

imaginary, generated by comparison with others, by differences, by the sense of uncertainty and weakness that one feels simply for not being in one's homeland. This imagery feeds the myth of return, a myth because for many it never comes true and a myth because for those who return, reality turns out to be far removed from the imagination.

The homeland according to Scalabrini

Scalabrini lived during *Risorgimento*, the historical period in which the Italian state was formed. He was therefore not immune to the rhetoric of patriotic love. He celebrated national progress: "we greet with jubilation the flourishing of the homeland which is embellished with new glories," and claimed the right to love the homeland: "Can no longer a bishop openly declare that he loves his country?"

But in Scalabrini, love of country is inextricably linked to love of religion. "Religion and homeland! These are still the two great loves implanted by the hand of God into the heart of humanity." The religious perspective relativizes the national feeling and directs it to the ultimate homeland. "The earthly homeland and the heavenly homeland. Oh, yes, we love the former. It is a gift from God ... but to truly love it we associate with its love the love of Religion which guides us to the eternal homeland."

Scalabrini suffers that the process of unification of the Italian state took place in conflict with the Pope and strives to heal this conflict. "Religion and homeland! These two supreme loves of our forefathers, these two aspirations of every gentle heart, must, as daughters of the same father, give each other the kiss of peace, must love and help each other."

His passion for migrants led him to solidify, but also to revise the concept of homeland. On the one hand, he believes that taking care of migrants is a duty based on both Christian and patriotic reasons, and therefore a duty for everyone. Furthermore, he believes that the purpose of the institute he founded is to maintain the unity between religion and homeland: "My Institute arose out of an admirable agreement of religious and patriotic sentiments"; in the Institute, "religion and homeland shake hand". Consequently, he considers it important that the culture of origin be preserved among the migrants, because this is functional to the maintenance of the faith. "I consider it necessary that the Italians, in order that religious faith in them spread and strengthen, keep themselves united in preserving the language of their homeland".

On the other hand, he is aware that emigration reconfigures the concept of homeland in favor of one based not so much on vain sentiments as on hard necessity: "for the disinherited, the homeland is the land that gives him bread". From a sociological point of view, migration is therefore a disruptive force that "elevates human destinies, expanding the concept of homeland beyond material and political boundaries, making the world everyone's homeland". From the perspective of faith, God is guiding humanity "even through catastrophes, toward the ultimate goal, which is man's perfection on earth and God's glory in heaven." In the world made everyone's homeland, "no more wars, no more colonial conquests made with blood... No more suppression of peoples, but fusions, adaptations, in which the different nationalities meet, cross each other, restore each other and give rise to other peoples".

The Scalabrinian Year

Scalabrini's sentence guides us in this year proclaimed to spread the devotion and to deepen the knowledge of the Founder. It is an expression that does not simply refer to Scalabrini's thinking. The relativization of the concept of homeland, in whose search, through the analogous term of land, Abraham's journey of faith begins, had already been made by the early Christian community. Christians are characterized by their condition of "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Pt 2:11). The text *To Diognetus* comments in a masterly way: "Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland... is a foreign country".

Attention to universal brotherhood, which underlies civil coexistence, is also a theme dear to Pope Francis, who developed it in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. He warns against "an abstract and globalizing universalism" as well as "homely pettiness." "Universal fraternity and social friendship are thus two inseparable and equally vital poles in every society," he said. "There can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots." Making the world everyone's homeland does not mean uncritically embracing globalization, "universal does not necessarily mean bland, uniform and standardized domain by a single prevailing cultural model." Rather, it means offering everyone the possibility of seeking conditions for a dignified life in an enriching dialogue in which everyone can receive and to which everyone can contribute.

This dialogue does not happen spontaneously. It is often the fruit of struggle, of effort, of action that begins within us and of which we must be the architects, having learned it with our lives. In addition to increasing the devotion and knowledge of the Founder, celebrating the Scalabrinian Year means developing the chosen theme in the many facets it offers. It is an invitation to give a homeland to those who have no homeland, to develop in particular that mission which expands its boundaries beyond the usual and the trite by attempting unexplored paths, to be at the side of those who are far from home so that they may feel at home. Internally, it is an invitation to strengthen the will to walk together, not emphasizing the homelands from which we come, but the greater homeland, the belonging that was created when we listened to the invitation of the One who called us, feeling like fellow citizens but also foreigners, because the true homeland always remains elsewhere.

The General Administration

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