

Twenty-first century Migrations

A hundred years after Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini's death, migration has become a worldwide phenomenon which from departure, transit to destination, involves all nations.

Worldwide, 214 million people live outside their country of birth. They include 15.2 million refugees and 983'000 asylum seekers.

To this international movement we should add the 27,1 million displaced people forced to flee from one region to another within their own country, and the unknown number of internal migrants who move mostly from rural areas to the outskirts of the sprawling mega cities. Migration is a matter of numbers and statistics in constant variation, but most importantly it involves people: their many faces and stories, their hopes and expectations...and the many "whys?" of humanity's current dramas. In the globalisation era, economies are progressively moving beyond national frontiers: they act almost autonomously, unrestrained by national political controls. The current global economy, does not offer guarantees for greater justice, democracy or the redistribution of goods. At the same that a single cultural uniformity, based on profit and free market values, is prevailing worldwide, new totalitarian ideologies are emerging, thriving on religious fundamentalism and on the obsessive preservation for one's ethnic identity.

The current and expanding migration flow is rooted in a growing social and economic inequality between North and South, in the lack of prospects for education and employment for many young people, in natural and ecological disasters, in the demographic imbalance between continents, in wars, in political, ethnic and religious persecution, terrorism, and human rights violations.

No less powerful than the reasons forcing people to migrate, are those which attract them awaking in them the urge to leave: among them, the media's portrayal of the social model of Western prosperity, the call of fellow countrymen who have migrated, and the active recruitment by smuggling organisations.

At the same time, international competition, which favors the hiring of highly skilled technicians and professionals, engenders a migration of educated persons. This impoverishes further the countries of origin depriving them of the personnel needed for economic and social development. Humanity is seemingly divided into two categories: the new supranational elite which can travel everywhere unconcerned with frontiers and national boundaries, and the vast majority of people, who, when they need to move, they do so to survive, risking their lives in border crossings, or, perhaps, end up trapped in places like refugee camps. The same freedom of movement applied today to financial goods, products and services, unfortunately is not universally recognized for people.

Everywhere in our world the sense of insecurity makes the local people fearful of migrants and this leads their governments to enact restrictive migration legislation. As a consequence, illegal immigrants have increased (2.5 to 4 million a year). Illegal immigration has now become a structural phenomenon all over the world. Those benefiting the most from this are the international organisations actively engaged in smuggling people across borders; but those who suffer the consequences for illegal border crossings, and too often lose their lives, are migrants and refugees. More inhuman still is the so-called "trade" of human beings involving hundreds of

thousand of women and children every year, forced into prostitution or servile jobs in conditions of actual slavery.

John Baptist Scalabrini, too, saw, the dramatic events of his time - the period between the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries marked by radical transformations. At that time, thousands upon thousands of Italians and other Europeans were leaving their country because of poverty and had to face the uncertainties and sufferings of migration. John Baptist Scalabrini, confronted by so much pain, could have simply stopped at a feeling of compassion, instead he asked himself the question: "What should be done?" and he shouldered the responsibility for the migrants that he saw and intervened on their behalf at different levels.

John Baptist Scalabrini combined his concrete action with a prophetic vision which he was able to bring to maturity, and which he left as a legacy to the Church. This legacy is ours today. Scalabrini sensed that within the travesty of migration, with all its problems and difficulties, a hidden positive aspect is at work, the seed of the future. This vision is not just the result of historical and sociological considerations. Thanks most of all to his faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, John Baptist Scalabrini sees God's plan in the unfolding of human history and is convinced that it is through the suffering and the uprooting of the migrants, through the encounter and even the clashes between cultures and mentalities, that a new world is being prepared, where peoples and persons discover their common human family, where no one is subject to the law of uniformity but, in the image of the Triune God, communion in diversity is possible.

Today, the world of human mobility has perhaps become even more complex and is affecting everyone, migrants and indigenous peoples alike. Migration is an important component of the growing interdependence between nations. It is also due to migration, if there is growing awareness that we "are travelling in the same boat", that is to say in the one and same world. Our destiny is ever more bound to everyone else's destiny. John Baptist Scalabrini's intuitions are, therefore, more relevant than ever and they are motivating the Scalabrinian Family to work for a constructive co-existence within the diversities of our society, to achieve an authentic communion within the Church, and to promote justice and peace in the world.