



Bl. Giovanni Battista Scalabrini

Birth name: Giovanni Battista Scalabrini

Born: 8 July 1839 Fino Mornasco, Como, Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia

Died: 1 June 1905 (aged 65) Piacenza, Kingdom of Italy

Parents: Luigi Scalabrini, Colomba Trombetta

Feast day: 1 June

Venerated: in Roman Catholic Church

Beatified: 9 November 1997 Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City by Pope John Paul II

Patronage: Diocese of Piacenza, Catholic Action, Migrants, Italian immigrants, Missionaries of Saint Charles, Mission Sisters of Saint Charles, Catechists, Missionaries

Ordination: 30 May 1863 by Carlo Marzorati

Consecration: 30 January 1876 by Alessandro Franchi

Blessed Giovanni Battista Scalabrini (8 July 1839 – 1 June 1905) was an Italian Roman Catholic prelate and the Bishop of Piacenza from 1876 until his death; he was the founder of both the Missionaries of Saint Charles and the Mission Sisters of Saint Charles.

Scalabrini's rise to the episcopate came at a rapid pace after giving a series of lectures on the First Vatican Council in 1872 and his staunch dedication to catechism which led Pope Pius IX to dub him as the "Apostle of the Catechism"; successive popes Leo XIII and Pius X held him in incredible esteem and both failed to convince him accept archdioceses or the cardinalate. He made five pastoral visits across his diocese which proved to be an exhaustive but effective mission of evangelization and his efforts at reforming seminaries and pastoral initiatives earned him praise even from the secular detractors who criticized him for his strict obedience to the pope.

The bishop's episcopal tenure resulted in the establishment of the "Saint Raphael Association" dedicated to the care of Italian migrants which proved to be a cause he held close to his heart. This solidified through the actions of his twin religious congregations and his visits to both Brazil and the United States of America where he went to meet Italian immigrants. He also dealt with the Paolo Miraglia-Gulotti schism that took place in his diocese and had known the faux-bishop after ordaining him in 1879. Scalabrini also held three important episcopal gatherings in his diocese that revitalized parish and diocesan practices and made his diocese the ground for the first-ever National Catechetical Congress in 1899; he was in the process of planning another before his death that was later celebrated in 1910.

Scalabrini's holiness was well-renowned across the Italian peninsula and there were countless who attested to his saintliness in an ensuring canonization process; his first title at the outset of the process was that of a Servant of God that Pope Pius XI bestowed upon him on 30 June 1926 while the confirmation of his heroic virtue allowed for Pope John Paul II to title him as Venerable on 16 March 1987. John Paul II later beatified Scalabrini in Saint Peter's Square on 9 November 1997.

Life

Education and priesthood

Giovanni Battista Scalabrini was born in Fino Mornasco as the third of eight children to Luigi Scalabrini and Colomba Trombetta; he was baptized just hours later at the parish church of Fino.

Two brothers emigrated to the Americas (one being Pietro) and one sister was Luisa while a brother was Angelo. He received his Confirmation from Bishop Carlo Romano on 8 September 1840 in the Fino parish.

In his adolescence he wrote a poem in praise of the life of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and in his childhood often recited the Angelus while each October reciting it in the Como Cathedral. He had a devotion to Saint Joseph and Saint Francis de Sales as well as Saint Charles Borromeo which extended for the remainder of his life.

He first attended the local state high school where he demonstrated a remarkable intelligence that made him a top student held in high esteem and then entered the Liceo Volta college in Como where he often received prizes for his academic excellence; he had interests in both science and foreign languages. Scalabrini underwent his philosophical and theological studies in Como from the fall of 1857.

In 1857 he was made a prefect of the Gallio College (a boarding school) where one of the students under his ward was Saint Luigi Guanella. Scalabrini received the tonsure on 1 June 1860 and then went on to receive the first two minor orders on 21 December 1860 and the second two on 24 May 1861. He was elevated into the subdiaconate on 14 June 1862 in Bergamo and then into the diaconate in Milan on 12 September 1862. He later received his ordination to the priesthood in mid-1863 from Bishop Carlo Marzorati. After being ordained he expressed a strong desire to join the missions in the Indies (his mother had consented to this wish and he had applied to PIME) but Bishop Marzorati had other ideas for him and said to him: "Your Indies are in Italy". The bishop instead appointed Scalabrini as a professor and then on 6 October 1868 rector of seminarians at Saint Abundius; he taught the Greek language and history there. On 17 July 1870 he was appointed as the pastor of the San Bartolomeo church and remained there until

1876. He distinguished himself during a cholera epidemic in 1867 through his tireless efforts to alleviate the suffering of the victims.

As the pastor of the parish he opened a kindergarten in the area and wrote the "Little Catechism for Kindergartens" to go with it. In 1872 he delivered a series of eleven addresses on the First Vatican Council - something that Saint Giovanni Bosco appreciated - and these addresses were printed in 1873 and even reached Rome which was a considerable factor in his later episcopal appointment. These were reprinted in a reduced form at the behest of Bosco himself.

Episcopate

Scalabrini received word from Pope Pius IX that he was to become the next Bishop of Piacenza at the beginning of 1876 despite the fact that the pope made up his mind in December 1875; Pius IX had once dubbed him the "Apostle of the Catechism" on 7 June 1877 and sent him a golden chalice on 6 February 1878 (just a day before the pope died). It was also Saint Giovanni Bosco who advised Pius IX to appoint Scalabrini as a bishop. Scalabrini received his episcopal consecration from Cardinal Alessandro Franchi in Rome in the chapel of the Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide in Piazza di Spagna and was installed in his new see a couple of weeks after this. He set his enthronement date because he wanted to preside over the celebrations that his predecessor had called for in regards to the sixth centennial of the death of Pope Gregory X. From 1877 to 1878 he prompted the reopening of the Pontifical Lombard in Rome and was a collaborator of those in charge of it. On 17 January 1878 a group of ruffians attacked the bishop's coach along the road and threatened him for his obedience to the pope in his denial of a requiem Mass for King Vittorio Emanuele II.

The bishop conducted five diocesan visitations and visited all the 365 parishes with half accessible via foot or mule due to being in mountainous places but this never hindered his desire to be with the people and review the conditions of each parish for himself. The first visitation began on 4 November 1876 where he learned that 11% of its members had emigrated and the visit ended on 28 August 1880. That first pastoral visitation proved to be so exhausting that his staff did not think that he would manage a second. He addressed his third pastoral letter in August 1876 to priests reminding them of the need for the Spiritual Exercises and the need to re-examine one's life. On 5 July 1876 he founded the first ever Italian catechetical magazine entitled "The Catholic Catechist". He began courses in the Gregorian Chant - something Pope Pius X later did and in 1876 licensed the first Italian catechetical review which was the second in the world; he also issued the book "Catholic Catechism" in 1876.

He held three diocesan synods with one being on the Eucharist; the first was held from 2-4 September 1879 (the first in 156 years) which focused on the needs of children while the other two were held in 1893 and 1899. The 1899 synodal document spanned 350 pages and he alone wrote the text for it. The synod on the Eucharist was held from 26-30 August 1899 and in that he ordered that altars be made of marble and he revived Eucharistic confraternities as well as asking that chalices be made of gilded silver. The bishop also resumed the procession of Corpus Christi despite government and secular opposition. The second synod was held from 2-4 May 1893 and dealt with diocesan administration.

He reorganized seminaries and reformed their curricula and this could be considered quite interesting since it precluded the Thomistic reform of Pope Leo XIII. Leo XIII later dubbed Piacenza "the City of Catechesis" while Cardinal Giovanni Nasalli Rocca di Corneli-

ano praised Scalabrini's heroic efforts for leading his diocese and for the championing of the migrants. He organized collections to help farmers that were affected from the land-slides at Tollara in 1895 and of Villanova and Bettola in 1904. He sent aid to flood victims in the Veneto and Polesine in 1882 as well as for the earthquake of Casamicciola in 1883. He also sent aid for those affected from the cloudburst in Campidano in 1889 as well as the families affected from the explosion of an arms depot in 1894 in Pontremoli. He made a third diocesan visitation from 1888 to 1891.

He also tended to the ill and to prisoners to comfort them. He also saved thousands of farmers and workers from the 1879-80 famine and twice sold his horses (used for pastoral visitations) as well as a pectoral cross and a golden chalice that Pope Pius IX had given him in order to purchase food. He oversaw the distribution of 244 460 bowls of soup with flour and firewood coupons in just two months though when pawning his valuables people believed he was at detriment; people said he would end up dead on nothing but straw but he countered and said it would be good to die where Jesus Christ was born. He often spent hours in Eucharistic adoration in addition to giving Marian homilies and going on Marian pilgrimages. He was perceived to be an eloquent orator and Saint Luigi Orione once said that his words "showed how he burned with apostolic zeal". His master of ceremonies once said that Scalabrini recited rosaries each day and when on foot on diocesan visits often stepped aside at times from the path to recite them.

He also founded the "Deaf and Dumb Institute" in November 1879 to aid the hearing and speech impaired people and ordered that catechism be instructed in all the parishes in the diocese while in 1880 starting the diocesan newspaper "The Truth". In June 1884 a bout of colic threatened his health and it took a prolonged period to recover from his illness - this was also attributed to sheer exhaustion from his pastoral visitations. He planned and presided the first National Catechetical Congress in 1889 which opened on 24 September and closed on 26 September. One cardinal as well as eleven bishops and 400 priests were in attendance to this congress; questions discussed included his proposal for a unified catechism that the then-Bishop of Mantua Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto (the future Pope Pius X) supported. On 9 July 1887 he established the "Saint Raphael Association" (which was later disbanded in 1923) dedicated to the care and protection of migrants and he often gave lectures on the subject in various cities such as Milan. The bishop established the association with the aid of the Marquis Giovanni Volpe Landi and Blessed Giuseppe Toniolo. In 1893 or 1894 he once contracted a hydrocele during a horse ride and kept this a close secret but his brother Angelo knew about it.

Scalabrini was convinced that Church-State relations could be repaired and thus prompted reconciliation while in 1885 the pope had asked him to look into how relations could be mended. The bishop also started working with millions of Italians forced to emigrate due to their dire conditions and therefore decided to establish a religious congregation in order to work with those people. He viewed migration as a social problem requiring urgent attention but also saw it as a challenge to the Christian faith that could be seen as a strong chance at evangelization. In 1887 he gave an address and recalled an instance where he met around 500 migrants at the Milan Railroad Station in 1880 which caused a "knot in the heart" which prompted him to do something to help those people; those migrants were taking the train to Genoa to take a ship to the United States of America. He seemed to be able to foretell that Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto would become pope - this happened in 1903 - and he also seemed to predict that Francesco Sidoli would be raised into the episcopate which later happened in 1916.

Beatification

The beatification process was held in Piacenza and the informative phase spanned from 30 June 1936 until 29 February 1940; his sister Luisa attested to his virtue but not to a great degree due to her failing strength. Archbishop Pasquale Morganti testified in favor as did Cardinal Agostino Richelmy; Saint Giovanni Calabria, Cardinal Ferrari and the Servant of God Raffaele Rossi also testified in favor. In total the informative tribunal conducted 185 sessions. There were also three rogatorial processes with two in Como with the first from 23 November to 10 December 1947 and the second opening on 4 May 1940; a third was held from 26 September 1939 at Camerino. A total of 57 witnesses were questioned: 3 were co-witnesses, the postulation summoned 39 and 15 were called "ex officio". The theologians collated all of his spiritual writings and declared that these writings were not in contradiction of the magisterium therefore approved them on 18 February 1972. But these writings were approved on 30 July and 24 October 1941 though made public on 9 September 1970 and made official in 1972.

The formal introduction to the cause came under Pope John Paul II on 11 May 1982 and Scalabrini was titled as a Servant of God; the apostolic process was dispensed with. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints validated the process on 20 December 1985 and received the Positio dossier from the postulation in 1986 before theologians approved the dossier on 25 November 1986 as did the C.C.S. on 17 February 1987. The confirmation of his heroic virtue on 16 March 1987 allowed for John Paul II to title him as Venerable.

The process for a miracle attributed to him spanned from 23 December 1994 to 5 June 1995 in the diocese of its origin and it received C.C.S. validation on 13 October 1995 before a panel of medical experts approved the healing to be a miracle on 5 December 1996. Theologians likewise approved it on 21 March 1997 as did the cardinal and bishop members of the C.C.S. on 3 June 1997. John Paul II approved this on 7 July 1997 and beatified Scalabrini on 9 November 1997 in Saint Peter's Square. The then-Piacenza bishop Luciano Monari was at the beatification.