

St. GASPAR BERTONI



Some paintings at Saint Paul of Campo Marzio Church, in Verona, Italy, where St. Gaspar Bertoni preached most of the parish sermons.

An Excerpt of the Early Spiritual Writings PARISH SERMONS

1806

[Manoscritti Bertoni ## 1211 – 1296]

Translation into English
Rev. Joseph Charles Henchey, CSS
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1211:**SERMON 35****The Rule for our Thoughts and Actions**

For the Feast of the Epiphany, on January 6th, of the Year 1806, in St. Paul's, Verona, on the left bank.

You have, my brothers and sisters, suffered one intrusion of mine: today, you have to suffer still another, but one that is not just for your best interests, but one that is also necessary. The circumstances of the times in which we live demand this.

1212: The Feast that recurs today offers us both the material and the occasion. The Magi tend toward Christ, they seek Christ in Jerusalem, the seat of Herod, a powerful politician. But, Christ is born outside Jerusalem. The star that surely guides to Christ appears only outside of Jerusalem, far from the court.

What does this mean, my brothers and sisters, if not that we, too, tend toward Christ, i.e., toward the Truth, the Life: ... *I am... the truth and the life...* [cf. Jn 14::6]. But, this Truth, this Life, that is the ultimate end of our desires is beyond, i.e., above every human intellect: ... *the eye has not seen, O God, besides You what things you have prepared for them that wait for You...* [Is 64:4].

1213: It is only fitting, then, to go beyond all the opinions, above the judgments of earthly wisdom, if we wish to find this blessed goal, indeed if we wish to find the star, i.e., an infallible rule that conducts to this blessed goal. This star, in fact, is Christ Himself Who, as the Truth and the Life, He is also the Way in order to reach both the Eternal Truth and the Blessed Life toward which we aspire: ... *I am the way, the truth and the life...* [Jn 14:6]. In another place, this evangelist says [ib 1:9] that Christ is the true Light that illumines every person who comes into this world. He is Uncreated Wisdom, the Word of God, and therefore, He has the words of eternal life: ...*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...* [Jn 6:69].

1214: However, this word of the Word is hard for human reason: ...*This saying is hard, and who can hear it...?* Jn 6:61]. This is because it cannot be understood, comprehended. It is necessary to go beyond dallying human reasoning in order to believe it. The star appears only outside of Jerusalem, and far from the courts of worldly, earthly politics. And so it is clear that it is not human reason, nor the opinions of human beings, it is not the maxims of this present world, and it is not the dogmas of modern wisdom - but, it is the Word of God that is the unique and infallible rule of our thinking, of our acting, in order to reach the supernatural and divine end to which we have been called.

1215: No faculty can in its own operations surpass the limits of its own nature. If reason, however, is a directing faculty in human beings, it will be able to direct each one to a natural happiness. This is provided, of course, that it be cleansed of errors

and ignorance, not burdened by vices, not weighed down by passions. And it will never be able, on its own, to serve as the guide to the Christian for a supernatural happiness, to which it is destined by its vocation.

1216: In fact, says St. Thomas¹, each human being is ordered to God as to an end that surpasses the comprehension of reason. However, this end has to be foreknown by human beings if they are to direct their intentions toward Him and their operations. God alone, however, can instruct a person concerning these truths that surpass and exceed all human reason. Yet, these truths are so necessary that in them, all salvation resides for human beings. Salvation consists in God and in Christ: *...How this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent..* [cf. Jn 17:3].

1217: Whenever it is a matter of the soul, of the salvation of the soul, Tertullian² wrote in this regard, a human being must turn to God, and be directed according to the rules of God: When anything regarding the soul is to be examined, let each be directed in accord with the rules of God. One could not find a better teacher of salvation than the very Author of salvation: surely no more powerful demonstrator will you ever find than the Author. Who could teach or reveal that which God has held hidden and concealed? The most wise in the world, the most prudent, are precisely those from whom God has held His truth so hidden: *... I confess to You, o Father... because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent and You have revealed them to the little ones...* [Mt 11:25].

1218: This is the way it is, my brothers and sisters. The little ones, the poor in spirit, the humble, who only know what God teaches them, Whose Spirit reposes on them. By the voice of God we are taught the knowledge of the truth. This is the view of St. Clement of Alexandria³ He teaches that if human beings say something without proving it, faith cannot be given to them, for human beings can also tell falsehoods. And if there is need of a proof, we do not await the testimony of human beings as witness, but through the Word of God we prove that which is sought. Since the Word of God is more worthy of faith than any demonstration whatsoever - rather, in this matter, it is the sole demonstration.

1219: Now God has spoken: *...God has spoken once...* [Ps 61:12]. He has also spoken in many ways: in the Prophets to the ancient Patriarchs, and ultimately in His Son, He has spoken to the Apostles [Heb 1:1, ff.]. And to these last, He has spoken even more plainly and more fully, the Holy Spirit instructing them regarding every truth pertaining to salvation: *... I have many things yet to say to you, but you cannot bear them now...* [Jn 16:12]. *...But when He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will teach you all truth...* [v. 13].

¹ St. Thomas, I, q. 1, a. 1.

² Tertullian, *De Anima*, 1, near the end, p. 163/2.

³ St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 7, 15, p. 757 C.

1220: We have the books of the Prophets, we have the Evangelical books of the Apostles: this is the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures. Furthermore, the Apostles communicated by voice many of these truths revealed to them, and left them to their disciples in Deposit for the Church. These are contained in the common consensus of the Holy Fathers, in the authentic definitions of the sacred General Councils and the Supreme Pontiffs, in the universal sense and custom of the entire Church. This is the Word of God revealed in Tradition.

1221: God has spoken: what more are we looking for? God has taught the truth, salvation from His own mouth: why do we look for other teachers? Why would we ever make ourselves disciples of other human beings, if we have God Himself for our Teacher? Why should we be bothered about the doctrines of earth, if we have the teachings of heaven? We have the eternal truth that directs us, and would we allow ourselves to be swayed by the fallacious opinions of other human beings?

1222: We have the Scriptures in which God speaks: what do the books of this world have to do with us? In the Sacred Scriptures, we have all that is necessary, and not only this - but further, all that is useful to know, to discern what is evil, to correct our habits, and to justify our spirit. What more should we need? In order to make us saints and instructed in every good work: ... *All Scripture inspired of God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct to justice ...* [2 Tm 3:16]. ...*that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work...* [cv. 17].. This is what the Apostle teaches.

1223: The Word of God in the Scriptures, my brothers and sisters, ought to be the rule of our thinking, of our acting, if we wish to know the truth, and to arrive at salvation. The foreign systems of thought, which always vary, as they are dispersed through the books of our century, cannot do this. Do not let yourselves be carried away, my brothers and sisters, by various and novel doctrines, as the Apostle himself advises us: ... *Be not led away with various and strange doctrines...* [Heb 13:9].

1224: That God does speak in the Scriptures, He speaks also in Tradition. This is found in the books of the ancient and venerated Fathers, so esteemed for their doctrine and their holiness. These we should follow, much more than the modern wise people. These most Holy Fathers of the Church, who are at the same time most learned, God Himself has given them to us as Pastors and Doctors. They have been given to perfect the elect of the Church. They have been granted to carry on the grand work of salvation to build up the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. This is so that we will not be like children, carried this way and that, and that we be not swept away and blown by every kind of doctrine that might be introduced by the malice of human beings and by their astuteness, to tumble us into error. Paul tells us again: ... *and he gave other some pastors and doctors...* [Ep 4:11] ...*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of their ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ...* [v. 12]...*that henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro and carried by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive...* [v. 14].

1225: Whoever is truly wise, or would like to become wise, will seek the wisdom of the all the ancients, says the Holy Spirit ...*The wise man will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients...* [SI 39:1].. Of the ancients , and not of the moderns, is the authentic wisdom. In the ancients and not the moderns is the genuine prudence: ...*In the ancient is wisdom, and in length of days, prudence...* [Jn 12:12]. The speech of the moderns does not penetrate, but rather delights very much those who read them, or hear them. This is not the style of the wise. According to the Holy Spirit, the words of the wise person and pungent: ...*the words of the wise are goads...* [Qo 12:11]. They provoke the sinner to conversion: ...*they are as nails, deeply fastened in, which by the counsel of masters are given from one Shepherd...* [ib].

1226: They are firm, and deeply piercing, as nails driven in deeply [92]. Such are the doctrines that come from the counsel of the saints, and in the unanimous consensus of all the masters and doctors, they all originate from one single Shepherd, which is Christ, who is God. Thus, no matter how many there may be who teach, the Author, however, of the doctrine is only one, that is, the Lord:*more than these, my son, require not...* [ib. v. 12]. So, my children seek nothing other than these - do not try anything else, do not presume anything. Follow along in the footsteps of your Elders, and do not distance yourself from their authority:... *of making many books, there is no end...* [ib.]. If you look for many things, there will come into your hands an infinite number of all kinds of books that will lead you into error.

Up to this point, it has been the Holy Spirit speaking to you, along with the Commentary of Jerome ⁴.

1227: It is confirmed, then, that God's Word, revealed in the Scriptures and in Tradition, is the sole infallible rule of our believing, hoping and operating, if indeed we wish to find the truth, and achieve salvation.

- What will, then, happen to us, poor ignorant people, who do not know how to read the Scriptures?

- It is not necessary for the ignorant to read the Scriptures.

- Will it suffice for us, then, that the learned read the Scriptures?

- It is not enough for the learned to read the Scriptures. For both the learned as well as for the ignorant there is necessary the *Magisterium* of the Church.

The Church has the authority to propose the Word of God, to explain it, to determine it in its legitimate sense. The ignorant should not despair: he has a visible, universal teacher: the Catholic Church. The learned should not presume: for he has over him a judge that is still alive, infallible, supreme: the Roman Catholic Church.

1228: Would any perhaps believe that he is sufficiently learned, that for him there suffices the acuteness of his own power or reasoning? No says St. Augustine ⁵: we believe in order to know, and not that we believe because we do not know: *We*

⁴ St. Jerome, *In Ecclesiasten*, ib., t. 3, pp. 494, B, ff..

⁵ St. Augustine, *In Io.. Ev.*, tr. 40, p [t. 3/1, p. 568 f].

believe in order that we might know: we do not know, so that we must believe. And what else is faith than to believe that which one does not see?

1229: Would any think that he is already sufficiently holy, that to him are sufficient only his own private lights? Let us be very careful, says the same Father ⁶ : let us guard ourselves from such temptations of such pride, and rather let us think that Paul, the Apostle himself, even though instructed by the voice of God and by the Spirit of God, was sent to someone else to find out what he should do: *...what will you have me to do?... [Ac 9:6]* And let us think that Cornelius, even though he had been assured by the Angel that his prayers had been heard, and had accepted the alms, was nonetheless committed to have instructions from St. Peter. From his mouth he could have learned that he had to believe, to hope and to love.

1270: But no, my brothers and sisters. God's Word is the rule of our believing, hoping and operating: but it is necessary to hear the Word of God from the Church. Whoever does not listen to the Church, is declared by Christ Himself [Mt 18:17] no longer one of the faithful, but a gentile: *...And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to you as the heathen and the publican... [Mt 18:17]*. The Holy Spirit also says in Malachi [2:7] quite clearly: *...the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge...* It is certain that the Church has been made the depositary and guardian by God Himself of His Word:

1231: *...O Timothy, keep what is committed to your trust... [1 Tm 2:20]*. So it is that the lips of the Priest of the Church guard its knowledge: *...they shall seek the law at his mouth... [Ml 2:7]*. Note well, my brothers and sisters: And the people will seek the law, i.e., the rule, not from the law, nor from the rule itself, but from the lips of the priest, from the mouth of the Church that possesses it: *from his mouth*.

1232: In fact, in the controversy between Paul and those of Antioch [Ac 15:1, ff.], regarding the matter of faith, they did not appeal directly to the Scriptures to define the matter. The appeal was made rather to the Apostles and the Elders of Jerusalem. The Apostles did not, neither did the Elders, make the Scriptures the judge, but themselves and the Holy Spirit: *...it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us... [Ac 15:28]*. The Holy Spirit does not dwell in the letter, but in the spirit; not in the syllables, but in hearts. There is a most sublime reflection on the part of that noble theologian, Melchior Cano ⁷. The Church is the column and the firmament of the truth: *...the pillar and the ground of the truth... [1 Tm 3:15]*.

1233: And by the word *Church* here, there are not to be understood the lowest members of the Mystical Body of Christ, but the Bishops and the Supreme Shepherds of Christ's flock. In fact, the Bishops in the Church are the sole judges authorized by God. The custom of the Church confirms this. And besides, not all are doctors, according to St. Paul [1 Co 12:29]. Furthermore, to feed with the knowledge and the doctrine is proper to the Shepherds, that is, the Bishops [Ac 20:28]. Finally, a

⁶ St. Augustine, *De Doctr. Chris.* in Prol. 6 [t. 3/1, 3 F].

⁷ cf. *De locis theol.*, 2, 7 [93].

certain doctrine, contrary to this one, one cannot and should not in these times be ignorant of it. Such has already been condemned with an authentic censure ⁸.

1234: From these Shepherds, therefore, that the Holy Spirit has placed to rule the Church of God, that He purchased with His Blood [Ac 20:28] - from these Shepherds, who are legitimate, we must depend. We need to await from them that there be proposed and explained, and in its true sense, declared God's Word revealed in the Scriptures and in Tradition, as the unique and infallible rule of our thinking and operating. And we must follow this faithfully, constantly if we wish to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, and at the possession of supernatural beatitude, eternal happiness, that we hope in God and with God. *...And whosoever shall follow this rule, peace on them...* [Ga 6:16].

1235: This is the rule, this is the star that we must follow. Let us walk, then, let us walk worthily toward the goal to which we have been called. St. Paul tells us: *... I ... beseech you* [by the very chains with which he was held bound in his apostolate] *...I beseech you, a prisoner in the Lord; that you walk worthily of the vocation in which you are called...* [Ep 4:1]. *... with all simplicity and mildness, with patience, supporting one another...* [v. 2].

1236: It is necessary to work worthily in this vocation, submitting our intellects with humble **obsequiousness** to believe the divine Word: *with all simplicity* [ib., v. 2]. We are not to resist with obstinate contradiction the authoritative judgments of those legitimate Shepherds, who have the right from God Himself to propose this and to explain this. *With mildness* [ib.]. this is done by overcoming with invincible patience calumnies, derision, opposition, that come from the enemies of the faith and of peace and of the Church. *With patience* [ib.]. We must support with reciprocal love, to walk together, bearing the burdens of one another, all of us who have the same vocation together: *supporting one another with charity...*

1237: *...careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...* [Ep 4:3]. By the grace of God, this unity of spirit, or faith, we do possess it. It is enough for us to conserve it: *to keep*. For this, though, there is necessary vigilance, concern, diligence to keep it: *careful* [ib.]. One is kept in the bond of peace, charity, if we are well united and bonded among us with love, and all are thus joined together and united. When this is so, we will have a great attachment to the Shepherds of the Church, whom we must follow. This is especially due to the supreme Shepherd, the Center of unity: *...careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...* [v. 3].

1238: *One body* [v. 4]. We are one sole Body, of which Christ is the Head, and all of us are its members. Among the members of this Body, some have the office of presiding and guiding, like the eyes and the tongue. Others have only the office to obey, to follow, as the hands and the feet: *One Body and One Spirit* [v. 4]. There should not be among us diversity of sentences, division of parties: but one sole spirit

⁸ Pius VI, Errors of the Synod of Pistoia. Errors about the Church, *Auctorem Fidei*, n. 10, August 28, 1794 - Denz. 1510.

of faith should animate all, as we are one sole body. One sole supernatural end to that to which we all tend: ... *as you are called to one hope of your calling...* [ib.].

1239: One sole is the Author of this end and the Director toward this end. If many Shepherds do indeed rule over us, they rule only in His authority, in His Name: *One Lord* [v. 5]. One only is the rule, only one is the star that points out the way: the divine Word, object of our faith: *one faith* [ib.]. Only one is the Orient in which our star appears, and from whom we all equally take our movement, which is our Baptism. This is called the Sacrament of Illumination and of Faith⁹: *one Baptism*.

1240: One sole God, object of our Beatitude: *One God* [v. 6] and the Father of all, who invites us to this Beatitude: ... *and Father of all* [v. 6]. He is above all with His truth, to illumine all to come to know it:*who is above all...* [ib.], and He is through all things with His Providence to direct all to find this: ...*and through all...* [ib.]. And finally, He is indwelling all with His Grace, as the Intimate Principle, to move all to seek this: ...*and in us all...* [ib.].

To Whom be glory forever!

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SOURCES

OT

Jb 12:12	## 1225; 1226	Si 39:1	# 1225
Ps 61:12	# 1219	Is 64:4	# 1212
Qo 12:11	# 1225	MI 2:7	## 1230; 1231

NT

Mt 11:25	# 1217	Ep 4:1	# 1235
18:17	# 1210	2	## 1235;1236
Jn 1:9	# 1230	3	# 1237
6:61	# 1214	4	# 1238
69	# 1213	5	# 1239
14:6	##1212;1213	6	# 1240
16:12	# 1219	11	# 1224
13	# 1219	12	# 1224
Ac 9:6	# 1229	14	# 1224
15:1, ff.	# 1232	1 Tm 2:20	# 1231
28	# 1232	3:15	# 1232
20:28 [Bishops]	##1233, 1234	2 Tm 3:16	# 1222
1 Co 12:29	# 1233	17	# 1222
Ga 6:16	# 1234	Heb 1:1, ff.	# 1219
		13:9	# 1223

⁹ Translator's Note: cf. # 244, of St. Gaspar Bertoni's Catechetical Instructions on Baptism.

Magisterium

Pius VI, *Auctorem Fidei*, August 28, 1794 - Denz. 1510 # 1233

Fathers & Doctors

St. Augustine, *De Doctr. Christ.*, In Prol. l 6 [t. 3/1, p. 3, f] # 1229
In Io. Ev., tr. 40, 9. [t. 3/2, p. 568 F] # 1228
St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7 15 [p, 757 C] # 1218
St. Jerome, *In Eccles.* 12:11, ff. [t. 3, pp. 494 B, ff.] # 1226
St. Thomas Aquinas, l, q. 1, a. 1 # 1216

Other Writers

Melchior Cano, *De locis theol.*, 2, 7 # 1232
Tertullian, *De Anima* 1 [near the end - p. 163.2] # 1217

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