



## CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY\*

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What are the foundations that should be referential to guide the apostolic mission of the mscs congregation today in the different realities and countries?

If we look at our history of 125 years of the MSCS Congregation, we perceive the great signs of God's love and Providence. The charism characterized the whole being and acting of the Congregation. Even in the most challenging periods, there was creative fidelity to the charism, courage in the assumed mission, missionary expansion and new congregational horizons.

### 1. The Scalabrinian Charism

A gift of the Spirit given to the founder John Baptist Scalabrini, "it is a charism the Lord has given the Church through him for the world of human mobility<sup>1</sup>."

Pope Francis affirms that charisms in the Church are not something static, rigid, they are not "museum pieces. On the contrary, they are rivers of living water (cf. Jn 7:37-39) that flow through the soil of history to irrigate it and make the seeds of the Good sprout<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, the charism represents a dynamic and historical reality, an event that is transmitted through time while continuing to be realized in different and new ways. It is the unchanging core that goes through times and places and is translated into each new reality. This is why it is living, flexible and adaptable.

The dynamism in the charism awakened in the Founder helped him to understand the phenomenon of migration in all its dimensions: human, social, economic, and especially in the dimension of faith. This charism was not only a

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1 *Traditio Scalabriniana* (TS), n. 2.

2 JOHN PAUL II, post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation , *Vita Consecrata* (VC), n. 37.



gift to Scalabrini but was communicated by the same Spirit to other people who joined him, priests, religious, and laypeople, leading them to assume a specific mission with the migrants in the Church. And we acknowledge the tireless giving of the co-founders, Mother Assunta Marchetti and Father Joseph Marchetti, who incarnated this charism from the "first hour" and gave their lives for love of it.

From this original charism of Scalabrini, the Church awakened in front of the pastoral and social urgencies caused by the phenomenon of migration, engaged in reflection and guidance for pastoral practice, above all, to keep alive the faith of millions of migrants, of all nationalities, spread across the various continents.

## 2. The feminine face of the Scalabrinian charism

In a religious family, the charism traces the essential lines that characterize the very identity of the Institute, its mission in the Church, and its spirituality. According to our Constitutions, the charismatic gift given to the Founder and transmitted to each one of us imprints a particular style of sanctification and apostolate enables us to contemplate migration from the perspective of faith and to see in migrants the image of the pilgrim Christ: "*I was a stranger, and you welcomed me*" (Mt 25:35). This charism challenges us to live welcoming and solidarity, assume the apostolic itinerancy of being "migrants with the migrants," and witness communion in<sup>3</sup>.

The charism gives us a mystique in our being and in our doing. We took on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in the Church, and we carry it out in the following areas: religious, educational, cultural, social, and health. In this missionary action, we are a feminine force and a sign of hope in the world of migrations called to transform our life into "evangelical-missionary service to migrants, preferably the poorest in situations of greater vulnerability, who need a specific pastoral action<sup>4</sup>."

Even before the Congregation's foundation, Scalabrini wrote to Fr. Consoni: "*The work of the missionaries would be incomplete, especially in South America, without the help of the sisters. Therefore, I asked different congregations already existing, but I did not achieve anything*"<sup>5</sup>. In the resistance of other congregations to work with the migrants, we felt that it permeates the mysterious designs of God's Providence. It was us, Scalabrinian missionaries, who were being conceived in God's Plan. And remembering an image of the prophet Jeremiah, with some boldness, we can say: *we were like a branch of an almond tree, about to blossom, and God was watching to accomplish his*

<sup>3</sup> MSCS, Constitutional Norms (NC), n. 3.

<sup>4</sup> NC, n. 5.6.

<sup>5</sup> SCALABRINIAN CONGREGATIONS, *Scalabrini a living voice*, Loyola, 1989, p. 421.



word (Jer 1, 11-12). And this word was fulfilled, this branch sprouted, gave flowers, and embellished the garden of feminine charisms in the Church.

And also famous are Scalabrini's words about the missionary woman, just before leaving for the mission: "*God placed in the heart of women a particular gift, which has a mysterious power over minds and hearts, therefore, I trust that you will correspond to the Grace of God who calls you to a distant land, to a sublime mission*<sup>6</sup>."

The Church recognizes the 'feminine genius', the charisma of femininity with all its beauty and richness and not only<sup>7</sup> in its diverse apostolic activities, but also in other areas, such as the field of "*theological, cultural, and spiritual reflection*<sup>8</sup>."

### 3. The spiritual dimension of the Charism

In the spiritual dimension of the charism, our Constitutions define spirituality as Christocentric in Trinitarian perspective, which is incarnated in the reality of migrants, permeates the life and mission of the Congregation. This experience, lived by the Founder and Co-Founders, is based on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, who places his tent among us. The Founder's episcopal coat of arms motivates us to have an experience in the Spirit that integrates contemplation and action. This spirituality, lived in community is nourished mainly by the Eucharist, listening to the Word of God, from the devotion to Mary, and the calls of migrants<sup>9</sup>.

This spirituality is anchored in the God who prefers the tent as his living place, who becomes a pilgrim in Jesus Christ, to walk beside the migrants and all those who struggle for life. The *Traditio* Scalabrinian states that "*only a specific spirituality can clothe our presence with prophecy in the Church and in the world and thus revitalize our mission with and for the migrants in the local churches*<sup>10</sup>," bearing fruit where we are and work<sup>11</sup>."

The call is to be missionaries "contemplative in action<sup>12</sup>." We cannot separate spirituality and mission; both are intertwined, integrated. The ultimate goal is holiness. Holiness is the high standard of ordinary Christian life and not

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6 M. FRANCESCONI, *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini*, Città Nuova Editrice, 1985, p. 1055.

7 CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *New wine in new wineskins*, n. 17.

8 VC, n. 58.

9 NC, n. 4.

10 TS, n. 1.

11 TS, n. 5.

12 JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* (RMI), n. 91.



only that, it is the goal of every pastoral journey. And to place pastoral work in this perspective is a choice fraught with consequences.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Foundations that should be referential to guide the apostolic mission of the MSCS congregation today in the different realities and countries?**

And for us to maintain a creative and dynamic fidelity to our own charism, which foundations should be referential to guide the apostolic mission of the Congregation?

They are already part of our charismatic identity, of the nature and purpose of the Congregation: **welcoming, itinerancy, and communion in diversity**<sup>14</sup>. Besides these, by the nature of our charism, I propose **universality, incarnation, and hope**. *I justify this choice with references to the documents of the Church, of the Congregation, and of the life of the Founder and Co-Founders.*

##### **4.1 Welcoming**

By welcoming, we participate in God's project, so that the earth becomes a place of brotherhood and sharing, anticipation of that banquet of the Kingdom, by their name<sup>15</sup>.

##### ***In the life of the Founder and Co-Founders***

Scalabrini, in his pastoral zeal, expressed welcoming, above all, through the multiple works of charity. He affirmed that *"to leave a person without giving food, a thirsty person without giving drink, a naked person without giving clothes, a pilgrim without giving hospitality, an unhappy person without giving comfort, is like leaving hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, disconsolate and abandoned Jesus Christ himself. Therefore, the most delicate care, the most tender and affectionate attention is for the one who is small, fragile, despised in the eyes of the world"*<sup>16</sup>. With the migrants, he felt it was necessary to be beside them, from the moment of their departure, during the crossings, at their arrival, in the places of insertion, and there were countless initiatives in their favor.

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13 NMI, n. 31.

14 NC, n. 3.

15 TS, n. 4.

16 M. CALIARO – M. FRANCESCONI. *The apostle of the emigrants*, Ancora, 1968, p. 298.



*Mother Assunta* was solicitous in welcoming the sisters, the orphans, and was moved by the material needs of the poor. When a new orphan arrived, she was the first to offer to give him/her the first hygienic care<sup>17</sup>.

*Father Joseph Marchetti*, an example of self-giving and of a heart who saw Christ in the faces of the little ones. The charity was the flame that illuminated and impregnated his entire apostolate. His dream of embracing everyone, to give them fraternal support, was realized through self-giving, personal sacrifice, and an exhausting mission.<sup>18</sup>

### ***In the mission of the Scalabrinian Sister***

Welcoming presupposes a desire and a mental and spiritual attitude toward the other, which overcomes prejudices, distances, and indifferences. Christ asks to be welcomed in migrants, refugees, but also in the sick, in the poor, in the young, in the most diverse groups of people, with all their diversities.

The process of welcoming requires emptying oneself; it is building bridges between one culture and another, between one people and another. This requires listening, dialoguing, engaging in fraternal relationships, in a word, building a *Culture of Encounter*.

## **4.2 Universality**

The greatness of the charism bequeathed by Scalabrini is based on the ecumenical and universalistic spirit<sup>19</sup>. "We are challenged to widen our circle, to give our capacity to love a universal dimension, capable of going beyond all prejudices, all historical or cultural barriers, *all petty interests*<sup>20</sup>."

### ***In the life of the Founder and the Co-Founders***

Scalabrini affirmed that, almost always, emigration is a good for humanity and extends the concept of homeland beyond the material confines, giving man the world as his homeland<sup>21</sup>.

He wanted the Church to act for the unity of the "dispersed children of God". He saw in migrations a privileged way for the unity of peoples. The idea

17 L. BONDI, *Virtues of the servant of God Mother Assunta Marchetti*, Loyola, 2004, p.16.

18 Z. ORNAGHI, *Fr. Joseph Marchetti – the martyr of charity*, EDUCS, 1997, p. 17.25.28.34.

19 R. RIZZARDO, *the Scalabrinian Charism in the Church*, Scalabrinian Congregation 1991, p. 119-121.

20 FRANCISCO, Encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* (FT), n. 83.

21 *Scalabrini A living voice*, p. 369.



was not a utopia, but a well- articulated work, carried out with an efficient and ecumenical pastoral<sup>22</sup>.

And almost at the end of his life, as he himself states, "fruit of what I have seen in my travels; what I have visited; what I have known; what I have experienced", he presents to the Church - the Memorial - a proposal for the Church to assume the commitment of accompanying the migrants of all nationalities.<sup>23</sup>.

*Mother Assunta* had a big heart open to everyone. In the orphanages there were not only children of Italians but also children of former slaves, Polish, Spanish, etc. She cared for them all with affection, especially those with the most repugnant appearance because of the misery in which they were found.

In the Christopher Columbus Orphanage, *Father Joseph Marchetti* had as his main objective to help the children of Italian immigrants. Still, in the Statutes of the Orphanage, written by him, a paragraph says: "Orphans of other nationalities are also accepted, whenever the authorities of these other nationalities request it."

### ***In the mission of the Scalabrinian Sister***

Today, in multicultural contexts, it becomes necessary to go beyond borders and cultivate the art of negotiating confines. This requires educating Christian communities to an authentic spirit of universality, building an intercultural human reality, with new and respectful relationships among people of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

Ecumenical, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue is a relevant missionary aspect in the pastoral action of the Scalabrinian Sister. She recognizes and respects the religious and cultural identity of the migrants and the "seeds of the Word" present in all peoples and religions. At the same time, she promotes spaces of communication and of religious and cultural encounter among the various cultures<sup>24</sup>. Every culture has something sacred, but it is necessary to "avoid the needless hallowing of our own culture<sup>25</sup>."

## **4.3 Incarnation**

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22 P. BORZOMATI, *John Baptist Scalabrini – The bishop of the excluded*, Rubbettino, 1997, p. 111-112.

23 *Scalabrini A living voice*, Memorial, p. 395-405.

24 NC, n. 123-125.

25 EG, n. 117.



The Incarnation of Jesus Christ has no other purpose than the redemption of the person, his elevation to the adopted son of God. He emptied himself and shared the human condition to the point of "death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). (FI 2,8). The divine *kenosis* in the Incarnation reveals that Jesus reasoned in terms of solidarity, sharing, and giving. The cross is the ultimate revelation of God's solidarity.

### ***In the life of the Founder and Co-Founders***

In speaking of the Incarnation, Scalabrini affirms that Jesus Christ assumed our humanity in order to feel compassion more deeply and to experience in himself the afflictions, the miseries, the pains of those he loves to the core<sup>26</sup>. Our humanity is divinized by the extension of the Incarnation into each one of us<sup>27</sup>.

For Scalabrini, the **Incarnation of Jesus continues in each person, in the Church, and in human history**<sup>28</sup>.

***In the person*** - Christ is prolonged in us and through us the love of the Father is prolonged. We lend our humanity to Christ, so that in that and through that, He continues to think, to speak, to be mediator, to glorify the Father.

***In the Church*** - The Church continues the work of the Redeemer and sanctifies people.

***In human history*** - in the history of humanity and the world, in the light of faith, which is the light of the Word, Scalabrini reads the history of salvation, in a unique way, he sees the advent of the Kingdom of God in the historical and social phenomenon of emigration.

*Mother Assunta*, her life reveals incarnation and kenosis. She approached the poorest and simplest with affability and tenderness. A doctor said: "She saw God in those who suffered: she served them as if she were serving God himself". She always preferred the humblest jobs. Her behavior did not show any superiority<sup>29</sup>.

*Father Joseph Marchetti* gave himself radically so that the migrants, the orphans, the abandoned could have a dignified life. His missionary testimony

26 JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI, Pastoral Letter 1878.

27 M. FRANCESCONI, *John Baptist Scalabrini – Spirituality of Incarnation*, Scalabrinian Congregations 1991, p.15.126.

28 *Spirituality of Incarnation*, p. 11-30

29 *Virtues of the Servant of God*, p. 85.246.





beckons us to the utopia of love without measure, to the value of losing one's life so that others may live it to the full <sup>30</sup>.

### ***In the mission of the Scalabrinian Sister***

In mission, to be a continuation of the Incarnation of Christ is to take on the commitment to defend the dignity of the 'least', because the Incarnation denounces an alienated and alienating faith.

The incarnation is the basis and condition of the inculturation process. Wherever it is proclaimed, the Gospel follows the logic of incarnation. It needs to insert itself deeply into all cultures, to ferment them, to fertilize them, and to transform them. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness. Incarnation of Jesus invited us to the revolution of tenderness”<sup>31</sup>.

### **4.4 Apostolic Itinerancy/temporariness**

The charism calls us to be "migrants with the migrants." But itinerancy is not only geographic, it is also a mental, cultural, spiritual attitude of uprooting from securities, ideas, crystallized positions, positions, self-referentiality. Itinerancy must become a way of life.

### ***In the life of the Founder and Co-Founders***

Scalabrini was a man with an itinerant, missionary heart. In a speech to the departing missionaries (1888), he said: *"As I clasp to myself the golden cross of the bishop, I gently complain, almost, to Jesus, because he denied me the wooden cross of the missionary, and I cannot help feeling a holy envy of you."* He also said, *"Every send off of missionaries is nothing else than the renewal, or better the continuation, of what the Divine Master did when he said to his Apostles: 'Go, and teach all nations!'"<sup>32</sup>.*

*Mother Assunta* put aside her dream of being a cloistered sister and accepted God's call, who wanted her to work with orphans and abandoned people in Brazil. Her missionary itinerancy took place in several cities in the states of SP and RS. She wrote to Father Consoni: "We go from here to there until God calls us for eternity."

*Father Joseph Marchetti*, upon hearing Scalabrini's speech on immigration, soon enlisted to accompany the immigrants. Ship's chaplain; builder

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<sup>30</sup> *The Martyr of charity* p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> EG, n. 88.

<sup>32</sup> *Scalabrini a living voice* p. 434.





and administrator of the orphanage; preacher; confessor. And the state of SP was no longer enough for him. He wrote to Scalabrini about his desire to go to other regions (countries) <sup>33</sup>. Someone defined him as an "*itinerant mystic*"<sup>34</sup>."

### ***In the mission of the Scalabrinian Sister***

To feel itinerant, to live in a temporary situation, modifies the person, the tasks, the strategies, the goals of the mission. The missionary lives in an attitude of permanent exodus: exodus from herself; ecclesial exodus; socio-cultural exodus. Pastoral structures must also be flexible and open, and this seems to be the greatest challenge of the future<sup>35</sup>."

### **4.5 Communion in diversity**

We are called to proclaim the mystery of Trinitarian communion, whereby the dialogue between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is presented to us as the possibility and model of every relationship<sup>36</sup> his truth is a call to us to be instruments that weave relationships of communion, witnesses of universal brotherhood, reflections of communities "home and school of communion"<sup>37</sup>."

### ***In the life of the Founder and Co-Founders***

Scalabrini recommended unity in charity to his missionaries. He affirmed: no category of men, no matter how rich it may be in individual strengths, if it is not subjected to the great law of unity, will ever do great things, and even less will the missionaries. Be united as one. United in thoughts, affections, and aspirations, as you are united to a single end<sup>38</sup>.

*Mother Assunta* loved everyone intensely with an unconditional love<sup>39</sup>, and affirmed that without union and charity, the good of others was not possible. She wished the sisters of the Congregation to be united like the links of a chain. She urged them to work for unity and to form one only body.

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33 L. BONDI, *Father Joseph Marchetti - A meteor that did not disappear*, Letter of Fr. Joseph Marchetti to John Baptist Scalabrini, June 14, 1895, p. 34.

34 *John Baptist Scalabrini – The bishop of the excluded*, p. 147.

35 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, *Instrução Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, n. 90.

36 *Traditio Scalabriniana*, n. 4.

37 NMI, n. 43.

38 *Scalabrini a living voice*, p. 444.

39 *Virtues of the Servant of God*, p. 197.



*Fr. Joseph Marchetti*, wherever the migrants, the poor, the sick were, he was there to bring them the comfort of faith and the strength of hope. He was for them the father, the friend, the counselor, the nurse<sup>40</sup>. He strove to live in communion with his superiors and with his confreres; he wanted to form a compact and organized body, of great moral and physical strength. He said: "the good of the Congregation requires that we be united and not dispersed"<sup>41</sup>.

### ***In the mission of the Scalabrinian Sister***

The various places of missionary activity can become a space for sharing, a place of integration, of relationships that welcome the other in their diversity, making present the experience of Pentecost.

To make our communities "home and school of communion", is to feel that we are an "outgoing Church", challenged to embrace people and groups that "do not count", fleeing from situations of extreme social vulnerability and poverty; from violence and war; from ethnic and religious intolerance. These are people on long and dangerous journeys, driven by the hope for a better life.

## **4.6 Hope**

Hope motivates feelings, aspirations, projects. "The person needs a hope that goes beyond"<sup>42</sup>. Whoever loses the most profound hope loses the meaning of his life.

### ***In the life of the Founder and Co-Founders***

Scalabrini is the man of hope and his perspective is Christocentric. He sees in the meeting of peoples, the birth of a new Christian civilization. His hope was also confidence in divine Providence. In the difficult works that he had to accomplish, he adopted the human means that were at his disposal, but he put all his trust in divine Providence, which never failed to help him: He used to say, "*I start a work and then I put it in God's hands, and He thinks. I am never discouraged, knowing well that divine Providence watches over the works begun by Him with a mother's tenderness and knows how to bring them to completion. I touch it with my hands, I can say, every day*"<sup>43</sup>.

*Mother Assunta* in all circumstances knew how to keep her great hope unchanged. She also had unlimited confidence in divine Providence. In times of

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40 *The Martyr of charity*, p. 64.

41 *Father Joseph Marchetti - A meteor that did not disappear*, p. 45-46.

42 SS, n. 30.

43 *The apostle of the migrants*, p. 496.



difficulty, she exclaimed: "God sees, God provides." She trusted in Him without reserve. Proof of her abandonment: "God proves us, but he does not abandon us. We are in his hands and everything he does is done well<sup>44</sup>."

*Fr. Joseph Marchetti*, two words summarize a life of faith, hope and trust in God. *Deo Gratias*. It is the thanksgiving to the paternal provident God<sup>45</sup>. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is his confidant. From Him comes the certainty that God makes his work fruitful: "God wanted the orphanage, I see it, feel it, and perceive it<sup>46</sup>". The Providence opens ways for him to make his dreams come true. This is why he committed himself with all his strength, involving other people in the mission and repeating: "Go ahead until God wants it<sup>47</sup>."

### ***In the mission of the Scalabrinian Sister***

Those who have a look of hope fight with love for justice, for peace, for the dignity of the person, for the balance of nature, they work for the values of the Kingdom. *"To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope!<sup>48</sup>."*

Nowadays, hope has a short breath, a society lacking global perspectives, a projection of the future. It is necessary to educate people and communities to cultivate a culture of hope, with forgiveness, with relationships open to dialog and collaboration, joy, and serenity even in trials and suffering. Let us be witnesses of the proclamation of the Gospel and revelation of the maternal tenderness of God and the Church<sup>49</sup>. *"Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope<sup>50</sup>."*

May the charism shine more and more brightly through the participation and dynamism of each Scalabrinian missionary and awakening new vocations through the witness of life and apostolic action<sup>51</sup>.

Porto Alegre, 2022.04.30.

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44 *Virtues of the Servant of God*, p. 43-44.

45 *The Martyr of charity*, p. 36-37.

46 *Father Joseph Marchetti - A meteor that didn't disappear*, p. 14-16.

47 *Father Joseph Marchetti - A meteor that didn't disappear*, p. 52.

48 FRANCISCO, (Homely, 19.03.2013).

49 NC, n. 112.

50 EG, n. 86.

51 NC, n. 115.