

“For while the world is dazzled by its progress, while man exults in his conquests over matter ... 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 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”.
(J. B. Scalabrini)

The Intuitions & Charism of Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, Bishop and Father to the Migrants.

John Baptist Scalabrini clearly grasped the political, social and religious impact of the phenomenon of migration in modern society. He understood the global and permanent dimensions of migration, even when some of his contemporaries considered it a passing trend. Today we can only marvel at his prophetic intuition.

As missionary Bishop, Scalabrini took to heart the plight of so many of his countrymen, who had no choice but to migrate. While de-

fending people’s right to migrate, he took on those who claimed the right to force people to migrate and intervened to protect migrants from exploitation by “agents of human flesh.” He traveled throughout Italy, denouncing the causes of migration and seeking to stir the awareness of both society and Church, while lobbying for fair emigration laws. His main concern was the preservation of the migrants’ faith, and the safeguard of their language and culture, while advocating a better rapport with local Church and society.



Seeds migrate on the wings of the wind. Plants migrate from continent to continent on the waves of the seas and rivers. Birds and other animals move from place to place. But even more do 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. (J. B. Scalabrini 1876)

As a man of faith, he searched for the signs of God's plan even in the phenomenon of migration. Scalabrini believed that all human events were directed by Divine Providence and this led him to believe that even the anguished world of migration was the object of the Father's love: a world in which, with the unifying force of the Spirit, the Father is at work in building solidarity, justice and peace, for the single purpose of: ***"making out of many peoples one people, out of many families one family."*** And herein

was Scalabrini's dream.

Following his two pastoral visits to Italian migrants in the United States (1901) and in Brazil (1904), Bishop Scalabrini became convinced that the

Church needed to take to heart the migrants' cause, regardless of their nationality, ethnic origins or culture. He outlined this in a proposal he sent to Pope Pius X as a special ***"Memorandum"***, which is his spiritual testament, entrusted to the Church, inviting her to see in migration a God-given opportunity to show her ***"catholicity."***



The Timeliness of The Scalabrinian Charism

As Scalabrini's sons and daughters, we make ourselves migrants with the migrants so as to share their journey of hope, in solidarity and communion. Aware that our charism places us at the center of the mission and at the very heart of the Church's spirituality of communion, we feel called to promote communion



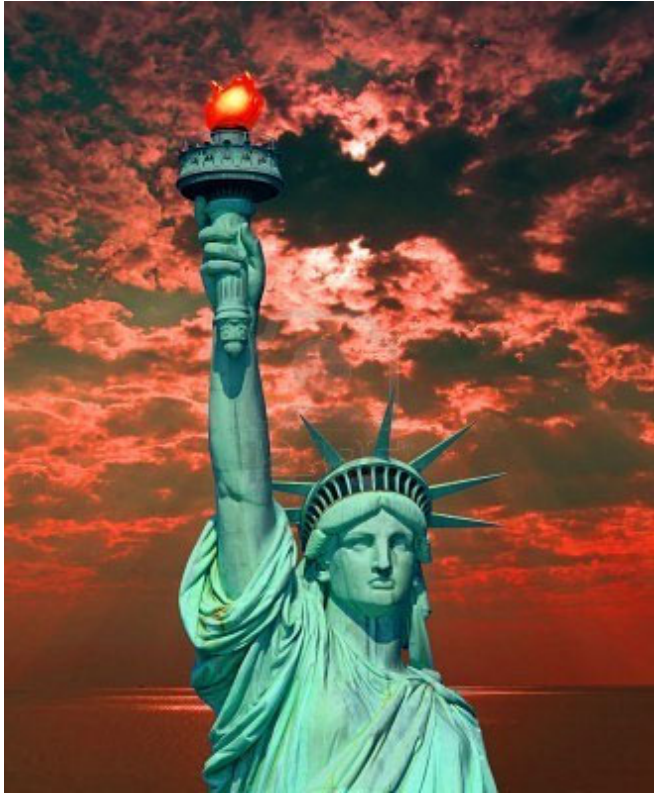
in diversity and to bring together God's scattered children, particularly those living most acutely the drama of migration. The phenomenon of migration challenges the very foundations of civil and religious coexistence, and is to be considered the ultimate test of a society's level of civilization and of the catholic identity of Church.

Migrations: Challenge and Resource for Church and Society

Everyone is aware by now that international society is undergoing a process of irreversible transformation, and is becoming increasingly multiethnic and plurireligious. This transformation, in which migration plays an important – though not exclusive – role, is to be seen as both a challenge and resource for society in general and for the Church's new evangelizing mission in particular.

We know that the world of immigrants can make a valid contribution to the consolidation of peace.

John Baptist Scalabrini, anticipating the times, placed fully his hope on *“the children of misery and labor”*: in the migrants he saw potential signs and witnesses of communion, the gift of Pentecost, where differences are reconciled by the Spirit, and love finds its validity in welcoming the other.



Rethinking The Future With The Stranger In Mind

This new century has been called the century of the stranger “par excellence”.

Some migrants are forced out of their lands and communities by persecution or ethnic cleansing. Others leave their homelands because of poverty and hunger, desperately seeking the bread of survival. The poor, the hungry and the wretched of the so-called third or fourth world, deprived even of the

bear minimum, are the strangers “par excellence” of the 21st century. Entering the affluent cities of our western world, they cry out their anguish and their right to share in this affluence.

But the displaced and hungry migrants are not our century’s only strangers; people in general are also becoming strangers to themselves. It’s that sense of estrangement whereby a person perceives itself as foreigner within it’s own culture, in trying to establish it’s own individual otherness and transcendence.

The New Colossus (by Emma Lazarus)
***Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”***

This new century, then, marked by *the troubling experience of feeling foreign* even to one's immediate surroundings, (be they a foreign language or country, or the deprivation of the basic goods or the violation of one's identity), is in need of a new way of thinking. It offers the favorable opportunity and the outright urgent necessity to restructure our relations with the *strangers* among us, perceiving them not as *a threat*, as it has too often occurred, but as *something sacred*, as it has seldom been the case. New categories must be found to help rethink our concept of "*stranger*". Though an *outsider*, the *stranger* must not be perceived as a *threat to be removed*, but as a "*word*" to be welcomed. This "*word*", once accepted, opens new ethical dimensions and a fresh outlook, no longer centered on our personal "*ego*" with its demands for satisfactions and rights, but on the "*other*," whose countenance reflects a light coming from beyond.

