



**Rediscovering our common
identity in the light of
Scalabrini's spirituality**

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REDISCOVERING OUR COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN THE LIGHT OF BISHOP SCALABRINI'S SPIRIT

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1. Formal aspect

a) *Common Life and Community Life*

When we speak of a religious community, we can mean three things: *the whole Congregation* (the Scalabrinian Congregation is “an apostolic community of religious,” R.L. 1), “*the provincial community*” (R.L. 15), and the “*local community*,” which is “the living cell of the Congregation” (R.L. 15). As a rule, we mean the local community, the one that lives in a religious house: “A religious community must live in a house legitimately constituted under the authority of the superior designated according to the norm of law” (Canon 608).

So, we will keep all three aspects in mind but especially the third one: the local community. For the local community is, in effect, the place where we live, work and pray together, where, in other words, we live community life. Now, community life is a necessary result of common life, itself an essential element of religious life in “religious institutes.” Common life implies incorporation into the Institute in the full sense, not just in a juridical sense: it implies putting things in common, “bringing together our gifts of nature and grace, so that we place everything at the service of our mission” (R.L. 10), setting up with others a common apostolic “project,” considering ourselves personally responsible for its realization and carrying it out together with our confreres, living “community life in the practice of the evangelical counsels” (R.L. 9).

To be real, common life implies a minimum of community life: “Scalabrinian residences must be set up in such a way as to guarantee an adequate form of community life” (R.L. 51). This is Church law: “Observing a common life, religious are to live in their own religious house” (Canon 665, 1). Our communities “shall normally have more than one religious” (R.L. 52); only by way of exception and under certain conditions are confreres allowed to live alone (R.L. 53).

A superior is always required. According to our Rules of Life, the superior can be the religious superior either of a local community (R.L. 254, 1) or of several houses united under one superior (R.L., 254, 2) or he can be the general or provincial superior (R.L. 255, 2). In all cases our Rules of Life require a minimum of community life: “frequent contacts with his superior and the confreres of the community he belongs to or the one nearest him,” in the case of a religious living alone (R.L. 53). For every community, our Rules of Life prescribe “its own plan of life and work” (R.L. 54), “regular meetings” (R.L. 55), “prayer in common, possibly every day” (R.L. 45), a superior who is directly responsible for the observance of the Rules of Life and is the prime animator of the religious life (R.L. 256), a treasurer (R.L. 251, 1), and a council (R.L.. 261, 2).

On these concrete matters - which Canon law and our Rules of Life require for the formal aspect of community life - what were the Founder's directives and how did he justify them?

b) Life in Common

The 1895 Rule prescribes: “Even in these Houses (in the missions) the Missionaries will live common life; and when, at the superior’s behest, they must go to the colonies or preach elsewhere, they will return as soon as they have finished their work” (*Rule of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles for the Italian Emigrants, Piacenza 1895, ch. X, 2*). The 1888 Rule added the reason: “for the purpose of preserving the spirit of the Congregation and strengthening common life and discipline” (*Rule of the Congregation of the Missionaries for the Emigrants, approved by Propaganda Fide in 1888, ch. VIII, 2*).

Common life meant “common acts”: “The internal running of the Houses, their regulations and schedules will possibly be in conformity with those at the Mother House” (1895, ch. X, 4). The 1888 Rule, drafted before any missionary experience, did not contain the adverb “possibly”, which we find in the 1895 Rule.

In fact, at the Mother House, the Rule called for “common acts”. We mention just the practices of piety: “a) a 1-hour meditation, including the reading of a chapter from the New Testament, b) visit to the Blessed Sacrament for a quarter of an hour, c) spiritual reading for a half hour, d) the recitation of the Breviary, e) particular examination of conscience before lunch, f) brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament after lunch and supper, g) recitation of the Rosary, h) general examination” (1895 Rule, ch. VI, 1).

Now, while the 1888 Rule added: “All these practices will always be done in common” (ch. III, 5); “all the practices of piety...are obligatory for all the houses of the Missionaries, as well as for the Missionaries who might be living alone or with a lay brother” (ch. III, 12), the 1895 Rule, instead, stated: “At the Mother House, all these practices of piety shall be done in common, except for the recitation of the Minor Hours” (ch. VI, 2), while for the other houses it prescribed: “Regarding the schedule of the exercises of piety and common acts, the local Superior, in concert with the Provincial, may in other houses modify the order observed at the Mother House, adapting it to the needs and the usages of the country” (ch. VI, 22).

So, the adverb “possibly” referred to the setup of the schedule, not to the quantity of the acts and the requirement to do them in common, except for the missionaries living alone. As we have seen, the possibility of living alone was explicitly mentioned by the 1895 Rule. But, in practice, the Founder wanted communities, however small, that should reside and live under the same roof, at least as a rule.

To Fr. Marchetti, who in accord with the consul general in Rio de Janeiro, had asked for missionaries for three “hospedarias”, in Rio de Janeiro, Santos and São Paulo, Scalabrini answered:

“First, please give the enclosed letter...to the Consul General and discuss the well known matter with him. But don’t forget that our rules don’t ordinarily allow a Missionary to live alone. He must always be with someone else. So, if it’s possible to have a church or chapel with some rooms where two or three of our Fathers can live, one of them could dedicate himself to the migrant centers and stay there if he had to and then go back to his own residence when the need is over” (*J.B. Scalabrini to Fr. Marchetti, Dec. 26, 1894*).

The reference to a church or chapel is interesting, because, in fact, the new Code of Canon Law states: “Each house is to have an oratory in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved so that it truly is the center of the community” (Canon 608).

And to the consul general Scalabrini explained:

“For me the most serious problem would be to leave the Missionaries separated. You, Sir, are a man of experience and know how hard it is to keep the spirit of one’s vocation for long when one is living alone in the midst of the most diverse types of people with whom one has to struggle more or less constantly. Over the long haul, the soul grows weak and once in a while needs to find solace and strength in the words and examples of one’s confreres, in the spirit of one’s Rules. So, it would be wise if at least two Missionaries lived together and could, even in the new place, live the common life” (*id. to Gherardo Pio di Savoia*, Dec. 26, 1894).

In practice, the Founder, too, had to reckon with two concrete factors: 1) the lack of personnel - which, for example, allowed the Founder to send Fr. Marchetti a companion only two years later, namely, Fr. Natale Pigato, who, in fact, arrived in São Paulo on the eve of Fr. Marchetti’s death - and 2) regard for the individual, for whom he would make an exception: “Fr. Riva is somewhat original but has a good conscience. I think that alone he could do quite well” (*id. to Fr. F. Zaboglio*, April 9, 1894). This is the only explicit exception we know of. A different matter was the practical exceptions the Founder “tolerated” for pastoral reasons. In an 1899 report, we find missionaries by themselves in Syracuse, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Kansas City. In a 1900 report we also find Providence, New Orleans, and Detroit: about half the missions.

But, as a matter of principle, from the very beginnings of the Institute, we note a significant insistence in this matter:

“The Missionaries must have free and independent living quarters, even they have to be in a rented house, in order to live the common life” (*id.* June 4, 1888). “The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda... wants that in every house there be at least two priests. I don’t think there will be any resistance.... I regard it as a very wise rule. A priest alone (...), what can you expect from him? He would lose courage. So, let there be at least two together and they can go to the feasts wherever the need requires” (*id.* Nov. 9, 1888). “Fr. Bandini needs to have a certain freedom of action and not have to think of anything else.... But, in any case, he will always have at least a lay brother with him” (*id.* May 18, 1891).

Together with “freedom of ministry”, the Founder would lay down the same condition for those bishops who would ask for missionaries: “There should be a house in your area where the missionaries can live, because they have to live the common life *if possible*” (*Idem to M.A. Corrigan*, Feb. 27, 1888). “I must first know: 1) if the priests can have separate living quarters, modest as they may be, so they can abide by the Rule” (*id. to Thiel*, Bishop of Costarica, March 20, 1889).

c) The reasons

Let us examine the reasons: to preserve the spirit of the Congregation, to keep the spirit of one’s vocation, to find solace and strength in the word and examples of the confreres, and not to lose courage. Keeping in mind that we are dealing with the formal aspect, which presupposes a deeper substantial aspect, we can say that the two reasons - 1) perseverance in the spirit of one’s specific vocation and 2) mutual support and edification - are dictated by a very realistic view of the concrete situations in which our missionaries lived and by a concept of the common life based on unity “of thought, of affections and aspirations”. And this, in turn, is based on the unity of the apostolic purpose and on the foundation of charity, which makes people carry each other’s burdens (see *id.*, *Ai Missionari per gl’Italiani nelle Americhe*, March 15, 1892, p. 6).

The aspect of mutual supervision also emerges, for example, in the rule that prescribed that one have a companion when leaving the house, especially on visits to women (see the 1895 Rule, ch. VII, 27). But, aside from this rule that strongly echoes the mentality of the times, when perhaps Church legislation generally put more stress on

disciplinary supervision than on the formation of personal convictions, the Founder's main reasons are those our Rules of Life translate into modern language:

"In the conviction that each of us is responsible for the prayer life of all and all are responsible for the prayer life of each one of us, we cultivate with perseverance the spirit of prayer in our community and personal life" (R.L. 41).

"Community life...ensures mutual support and is the most effective way to face the problems of our mission, which are many and varied" (L.R. 51).

"The religious will consider it their duty to accept one another and form a community that is made one by their love for Christ and by their common commitment to respond to the demands of our mission" (R.L. 52).

As regards chastity, the justification finds a much more precise focus in our Rules of Life:

"We will more surely safeguard chastity if in the community we practice real brotherly love among ourselves" and create "bonds of true friendship, that knows how to understand and lend support" (R.L. 80).

d) Prayer in Common, "the Most Essential Point"

The Founder's insistence becomes urgent when he deals with prayer in common:

"I strongly urge you to introduce the exercises of piety, in common as far as possible: meditation, spiritual reading, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and the rosary. Start in Boston if this custom doesn't exist there. When the new ones arrive, make sure that everything is according to our Rules. This is a most essential point" (*Scalabrini to Fr. Zaboglio*, Aug. 31, 1895).

"Now, with all my might, I want to recommend the practices of piety to you, especially meditation in common according to the Rule. You must insist opportune et importune and avail yourself of command if exhortation is not enough, but you must absolutely enforce what is prescribed in this regard. Meditation and the annual retreat are essential to priestly life and one must desire them at all costs. You will be doing an inestimable service to our cause if, with God's help, you are successful in this most holy goal" (*Idem to Fr. Zaboglio*, Sept. 21, 1895).

In announcing the arrival of three missionaries, Bishop Scalabrini adds:

"I beg you to make sure they can long preserve the spirit of their vocation. So it's important that in Boston and New York the Rules be put into practice and, above all, those that have to do with the practices of piety in common, and meditation at all costs (*id. to Fr. Zaboglio*, Sept. 23, 1895).

In a letter the Founder wrote Fr. Novati a month before his own death, he will bring up this matter once again:

"After weighing, as I told you orally, the desires expressed by a good number of our missionaries and the needs of the Congregation and after having invoked the help of our heavenly Patron, St. Charles, I, for the greater glory of God and the good of souls, have prescribed and do hereby prescribe the following:

1. All will make their meditation and spiritual reading and recite the Rosary daily and in common.
2. Every year or every two years, depending on the practice in the various dioceses, all will make their Spiritual Exercises together with the clergy of the diocese

where they reside... Furthermore, in every House you must promote and cultivate more and more the spirit of piety and prayer: the foundation and support of everything” (*id. to Fr. Novati*, April 2, 1905).

e) *The Letter and the Spirit*

What has remained of all this in our Rules of Life, which authentically interpret the spirit of the Founder and of the Congregation? *Not much* and, then again, *much*.

Not much, if we limit ourselves to the formal aspects. For prayer in common we have only art. 45, in the Directory: “In keeping with the Church’s and the Founder’s recommendations, we will be faithful to prayer in common, possibly every day” (R.L. 45). There is also a reference to “regular times for days of recollection and for the Spiritual Exercises” (R.L. 44).

Much, instead, if we consider the driving principles:

“Like the communities in the days of the apostles, which expressed their fellowship by devoting themselves to the prayers and the breaking of bread, we look on the Eucharist and prayer in common as the very heart of our community life and its loftiest expression, as well as the source of our commitment to evangelization” (R.L. 42).

Moreover, we must have “the conviction that each of us is responsible for the prayer life of all and all are responsible for the prayer life of each of us” (R.L. 41).

We have more: “Like the Church of which it is a living part, our community is, above all, one of faith and worship, for it too is founded on prayer and perseveres in prayer, which culminates in the Eucharist.... Prayer, with which our community unceasingly nourishes itself, is a quest for intimate union with God, a search for his saving will, in a continual renewal of our personal and community life” (R.L. 10).

Now, “To discover God’s will for our life and missionary activity, we adopt an attitude of seeking his will in common” under the guidance of the superior (R.L. 14).

In fact, “By obedience, we commit ourselves to a common search for God’s will and to its fulfilment” (R.L. 88); and to this end “we will foster dialogue” and “the superiors will stimulate it” (R.L. 89).

“In their various assignments, all members of the community feel responsible for its life. Together and with their superior, they seek the will of God and are docile to it” (R.L. 50).

The problem is to put into practice these principles, which correspond perfectly to the Founder’s spirit. Are “a coming together for prayer in common, possibly every day” and “regular meetings” for evaluation and planning enough?

We know that to properly interpret the spirit of the Founder we have to ask ourselves: what were the Founder’s basic concerns? Who were the people he was concerned with? What were the conditions he considered indispensable or essential for responding to these particular concerns for these particular people? Now there’s no doubt that living in common to keep the spirit of one’s vocation and to help each other fraternally, as well as prayer in common, were the Founder’s essential conditions (excluding emergency situations where the supreme law of *the good of souls* is paramount): “this is a most essential point.”

I believe we must reinterpret the primeval charism in the context of today’s culture and in the context of the Church, that is to say, with the Church, as *Perfectae Charitatis* tells us. Reinterpreting the charism in a new culture will lead us to new ways of incarnating the substance and not to a destruction of the substance. We need some imagination, some

creativity, but, above all, fidelity to the Spirit and lots of courage (our Founder would clearly say: lots of drive and lack of human respect). Reinterpreting the charism with the whole Church would make us open our eyes. Scalabrini was always tremendously afraid of being last in line, of arriving late for his rendez-vous with history, of not keeping up with events. Do we Scalabrinians realize what progress the churches, the Christian communities, and other religious institutes have made in the rediscovery of contemplation, of adoration, of the liturgical praise of God, of a Eucharistic community, of a praying community, of the “brotherhood” idealized by the Acts of the Apostles?

Don't you agree that an exasperated individualism is still holding us back, an individualism that has been one of the capital vices of our Congregation? More or less subtly, we tell our confreres: don't you stick your nose into this, this is my business. We don't realize that, in the last analysis, that “you” is not just our confrere who might be indiscrete or the superior (we've somewhat lost the idea of what a superior is meant to be), that “you” is the Church, the People of God, the new Israel, which is saved only in its entirety and its unity. Of course, even if we were to get back to doing together all the practices of piety that our Founder prescribed for the Mother House, we would not solve the basic problem. Exterior observances can hide interior emptiness. Pharisaism is the opposite of Christianity. For it is not the letter that saves but the Spirit.

So, then, let us move on to study “the spirit”, the substantial aspect of community life, according to our Founder.

2. Substantial aspect

a) Unity, the Basic Element of the Congregation

As the foundation of our institution, our Founder put poverty and unity. The reason he wanted us to be a religious Congregation was this: in contrast to many other priests who went to America, our missionaries were to have only one aspiration, the apostolic one, and no earthly interest and also “they were to work together.” To explain his thinking, our Founder cites the example of the bishop of Münster, who by himself and at various times sent 92 priests from his diocese to America, gathered them into a congregation, and made them take the vows, so that no one would be tempted to work for himself and that all of them would work together for their fellow countrymen abroad” (Scalabrini, *L'emigrazione degli operai italiani*, 1899).

“Our Founder wanted us to be an apostolic community and, more precisely, a religious congregation, because he wanted to guarantee the efficacy of our dedication to the service of the migrants and the stability of his institute” (R.L. 9).

In fact, it is characteristic of community life “to be built up - day in, day out - on faith and love, which, in turn, takes concrete form in the gift of self to one's brothers” (R.L. 47).

Now, to work for oneself and by oneself dilutes the gift of self as the Lord's property, the donation whose roots are in Baptism itself and in one's total consecration to God in Christ Jesus, expressed by the profession of religious vows. The love of self-donation is the very soul of the consecration of our person to the person of Christ and, for this reason, to his Body, the People of God. Giving up personal interest and putting the emphasis on unity will allow for full apostolic availability and the encounter of the “whole” man:

“A Congregation of Missionaries that achieves its goal by founding churches, school, orphanages, and hospitals through priests, all united like in a family by the religious vows of chastity, obedience and poverty, ready to fly wherever they are sent, as apostles, teachers, doctors, nurses, depending on the need” (id., *1^a conferenza sull’emigrazione*, 1891).

b) The Essential Point of Reference: Christ

Scalabrini is far from an inward-directed concept of the religious life: he did not want us to be a community so we could cuddle each other in the warmth of a group friendship closed in on itself. He wanted us to be “an apostolic community of religious”, as the very first lines of our Rules of Life state succinctly. He did not want to give us heavy structures, which would keep us from “flying wherever” the needs of the migrants called them. He did not want the religious house to be a monastery nor residing in the religious house a tabu: “When they can, they ought to prefer the flying Mission to the permanent Mission in tile parishes, so they can run to wherever the need is greatest” (1895 Rule, ch. XIV, 13), even though he added the admonition that they return as soon as possible to “the central house”, where they could live the common life “in order to keep the spirit of the Congregation.”

For the Founder the religious life is, first of all, an incorporation into Christ and therefore to the mission of Christ and the Church. His idea is faithfully translated by art. 1 of our Rules of Life: “The Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles (Scalabrinians) is an apostolic community of religious that shares in the missionary activity Christ continues in the Church for the realization of the plan of God in the world and in history.”

The essential point of reference of our community is Christ. He has “called us to announce the mystery of salvation” to the migrants: we accomplish our mission “just like Christ” (R.L. 1). “You have answered his call, dearly beloved; you have gone, you have done a lot of good; but it’s not enough; you must produce lasting fruits: *ut fructum afferatis et fructus vester maneat*. What is needed for the branch to give fruit? That it remain attached to the vine. Now Christ is the vine and you, dearly beloved, are the branches.... So, as long as you remain in him, you will feel possessed of superhuman power and the fruit you produce can only be abundant and lasting. You will find everything easy, even in the face of the most serious obstacles. Instead, if you are separated from him, you will become like a body without a soul, sterile of any good work. You will be like branches, good for nothing more than to be thrown into the fire: *sine me nihil potestis facere*. Union, therefore, my dearest brothers and sons, union with Jesus Christ before anything else. And you will achieve this union by nourishing faith in yourselves with continuing exercises of piety and by keeping grace alive in your hearts” (Scalabrini, *Ai Missionari per gl’Italiani nelle Americhe*, March 15, 1892, p. 5).

c) Community and Mission

Here is the exact place of prayer, on which the Founder insisted so much: not in view of merits nor just for personal sanctification but in view of the mission, which would otherwise remain sterile. It would indeed be strange if a community that was meant to live together and to work together for an apostolic purpose did not also pray together. It would be like taking away from the daily life of the community the daily sustenance of its apostolic activity.

But there is another principle that our Founder deduces from union with Christ and that goes to the heart, to the essence of community life: “The fruit of such a union will then

be union among yourselves”. This means that no community can exist without everyone’s union with Christ; and without union among ourselves we are unable to carry out our mission effectively: “that union which Jesus so ardently implored for his disciples and which is really so necessary. No group of people, howsoever endowed with individual talents, can ever accomplish great things, if they do not abide by the great law of unity. And much less can our Missionaries accomplish, for they work with souls as simple instruments of Christ and from this sovereign source that animates them they derive all their efficacy” (ibid.).

Our Rules of Life state:

“The mission we have received from the Church takes on meaning and credibility if, in the process of proclaiming the message of Christ, we live in fellowship with him and with our brothers. For this reason we choose to live a community life in the practice of the evangelical counsels and resolve to become a sign of liberation and salvation to the migrants and a witness of brotherhood and unity” (R.L. 9).

“Our communities have an eminently apostolic meaning, because, by the unity of the brethren, they show that the Lord has come and thus become sources of great energies for the apostolate” (R.L. 10).

They are efficacious signs and a witnesses because, in the words of our Founder, “that union which Jesus Christ so ardently implored” is “the sovereign source” from which our apostolic activities derive “all their efficacy.”

d) Charity: Soul of the Community

As is typical of him, Scalabrini is not satisfied with simply enunciating a doctrine: he jumps at once to practical conclusions and does so with a passion.

“And so, beloved brothers, I implore you, I beg you in the bowels of Christ and for the good of our confreres not to fragment your energies, each one working on his own account and with no other guide except one’s own will, but rather to be all united and like one thing: ut sint unum. United in thought, affections, and aspirations, just as you are united for the same goal....And how can you succeed in this? By bearing with one another with every humility and meekness and patience... So, may vain jealousy, harmful words, arguments, and competition be far from every Missionary! Each one should be calm and tolerant in fulfilling his duties. Each one should bear with the defects of the other. Each one should strive to preserve unity of spirit through the bond of peace” (Scalabrini, *ibid.*, p. 5-6).

His recommendation for peace and harmony is pressing and extends to the whole Congregation, especially to the provincial community, with its superiors. To the vicar general, Fr. Zaboglio, the Founder wrote these words:

“As strongly as I know how, I urge you to make every effort, to make any sacrifice, to maintain and strengthen harmony among the confreres. I know that just the appearance of disunity has more or less harmed our works” (*id. to Fr. F. Zaboglio*, Oct. 8, 1891).

When planning to transfer a priest, he recommends to Fr. Zaboglio:

“Talk to Morelli and Frs. Vicentini and Bandini, so no one will accuse us of always acting divisively, creating a factionalism that is dangerous and paralyzes every holy enterprise. By the way, is it true that this factionalism exists? That the missionaries are split between you and Morelli? Oh, how it would hurt me if this were true! If even only the shadow of this evil exists, make sure you eliminate it; and leave New York only after seeing peace, harmony and unity flourish once again” (*Idem to Fr. F. Zaboglio*, July 30, 1892).

And he cites the example of the missionaries in Brazil:

“The Missionaries in South America have endeared themselves to the bishops and are held in esteem in the colonies because they observe the rules, love each other, and form a real religious body. You haven’t reached this point yet and this hurts me very much. I understand the situation, I recognize the extenuating circumstances. Still, you’ve got to reach that point, too” (*id. to Fr. G. Gambera, end of 1897*).

On his return from North America, Scalabrini wrote to his Missionaries:

“You must work for an ever greater increase of our Congregation and win it the esteem and respect of our very adversaries and love it and help it like your beloved family. You know that the strength, the health, the life of any family, any society, is harmony, discipline. And these two things, above all, I recommend to you, my beloved brothers. And I dare say that in this way, though few, you will perform miracles; without them, even if you were an army, you would accomplish precious little” (*id. to the Missionaries of North America, Dec. 1901*).

e) *Pax Christi in Uno Corpore*

To Fr. Morelli he had written;

“I urge you, dear Fr. Felice, to make very sure that everything in our Missions is orderly and that everybody observes that decorum, that discipline, that unity of action that is so necessary for the success of any undertaking and for our good name. *Super omnia autem haec, charitatem habete, quod est vinculum perfectionis. Et pax Christi exultet in cordibus, in qua et vocati estis, in uno corpore: et grati estote* (*Idem to Fr. F. Morelli, May 1891*).

This then is our program, the program of our apostolic community of people who have been called to build up the body of Christ, within our community and concurrently - as a consequence that is logical on the level of faith outside of our community. Yes, one sole body, a united family! But the family spirit, the esprit de corps, the sense of “belonging”, all still seem so weak in our Congregation. We view our conferes too superficially. On the surface we can notice so many different things and even many defects; and so we stop to look at the negative features, which are the ones that strike the superficial observer the most. And then we gossip and make rash judgments, that logically should remain on the surface but which “paralyze” and keep us from seeing into the depths of our confreres’ lives, into the roots of the same vocation and mission. How much we must still do before our communities achieve the ideal described by our Rules of Life:

“Our communities encourage us to live out our faith, our hope, and the fundamental law of love in concrete circumstances, in a manner of life that bespeaks the higher goods that bind us together” (R.L. 10).

Too often what is missing is the practical appreciation of the foundation, which is the supernatural life:

“Community life must be built up - day in, day out - on faith and love which, in turn, take concrete form in the gift of self to one’s brothers. In the community, the confreres ‘will take care to preserve always and everywhere the closest union among themselves...and deal with each other with openness and sincere affection’ (1895 Rule, ch. XIV, 4, in mutual respect and acceptance, in a climate of charity and trust that makes room for reciprocal forgiveness and fraternal correction” (R.L. 47).

f) Accepting the Other Person

We must put into practice especially among ourselves what art. 19 teaches about the diversity of our migrant brothers and sisters:

“The migrants’ peculiar traits remind us of the fellowship of Pentecost, where the Spirit brings harmony among all differences and where love shows itself to be genuine by accepting “the other” (R.L. 19).

When we accept the other person in supernatural faith, hope and love, we avoid the defect that, in their days, St. Paul, St. John, and St. James condemned as fatal to the Christian life, which is a life of love. This is the reason for such strong admonitions by our Founder on criticism, murmuring, back-biting, “judging” others (in fact, here Christ himself is speaking clearly), which eat away at the foundations of community life.

He exhorts Fr. Zaboglio:

“I would also like for you to examine yourself seriously to see if you have the defect of expressing unfavorable judgments about your confreres. If you find you do, as I think you do a little, how about a nice resolution to change?” (*Scalabrini to Fr. F. Zaboglio*, June 17, 1891).

In other letters to Fr. Zaboglio, to Fr. Colbachini, to Fr. Faustino Consoni, he reproaches them for being “hasty” in judging their confreres, that is to say, for pronouncing judgement too easily on their behaviour and making swift decisions, without calmly and impartially weighing all the circumstances, all the internal and external reasons for a certain attitude, a position, a conversation, a gesture.

In a rough draft written on the boat, “La Liguria,” that was bringing him back from the United States, we read this particularly sharp observation:

“The spirit of charity: I’ve noticed a certain ease in criticizing, murmuring, spitting out opinions on everybody and everything, and this especially in certain young confreres of whom one can still say that they know absolutely nothing. Ignorance is always the source of pride and the more one is an ass, the more he is bold and feels superior to others. The superiors of the houses must be put on guard to always prevent this, as much as possible, but for sure during lunch, supper, and recreation. This must be done in the most appropriate ways, not in such a way that the house becomes a tavern or a hovel of the lowestclass of people. Sometimes I was really disgusted” (*Idem to Fr. P. Novati*, Nov. 1901).

“And may the peace of Christ exult in your hearts, because unto this were you called in one body” (Col. 3:15). The topic of peace - which is not ironic, acquiescence, indifference, or insensitivity, but the fruit of a strong and deep love for Christ - is discussed by Scalabrini in his Open Letter to his Missionaries of March 15, 1892:

“Peace, my beloved brothers, not just among yourselves but also with your brothers in the ministry. By force of things, you must often come into contact with priests and missionaries of different nationalities, you must learn from their experience. Be most deferential toward them, love them sincerely, respect them always. Peace in the house and outside the house, peace with everybody” (p. 6).

It is the community that opens up and collaborates: “it fosters mutual understanding with all those persons and institutions, ecclesiastical or lay, that work in the field of migration” (R.L. 33).

This opening was one of Scalabrini’s intuitions, this opening to everybody, to priests and lay people, to all religious and social forces, to all men of good will, even if belonging to different ideological, confessional, and political persuasions, when there is

question of coming to the aid of the migrants. But the house can be open only when the people inside feel secure, when they feel at home, when they don't have to worry that those who come to it might find a stumbling block in the scandal of a divided community.

g) Obedientia et Pax

We find another variation of this theme in the motif *Obedientia et Pax* (St. Augustine).

“But peace is not possible without order, and order cannot exist without a rule. And you, my brothers and sons, have your rules, approved by the Holy See. Be exact in observing them even to the point of scruple. But this is not enough. Only then will peace reign among men, writes St. Augustine, when everyone remains faithfully in the place divine Providence assigns him: ‘Pax est in hoc, quod omnes teneant loca sua.’ So the one among you who has the task of commanding must firmly and at the same time modestly fulfil this task. And he who must obey, let him, in the words of St. Bernard, obey simpliciter, velociter, indēsinenter. Obedience to one’s legitimate superiors ought to be your uniform” (Ibid. pp. 6-7).

There is no religious community without a superior and without a rule. There is no peace of Christ without obedience: *obedientia et pax*. Even our Rules of Life are clear:

“By obedience, we commit ourselves to a common search for God’s will and to its fulfilment: in the light of the Gospel, the teachings of the Church, and the demands of our apostolic mission. Obedience calls for a faith that can discern God in the things of this world, in people, especially in the world of migrants” (R.L. 88).

Now, this common search implies “dialogue: to be conducted in the context of charity, respect, trust, humility, and openness” and will be stimulated, encouraged, and guided by the superior:

“The superior, sign and bond of communion, stimulates and guides this search and, when necessary, brings it to an end by a decision (ET, 25). In this way, authority and individual liberty come together equally in the service of our mission, in a spirit of confident dialogue and shared responsibility, after the example of our Founder who was ‘committed without measure and without measure free’” (R.L. 14).

Our Founder taught us these things more by his example than by his words: he was a forerunner in the matter of “dialogue” and of the obedience Vatican II calls “active and responsible.” But we all know that, at the end of the dialogue, he was ready to obey the decision of his superiors and that he demanded similar obedience from others.

“To my great chagrin, I have learned of something that I can hardly believe, namely that some of our missionary priests look on the superior of the house as an honorary superior rather than as an effective superior. To root out this error that tends, believe it or not, to the chaos and destruction of our little and humble Congregation, I hereby solemnly declare that the superior of the house is the true and effective superior of all the Missionaries, both priests and brothers, who reside in that house and that they therefore owe him subservience and obedience in everything he may decide to prescribe or command” (*Scalabrini to Local Superiors*, Feb. 15, 1893).

Frankly, we must ask ourselves: are there more religious today who disobey or superiors who fail to give order? Even this is a danger to the authenticity of a community. Scalabrini reminds his superiors of the *Principiis obsta*:

“If he (Fr. Vicentini) had used a little more firmness at the beginning, things would not have come to this pass. But for fear of worse, he closed one eye and maybe both, without thinking

about the *necesse est*, with what follows. A superior must be firm when duty requires it, and not let himself be intimidated by what might happen. Prudence and firmness, these are the qualities that contribute to good government” (*id. to Fr. F. Zaboglio*, Nov. 29, 1895).

“The local superiors are directly responsible for the observance of the Rules of Life and the prime animators of the religious life” (R.L. 256).

And this is true on all levels, for all superiors, because:

“Authority in the Congregation has its source in the Church and is at the source of our apostolic mission. Its purpose is to guide and regulate the activity of the community and of the individuals so that, when assuming his responsibilities, each one will discharge the tasks entrusted to him and bring to full bloom his gifts of nature and grace by placing them at the service of the Congregation” (R.L. 170).

3. Conclusion: values to recover

a) The Role of the Community

The mature person is one who is able to assume his responsibilities. The community, in fact, helps a person to mature.

“In intimate fellowship with Christ and our brothers, we will be able to achieve a more complete personal, human, and Christian maturity and a more effective apostolic activity” (R.L. 38).

As we saw, our Founder viewed the community as the place where we can fortify ourselves with the words and examples of our confreres and where we preserve the spirit of our vocation and the Congregation. What he used to apply to individuals, refers just as well to the Congregation, to the Province, and to the local community. We must get back to the community, if we want to preserve the spirit of our specific vocation. We must look on the community with greater faith and trust. Not on the formality of a community that cohabits under the same roof and maybe performs some practice in common but lacks a soul: the love of Christ, namely, the total gift of self, the oblation love, the putting in common of our whole person (see R.L. 47 and 85), in view of our service to the migrants.

“In fact, the mission we have received from the Church takes on meaning and credibility if, in the process of proclaiming the message of Christ, we live in fellowship with him and our brothers” (R.L. 9).

Our gift of self to the migrants doesn't have meaning and credibility if such a gift of self is not bestowed especially on the people in our own family, gathered together for a common purpose not by flesh or blood but by the Spirit of the Father and the Son: “By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

b) The Interpersonal and Social Dimensions of the Religious Life

In *Redemptionis Donum* (1984), Pope John Paul II observed: “The basically communitarian nature of your religious life, nourished by the doctrine of the Gospel, by the Sacred Liturgy, and, above all, by the Eucharist constitutes a privileged way of realizing

this interpersonal and social dimension; for by helping each other and carrying each other's burdens, you show by your unity that Christ is alive in your midst" (RD 15).

In other words, if there is no unity, Christ will not be alive in our midst. If so, how can we show and bring Christ to others? Without sensitivity to the needs and sufferings, the hopes and joys of our confreres (see R.L. 47-48), how can we be truly sensitive to the aspirations and needs, the sufferings and hopes of our migrant brothers and sisters (R.L. 6 and 10)? How can we tolerate the absurd situation - which unfortunately exists at times - in which our "confreres" are not our "brothers?" Kierkegaard once wrote: "Existence is what preaches, not the mouth. "The Missionary, as a Gospel worker, must remember that he must spread the good fragrance of Jesus Christ by his life, that he must preach the Gospel more by his example than by his words" (1895 Rule, ch. XIV, 1). This is a Gospel service we must render also to one another.

c) In Unity there is Strength

The Founder underlines also the other aspect of community life: the apostolic aspect: "I beg you not disperse your forces, each one on his own, with only one's will as guide" (cit.).

In our Congregation there always lurks the danger of the fragmentation, not to say of the pulverization of our limited forces. In proportion to our small numbers, there are still too many who walk alone, who don't take part in creating and carrying out common projects, and who don't reckon with the project of the community. Harmony and discipline are still missing, here and there, according to the Founder's expression: "Even though you are just a few..., with harmony and discipline you will perform miracles; without them, even if you were an army, you would be able to do precious little" (cit.).

We don't deserve the caustic observations of Archbishop R.C. Rossi at the time of the great crisis: "Everyone did his own thing;" "the spirit of society has become weak;" "too many people are taken up with their personal interests." We have come a long way since then, but we still have a long way to go before we can say that we are not just juridically but in the deepest sense of the word, "a community of religious," in which, "though in different ways, all the religious are jointly responsible for the religious and apostolic life" (R.L. 173).

d) The "Substance" of the Religious Life

We must dispel the impression that the desired renewal, fruit of the reflection "carried out by the local communities together with the entire community and the proper organs of study and research" (R.L. 30) but carried out also through the reflection and sharing promoted by the Province (area meetings, secretariats, etc.) consists in a return to a type of religious and community life that in our Congregation has, for all practical purposes, existed only in novitiate and at some period of our formation.

Yes, the Founder demanded a minimum of formal community life, but, in this matter, he had to struggle even with the Holy See, precisely because he had a different concept of the religious life from the often bureaucratic and formalistic view of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Our men could not have "formed houses", they were often far away from their superiors, they didn't have that "separation" from the world that characterized many religious communities. For this reason, the Holy See was not inclined to approve our perpetual vows. But our Founder saw our missionaries as being immersed in the crucible where a new humanity was being formed, as being present in the work camps where human mobility and the industrial revolution - today's world - was

being constructed through cultural transformations and minglings. He did nothing more than incarnate the project of religious life in a new culture, in the evolution of history, which for him is always salvation history. He wanted his missionaries to be immersed in the history of the migrants, the history of the poor, the downtrodden, the isolated, the people on the move, who by their immense labors and sufferings, are preparing a better tomorrow, not only from the economic point of view but also from the “human” one as well, with everything that “man” means in the plan of Him who designed man with his fatherly love: “the perfection of man on earth and the glory of God in the heavens” (Scalabrini, *L’Emigrazione degli operai italiani*, 1899. See *Discorso al Catholic Club di New York*, Oct. 15, 1901).

Hence, he wanted a Congregation that is agile, elastic, and ready to follow the migrants, and therefore one with solid but light structures. We must remember that in 1902 he sought and obtained from Propaganda Fide the approval of the new status of religious with perpetual vows, right after having seen for himself the conditions in which our missionaries in the United States had been working: a sign that for him the substance of the religious life could be lived even without certain forms that were too tight-laced. But he insisted that, in their stead, there should be that union with Christ that creates union with one’s confreres, that faith that accepts “the other” as brother, that love that makes all one thing with the Father and the Son in the Spirit.

e) Community of Faith and Worship

The Founder used to admonish his men that such union, such faith and such love can be nourished only by prayer (see lettera ai Missionari per gl’Italiani nelle Americhe, March 15, 1895, p. 5). He wanted us to be “a community of faith and worship”, that “is founded on prayer and perseveres in prayer, which culminates in the Eucharist” (R.L. 10).

The rediscovery of prayer life and Eucharistic life are prime requirements for a rediscovery of the Founder’s spirit. He, man of conciliation, knew perfectly well how to reconcile and integrate the two aspects of contemplation and action and with his word and example proposed this interaction and integration to us. “At the foundation of their activities, they shall place this great principle: not to apply themselves so much to the exercise of the apostolic ministry as to neglect their interior life and not abandon themselves so much to the sweetness of the interior life as to neglect the exercise of the apostolic ministry” (1895 Rule, ch. XIV, 2). These expressions echo the style and Scholastic distinctions of his times. He expressed himself more precisely when he reminded us that prayer “is the most vital, most powerful, and most fruitful component of the apostolate” (Scalabrini, *Discorso ai missionari partenti*, Jan. 24, 1889).

This is the same value expressed with greater theological precision by our Rules of Life:

“We choose for ourselves the style of life the Son God - in obedience to his Father - took upon himself in working out the salvation of the world in a perfect blending of contemplation and action. And so like him, we, too, combine our apostolic activity with an unceasing dialogue with God in quest of his will, in docility to the Holy Spirit” (R.L. 40).