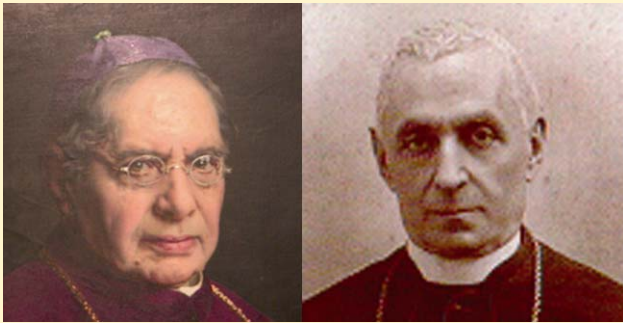


REMEMBERING SCALABRINI

*Homily of Bishop Geremia Bonomelli
Cremona, May 12th, 1906*

In November 1868 I was invited to give a spiritual retreat in each of the two seminaries at Como, to the seminarians in Theology, in Philosophy and in High School. This last one, at the time, (I'm not aware of any changes) was adjacent to the historic church of St. Abbondio, and John Baptist Scalabrini was Rector and Professor: I knew him only by name because of the good reputation he enjoyed, for his intelligence and his priestly zeal. He was about 30 years old, if I am not mistaken; I was 37, and, at that time, I was pastor at Lovere. The short time it took to meet and talk to one another, and enjoy each other's company gave rise to a very close friendship that lasted unshaken until June of last year, when Scalabrini left this world heaven bound. Those beautiful evenings, those wonderful conversations at St. Abbondio! There were other six or seven other professors, mostly young, full of zest, intelligence and academic learning, and the eager to devote themselves to priestly ministry. I never forgot those days.



Our relationship remained alive and growing, thanks to an interesting and constant written correspondence, through which we shared our ideas, our hopes, our fears, and our joys in that God-given freedom that hides no secrets.

In 1871 I was appointed bishop of Cremona and a few years later he was also appointed bishop of Piacenza. Divine Providence placed us very close to one another and thus our relationship through letters and travels to his city or mine became intense. For this reason our friendship grew stronger and lasted 35 years without even the slightest cloud of disagreement. Between the two of us there was no secret whatsoever and no suspicious motivation: he, a true friend, read my heart as I did his. I think that no other two friends found each other in such harmony as the two of us. This friendship, though close and personal, not only it did not diminish our ability to think and to act freely in any matter, but it actually made it more pleasing and solid and when necessary heroic; and bishop Scalabrini proved it over and over again in a sublime manner in crucial moments. In his privileged spirit, during our conversations, I discovered ever newer qualities and virtues shining before me.

God had granted him the gift of a vast and ready intelligence, which was also versatile, sharp and clear. In any field of science he excelled without any shadow of difficulty. The hardest problems in philosophy, theology, history, politics, were addressed and unfolded with positive and unequivocal vision that always left me confounded and awed. It just looked as if he had specialized in that subject. He was fluent in ancient Greek and Latin, which he could write in elegant form. He spoke French and Spanish, and he could understand well English and German. In whatever conversation or discussion he would find himself, he always succeeded in giving honor to the episcopate and to religion, even winning the respect from hostile thinkers. He was a man of dignity: affable, prepared, clever, clear. In presenting his ideas he was frank, always

coherent, in love with truth, no matter whom he was talking to. He knew brilliantly how to unite staunch firmness with condescendence and with the ability to bend, so necessary to human interaction. He always found solutions to the most complicated situations. On more than one occasion I was with him in the midst of thorny situations truly hurting beyond imagining. From his mouth never came a word of discouragement, an uncontrolled expression or a single complaint. Always calm and self possessed, it seemed as if they were not his problems, but someone else's.

His intelligence was sublime, but greater yet was his heart. He knew only how to love, to seek the good, all the good, for every one with generosity and praise worthy largess. He did not know self interest. Whatever he received he would donate it all away, and during his mandate as bishop, somewhat long, and yet so short for such a great man, what didn't he do? How many good works, how many projects in his city, in the diocese and outside his diocese he had the courage to initiate and to bring to completion!

He was mindless toward offenses: it was as if in ever received them, and he would compensate them with acts of generosity and charity as if they did not cost him any sacrifice at all. What a noble, generous and brave soul! In my life I have never met a man so indifferent to honors and unconcerned about them! His talents, his learning, his extraordinary activity, his practical skills, what he accomplished and the sublime virtues, of which he was endowed, were setting him ready for higher honors within the Church. Never did he utter a word, never a sign that would give the impression that he longed for them: on the contrary many times he spoke and acted in such a way as to show that he disdained them, and in fact he refused them.

A faithful and fearless friend, he would never hesitate a single moment in identifying himself with a friend's concerns, in facing troubles, in challenging dangers to be of service to him.

Throughout his life, he showed us a model of the bishop, especially in these our days that he knew so well. During some days and hours, how many times I recall the conversations I had with him, the enlightening advice and the comfort I received! How well did he know modern society, the needs of the Church and the means to remedy the moral and religious decay, that indifference and disbelief are promoting!

Oh Blessed and chosen soul, you have fought the good fight; you have come to the end of your journey; and have left here on earth great and luminous footsteps of your passing! You have spread widely the good aroma of Christ, and you now rest in God and in Him you rejoice. Look down upon us still struggling in this large battle field and help us remain faithful to our mission so that we may walk the path you have so gloriously traveled!

+ GEREMIA BONOMELLI

Bishop of Cremona