical essays on Scalabrinian ministry vary considerably. Mary Brown’s excellent analysis of Scalabrinians in North America is quite different from the research carried out by Brazilian historians on the same topic.²⁶ A difficulty may derive from the fact that many pastoral experts, upholding a technocratic approach to ministry, limit their investigation exclusively to the analysis of pastoral models, which may vary from church to church, and from one migrant group to another. Scalabrinians’ main concern is no longer directed at pastoral structures and techniques. Pluralism in this field is part of our ministry and constitutes our first experiment in diversity. We may tackle emergency situations, we may staff multilingual parishes, we may cater to a single migrant group, we may work in study centers or in the field of media, or we may coordinate activities for migrants at a diocesan, national, or international level.

We believe that the church, “pilgrim” and “missionary by her very nature,”²⁷ cannot become fixed in its modes. The temptation of a mono cultural approach is ever present. We are part of the pilgrim church and go among the men and women of today’s multicultural societies, announcing to them the mystery of communion. The Trinitarian dialogue becomes for us the model for all relationships. Rather than recommending pastoral exterior arrangements that are tied to particular circumstances and to the equitable demands of migrants, we prefer searching for ecclesiological principles to be adopted by those who wish to take up the challenge of an original pastoral approach to immigration. Migration in fact questions the true nature of the church. That is why during the past decades Scalabrinians, besides venturing into new modes of serving migrants, have been trying to highlight some ecclesiological and biblical traits that are meaningful to our specific ministry. Besides furthering the economic, the political, and the sociological study of the phenomenon, we have urged theologians, church historians, experts in spirituality, and biblical scholars to shed

²⁵ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. CHARLES (SCALABRINIANS), *Rules of Life*, Rome 1999, no. 5.

²⁶ MARY ELIZABETH BROWN, *The Scalabrinians...*, op. cit.

²⁷ II VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 1965, no. 2.

light on the phenomenon of human mobility in order to enlighten our journey in hope.²⁸

Scalabrini's vision, together with the newer biblical and theological insights that accompany our pastoral journey, have led us to consider the virtues of welcoming, of itinerancy, and of communion in diversity as basic to our ministry. When we welcome other people, we share in the Father's loving project. Welcoming means first of all spreading appreciation for migrants. Thus, we contribute to God's plan to make of the earth a place of fellowship and gratuitousness, anticipating the banquet of the Kingdom, where no one is excluded and all are called by name by our gracious God.

Ministering to migrants requires us to become itinerant in order to reveal in our lives Jesus's paschal mystery of death and resurrection. We emigrate from ourselves, from our own mentality, and from our self-interest, and go out to meet the other. Dying to ourselves brings about the resurrection of the other. Our pilgrimage from ourselves to the migrants entails breaking with them the bread of our lives as baptized and consecrated persons, humbly washing their feet, pouring precious nard on the unexpected guests, pausing to look after our fellow pilgrims wounded or hurt in their dignity, caring for them with the tenderness and commitment of Jesus, the good Samaritan.

Often feeling powerless when confronted with persons and institutions that seek to eliminate differences and impose uniformity, we turn to the creator Spirit of Pentecost. In spite of our temptation to give up, the Spirit of God invites us to move constantly from communion to diversity and from diversity to communion.

4. Elements of a Scalabrinian Missionary Spirituality

Our ministry and presence within the church has brought about some results on a theoretical as well as on a practical level. Our ministry is not parallel to but is an integral part of the local church's ministry. Within the local church, migrants have the same rights as everybody else because "in the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, any where."²⁹ From a religious as well as from a cultural point of view migrants are not biodegradable. One of the first fruits of the Scalabrinian tradition is in fact the appreciation of diversity through personal, ecclesial, and social relations. As individuals and as community, we invite those we meet to walk with us in that spirit of communion which overcomes all temptations to uniformity and has the power to transform the affirmation of one's own identity into a celebration of diversity perceived as a gift.

We are meant to be ministers of communion, building bridges between migrants and local churches. Inspired by Scalabrini, we work with migrants for the growth of a church that must express fully the notes of catholicity and communion, where differences are not left at the door nor forced into uniformity. Our ministry aims at educating fellow Christians to welcome and not to refuse or merely tolerate migrants.

²⁸ For an analysis of the theological and philosophical essays on migration published recently see C. LUBOS; G.G. TASSELLO (eds.), *Scienze teologiche e mobilità umana: Excursus bibliografico (1980-1997)*, "Studi Emigrazione", XXXIV, 128, 1997, pp. 578-734; G.G. TASSELLO; L. DEPONTI; C. LUBOS (eds.), *Filosofia e teologia in contesto migratorio: Un aggiornamento bibliografico*, "Studi Emigrazione", XXXVIII, 143, 2001, pp. 655-739.

²⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Message for World Migration Day, 1995-1996*, no. 5.

In spite of their dramatic existence, which is often the result of injustice and exclusion, migrants are the hidden and providential builders of universal brotherhood and sisterhood. Their presence becomes for the church prophecy and sacrament of catholicity, reminding it of its universal vocation. We are asked to be the sentries of a new dawn, waiting together with migrants for new heavens and a new earth (*Rv* 21:1).

Quite a few church people do not consider migration as a problem any longer, but as a providential opportunity for both church and society. They emphasize that ministry to migrants is an essential part of the church's pastoral care and not a response to an emergency, or a passing whim. Religious ministry to migrants does not simply mean offering them linguistic assistance for their liturgical celebrations. It requires a long educational process in which migrants are taught to interpret their history through the eyes of faith and accept the responsibility of their new mission in life. In the past we were speaking of a mission of the church to migrants. Today we insist on the mission of migrants within the church.

A theological vision of the care of migrants is much more relevant than a technical service. Migrants are not numbers to be used for power games but a revelation of the good news. What in the beginning was solely a control issue has now become a theological concern. The effort to assimilate migrants has given way to an intercultural approach, which demands that the care of migrants, in order to be a true ministry, be specific, specialized, exemplary, and catholic in its outcome.

While the political issue is ever present (the fear of a *deAmericanization* of the U.S. through the influx of newer immigrants is apparent even today³⁰), the church has become aware of its *new* image, from a theological as well as from a sociological point of view. In the past, she worked for migrants, or with them; today she defines herself as a *pilgrim*, a *migrant church*.

The history of the Scalabrinian congregation is a history of loss and recovery, of death and resurrection, of diversity and communion: a typical migrant history. We consider the discrepancy between the ideals handed to us and the daily reality we face as a laboratory, in which it is possible to grow together. Every step toward communion, motivated by trust in the Father's promise, becomes prophecy and anticipation of the kingdom.

God's behavior has taught us to be patient with ourselves, with migrants, and with local Catholic communities. During our pilgrimage, we have felt the necessity to seek companions, people who share our vision and our hopes. With them and by the grace of God we can journey toward the future:

"Some day [...] all nations will have in this land numerous rich, happy, moral, and God-fearing descendants who, while retaining the characteristics of their respective nationalities, will be closely united. This land of blessings will give rise to inspirations, develop principles, unfurl new mysterious forces that will regenerate and revitalize the Old World, teaching it the true economy of liberty, brotherhood, and equality, showing it that, though politically and religiously united, people of different origins can very well keep their own language and nationality, without the barriers that divide people and make them envious, without armed forces to dominate and destroy one another. [...] Yes, this is my hope! For while the world is dazzled by its progress, while man exults in his conquests over matter and lords it over nature, disemboweling the earth, yoking the lightning, cutting isthmuses to mingle the waters of the oceans, eliminating distances; while nations fall and rise and renew themselves; while races mingle, spread, and fuse; above the roar of our machines, above all this feverish activity, over and beyond all these

³⁰ This view has been recently championed in SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *Who are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Simon and Schuster, New York 2004.

gigantic achievements and not without them, a much vaster, nobler, and more sublime work is developing: the union in God through Jesus Christ of *all* people of good will.”³¹

This was Scalabrini’s dream. This is also our dream. Our task is not yet finished. We are not people of the past, but together with many other persons working with migrants we are the forerunners of the future. And this is a great challenge and a great responsibility.

³¹ JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, *A Living Voice*..., op. cit., pp. 391–392.