



Rome, October 14, 2023

His Holiness

Pope Francis

Holy Father,

One year ago, you received us, the day after the canonization of our Founder and Inspirer, Saint John Baptist Scalabrini, to encourage us to walk like him on the path of holiness. As a Scalabrinian family, comprised by the Scalabrinian Missionaries, the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, the Scalabrinian Secular Missionaries and delegates from the laity, representing numerous groups of Scalabrinian lay people and people of good will scattered all over the world who share the charism and mission we inherited from St. John Baptist Scalabrini, we have returned a year later, at the end of a journey dedicated to spirituality, to hear once again your words of encouragement.

We have in our eyes the tragic images of these days, images of unprecedented violence, ruthless hatred leading to new slaughter of innocents, images that seem to say that there is no limit to human wickedness. These images overlap with the many others of migrants – men, women and children – dying on their route to hope or colliding with walls and barbed wire against which their dreams are shattered. How to speak of spirituality when the reality is one of confrontation, hatred, anguish, blood, and death?

But it is precisely in this context of wounded and anguished humanity that we must listen to the Spirit, because we are convinced, as you teach us, that only by listening to the voice of the Spirit can we heal our hearts. If we do not allow the Holy Spirit to heal our hearts, we will never have the same feelings as Christ (Phil. 2:5) and wickedness and indifference toward those who suffer will continue to emerge from our souls.

We were guided in our reflection by the verse from the prophet Isaiah: *I will come to gather all the nations* (Is. 66:18). With confidence in the great plan of salvation, in which Scalabrini firmly believed and in which he saw migrants involved as protagonists, we returned to drink at the well of our charism and tradition and reflected on the spirituality of the Father and apostle of migrants, whom you proclaimed as a model of Christian life to the whole Church. It is the spirituality of a man who sought to conform himself in all things to Christ, convinced that "union with Jesus Christ is a vital thing for us; taken away from him, we are dead, and dead are our things"; a bishop who loved the Church, regarded as "the masterpiece of the mind and heart of God," a Church that "will never forget the mission entrusted to it by God to evangelize the children of poverty and labor." The spirituality of a man whose charity had no limits, a man who considered the poor "the pupil of God's eyes" and who, as St. Paul teaches, made himself all things to all people, but without neglecting the inner life "in which alone is found consolation, strength, inner nourishment, light, peace." Against the divisions of his time, he always sought conciliation, but never at the expense of truth, which he always upheld "with much charity and much gentleness." The spirituality of a missionary who sought the encounter with people, convinced that it was necessary to leave the temple, but "after having drawn from piety

and prayer light and comfort"; the spirituality of a pastor who knew how to widen his heart beyond the borders of his diocese "to seek new flock" among the emigrants in the American continent. Saint Scalabrini found his support in the Eucharist, his refuge in the cross of Jesus, his comfort in Mary, mother of the Church.

These days of reflection, prayer and discernment on Scalabrinian spirituality have revived our conviction and commitment to follow Scalabrini's example of letting the Spirit be the engine of our actions. His spiritual legacy, combined with his charismatic legacy, should make us capable of welcoming to collaborate in the Father's plan of salvation; of itinerancy, to translate the Paschal mystery of the Son into our lives and make us migrants with migrants; and of communion in diversity to welcome the new creation of the Spirit. At the service of the Word, we feel we are sent on a mission that demands of us the capacity for intercultural dialogue and that has as its ultimate goal the reunion of all peoples. We are spurred on by Scalabrini's invitation, "love everyone, do good to all, to all without exception."

Holy Father, our mission is getting larger and larger and, as you reminded us a few years ago, we are too few. We want, however, to walk confidently in a life lived in the Spirit, because the Spirit is the protagonist of mission. We also want to walk in a synodal way, together with the Church, the social and political actors and all people of good will committed to building the Kingdom of God. Trusting that the Holy Spirit will heal our hearts and never make us weary of washing the feet of migrants wounded and hurt in their dignity, always walking humbly with our God and his people, we ask for your fatherly blessing.

*Fr. Leonir M. Chiarello, cs.
Superior General*

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE PROMOTED BY
MISSIONARIES OF SAINT CHARLES (SCALABRINIANS)**

Consistory Hall, Saturday, 14 October 2013

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet you all, pleased to meet you at the end of the Convention on Scalabrinian spirituality. You have reflected on the Biblical verse: “I am coming to gather all nations and tongues” (Is 66:18), a theme that is very meaningful for your charism. Indeed, Saint John Baptist Scalabrini, who founded you as missionaries for migrants, taught you, in taking care of them, to consider yourselves brothers and sisters, walking towards unity, according to the heartfelt words of Jesus’ priestly prayer (cf. Jn 17:20-23).

Let us be clear: migrating is not a pleasant pilgrimage in communion; it is often an ordeal. And, just as every person the right to migrate, so too they have the right to be able to stay in their own land and live there in peace and dignity. Yet the tragedy of forced migrations caused by wars, famine, poverty and environmental hardship is there for all to see today. And this is precisely where your spirituality comes in: how do you dispose your heart towards these brothers and sisters? With the support of which spiritual path?

Scalabrini helps us, precisely by looking at the missionaries of migrants as cooperators of the Holy Spirit for unity. His is an enlightened and original vision of the migratory phenomenon, viewed as a call to create communion in charity. While still a young parish priest, he recounts finding himself, at Milan Central Station, in front of a mass of Italian migrants leaving for America. He recounts seeing “three or four hundred poorly dressed individuals, divided into different groups. On their faces [...] furrowed by the premature wrinkles that deprivation imprints on them, the turmoil of the affections that stirred their hearts at that moment was visible. [...] They were emigrants [...] They were preparing to leave their homeland” (*L'emigrazione italiana in America*, 1888). These images are unfortunately familiar to us too. And the Saint, struck by that great misery, understood that there was a sign from God for him there: the call to assist those people materially and spiritually, so that none of them, left to themselves, would be lost, to lose their faith; so that they could come, as the prophet Isaiah says, to the holy mountain of Jerusalem “from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries” (66:20). Horses, chariots, sedan chairs, mules and dromedaries, to which we could add today boats, TIRs and barely seaworthy vessels; but the destination remains the same, Jerusalem, the city of peace (cf. Ps 122:3-9), the Church, the home of all peoples (cf. Is 56:7), where the life of each is sacred and precious. Yes, for Scalabrini this Jerusalem is the Catholic, that is, universal, Church; and she is such because she is “mother”, because she is a city open to anyone seeking a home and a safe harbour.

And here there is a first appeal to us, to cultivate hearts that are rich in catholicity, that is, desirous of universality and unity, of encounter and communion. It is the invitation to spread a mentality of proximity – “proximity”, this key word, is the style of God, who always makes himself close - a spirituality, a mindset of care and welcome, and to make “the civilization of love” grow in the world, in the words of Saint Paul VI (Homily for the solemn closing rite of the Holy Year, 25 December 1975). However, it would be somewhat utopian to claim that all this can be achieved by human forces alone. Instead, it is a matter of co-operating with the action of the Spirit, and therefore of acting in

history under the guidance and with the energy that comes from God: of allowing ourselves to be conquered by his infinite tenderness to feel and act according to his ways, which are not always our ways (cf. Is 55:8), to recognize him in the stranger (cf. Mt 25:35) and to find in him the strength to love freely. The stranger. Let us not forget these three words from the Old Testament: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. And this is an important thing in the Old Testament: the stranger.

And here is the second appeal that the Bishop Saint of Piacenza makes to us, when he insists on the need for the missionary to have a relationship of love with Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate, and to cultivate it especially through the Eucharist, celebrated and adored. I emphasize this word "adored". I think we have lost the sense of adoration. And we have prayers to do something or... beautiful prayers, but... in silence, adoring. The modern mentality has taken this sense of adoration away from us a little bit. Rediscover it, please, rediscover it.

We know how much Scalabrini loved Adoration, to which he devoted himself even at night, despite his tiredness from his exhausting work schedule, and which he did not renounce during the day, even in his busiest moments. He had no illusions: without prayer there is no mission! He said: "[Do not] allow yourselves to be led astray by a certain mad desire to help others, neglecting yourselves [...]. It is right that you make yourselves all things to all men; but [...] remember the Angels who in Jacob's Ladder ascended to God and descended to earth [...]. For you, too, are Angels of the Lord" (Final address to the Diocesan Synod of Piacenza, 4 September 1879). To ascend to God is indispensable to then know how to descend to the ground, to be "angels from below", close to the least: it is no coincidence that Jacob's ladder (cf. Gen 28:10-22) is depicted right in the centre of Scalabrini's episcopal coat of arms.

Therefore, dear sisters, dear brothers, here is an invitation to renew your commitment to migrants, and to root it increasingly in an intense spiritual life, following the example of your Founder. Along with this, though, I want to say a big thank you to you, a very big thank you for the great deal of work you do throughout the world! Since the times of Buenos Aires I am a witness to this work, and you do it so well. Thank you, thank you very much! Keep going, God bless you. And pray. And also, pray for me, because this "profession" is not easy!



From the Vatican, October 16, 2023

Dear Brother,

I would like to thank you for your kind letter of October 14 and for the contribution that, on behalf of the Missionaries of St. Charles, you made to me for works of charity.

I greatly appreciated your gesture of concern for the poor and the words with which you accompanied it. Go forward with joy. I assure you of my spiritual closeness.

Invoking the protection of the Blessed Virgin, I heartily bless the entire Scalabrinian family. Please continue to pray for me.

Fraternally,

Francesco

Rev. P Leonir M. Chiarello, es
Superiore Generale dei Missionari di San Carlo

SYMPOSIUM ON SPIRITUALITY

Rome, 9-14 October 2023

Summary of presentations, discussions, and suggestions

The conference, requested by the 15th General Chapter, was organized in Rome at the International College of St. Lawrence of Brindisi of the Capuchin Friars Minor from October 9 to 14, 2023. The verse from Isaiah (66:18), "I will come to gather all nations," was chosen as the theme of the conference to emphasize that all of us, with our particularities and differences, which harmonize in relationships set on the basis of intercultural dialogue, are moving toward the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation on all humanity, that plan in which migrants are also actively involved, as Scalabrini taught us.

Sixty-seven delegates from the various regions/provinces attended the conference, including a representation of lay Scalabrinians, Scalabrinian missionary sisters and Scalabrinian secular missionaries.

1. The proceedings of the conference

The conference began with a reflection on spirituality, which invited us to seek new wells and new paths, but without forgetting to drink from the well of our tradition. The presentation on diversity, a gift of the Spirit, emphasized that "interculturality is not a content or technique to be learned but a process of personal and communal transformation. It is not just the experience of diversity as mutual enrichment but leads to transcending diversity (as divisive) toward greater inclusion and union."

After a clarification of the notion of spirituality and the cross-cultural dimension of spirituality, we heard how Jesuits and Xavierians moved from the spirituality of the Founder to the spirituality of the Institute. Decisive were the constitutions, which gave substance to the Founder's spirit, and the process of discernment, which led to the identification of constants found in the spirituality of the Founder and of the Institute.

The testimonies of lay people in the four areas of the Congregation, and that of the Scalabrinian secular missionaries, the Scalabrinian missionary sisters and the Scalabrinian missionaries illustrated how Scalabrinian spirituality is currently lived out. It was noted that in the commitment to mission there is joy in living the Scalabrinian charism and joy in seeing how relevant it is. Scalabrinian devotions continue to be a point of reference both personally and communally. At the same time, however, uncertainty has been noted in specifically identifying Scalabrinian spirituality, the lack of shared expressions of this spirituality, and sometimes even the little spiritual support that is offered to those engaged in mission.

An attempt was made to identify the essential elements that characterized Scalabrini's spirituality (a Christocentric, ecclesial, communion, self-giving, missionary spirituality) and how these elements survive in the Scalabrinian spirituality. This path was synthesized in the past by the three Institutes in the basic text of *Traditio*, revised a few years ago. It is, however, a process always in progress. To the dimensions of welcome, itinerancy and union in diversity, which refer back to the Trinity, it is appropriate to add also the dimensions of donation and missionary spirit, so as not to lose these aspects that were so important in Scalabrini's spiritual experience. In order to be faithful and creative in the process of identifying Scalabrinian spirituality, it is necessary to keep Scalabrini's charismatic

inheritance in relation with spiritual inheritance, so as to allow the charism to connote spirituality in the expressions of the various historical periods in which one lives and the various contexts in which one is sent on mission, and the spirituality to render mission as an action of the Spirit that leads to the transformation of life, community and society. In the ongoing process of appropriating the spiritual legacy of the Founder, it is necessary to equip oneself with an appropriate pedagogy, both in the period of initial formation and in the period of ongoing formation.

The testimonies on the journey made in the various areas from the 1996 conference to the present day have brought out the creativity that has been experienced in characterizing the mission with the connotations of the Scalabrinian tradition, including through meetings, conferences, animation programs, liturgies, prayers, performances, and songs. The Scalabrinian year and the event of Scalabrini's canonization have led to greater interest in the figure of the Founder and specific initiatives to make him known. It has been noted that often the laity, sometimes with heroic testimonies, were the ones who have emphasized the belonging to the Scalabrinian charism and adherence to the Scalabrinian identity, those laity who ask for a greater contribution from religious in sharing the sources of spirituality.

The difficulties in living intercultural dialogue and the inspiration to move toward a more harmonious path in both the community and pastoral spheres were the subject of two meditations, in which, starting from chapters 13 and 15 of the Acts of the Apostles, the aspects that must be present in the apostle's discernment and in community discernment in view of a mission guided by the Spirit were grasped.

2. Some highlights that emerged from the workshops

We cannot do justice in a few lines to the richness that emerged in the group discussions, made up of sharing, suggestions, testimonies. We report only a few expressions among many.

- Scalabrinians are custodians of differences, capable of welcoming and accepting differences.
- More than looking for answers in the journey with migrants, with all their differences, it is important to stay on the journey together with them.
- The encounter with the migrant, to be a true spiritual encounter, requires the ability to make space in us, and thus the ability to empty ourselves, to kenosis, and the ability to allow ourselves to be transformed.
- An authentic spirituality asks to avoid certain negativity, e.g., indifference, paternalism, welfarism, utilitarianism, passivity, tolerance, self-referentiality.
- Personal growth in Scalabrinian spirituality is necessary, so as to spread it by speaking to what is in one's heart.
- What feeds our spirituality? It seems that Scalabrini's devotions remain the most common reference. At the same time, other forms of prayer closer to contemporary sensibilities have developed in the Church, and others can be sought. However, there is no convergence on which form of prayer unites and characterizes us.

- We need to be careful of the dispersion to which migrants lead us when the interior life is neglected lest we run the risk of losing the center of convergence that is Christ. It is necessary to leave the sacristy but not without first contemplating Christ.
- The symposium was a step forward because it forced us to become aware of the relevance of the spiritual dimension in our missionary action, both on a personal and community level and drew attention to the importance of intercultural dialogue in our communities and mission. It was pointed out that our spirituality is a mosaic of elements still unfinished. There is an attempt at synthesis, which still needs to be reflected upon. However, we must remember that spirituality is a gift we have received and for which we must be grateful, remaining faithful but also allowing ourselves to be carried by the creativity of the Spirit.
- The vitality of the assembly, the desire to go deeper, the heterogeneity of experiences, the testimonies of the laity were an unexpected richness. Perhaps the testimony of some migrants would have made an additional contribution.
- It struck that Scalabrinian spirituality is alive and embraces a larger horizon than we think. The variety of origins and the many faces of the Congregation were striking. What divides us is not cultural diversity. Striking was also the interaction among the participants, the bonds created, the experiences of giving in service to migrants.
- The laity asked that they be given more space and the opportunity to meet, to get to know each other, and to promote spirituality.
- We need to be a bridge between languages, cultures, different ways of doing pastoral care. But above all, we need to be a bridge among each other.
- It is necessary to bring back what we have experienced in the various local contexts so that the same path is taken locally as well.
- Spirituality must permeate all dimensions of what we do, including administrative action.
- Spirituality must be embodied. In this process it is necessary to make room for cultural diversity within ourselves and in our mission so as not to impoverish it.
- The basic text of the *Traditio* must be rediscovered and enhanced, making it an object of personal meditation and communal reflection.

3. Initiatives to deepen and spread Scalabrinian spirituality

Personal initiatives

- To know and deepen the reference texts: writings by Scalabrini and texts by and about Scalabrinian spirituality (e.g., the basic text of the *Traditio*).
- Transmitting Scalabrinian spirituality through pastoral action.

At the local level

- Enhance occasions when Scalabrinian spirituality can be transmitted, e.g., liturgical feasts in memory of St. G. B. Scalabrini, St. Charles, Blessed Mother Assunta.

- Promote an intercultural approach to the various feasts that are celebrated (peoples' feasts, feasts of patron saints, Marian feasts, cultural celebrations).
- Ensure that in pastoral contexts (parishes, missions, houses for migrants...) there is identification with the congregation, through posters, images, distribution of literature...
- Adopt the habit of reciting the prayer to Scalabrini together every day.

At the regional/provincial level

- Organize a spirituality congress at the regional/provincial level.

At the general level

- Establish a spirituality center at the general level in the Motherhouse in Piacenza and spirituality centers at the regional/provincial level with the tasks of producing specific materials and organize initiatives such as spiritual exercises, retreats, etc. See that this is dealt with at the next General Chapter.
- Ensure that the initial formation program develops in its various stages the theme of Scalabrinian spirituality.
- Organize ongoing formation initiatives on the theme of Scalabrinian spirituality.
- Give a Scalabrinian characterization to the 30-day exercises before perpetual profession.
- Choose an annual theme for reflection and deepening on Scalabrinian spirituality.
- Develop a calendar of Scalabrinian spirituality, in which a theme related to Scalabrinian spirituality is chosen in each month.
- Train people to study Scalabrinian spirituality.
- Translate into other languages the material that is currently available only in Italian.
- Make an in-depth study of Scalabrini's vision of the laity and invest in the formation of the laity.
- Have international meetings of young Scalabrinians.
- Have a common approach of the three Institutes in some specific initiatives.

4. Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks to the confreres who translated the written texts, especially Fathers Mario Geremia, Mario Zambiasi, Vincenzo Ronchi, Pio Finizio, Giovanni Bizzotto, Miguel Alvarez and others.

For simultaneous translations during the conference, we were helped in the morning by Fathers Sergio Durigon, Luis Antonio Diaz, Delmar Silva and Reinaldo Vassoler and in the afternoon by Fathers Walter Tonelotto, Mario Zambiasi, Gerardo Garcia and Leandro Fossà. We thank them sincerely.

Special thanks to Fr. Gianni Borin for all the logistical and technical organization, as well as to Fathers Mario Geremia and Mariano Cisco. Thanks to Maria Gabriella Lanza for the photos, videos and interviews that spread the conference proceedings on social media.