



**Itinerant Missions:
Alternate Experiences
in the History of
Scalabrinians in North America**

Graziano Battistella, c.s.

**ITINERANT MISSIONS:
ALTERNATE EXPERIENCES IN THE HISTORY OF
SCALABRINIANS IN NORTH AMERICA**

Graziano Battistella, c.s.

CMS Occasional Papers:
Pastoral Series 6, 1986

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. Bishop Scalabrini and the Itinerant Missions	3
B. The Apostolate of the First Missionaries	11
Missions in Scalabrinian Parishes	11
Missions that Originated a New Parish	12
Itinerant Missions	13
Fr. Francis Zaboglio	13
Fr. Vincent Astori	15
Fr. Robert Biasotti	20
C. The Times of Card. Rossi	22
D. Fr. Corbellini's Mission Band	25
E. Remarks	27

Itinerant Missions

Alternate experiences in the History of Scalabrinians in North America

The reasons for a specific pastoral care of migrants derive from the conditions inherent to the migrant situation: migrants do not speak the language of the host country; they express their faith in ways different from those of the host community; they do not have much of a political or social “clout”; they are cut off from their native cultural environment. The local community finds it difficult to provide a pastoral care to cope with the problems generated by being migrants. Hence, the necessity to have missionaries for migrants and the necessity for a variety of pastoral forms to evangelize the migrants. The *Instruction on the Pastoral Care of People who Migrate* (# 33) presents a list of these forms: personal parish; mission with the care of souls; and chaplain, or missionary, of the same language with a specified territory in which to exercise the ministry.

The list provided by the *Instruction* indicates the pastoral structures established through the history of ministering to the migrants. The diversity of migratory situations and of local churches in the various geographical areas generated different methods for structuring this apostolate which would be appropriate for one or the other area.

In the United States, the prevalent model has been that of the national parish. This model, constituted originally for migrants from Germany and the France, was adopted also for the Italians and other national groups. This was an effective pastoral form, relevant not only for the religious, but also for the social and cultural dimensions. Nevertheless, it was not reinstated massively for the migration flows of the 1960s and 1970s.

The purpose of this study is not to present a critical evaluation of the national parish, but to consider a specific pastoral initiative – the “itinerant missions”, within the context of the apostolate of the Missionaries of St. Charles (Scalabrinians) in the United States, particularly on the East Coast.

Mission is a controversial term because of its many analogous meanings. In a generic sense, it connotes the sending of persons with authority to preach. But the term has more frequently been limited to apostolic action in non – Christian regions. Additionally, missions have been distinguished as “foreign” and “domestic”. The latter refer to apostolic action taken within the dioceses of well – established Churches. They are a form of intensive

evangelization directed to revitalize the Christian faith. Also called sacred missions or parochial missions, they were regulated by the 1917 Canon Law, which recommended that Bishops provide missions for their faithful at least once every ten years (can. 1349).

Specialized clerical groups were formed for this type of preaching, i.e. the Passionists, the Redemptorists, and diocesan clergy congregated in missionary associations. Because of the extensive traveling, the missionaries were popularly called itinerant or “flying” missionaries. The term was then applied by analogy to the missions. This terminology will be used throughout this paper.

In the first part of this study we will define Bishop Scalabrini’s idea of itinerant missions and, in the second part, how that idea was implemented by the first missionaries. In the third part we will monitor the resurgence of the idea in the history of the Scalabrinian Congregation in the United States. We will conclude with some considerations regarding current missionary action.

A. SCALABRINI AND THE ITINERANT MISSIONS

Itinerant missions are present from the very beginnings of the Scalabrinian Congregation.

In a letter to Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, written on January 1, 1887, Bishop Scalabrini referred to a letter from Fr. Zaboglio, who had visited some Italian communities in the United States, and to “the need those poor men feel to receive from time to time the visit of some minister of the Lord”. And later on, in the same letter: “Here I have that blessed man, Mons. Belasio, known to Your Excellency, who would be ready to leave, even today, to go from colony to colony to mission those abandoned poor people...”¹

In the **Project of an Association to Provide for the Spiritual Needs of the Italian Immigrants in the Americas** sent by Scalabrini to Card. Simeoni (Feb. 16, 1887), immediately after the title “How to Provide” Scalabrini said:

First of all, it seems necessary to me that in the regions where our fellow countrymen are present, priests be sent without fixed residence. They, in

¹ Scalabrini to Simeoni, Piacenza, January 11, 1887, Archivio Generale Scalabriniano (AGS), 1/1.

agreement with the local Ordinaries, should give 15 or 20 day missions, according to the necessities, should encourage them to build a chapel and to find the means to support a priest: they should keep note of the places, their conditions, number of inhabitants, etc. and send everything to the person who will be appointed by the Holy See as Superior of the Pious Association.²

The function, then, of this kind of mission is temporary as compared to the permanent mission that could be established further on when communities develop. In fact, Scalabrini calls these missionaries the “forerunners” of permanent missionaries. The first idea of the itinerant mission, according to Scalabrini, is the mission that first addresses the immigrant group as a community, even within the context of a host parish. It is the mission that fills the void left by the scarcity of priests and keeps lit the smoldering wick of faith. In fact, once the missionary has left,

to preserve the fruit of the mission, it should be recommended in every priestless group of Italians that they not only maintain every day in the house the pious duties of the good Christians, but that they gather in the church or chapel during the holidays to pray together, to worship the Lord, to teach the children catechism, to read the Sunday gospel: in a word, to perform those religious practices permitted to the lay people.³

Scalabrini’s idea was fully accepted by the Holy See. On June 26, card. Simeoni presented the Holy Father with six practical proposals “to give some support to the increasing Italian emigration”. Proposal n. 4 says: “To Institute in Italy one or several associations of priests to go to America to give missions among emigrants to support their faith”. And proposal n. 5: “To keep a house of those priests in some convenient areas of the United States and South America so that these missionaries may go to preach itinerant missions among emigrants to rescue their faith.”⁴ Therefore, in the proposals of the Holy See, borrowed from Bishop Scalabrini, the itinerant missions are considered the form of first assistance to the migrants.

The same idea is reinforced by a document written after a meeting between Msgr. Scalabrini and Msgr. Jacobini, held in Rome on the evening of November 9, 1887.

² G.B. Scalabrini, Progetto di una associazione allo scopo di provvedere ai bisogni spirituali degli Italiani emigrati nelle Americhe, Piacenza, Feb. 16, 1887, AGS, 1/1.

³ Ibidem

⁴ Arch. S.C.P.F., Collegi d'Italia, Piacenza, f. 1382.

To institute in America several central houses of these missionaries dedicated to itinerant missions among those emigrants who live too far away from others and for whom it would not be possible to provide a resident priest.⁵

The decisions of the Holy Father, given to the Secretary of Propaganda Fide in the Ex Udientia SS.mi and transmitted to Bishop Scalabrini, report almost the same words. In both cases, though, I should like to point out that the necessity of itinerant missions was limited to those “emigrants who live too far away from others and for whom it would not be possible to provide a resident priest”.

Two models of pastoral care for migrants appear then in the intentions of the Holy See and Bishop Scalabrini:

- 1 - resident priests.
- 2.- houses for missionaries dedicated to itinerant missions.

Both pastoral models seemed necessary, because two migratory situations were present at the same time: numerous and concentrated groups of migrants, particularly in major cities, and thin and scattered groups of migrants, dispersed in smaller urban areas or working in agricultural and mine activities. Nevertheless, it appears that in the beginning Bishop Scalabrini conceived his missionaries mostly as itinerant missionaries, leaving the task of establishing permanent residences to others.

When time came to go from ideas to implementation, Bishop Scalabrini's first concern was to provide his missionaries with a permanent residence. In a letter to Msgr. Corrigan, Archbishop of New York, written before sending the first missionaries in 1888, he asked that “There should be a house for lodging the missionaries, since they should possibly live in community; and a church, perhaps even a basement for now, where they could perform freely the sacred ministry, always in absolute dependence of your Most Rev. Excellency”.⁶

The reasons for this request lay in the two requirements that Scalabrini had been clarifying in his mind: his missionaries had to have some independence in the apostolate from the local pastors and they had to live in fraternity.

⁵ Arch. S.C.P.F., Collegi d'Italia, Piacenza, f. 1384.

⁶ Scalabrini to Corrigan, Piacenza, February 27, 1887, AGS 549/1.

Even the immigrants at this time were longing for spiritual assistance and for their own church – as testified in a letter sent to Scalabrini by a group of migrants of the Transfiguration Church in New York on March 27, 1888.⁷ The necessity for some stability in the apostolate is also underscored by Fr. Moroni. In one of his letters, after mentioning a touching First Communion ceremony he had just performed, he concludes: “Everything is fine, but unless there are permanent priests as the Bishop of Piacenza would keep, it will always be a precarious benefit”.⁸ And Msgr. Corrigan was not hesitant to assure Msgr. Scalabrini on April 13, 1888: “It is my strong wish to give them a national church – of their own - – where they will be absolutely independent”.⁹

Nevertheless, the idea of itinerant missions was not abandoned by the Holy See, or by the American Bishops, the missionaries themselves and, least of all, by Msgr. Scalabrini, even though for strategical purposes he focused his concern on permanent residences.

Msgr. Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote to Scalabrini on December 21, 1888, showing appreciation for the newly founded Institute and encouragement for its growth. He continued:

In the activity of the Italian Missions in the United States there will be a very noticeable gap to fill until some provisions will be taken to reach the small groups of Italians, scattered in these States, among whom it will be impossible to keep two priests, and often time even one on a permanent basis, and who, therefore, will lose their faith and will be forgotten.¹⁰

Even more significant is the correspondence between Scalabrini and Gilmour, Bishop of Cleveland, Ohio, which resulted in the foundation of Holy Rosary Parish in Cleveland. Msgr. Gilmour wrote in 1889 to Propaganda Fide, asking for a young student willing to do his theological studies in America. “Once priest, the bishop would have assigned him to preach in Italian and in English in various places of the diocese.”¹¹ Msgr. Scalabrini, to whom Propaganda Fide had referred the request, answered offering two priests and two catechists but posing the usual requests of an independent residence for community life and independence from the pastors in the ministry to the Italians.

⁷ Comitato Ecclesiastico Collettori to Scalabrini, New York, March 27, 1888, AGS, D, I, 2.

⁸ Moroni d'Agnadello to Simeoni, New York, May 16, 1888, AGS, D, I, 2.

⁹ Corrigan to Scalabrini, New York, April 13, 1888, AGS, D, I, 1.

¹⁰ Ireland to Scalabrini, St. Paul, MN, December 21, 1888, AGS, D, I, 1.

¹¹ Francesconi, M., *Storia della Congregazione Scalabriniana*, Roma, 1973, vol. II, p. 116.

In his reply, Msgr. Gilmour reiterated his concern for the Italians scattered in small groups and, even in the case of large groups in populated cities, the necessity for Italians to move around in search for a job.

Now, under these conditions, the priests could not possibly have community life because of the type of work they would be supposed to carry out. We need those kinds of priests that gladly take their portable altar and go to the places where the Italians gather to assemble them together, to say mass in a poor house, to listen to confessions, to give instructions and, when numerous, to gather boys and girls to teach the basics of our holy religion.¹²

This method, according to Gilmour, was followed by all the other national groups. Only later the Italians would have had their own churches and parishes, like all the other ethnic groups.

It is quite evident in Gilmour's letter that itinerant missions were meant to be temporary and their function was to provide the first evangelization in view of establishing permanent communities at a later time. In fact, Fr. Capitani, sending the Italian translation of Gilmour's letter to Scalabrini, specified that he alone had to participate in 25 missions. When the first Scalabrinian, Fr. Strumia, arrived in Cleveland, Fr. Zaboglio wrote to Msgr. Scalabrini: "In the meantime, Fr. Strumia will give missions in the diocese".¹³ The missions were indeed temporary. In fact, eventually a parish was established for the Italians, Holy Rosary's Church in East Cleveland, held by the Scalabrinians until 1907.

We said that the Holy See did not forget the idea of a house for missionaries exclusively dedicated to itinerant missions and neither did Scalabrini and his missionaries. We get this from an excited crisscrossing of letters. To Fr. Vicentini, Provincial Superior, contacted by Msgr. Satolli on the opportunity for a residence, Scalabrini wrote: "Msgr. Satolli's idea is our old idea, and, when financially possible, a house of itinerant missionaries would be the most beautiful and useful idea of the world. We should think about it".¹⁴

At the same time, on September 1893, he contacted Msgr. Satolli:

¹² Gilmour to Scalabrini, Cleveland, June 7, 1889, AGS, 651/1.

¹³ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, Youngstown, OH, November 1, 1891, AGS, 550/2.

¹⁴ Scalabrini to Vicentini, Piacenza, September 9, 1893, AGS, 3032/2.

Fr. Vicentini wrote to me manifesting Your Excellency's desire to establish a house of itinerant missionaries, ministering to Italian communities.

This is one of my old desires, a wish manifested to me also by the Holy Father, and I would have gladly implemented it if I had the means to do it. If Your Excellency (...) could come to my aid, the establishment of that house in a central location could be a real blessing.¹⁵

Subsequently, he wrote to Card. Ledochowski:

The project mentioned by Msgr. Satolli, warmly supported from the beginning by the Holy Father, was to found a house of itinerant missionaries with the task to go here and there to give missions to the migrants, but it is paralyzed by the lack of means.¹⁶

Thus, it was a matter of financial problems that prevented Scalabrini from accomplishing that "old idea" (we should not forget that at that time Scalabrini was struggling with the problem of the Most Precious Blood Church and St. Joachim also was in bad financial shape).

A step forward in that direction appeared to happen in 1901. Passing by Providence, Scalabrini wrote to Msgr. Mangot on October 23: "The house adjacent to that of the missionaries is for sale for \$4,500, maybe \$4,000 will be sufficient. We decided to purchase it to install three or four priests devoted to the missions."¹⁷ In Italy, Scalabrini followed up the matter.

In the beginning of 1902, Fr. Novati, Provincial Superior, answered to the Founder's insistency that he had not bought the appropriate house yet because he did not have ... missionaries to assign to it. Around the end of 1903, he announced that he had bought the house, for which he had received a grant of \$1,000 by the Bishop of Providence. But the only news about this missionary band, led by Fr. Roberto Biasotti and Fr. Beccherini, is that it did not last long, for the usual reason of lack of personnel.¹⁸

The lack of personnel was not considered by Bishop Scalabrini ten years before, when the idea started. Obviously, it was a real factor, even though it is indicative that no decision was taken to switch personnel from the parishes to the itinerant missions.

Observations

¹⁵ Scalabrini to Satolli, September 14, 1893, in G.B. Scalabrini, *Scritti*, Roma, Congregazione Scalabriniana, 1980, vol. I, p. 18.

¹⁶ Scalabrini to Ledochowski, September or November 1893 in M. Francesconi, *Il patrimonio costituzionale della Congregazione Scalabriniana*, Roma, 1969, p. 35.

¹⁷ Scalabrini to Mangot, October 23, 1901, in Francesconi, *Storia*, vol. IV, p. 392.

¹⁸ Francesconi, *Storia*, vol. IV, p. 131-132.

Did Bishop Scalabrini prefer the parish or the itinerant mission as a pastoral structure for the work with migrants?

One answer can be found in the 1895 “Regola”: “To the permanent mission in the parish the Missionaries should prefer, when it is possible, the itinerant mission, rushing where the need is greater” (XIV, 13).¹⁹

One should not forget that to the Founder “a law should not be either a dogma, or an affirmation of absolute principles”; however, that rule sheds quite a light on the support given by Scalabrini to this form of pastoral approach.

As a matter of fact, it is surprising how Scalabrini, while fully supporting that idea, supported also and saw mostly the realization of permanent missions.

First of all, he had to deal with the mass migration of his time. In these groups, it was imperative to preserve the spirit and the cultural environment of the motherland, so that people would not be lost in anonymity and their integration in the host society would not be endangered. Also, from a religious point of view it was wise to preserve, as much as possible, the original context in which the religiosity of migrants was born and grown. Therefore, he preferred parishes, holding the same characteristics of the parishes in the country of origin.²⁰

To the above reasons, the preoccupation for community life and independence in the ministry from the local clergy should be added.

Furthermore, he had to balance the conflicting suggestions he received from the missionaries, not just those in the United States, but those in Brazil as well, where the same issue was discussed.

In Brazil, Fr. Colbacchini’s vision of a mother church, with branch chapels to be visited periodically, differed from Fr. Marchetti’s idea of large communities from which to depart for itinerant missions. The latest, stationed in S. Paulo, informed that in 1895 Bishop Scalabrini intended to send some missionaries only to the state of Paraná, wrote:

¹⁹ Regola della Congregazione dei Missionari di S. Carlo per gl’Italiani emigrati, Piacenza, 1895, p. 79.

²⁰ Francesconi, M., *Il patrimonio costituzionale della Congregazione*, p. 34-37.

My mission is almost completed, but I have to say that if two of our Fathers go to Paraná, four to Rio de Janeiro, one to S. Paulo, two to S. Catarina, etc., we conclude nothing (...)

As I say, if one is appointed pastor here, another there, we do not accomplish anything. This colony or the other colony with the fortune of having a missionary will feel some benefit, but what about the others? They will languish in the same old routine. Instead, when we will constitute a mother house in each province where ten or twelve priests could be stationed, they will suffice to take care of the material and spiritual needs of Italian migrants. They could go two by two in all colonies and "fazendas", remain there ten or fifteen days, awake their faith, purify their consciences, plant crosses, in a word give missions, as the zealous Missionaries of St. Paul of the Cross do among us, etc.²¹

Later on he reiterated the urgent need for help:

I had to purchase a horse, because my legs do not want to respond to my thoughts and heart. What a pain to be alone! So, venerable and beloved Father, will you delay feeling compassion for this poor priest? Our mission is urgently needed here, in S. Paulo. One Father here and one there do not accomplish anything, as nothing would have been accomplished by the Jesuits, the Salesians, the Capuchins, etc. The parishes are the tomb of the spirit of our Congregation.²²

History tells us that it was the parish strategy that prevailed. In 1905, writing a memorial for the Congregation or Commission "pro emigratis catholicis" that the Holy See was to institute in Rome, Scalabrini said:

For North America, the danger to lose the Faith is even greater. (...) Remedies, besides the one already mentioned of sending numerous and well-prepared priests of the same nation, are: 1) The institution of national parishes every time the catholic communities are able to defray the expenses of such institutions, both for the support of the clergy and the development of the community. 2) In those places where different nationalities coexist, but no one is able to form a parish, mixed clergy should be employed, with the strict mandate of instructing the adults and teaching the children catechism, each in his own language.²³

Itinerant missions were not mentioned at all.

²¹ Marchetti to Scalabrini, S. Paulo, June 14, 1895, AGS, 396/1.

²² Marchetti to Scalabrini, S. Paulo, January 2, 1896, AGS, 396/1.

²³ Memoriale sulla Congregazione o Commissione "Pro Emigratis Catholicis", Piacenza, May 5, 1905, AGS, 3020/1.

One should not conclude that Scalabrini had completely abandoned the idea of itinerant missions, but that the contingent situation indicated the parish system as more effective.

B. THE APOSTOLATE OF THE FIRST MISSIONARIES

From the writings of the first Scalabrinian missionaries in the United States one gets frequent allusions to missions. This confirms how much this form of evangelization was pursued at that time. However, not all the missions mentioned there can be considered itinerant missions. Rather, three kinds of missions can be distinguished: missions given in parishes ministered by Scalabrinians; missions preached in new areas, from which permanent positions were originated; missions as a typical form of apostolate, given to scattered groups, without originating a permanent position.

MISSIONS IN SCALABRINIAN PARISHES

This type of work was well established in the Church. The Scalabrinian missionaries applied it almost immediately and never interrupted it, and it is continued today.

Easter has always been the favorite season for these missions, but other occasions, such as the celebration of the feast of the Patron Saint, were and are opportunities for intensive preaching.

Fr. Amos Astorri, particularly talented in this preaching activity, from the very beginning of his work at the Resurrection Chapel in New York, “did the preliminary work through missions by categories of people: fathers, mothers, young men and young girls.”²⁴ More quotations of the same kind could be added, but these missions are not the primary purpose of this paper. However, very significant is a reference to the Sacred Heart parish in Boston: “During lent of 1896, missions of fifteen days were given with four sermons every day”.²⁵ The length of the missions, the intensity of the work, the participation of people, all speak well of the burden of apostolic work required by our parishes at that time. In 1897,

since the church could accommodate only one fifth of those who participated (...) Fr. Gambera had to ask the pastor of the nearby St. Stephen Parish permission to use his church, and the archbishop ordered that lent

²⁴ Francesconi, *Storia*, vol. II, p. 23.

²⁵ Francesconi, *Storia*, vol. IV, p. 173.

ceremonies be suspended for a week, to allow the Italians to participate in the missions.²⁶

MISSIONS THAT ORIGINATED A NEW PARISH

It often happened that, because of large groups of Italians, the missionaries either were invited or requested to preach missions, from which a permanent position was originated. This is the case of Pittsburg, PA,²⁷ where the Scalabrinians remained from 1889 to 1894, in time to build the church and pass it over to the Franciscans, because unable to pay for it. It was also the case at Holy Ghost in Providence. Fr. Zaboglio, writing to Bishop Scalabrini, noted: "During this week some of our Fathers from New York should be in Providence to preach missions and initiate the parish."²⁸ It was also the case in New Orleans, as we construe again from a Fr. Zaboglio's letter:

Last Sunday the missions started here, preached by Fr. Martinelli, from New York, in the cathedral, kindly loaned by the Archbishop, since the chapel was too small: some people came, but not many in proportion to the Italian population, which amounts to 15 or 20 thousand people.²⁹

And the same happened in St. Louis, MO, as Fr. Gambera reports, giving the account of his period as Provincial Superior:

In St. Louis, after long transactions, I got the permission from the Archbishop to preach a mission for the Italian colony. The mission was held in the Irish church of St. Patrick, hoping to establish a permanent position for our people. It was such a success that the mission was terminated in our own church, bought in two days.³⁰

Did the missionaries continue the care of scattered groups of migrants once a permanent position was established? The answer is affirmative, taken from various witnesses. For instance, Fr. Angelo Chiariglione intended to leave Hartford and move to Meriden, once the chapel there was built.

From there he could have assisted the 100 Italians of Meriden, the 800 of Hartford, the 100 of Windsor Locks, the 400 of Middletown, the 500 of

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Idem, vol. II, p. 77.

²⁸ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, Boston, August 5, 1889, in Francesconi, Storia, vol. II, p. 158.

²⁹ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, New Orleans, February 12, 1892, in Francesconi, Storia, vol. 11, 188.

³⁰ Gambera, G., Memorie, p. 43, AGS 1558/3.

Waterbury, the 300 of New Britain, the 300 of West Norfolk, the 500 of Daubury.³¹

On the same line refers Fr. Novati in the 1896 report on Holy Ghost Parish. He complained he was alone with the care of six thousand souls scattered in an area of more than fifty-mile perimeter and he was forced to “remain home the whole day to be ready for calls that could come from the city as well as the country(...). If only the priest could pay at least a weekly visit to those small groups of Italians so far from the church...”³²

Also, in the same report we read that from the beginning the missionaries of Holy Ghost parish took care of the Italian groups in Thornton, Menton, Cranston, Warren, Barrington and Bristol. In some of those centers a Scalabrinian parish was later founded. This radial activity cannot be properly included in the itinerant missions as such, but it indicates the same method and spirit: to act without waiting for requests, to seek the migrants first, to bring some form of evangelization.

THE ITINERANT MISSIONS

Fr. Oreste Alussi, in his report of April 30, 1889, after talking about the celebration of Easter in St. Joachim's Church, continues:

Starting with May 5 we will go two each time to give missions, spiritual retreats in the surrounding towns and cities to the poor Italians scattered in the country, and thus we have them fulfill the Easter duty. Often and many times Bishops and Pastors ask for these missions. Excellency, please send to New York as soon as you can priests ready to preach apostolically.³³

On this type of missions, I should like to expand, following the testimonies of three missionaries: Fr. Zaboglio, Fr. Astorri and Fr. Biasiotti.

Fr. Francesco Zaboglio

Forerunner of the Scalabrinian mission in the United States, prominent figure and privileged interlocutor of Bishop Scalabrini, Fr. Zaboglio travelled often. Writing to Scalabrini from Boston in 1888, he asks for “at least two or three cases of missionary equipment (with the necessary items

³¹ Francesconi, Storia, vol. II, 126.

³² Novati, P., Relazione sull'andamento e progressi di questa Missione di Providence, R.I., January 20, 1896, AG.S, 591/4.

³³ Alussi to Scalabrini, New York, April 30, 1889, AGS. 665.

to celebrate mass) ... they will be divided among us as it will be opportune. I think one would be assigned to me, as the one who travels the most."³⁴

And Scalabrini answered in November: "At the first arrival of missionaries I will send you the case that you requested. It is just one and I assign it to you".³⁵

History tells that in the beginning the Scalabrinian Missionaries scattered, reaching the cities where Italians were most numerous. Barely two years after the arrival, the missionaries were already present in New York, Boston, Pittsburg, New Haven, New Orleans, Providence, Buffalo, Cincinnati. This dispersion preoccupied Fr. Zaboglio, who wrote to Scalabrini:

I would have considered it more necessary to assign at least three missionaries in New York, with the only task to give missions for New England and the rest of the States, as to help as much as possible the many hundreds of our countrymen who cannot be served by permanent missions, than to assign an additional priest to the Bishop of Hartford, who already has two of them.³⁶

And further down in the same letter he wrote:

Excellency, let me restate my opinion, expressed already in a different letter: that is, we have to pause accepting other parishes, for the moment. Now we have to strengthen the communities that we already have, because in this way, besides other benefits, we could assist the Italians of the hamlets, of the mines, of the cities surrounding the large cities where we already have a mission. In Pennsylvania, of which Pittsburg is the center, we do not have but one priest, while this State, full of mines, swarms with Italians who could be assisted from Pittsburg. The same could be said of the State of New York, Massachusetts, Louisiana and many more. Furthermore, it is absolutely necessary that we form a corps of Itinerant Missionaries, located in New York, as the Passionists, the Jesuits, the Redemptorists have. And those ideas were also Your Excellency's ideas, but now it is time to implement them, in my opinion, because it could produce a better result than accepting some other parish here or there.³⁷

Fr. Zaboglio's concern expresses what will be Fr. Marchetti's idea in Brazil, facing the same situation: numerous and scattered immigrants on one side,

³⁴ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, Boston, September 19, 1888, in Francesconi, Storia. Vol. II, 135.

³⁵ Scalabrini to Zaboglio, Piacenza, November 9, 1888, AGS, 3023/1.

³⁶ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, December 21, 1891, in Francesconi, Storia, vol II, p. 186.

³⁷ Ibidem

and few missionaries on the other. There is a strategic choice to be made: whether to have many parishes, each with limited personnel, allowing an in-depth ministry but on a limited number of people, or to have few parishes, with numerous personnel, allowing to reach out to more immigrants, although occasionally. Zaboglio leaned toward this second choice, but historically it was the first which prevailed.

We do not know Scalabrini's answer to Zaboglio's letter, but we do know that Zaboglio spoke again on the same topic. During March of 1892 he suggested that Bishop Scalabrini move Fr. Paroli from Providence and send him

to the countryside of Louisiana as an itinerant missionary. In this countryside ... there are thousands of Italians scattered here and there in groups of several hundreds, sometimes up to one thousand, totally alienated from the church... The Archbishop would like to have a missionary for the Italians, someone dedicated to nothing but to scour the country.³⁸

A few months later he asks: "Please, try to see if it is possible to send another portable altar with the new missionaries who are coming".³⁹ The repeated request for portable altars witnesses of an established policy of itinerant missions among the first Scalabrinians. Fr. Paroli, for instance, replacing Fr. Gambera in New Orleans, decided to abandon the project of building another church and "to dwell with the pastor of the cathedral from which he could take care for the Italians in the city as well as dedicate the free time to itinerant missions for the Italians of the surrounding parishes and neighborhoods".⁴⁰ And Fr. Lotti, at that time pastor in Cincinnati, went to Columbus in 1895 upon the request of Bishop H. Moeller to give a popular mission, even though "the attendants were few".⁴¹

Fr. Vincent Astorri

Fr. Astorri, the first missionary to the State along with Fr. Morelli, was also very involved with itinerant missions and left the most extensive documentation about it.

³⁸ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, Jennings, LA. March 7, 1892, in Francesconi, Storia, vol. II, 192.

³⁹ Zaboglio to Scalabrini, Cincinnati, OH, May 3, 1892, in Francesconi, Storia, vol. II, p. 194.

⁴⁰ Francesconi, Storia, vol II, p. 105.

⁴¹ Francesconi. Storia. vol IV, p. 208.

From a report on the first missions preached in 1889 in Paterson, NJ, it is possible to outline some methodological aspects on how the missions were organized. Two Fathers used to go together: one used to present the Instructions, the other one the Meditations. Usually they were invited by the pastor of a place with numerous Italians. Since the early missions were not usually well attended, the Father used to pass from house to house to invite the Italians to participate in the mission.

Wrote Fr. Astorri:

Fr. Felice gave the introductory sermon; but what a surprise for him since there were only about thirty Neapolitans present. We turned to the most valuable device of going to every house to personally renew the invitation (...). We went to each house, each hut, each hovel dwelled in by Italians and we used all our eloquence to convince them to come to the Church.⁴²

Most of the times the Fathers were well received, and this method was successful. A general confession and communion were the conclusion of the mission. The task of continuity was left, accomplished usually by establishing catholic organizations among Italians. Once a mission was over in one place, it was taken up in another location. "This same day I will leave at 6:00 PM for Pittsburg, more than four hundred miles from New York, to prepare our countrymen by visiting them. Fr. Superior and Fr. Martinelli will join me in three days."⁴³

Having been transferred to Boston, Fr. Astorri did not let his interest for the missions die. In his diary "My Missions in America" he extensively narrates about three places closed to his heart: North Adams, MA, Readsboro, VT and Mine-Paris.

He was invited to North Adams by Fr. Le-Duc, the French Pastor, highly praised by Fr Astorri "because he offered to the missionary not only the Church, to be used at his own convenience, but also room and board".⁴⁴ Also,

he strived, when I was not present, to listen to the confessions of Italians, using a book prepared on purpose and, to avoid any excuse on their part, he

⁴² Astorri to Scalabrini, New York, May 14, 1889, AGS, 665.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Astorri, A., *Le mie missioni in America*, p. 35.

used to leave the church open for them and to offer them a mass every Sunday, on a fixed time, in which he adjusted to read the gospel in Italian.⁴⁵

From those notes, and from other clues, one can surmise that a true solidarity and interest for the migrants was there among priests of different nationality, an interest greater than the one shown by the local clergy, already established and forgetful of the same experiences lived in the past.

In addition to visiting families, Fr. Astorri also used special advertisements to notify the Italians of the mission activities.

CATHOLIC ITALIANS

Dwelling in this city of North Adams

The undersigned notifies you that Fr. Vincenzo Astorri, Apostolic Missionary, will come here Thursday to give you the opportunity to fulfill Easter duty. If you care for the salvation of your soul, take all advantage of the grace given you by the Lord.

Fr. L. LEDUC

North Adams, Mass., May 22, 1893.⁴⁶

Once he touched base with this community, Fr. Astorri kept assisting it in all the years he remained in Boston, going there every Christmas and Easter. But in 1895 he remarked: "This year too (...) I would have visited the Italians and given them the opportunity to fulfill their Easter duty, but I did not do it because I did not have anybody to substitute me. 'Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci'.⁴⁷

The most distinguished characteristic of the itinerant missions preached in Readsboro, VT. ("right among high mountains, made up of some hundred Tyrolese Italians, who, together with an equal amount of Canadians, found an honest way to make a living in some factories that I gladly visited several times")⁴⁸ is the cooperation between Fr. Astorri and Fr. Paquet, one for the Italians, the other for the Canadians. The community of goals led to a common chapel, built in a short time, for the two ethnic groups, and

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Astorri, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Astorri, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Astorri, p. 38.

dedicated to St. Joachim, in homage to Pope Leo XIII who bore that name. The continuity was assured with the assignment of a Canadian priest to the place; he would have taken care of the Italians too.

These settlements were originated by groups of immigrants drawn far from the cities in places where special projects were undertaken. It was the case of Readboro's factories, but it was also the case of a quarry in Mine-Paris, a railroad station before North Adams, with a small group of Tyrolese. Some of those settlements were temporary, as long as the projects were completed, but the missionaries were concerned to provide minimum religious assistance to those scattered groups.

Obviously, things were often impromptu and without adequate structures. Fr. Astorri remembers that in Mine-Paris "I improvised an altar by assembling a table, some chairs and bed sheets. Lighting was provided by two wax candle and two oil lamps. Someone, not knowing that I had brought the wine myself, kindly produced (put forward) some cider for the mass."⁴⁹

Talking about itinerant missions, father Astorri voices his disagreement with the general policy of the Congregation, leaning toward a stabilization in parishes. According to him, it was sometimes the scarcity of missionaries or the lack of availability on their side that withered this activity; "who will be the missionary to go among them? Many unfortunate souls seek someone to nourish them in America; but they are not listened to and die of starvation."⁵⁰

Other times it was the structural and economic stability that prevailed.

One day I heard from Fr. Gambera, now superior and pastor in Boston, that we should abandon the missions that cannot support the missionary and provide some profit. This is ... truth that I cannot but disapprove, since, when we are called to make ourselves available to help our poor immigrant countrymen, particularly spiritually, we should not speculate on profits, but be generous in sacrifices instead.⁵¹

Fr Astorri did not overlook the necessity of some economic stability. However, according to him, the care of the parishes should not hinder the

⁴⁹ Astorri, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Astorri, p. 43.

itinerant missions, but rather support them: “those sacrifices can be made and sustained, without difficulty, from the house in Boston.”⁵²

Two years after returning to Italy, not a member of the Congregation anymore, Fr. Astorri had not forgotten America and wrote to Bishop Corrigan in 1897 that he would have liked to return the States,

where the evangelical mission is still very wide and one can, with God's help and goodwill, do very well; even more so if that category of unfortunate Italian immigrants are taking care of, who live more carefree about their soul, because scattered here in there and only seldom in contact with a priest who speaks their language. And this is what I would like to do, with the approval of my Bishop and yours. (...) My idea, already expounded to Bishop Scalabrini and fully approved by him, would be to take up the so-called itinerant missions in New York.⁵³

available then to be sent everywhere, upon request of Bishops and pastors.

These itinerant missions, as far as I know, do not exist in the United States and, even though the first idea of Bishop Scalabrini, as he himself told me, was precisely to establish similar missions, nevertheless, in reality Bishop Scalabrini founded missions that aim to establish merely Italian parishes in the most important cities, in the same way that German, French, Polish parishes exist. Yet, itinerant missions are necessary, most necessary, since numerous are the places where Italian immigrants in the United States live without being even visited, precisely because there are no real missionaries, exclusively dedicated to them: in fact, those who have parishes think of them and of the immigrants who do not live far away.⁵⁴

As an example of this of his statement he quotes the missions he used to do when he was in Boston and that were discontinued after his departure. Continuing in the explanation of his project, he affirms again he had the approval Bishop Scalabrini “who encouraged me and exhorted me to find two or three zealous priests to found a house (community) distinct from the others already founded by him.”⁵⁵ But instead of expanding on Scalabrini’s idea and rejoining the Congregation, Astorri preferred to be independent from the Scalabrinians and dependent directly from Corrigan. The reason he brought forward was that Scalabrini’s Congregation “because of its own

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Astorri to Corrigan, 1897, in Astorri, *Le mie missioni*.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

rules, a limited dependence from the American bishops and an object quite different from mine, could hamper my idea.”⁵⁶

Nevertheless, it is significant how clear it was for him, after his experience as Scalabrinian, that the Congregation was modeling itself in such a way as to exclude a special interest for the itinerant missions. Corrigan replied to Fr. Astorri that he could not accept his proposal, “because new dispositions have been taken recently regarding the Italian colony”.⁵⁷

Fr. Roberto Biasotti

Another priest who dedicated himself very much to itinerant missions was Fr. Roberto Biasotti. “A man of good qualities, except for being a good administrator” as Fr. Vicentini annotated, he had to leave Italy for Germany because of financial and political mishaps. In Germany he devoted himself to the assistance of the Italians, being appreciated by the clergy he got involved with, and becoming a member of the “Segretariato degli Operai Italiani” (The Secretariat for Italian Workers), instituted by Dr. L. Wethmann.

Fr. Biasotti was in Freiburg, Baden, when he wrote to Scalabrini.:

A permanent Italian missionary would be necessary in those places, who changes residence every Sunday and takes the spiritual care of the Italians in Gross Moveuvre, Hayange, Knontange, Audin le Tiche, towns of Lotaringe; in Villerupt, Thil, Hussigny in France; in Esch, Dudelange, Rumlange, Oborcorne in Luxembourg. In each of these places there are ordinarily a thousand Italian workers, with a total average of six to seven hundred Italian women. In this way, those workers could have the missionary at least once every two months.⁵⁸

That was the activity he was involved in, passing and preaching from group to group. He would have remained keen to this ministry even after he joined the Scalabrinian Congregation, “because the best days of my life were those I spent preaching missions, from which I got much comfort, with the help of God”.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Corrigan to Astorri, New York, August 13, 1897, in Astorri, *Le mie missioni*.

⁵⁸ Biasotti to Scalabrini, Freiburg, Baden, January 21, 1899, AGS, 1711.

⁵⁹ Biasotti to Scalabrini, Boston, May 29, 1899, AGS, 1711.

There is no organized documentation of the itinerant missions preached by Fr. Biasotti in the United States. We find him once with Fr. Beccherini, in the first Mission Band officially established by Fr. Novati. Later he was pastor in Boston, but he was subsequently removed by Fr. Provincial in 1907 “because he was a man of great enterprise but a bad administrator,” and assigned to the itinerant missions, his old dream.

The year after, he was in Chicago, for a two – week mission. But he had already left the Congregation, even though continuing in his missionary activity. “This year - he wrote on March 28 - I preached seven week-long missions in five different cities.⁶⁰

In 1910 Fr. Berti, who was in Boston, sent to the Superior a transcript of a notice published in the Italian newspaper *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*:

From Buffalo, NY.

Missions in St. Anthony's Church.

The 30th of this month, in the evening, the holy missions will start in St. Anthony of Padua Church, and they will last two weeks. This week, missions will be preached in the evening for women only, the following week for men only; however, everyone can come during the day. The speakers will be: Msgr. Cesare Spigardi, from St. Louis, MO, and Rev. Robert Biasotti, from New York, both of the Congregation of St. Charles. The schedule will be as follows: in the morning, mass at 5:00 and then meditation, mass at 8:00 and then instruction. In the afternoon, Stations of the Cross at 3:00 and then Instruction; Holy Rosary at 7:30 followed by a dialogued instruction, meditation and eucharistic benediction.⁶¹

Fr. Berti continues his letter with a long protest because these priests, who had already left the Congregation, kept declaring they were still part of it. His protest is not of immediate interest for this paper. It is more important to underline the progress in advertising the missions, from Fr. Astorri’s notice to a notice in the newspaper. It is also interesting to point out the busy schedule of those missions, similar to spiritual retreats for religious.

In our documentation Fr. Biasotti was last mentioned in a note written to him by Msgr. Lavelle, Vicar General and supervisor for the immigrants in the Archdiocese of New York. Msgr. Lavelle proposal was to form a

⁶⁰ Biasotti to Vicentini, Chicago, March 28. 1908, AGS, 1711.

⁶¹ Berti to Vicentini, Boston, January 8, 1910, AGS, 1711.

committee made up of a dean and secretary (Msgr. Ferrario) plus five additional members: Dr. Burke, a Franciscan, a Salesian, a member of the Congregation of St. Charles and a member of the Society of Pious Missions. In the note to Fr. Biasotti he said:

The missionary group of Italian diocesan priests was organized and put to work in September of last year. It had a great success (...) Now we have to prepare its program for next year (...) I am writing to you to ask whether you can utilize these missionaries during the next year.⁶²

Apparently, Scalabrini's old idea, never seriously implemented in his Congregation, was fulfilled by the diocesan priests. And to lead the group was a former Scalabrinian, in love with the itinerant missions: Fr. Robert Biasotti.

C. THE TIMES OF CARD. ROSSI

Not much documentation is available regarding the itinerant missions in the long period that goes from the crisis of the Congregation, after the religious vows were taken away, and its resurgence, particularly through the leadership of Card. Rossi. The issue emerges en passant, every time the problem of the immobility of the positions or the specific object of the Congregation are questioned.

A general review of the situation of the Scalabrinian Congregation was found among Card. Rossi's papers. It had been prepared by an officer of the Concistorial Congregation and annotated on the side by Msgr. Rossi, at that time a clerk. The report, after pointing out that the Scalabrinian parishes in the USA were only about thirty compared to eight hundred parishes for Italians in the whole nation, continues:

Therefore, it would be appropriate to consider whether it is convenient to specialize the Scalabrinian Fathers in new forms of assistance to the Italian immigrants, rather than take up new parishes. This would be required by the very nature of the Pious Society, that should adapt to the needs of the immigrants, basically changed since 1888.

Today the Pious Society does not differentiate itself from what other Congregations and Religious Orders are doing to assist the immigrants, perhaps even in more limited conditions; but, if the Pious Society is made up of Missionaries, it should at least form a group of itinerant priests, ready to

⁶² Lavelle to Biasotti, New York, July 1, 1913, AGS, 555/2.

go where the need is greater. Perhaps, that is not possible because of the lack of personnel or the particular economic condition, but when the financial situation will be more solid and new and proven members from the Seminary in Piacenza will be available, it should be considered whether it is convenient to return the Pious Society of St. Charles to its original purpose. (Particularly by expanding also in Europe).⁶³

There is no doubt that the Holy See considered the itinerant missions as an essential element of the original purpose of the Congregation. The last observation, an annotation of Card. Rossi, indicated his preference to an opening in Europe, where the immigration was expanding, as a means to revitalize the specific purpose of the Congregation. But he did not oppose the itinerant missions, rather he stressed several times the necessity for the availability to move elsewhere. He recommended not to be attached to established places, but to abandon the smaller and less meaningful parishes in favor of working in new areas, like the diocese of Brooklyn and Newark, where thousands of Italians were present.⁶⁴

Even though it is not the primary object of this essay, but because it is part of the same concept, I should like to quote some writings of Card. Rossi to the missionaries in Brazil on closing positions. After the parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Santo André was taken away by the diocese, he wrote to Fr. Provincial:

The Missionaries, in every part of the world, go, work, prepare the ground, preach and make converts: they labor year after year for the Lord. When everything is in order, when things are settled, they must relinquish the place to the local clergy. It could be said that their mission is completed, because the mission of the missionaries is not to enjoy what they earned, but to work, so that someone else takes over. The missionary does not live in a house, but under a tent; houses remain, tents are transported. Say this to your missionaries: that they have and maintain this spirit and be content.⁶⁵

Of the same tone are two letters sent to the regional superior of Rio Grande do Sul, on July 1937.

Unfortunately, your letters show me also your regret for the situation that is taking place because of the splitting of parishes, so that you are forced to

⁶³ Francesconi, *Storia*. vol. V, p. 62—63.

⁶⁴ The Scalabrinians did not settle in these dioceses before the late Seventies, and not for the Italians, but for immigrants of Spanish language.

⁶⁵ Rossi to Milini, Roma, June 1, 1940, AGS, 361/6.

abandon, or almost to abandon, an area of missionary work that the Scalabrinians have been cultivating with love for decades.

I notified His Excellency Msgr. Apostolic Nuncio of this and I am waiting for an answer. But - apart from intentions that are unknown and nobody can judge - you should not be completely surprised: this is the destiny of all missions. The missionaries go, work, build; for years and years they prepare the ground, accomplish a great work, then someone else succeeds: the local clergy, that has been providentially developing. At that moment the missionaries leave: they planted, someone else will reap: always for the pure and only glory of God and for the welfare of the souls. And they leave to start somewhere else the first difficult, fatiguing work, that implies innumerable sacrifices; when everything will be ready, once again they will surrender to the new arrived. (...)

But are these new missions really for Italians? Actually, due to a series of circumstances, I have some doubt about it. I do not say that some Italians are not present, but this would not be enough; it is necessary that the mission be for the major part Italian, otherwise the Scalabrinian Missionaries evade the area of their own specific apostolate and, even though doing some good, they dissipate their energies (...).⁶⁶

Substitute the word “Italians” with the word “immigrants”, and you will see how those words, pronounced fifty years ago, are still valid.

From 1921 to 1931, being provincial superior Fr. Leonardo Quaglia, one of the basic problems was the immobility of the settled positions. Two parishes were taken up (St. Anthony in Everett and St. Joseph in New York), but “on the opinion of the Concistorial Congregation itself, it was not through opening of new parishes that the problem was solved, because the type of pastoral care was not updated.”⁶⁷ It was the opinion of Msgr. Cicognani, deputy at the Concistorial, that “It was necessary to plan a specialized work of new forms of assistance, resuming the original idea of Bishop Scalabrini: parishes should have served as basis and support for groups of priests ready to hasten where the need of immigrants abandoned and neglected by the clergy was more urgent”.⁶⁸

The same problems remained in the following period, when Fr. Marchigiani was provincial. The Concistorial Congregation suggested they abandon the weak positions, like Our Lady of Loretto in East Providence, Our Lady of

⁶⁶ Rossi to Carlino, Roma, July 15, 1937, AGS, 418/4.

⁶⁷ Francesconi, *Storia*, vol. V, p. 137.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p. 138.

Mount Carmel in Bristol, St. Rocco in Thornton and seek parishes with high percentages of Italian population in the dioceses of Brooklyn and Newark.⁶⁹

The lack of personnel, made worse by the interruption of new arrivals of priests from Italy because of the war, defied any decision. The issue returned after the war and was given a solution toward the 'status quo' in 1946, when to the care of Italian immigrants, that of their descendants was added in the Constitutions.

D. FR. CORBELLINI'S MISSION BAND

In 1957, the General Chapter instituted for the second time in the history of the Congregation a formal Mission Band in the USA. Fr. Corbellini was put in charge of the Band. Some characteristics of the experiment are taken from his correspondence on the matter. The Mission Band operated from 1958 to 1965, and was formed almost exclusively of Fr. Corbellini, who laments in one letter that the only defect of the Mission Band is to be formed of a band director without band.

In the beginning there was no residence for this activity, and Fr. Corbellini was temporarily hosted by the pastor of St. Joseph's Church in New York. The first mission was preached at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Utica, then in Our Lady of All Souls in Hamilton. Cooksville later became the residence for the mission band, upon invitation of the pastor of that place. From Cooksville, missions and novenas were preached in our parishes in Chicago. "But the mission band was not taken seriously by the Provincial, Fr. Corrado Martellozzo".⁷⁰

In 1959 the new Provincial Administration established the headquarters for the mission band in Our Lady of Pompei, New York. From there missions were preached in Akron, OH, Trenton, Camden and Newark, NJ, Syracuse, NY, Hamilton, Oakville, and Toronto, Ont., Vancouver, Port Arthur (now Thunderbay). Fr. Remo Rizzato was temporarily assigned to the mission band, and Fr. Gregorio Zanoni assisted.

⁶⁹ Idem, p. 148-49.

⁷⁰ Corbellini to Battistella, Guadalajara 1986, CMS Archives, Scalabrini Fathers Papers, I.

From the beginning, the preaching of missions was accompanied by activities through the media: radio programs, booklets and articles in the newspapers.

Already in 1958, I had started to cooperate with a radio program in Hamilton and Oakville, Ont. I had brought on purpose a tape recorder and I used to record my talks, that were then broadcasted... In New York I had contacted "Il Progresso Italo-Americano" and started a series of considerations on Christian doctrine. I did the same thing with the Italian paper in Toronto.⁷¹

The series of pamphlets in Italian bore the title: "Testa e Cuore".

The Scalabrinians were not the only religious group involved with the missionary activity among the Italian immigrants, and Fr. Corbellini felt the necessity to bring an original approach to a field already crowded with other mission bands. "I think that the availability to visit the families, also of those who lost their way in the church, is the new element that the Scalabrinians can bring into the missions."⁷² In 1964 Fr. Corbellini was transferred to Cornwall and from there he continued to conduct missions and retreats. Then in 1965 he was assigned to the Western Province, requested to teach at Maryknoll College, and that was the end of the mission band.

In the general evaluation of the mission band, two elements must be taken into account: first, the lack of personnel; second, the emphasis on the parochial approach, that weakened the possibilities of the mission band to establish itself as a specific pastoral care to the migrants. Above all, the mission band lacked support both of superiors and the community.

It seemed strange for a Scalabrinian not to be attached to a parish and move around conducting missions. I heard many of our Fathers saying that the apostolate to Italian was dead... In Canada of course the situation was different. But even in Canada the main thrust was toward parishes.⁷³

On the 1957-63 period, Fr. Francesconi briefly comments:

Almost all the parishes entrusted to the Scalabrinian in those six years were territorial parishes or 'mixed', particularly in Australia and Canada. It was a condition generally imposed by the Bishops. This approach was considered

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Corbellini to Larcher, Oct. 2, 1960.

⁷³ Corbellini to Battistella, Guadalajara 1986, CMS Archives, Scalabrinian Fathers Papers, I.

very advantageous. even the ideal one, by many, since it left unprejudiced all the possibilities to assist the Italians, even more, in some instances it allowed to expand the field to the whole diocese. Nevertheless, to achieve that goal it would have been necessary to put beside the Fathers directly involved in the parish other missionaries dedicated to the 'itinerant missions'. Such a project was fulfilled only partially. A particular case was that of itinerant missions conducted through the involvement of the Scalabrinians among the chaplains of the Federazione Cattolica Italiana in California: this led eventually to the opening of two parishes in the same State.⁷⁴

E. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The itinerant missions are undoubtedly part of the idealistic heritage of the Congregation. Included by Msgr. Scalabrini in his original project of assistance to the immigrants and then recommended several times by himself, the itinerant missions were warmly supported in different occasions by the Holy See. Nevertheless, they were hardly implemented for several reasons (The only two formal mission bands in the Eastern province were instituted in 1903, with Fr. Biasotti and Fr. Beccherini, and in 1958 with Fr. Corbellini). Succinctly we can list some of those reasons:

- Bishop Scalabrini's concern for the independence of his missionaries in the ministry and for their community life.
- Lack of personnel.
- Low financial appeal of this missionary activity.
- Fluctuations in Italian immigration, massive and scattered in various areas in the beginning, then, after World War I, when it was no longer backed by numerous arrivals and mainly clustered in urban areas, having abundant assistance available from the diocesan clergy.
- Low flexibility in restructuring positions.⁷⁵

In retrospect, one can say that the itinerant missions appear like the second soul of the Congregation, that remained always a wish, unexpressed.

Is it still valid to talk of itinerant missions today?

⁷⁴ Francesconi, Storia, Vol. VI.

⁷⁵ Of the eighteen parishes of the Eastern Province in the USA, six were accepted before the year 1900, seven between 1900 and 1915, one in 1928, one in 1960, one in 1978 and the last two in 1985. The map of the Scalabrinian presence in the East of the US was drawn before World War I and remained practically the same.

It appears like a pastoral model valid only for the first arrival of the immigrants, before they settle down. Are such situations still present in the contemporary migration to the States? Positively, since the U.S. is absorbing immigration at a rate similar to that of the end of the 19th century. Even more, if one considers the phenomenon of irregular aliens, who are so afraid to participate even in ecclesiastical institutions.

However, the itinerant missions are a pastoral model valid also for a less recent immigration, provided it is scattered beyond the focal points of the national parishes. Those parishes were established several decades ago, and their ethnic compositions has changed. A resettling movement is common among immigrants who, after improving their economic condition, tend to move outside the areas where they first found pastoral care. Some of them integrate into the new Christian community, many do not. At this point the itinerant mission becomes contemporary, as a strategy to reach those people, encourage them to resume their religious practice and, eventually, integrate in the new parish.

Finally, there are other types of immigrants for whom the parish is not the most indicated structure and who require a flexible approach. Consider, for example, the farmworkers or the refugees. A team of itinerant missionaries for specialized programs and temporary activity in atypical situations could be of great impact and of great topicality.

The idea of a mission band returns in cycles; it is an idea never fully implemented in the history of our pastoral presence and always reappearing. like a perennial woodworm.

And it reappears every time the ever-changing immigration requires creative, atypical pastoral approaches. The Scalabrinians as religious for migrants are not asked to serve every single migrant from every country in every way, but they are required to be in the “front line”, to be available and creative. Creative in their ordinary ministry, because the parishes they serve, fully integrated in the local church, are a model of welcoming the migrants and orienting their cultural diversity into the one faith. And creative again in their proposals for different initiatives to evangelize the immigrants.

Therefore, it is not “outdated” to revive the itinerant missions, even though the format must be discussed. It is not improper because of the underlying

inspiration of the itinerant mission: evangelization, first of all, and evangelization of those who are far away.