

# St. Gaspar Bertoni



## The Spiritual Journal

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A Reflection on the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Its Inception

A Progressive Charism

From the Trinity, the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart  
to the Risen Lord

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**FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF THE MOST BLESSED TRINITY -  
THE SACRED HEART, THE EUCHARIST  
to the RISEN LORD**

**in the Charism of  
St. GASPAR BERTONI**

Foreword

There may be no better way to reflect on this 'anniversary' in our Stigmatine History, than to recall to mind what Fr. Joseph Stofella<sup>1</sup> wrote, more than 50 years ago, when he first presented this document to the Community:

*...The greatest interest, however, lies in the fact that this JOURNAL reveals the true nature of Fr. Bertoni's interior labor for his own spiritual growth. He seems to be resolutely committed to the practice of **Holy Abandonment**, to which he felt called by a particular vocation.*

*This **Abandonment** is understood not only in its passive sense, but also in its decisively active meaning (15 Sept, 8 Oct). It requires the quest for God alone (30 Jul; 20.25 Dec 1808; 14 Jul 1809), detachment from oneself (16 Jul 1809), detachment from creatures (24 Jul 1809), through the exercise of the virtues: of poverty (25 Sep, 22 Oct 1809); chastity (13 Sept 1808); obedience (1 Jul, 9 Aug, 23 Dec 1808); and an all embracing mortification (May 1809; 18 May 1811) founded on humility (9.19.24 Nov; 11.25 Dec 1808; 24 Jul 1809): "the challenge of following our Lord even at the cost of life itself...with a great desire for union and association with His sufferings and humiliations" (25.27 Sept 1808)<sup>2</sup>.*

***His efforts in imitating Christ would lead him to become "a portrait" of Him, "an image which we must make of Christ and show it to the divine Father" (26 Feb; 30 Jul 1809). This is a longing for a full transformation into Christ through love, until it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me** [cf. Ga 2:19, f.] (25 Oct 1808). Such **Abandonment** developed into an interior life that was remarkably supernatural (see 13 Oct, 16 Nov 1808; 22 March and especially 15.16.17 July 1809). The sanctifying will of God the Father was its foundation (24 Aug 1808, 11.27.28 Feb; 16 Jul 1809; 18 May 1811). This was seen as most pleasing to God through the lively exercise of the three theological virtues (15 Jul 1809).*

*God responded to this proportionately with special graces of prayer and union, whereby his soul was granted a special protection with gifts of joy and peace (2.11 Jul, 24 Aug, 27 Sept, 9,22,25 Oct, 11.25 Dec 1808; 11 Jan 1809, 30 May 1812)<sup>3</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *Summarium Addtionale*, pp. 654-656. [cf. Introduction IV - to Italian printing of the *Memoriale Privato*].

<sup>2</sup> cf. also July 11; September 28, 29; October 22, 24; December 25 of 1808. February 1, 1809; May 18, 1811; July 22, 1813.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Stofella notes: in this list, above all else, we have followed the guidance of Dom Columba MARMION, *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*. French Edition, Bruges 1929, pp. 498, ff. cf. also Rom italis

*Of no less interest also are some notes which refer to the intention of founding a Congregation of Priests who would live according to the spirit of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. This thought occupied the mind of Fr Bertoni at least from 15 Sept 1808 (see also 11 Oct 1808; 23.24 Jul 1809).*

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### The Stigmatine Founder and the Trinity

#### August 24, 1808:

**At St. Joseph's Convent. At the base of one's own nothingness, God may be found. While experiencing some sublime insights regarding God, I also had a much deeper understanding of myself.**

**This evening I saw a painting of the Most Blessed Trinity. This inspired much reverence and love for the Three Persons. The Eternal Father was depicted with His arms open, which explained His Mercy to me, and the ready communication of His gifts.**

**Thereafter, the Office was said with much devotion and for the glory of God.**<sup>4</sup>

#### September 27, 1808:

**Meditation today was on the Incarnation. I experienced feelings of gratitude for the Most Holy Trinity, and of correspondence with Jesus Christ. I was obliged to love God even before he became man: how much more now.** <sup>5</sup>

#### September 28, 1808:

**During Meditation today and afterwards, there was the desire for martyrdom, and prayer for it, along with deep interior exhortation.**

**This evening, expression of pardon. There was a sentiment of great love toward the Most Holy Trinity, in giving us the Son. Toward Him, there were feelings of much tenderness together with a very vivid faith, and a great desire for union. There was also the yearning for association in His sufferings and**

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LEHODEY, O.C.R., *Holy Abandonment*. Re-print [from 1934] Rockford: Tan Books 2003. [Dom Marmion, a priest of the Diocese of Dublin, Ireland, was ordained at the Irish College, St. Agatha of the Goths, in 1881 – since 1927, the Stigmatine General House in Rome].

<sup>4</sup> Memoriale Privato: 24 agosto 1808: “A S. Giuseppe. In fondo al proprio niente si trova Dio. Sentendo cose molto alte di Dio, una profonda cognizion di me stesso.

“La sera veggendo un'immagine della SS. Trinita' molta riverenza, e amore alle tre Persone. Il Padre eterno che stava colle braccia aperte mi spiegava la sua misericordia, e la facile comunicazione de' suoi doni, etc...” [CS IV, p. 39].

<sup>5</sup> Memoriale Privato: 27 settembre 1808: “Meditazione. Incarnazione. Sentimento di gratitudine alla Ss.ma Trinita' e di corrispondenza a Gesu' Cristo. Io ero obbligato ad amare Dio anche innanzi ch'ei si facesse uomo; quanto piu' adesso.

“Sera. Perdonanza. Sentimento dell'amore grande della SS.ma Trinita' in darci il Figliuolo, e gran tenerezza verso di questo insieme con fede molto viva, e desiderio grande di unione: e di associazione alle pene, ed ignominie sue: con petizione di grazia per patire, ed essere disprezzato per lui...” [CS IV, p. 55].

shame - with a prayer for the grace to suffer and even to be disregarded as He was.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Trinity and Mission:**

a. **Creation and Grace:** Fr. Bertoni's interest in the Trinity is concentrated in the doctrines concerning the Indwelling, the Eucharist, Mission and Hope. In accord with many of the Fathers, there is a kind of cycle: the descent through creation; the sharing of the Divine Nature, for an eventual return to eternal life in the bosom of the Trinity. The universe comes forth from God - grace is offered - for one to be elevated to eternal life. Fr. Bertoni is much more concerned in the documents of his that have come down to these times with the Divine Plan of Salvation [the so-called 'Economic Trinity'] than He is with the inner workings of the Trinity, or the 'Immanent Trinity.'

b. **Incarnation:** this pattern is noted in Jesus Christ: He descends to us from the Father - lives among us in total abjection and lowliness, His *Kenosis*, and then, is exalted [cf. Ph 2:5-11] - in order to lead us back to the life of the Trinity forever. The entire emphasis is on the Mission of the Son, so intimately tied in with His Personality: Jesus has been sent to accomplish our return. The Mission distinguishes the Son, but does not separate Him from the Father.

c. **Stigmata:** For the Stigmatines, the integral Paschal Mystery is seen in terms of Jesus' life carrying out this Plan of Redemption. The Five Wounds of Christ are the visible signs of this Paschal Mystery: the descent, the living among us, and the return to the Father, with the imprint of His Stigmata on His Risen Body.

d. **Kenosis** [self emptying] [cf. Ph 2:5-11]: This biblical passage - even though not often quoted explicitly by Fr. Bertoni - is one that seems to figure throughout his thinking and life - the *KENOSIS* of Jesus Christ. In some way, we might think of a kind of Kenosis of the Father [***who so loved the world that He gave up His only son - whom He did not spare***: cf. Rm 8:32; Jn 3:16] - and the Holy Spirit who has not come to say His own word, but only to remind the Church of the Message of Jesus [cf. Jn 16; 13,f]. The *KENOSIS* of Christ lends itself to this outline:

- Jesus did not cling to his equality with God: '**Pre-existence**';
- But, He emptied Himself: His entire **earthly sojourn**:

- His Incarnation - assuming the form of a slave;
- His Redemption - His death on the Cross.

- And the Father raised Him on high - for the divine glory: the **Exaltation**.

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<sup>6</sup> **Memoriale Privato: 28 settembre 1808:** "Meditazione e dopo. Desiderio e petizione umile del martirio, e grand'esortazione interna. [CS IV, p. 55].

This classical principle finds a multiple application: ***Bonum est diffusivum sui***: would offer some appreciation of the Mystery of the Trinity - the Sacraments - the Church and the Apostolic mission.

The great pattern is this: **AS** the Son is the Father's Apostle/Missionary, **SO** He sends His own Apostles, **JUST AS** He was sent by the Father:

***"... Jesus came and stood among the. 'Peace be with you', and he showed them His hands and His side... 'Peace be with you... AS the Father sent Me, SO I am sending you... [cf. Jn 20:21].***

This is the '**Mystique of Service**': the Trinity is not only contemplated, but it is also the heart of the message that is 'handed on to others.'<sup>7</sup> It becomes clearer and clearer that the Trinity is the ultimate source and principle of the Apostolic Mission. As Christ 'cooperated/collaborated' with the Father, each believer, each Stigmatine is sent, called to work as Christ did for the extension of the Father's Glory.

Among the 'Models of the Church', there will have to be room left for ecclesial obedience: ***Jesus, obedient unto death*** is the primordial Model of the Church, the Stigmatine. While the Holy Spirit breathes where He will, Fr. Bertoni saw Him as the source of the Stigmatine Vocation: ***this vocation is a work begun by the Holy Spirit, and He will bring it to completion***<sup>8</sup>. Fr. Bertoni believed, too, that the Spirit has been active in the naming of the hierarchy. It is through the Bishops that the Stigmatines discern the Apostolic Mission for the community. The choice of the apostolates, as the assistance of Bishops - is left up to them, as the Incarnate Divine Will for the Stigmatine ecclesial service.

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<sup>7</sup> **ORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONS 49:**

In this religious, clerical Institute, the purpose of which is not only to contemplate, but to hand on to others what has been contemplated, there is required not simply ordinary knowledge, but rather one that is perfect in those matters which pertain to faith and morals. And as a result, it is also necessary that the religious clerics commit themselves in this religious state to the acquiring of the knowledge of this kind.

<sup>8</sup> **"De Praecipuo Scopo Sodalium Professorum.**

**CF # 185:** "Cum ejusdem Sodalitatis scopus sit, Ecclesiae sub Episcoporum directione, obsequium praestare per varia et propria suae vocationis munera; haec autem quandoque ardua et difficilis res sit, et, si ad fragilitatem hominum comparetur quibusdam forte periculis exposita esse videatur, non tamen propterea imprudens aut temerarium est propositum devotionis nostrae. Primo quidem, quia non humanis viribus, sed Spiritus Sancti gratia implendum creditur, qui enim coepit et inspiravit illud ipse perficiet (cf. Ph 1:6), si per nos non steterit: nam, haec est specialis gratia huius vocationis, quae potentior est omnibus periculis et difficultatibus. Deinde per hanc intentionem non proponimus nos periculis exponere, nec hunc vel illum locum adire, aut has vel illas actiones exercere, sed directionem sequi Orthodoxi Episcopi quem Spiritus Sanctus posuit regere ecclesiam Dei: quod medium satis cautum est ad non errandum in via Dei. Accedit tandem religionis providentia, tum in disponendis et probandis personis, tum etiam in eis eligendis et omni ope sulficiendis et confirmandis.

{The under-lined words are from Suarez, p. 862 a & b}.

Jesus is the **ICON** of the Invisible God [cf. Col 1:15] - Jesus really is the reflection of God's Glory, the impress [**KARAKTER**] of God's own being [cf. Heb 1:3]. By probing His humanity, one has a deeper sense of the divinity. The humanity of Jesus is a window into the Trinity, a mirror for Christianity. Fr. Bertoni seemed most aware of this:

**August 17, 1808:**

**"In prayer, begin with Christ, and from His Passion - then the spirit should be left free for wherever the Lord may attract it..."<sup>9</sup>.**

In his Constitutions on the Progress of Stigmatics in ecclesiastical disciplines, Fr. Bertoni noted the following in his original rule:

**"Since the Apostle says: '*for I am determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*' - and since Christ said of Himself: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end' - therefore, all the confreres shall start here, that is, to learn by heart, if possible, the Christian Doctrine as set forth for everyone's understanding in the Catechism of Cardinal Bellarmine. Moreover, those who devote themselves to study, shall every now and then, return to it, putting a deeper knowledge and hold on it from the Roman Catechism".<sup>10</sup>**

There is a biblical foundation for all this:

**... Jesus is the *EIKON* of the Invisible God... [Col 1:15]  
 ... *whoever sees me, sees the One Who sent Me...*" [cf. Jn 12:45]  
 ... *to have seen Me, is to have seen the Father...*" [cf. Jn 14:9]  
 ... *He is the radiant light of God's glory, the perfect copy of his nature...*" [cf. Heb 1:3]**

The Stigmatic 'image' of God, the ideal, in some way can be understood though the **Devotions to the Holy Spouses** [ manifesting the diversity of Gifts, and family unity, dedication to Christ, abandonment - and the **Sacred Stigmata**, indicating **the total self-giving of Christ**, His abandonment to the Father's Plan - and total availability for the Apostolic Mission [cf. Jn 20:20,f.].

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<sup>9</sup> **Memoriale Privato: 17 agosto 1808:** "Nell'Orazione si cominci da Cristo e dalla sua Passione, poi si lasci libero lo spirito, se Dio lo attragga..." [CS IV, p. 35].

<sup>10</sup> **CF # 51:** "Cum dicat Apostolus: '*non enim judicavi me scire aliquid inter vos, nisi Iesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum*' (1 Co 2:2); Christus autem de seipso dixerit: 'Ego sum Alpha et Omega, Principium et Finis' (Apoc. 1:8), hinc omnes prorsus ab addiscenda Doctrina Christiana, etiam memoriter, ubi fieri potest, prout expositam ad captum omnium habemus a Card. Bellarmino, incipiant. Qui vero studiis operam dabunt postmodum huc revertentur, ut addiscant et conquiescant in Catechismo Romano."

God has 'removed the veil', regarding Himself in Jesus Christ as is God's Work of Art, and of Him we are invited to **draw His portrait in our own lives**<sup>11</sup>.

He is the Father's Symphony, His Master-piece, made manifest under a variety of aspects in the charism of St. Gaspar Bertoni. There is a development in the grasp of Revelation in the lives of the believers as they correspond to God's word. It seems most evident that this passage was truly 'experienced' by Fr. Bertoni:

**... There is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts [cf. Lk 2: 19, 51], through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth... [DV 8].**

God is the supreme mystery - but, He has been made known through Jesus Christ:

***... No one has ever seen God; only the Son, who has made Him known. The Son is turned eternally toward the Father...* [cf. Jn 1:18].**

This idea of God is completed in Revelation in all that is sufficient for salvation - but, the progressive understanding of Him, and His Plan will go on until the end of time, through the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of those docile to him. The Mystery of God and human destiny are being unfolded also in the Stigmatine charism through the grace of God, the mediation of the Son and the continuing sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

### **God as Merciful Father:**

This is Christ's basic revelation of 'the One Who sent Him', God, the Father. Very early in the Creed, the Church has prayed for centuries: 'I believe in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father.' As the Son is the perfect IKON/Image/Copy/ KARAKTER of the Father, as the Son 'emptied' Himself [kenosis], this is the revelation the Church has of the Father:

***... God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up to benefit us all...* [cf. Rm 8:32].**

***...Yes, God loved the world so much that He gave up His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost, but may have eternal life...* {cf. Jn 3:16].**

In the Trinity, everything is one and the same, where there is not the opposition of relationship<sup>12</sup>. Jesus is 'constituted' by being 'sent' - the Father is distinct from Him,

<sup>11</sup> **Memoriale Privato: 26 febbraio 1809:**

**"Dobbiam fare un ritratto in noi stessi di Gesu' Cristo."**

<sup>12</sup> **Concilium Florentinum, Decretum pro Armenis:**

**"... Hae tres personae sunt unus Deus, et non tres dii: quia trium est una substantia, una essentia, una natura, una divinitas, una**



but not separated - by His 'sending' of the Son. Christ Himself informs us that He has made the Father known:

***... Everything has been entrusted to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him... Jesus' personal*** [cf. Mt II: 27].

In a certain sense, the Stigmatine is 'constituted' by Jesus' own personal Mission, received from His Father - the path to holiness traced by Fr. Bertoni is union with the Trinity in trying to put on the mind of Christ as much as possible, in so far as He is 'sent' by the Father. The 'traditional' treatment, or presentation, of the charism of Fr. Bertoni might have emphasized more his 'ascetical' points. There is a real effort in the Second Vatican Council era to understand the charism also from a biblical, 'theological' perspective - there is a 'mysticism of service' evident to the student of Fr. Bertoni's writings. Throughout, much emphasis has been given to the 'discipline', the 'hiddenness' in Fr. Bertoni's spirit - however, there is likewise a wonderful description of his paradoxical charism presented on the first centenary of the foundation of the Congregation, by the late Fr. John Baptist Tomasi, the Superior General in 1916<sup>13</sup>:

**... Our first Confreres were able to bring together these values:**

1. **A real effort to live modestly, and yet enjoyed a wide reputation for their witness to holiness;**
2. **Real penance, coupled with genuine joy;**
3. **A deep sense of poverty, yet maintaining the upkeep of their properties;**
4. **A disciplined life, yet most apostolic;**
5. **Real obedience, and at the same time, a wide multiplicity of activity;**
6. **Continual up-dating, along with deep piety..."**

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immensitas, una aeternitas, omniaque sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis oppositio." [D-S # 1330; cf. The Christian Faith, n. 325, p. 111].

**Concilium Florentinum, Decretum pro Armenis:** "... Hae tres personae sunt unus Deus, et non tres dii: quia trium est una substantia, una essentia, una natura, una divinitas, una immensitas, una aeternitas, omniaque sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis oppositio." [D-S # 1330; cf. The Christian Faith, n. 325, p. 111].

<sup>13</sup> **Breve Cronaca, I, p. 6:** "... Preghiamo soprattutto perche' il Signore ci conceda, sia pure a prezzo di qualche penoso sacrificio, di riacquistare intero quel segreto dei santi, per cui i nostri primi padri seppero conciliare insieme tante cose, che coi criteri umani son del tutto inconciliabili. I nostri primi padri infatti seppero unire:

- 1. La ricerca continua del piu' umile nascondimento, data come caratteristica della loro vita, con una fama illustre di santita'.
- 2. La penitenza la piu' austera con la piu' sincera allegria.
- 3. Un eroico disinteresse ed un vero spirito di poverta' con le spese per fabbriche di casa e chiesa compite senza debite e pur curandone senza risparmio la proprieta' ed il decoro.
- 4. La disciplina piu' regolare con la svariata molteplicita' delle occupazioni.
- 5. La soggezione piu' completa col pieno svolgimento delle singole attivita' dei confratelli.
- 6. Il costante studio e lavoro con la piu' soda pietà."

Fr. Bertoni's spirituality was not only constituted by his hiddenness, but, at times, manifested by it. In striving to fathom the very heart, or the central core of his spirit, many would agree that his spirituality centers on **Abandonment to God and Availability to the Church**. This is modeled on, and flows from Christ's own obedience, love for His heavenly Father.

'Abandonment' has been understood in a variety of ways by theologians: for some, 'abandonment' is that state that flows from the heroic fulfillment of all three of the theological virtues. This might be the position of St. Francis de Sales, with his special emphasis in the ***Treatise of Divine Love***. Others might have understood 'Holy Abandonment' as heroic faith. It seems that St. Gaspar Bertoni lived abandonment as **heroic hope**, the center of his whole restlessness, as well as his interior peace, was his quiet confidence: his absolute trust in Divine Providence<sup>14</sup>.

How Fr. Bertoni came to 'abandonment' seems to have been a combination of various elements in his life:

- on the 'natural' level: it seems to have happened to him in the events of life: deaths of loved ones; family troubles, in the division of his father from his mother; physical illness over a long period of time; failure in some apostolates; the Congregation that did not develop in his life time.
- on the level of the spiritual direction received: first from Fr. Louis Fortis, the future 'Prepositus General' of the Jesuits - and also Fr. Nicholas Galvani, St. Gaspar's spiritual father during his seminary and early priestly years. He is remembered by Stigmatines in the Necrologies for January 6th, as a 'Benefactor' to the community. It was he who made the gift of the house and Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi in Verona to Fr. Bertoni.
- his studies: deep appreciation for St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Ignatius of Loyola<sup>15</sup>.
- supernaturally, on the level of grace: his avowed '**Christocentrism**', the crucified and risen Christ - Christ as **Spouse** of the soul and of the Church.

Fr. Bertoni was much convinced that all of created being is simply a gift of the Creator. There is nothing that creatures could ever have done in order to be brought into this world - 'nothingness' has no reason of itself for being - has done nothing of itself to 'merit' existence<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> P. Nello Dalle Vedove, *CSS, Un Modello di Santo Abbando*. Verona: AMB 1951, specialmente pp. 74, ss.: "La virtù della Speranza e il Santo Abbando."

<sup>15</sup> In other studies, the use of *obsequium* by St. Thomas and by in the Constitutions of St. Ignatius has been deeply considered.

<sup>16</sup> *ib.*, pp. 15, ff.

Life itself is sheer 'gift'. If existence is indeed a gift, there must be a Giver. Since life, existence, are so fragile - they must be sustained, kept in being. This on-going creation defies any thought that God is on a 'sabbatical.' The Christian God is not a 'lazy', non-caring, 'sleeping' giant - but is actively engaged in each day's events:

*... can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair of your head is counted. So, there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows...* [cf. Mt 10:29,f.].

*... that is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. For life means more than food, and the body more than clothing.*

*Think of the ravens. They do not sow or reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet, God feeds them. And how much more are you worth than the birds!*

*Can any of you, for all his worrying, add a single cubit to his span of life?*

*If the smallest things, therefore, are outside your control, why worry about the rest?*

*Think of the flowers; they never have to spin, or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. Now, if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and gone tomorrow, how much more will he look after you, you men of little faith! But, you must not set your hearts on things to eat, and things to drink; nor must you worry...*

*Your Father well knows your needs... set your hearts on His kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well..*

*There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom...' [cf. Lk 12:22-32].*

Fr. Bertoni's insistence on Poverty<sup>17</sup> seems much more related to this more comprehensive ideal than to discipline. Christian poverty offers a fertile soul for **hope and trust**. There is an inverse relation between possessions and hope: the less one has, the more one may hope to be.

Fr. Bertoni's idea was that it not simply that creatures received a gift long before, at the moment of their coming into existence - rather, this gift is renewed daily, always, by **on-going creation**. Conservation is a kind of continuing creation. At this moment, God preserves life, this day is a new gift: this is repeated in all days, at all hours, in each instant. What is so often taken for granted: time, gifts, joys - all are donated.

The Scriptures present the mystery of **Creation** in a variety of ways:

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<sup>17</sup> *ib*, pp. 83, ff.

a. The Divine Breath:

***... God fashioned man from the dust of the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living soul... [cf. Gn 2:7].***

***... His breath made the heavens luminous... [cf. Jb 26:13]***

b. His Fingers:

***...I look up at the heavens, made by your fingers, at the moon and the stars You set in place - ah, what is man that You should spare a thought for him, the son of man, that you should care for him? [cf. Ps 8:3].***

c. His Hands:

***... I it was who spread out the heavens with my hands, and now give orders to their whole array... [cf. Is 45:12]***

***... My hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens... [cf. Is 48:13]***

d. His arms:

***... Yours was the arm and Yours the prowess... You control the pride of the ocean... the heavens are yours... [cf. Ps 89:13,f.]***

***... Awake, awake! Clothe yourself in strength, Arm of Yahweh...! [Is 51:9].***

e. He spread out the skies like a Tent:

***... Thus says God ... He who created the heavens and spread them out... [cf. Is 42:5; Jb 9:8; Ps 24:1, ff.]***

The Scriptures themselves present a great sense of hopeful trust in the Creator:

***... As tenderly as a father treats his children, so the Lord God treats those who fear Him; He knows what we are made of, He remembers that we are dust. A man last no longer than grass, no longer than a wild flower he lives, one gust of wind and he is gone, never to be seen there again; yet his love for those who fear Him lasts from all eternity and forever... [cf. Ps 103:15,f.].***

***... Lord God, my heart has no lofty ambitions, my eyes do not look too high. ... Enough for me is to keep my soul tranquil and quiet, like a child in its mother's arms, as content as a child that has been weaned... [cf. Ps 131].***

### **The Gifts of Creation need to Develop**

These gifts of being, existence, life - are but a first step in the Divine Plan. All activity in some ways, flows from the central Source of all life, and is meant to return there. There is great goodness in this cycle, or process - and an enormous possibility to grow spiritually and also culturally, or intellectually. Fr. Bertoni has made special

note of this in his '**Law of Progress**' throughout life which is indicated in his Original Constitutions<sup>18</sup>.

Fr. Bertoni's underlying ideal is very close to that of St. Paul in his speech before the Council of the Areopagus:

***... in fact, God is not far from any one of us, since it is in him that we live and move and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said... [cf. Ac 17:28].***

The next step in living out this sublime hope is the enormous respect for the **special grace** in the heart of Fr. Bertoni. In a key original **Constitution 185**<sup>19</sup>, Fr. Bertoni speaks of the '**special grace of [the Stigmatine] vocation that is more powerful than all dangers and difficulties...**'<sup>20</sup>.

While simple creation is a tremendous gift, that of redemption has added considerably to that by the **super-abundant** gift of grace:

***... how much greater the reign in life of those who receive the fullness of grace and the gift of saving justice, through the one man, Jesus Christ...***

***... You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid for ... [cf. I Co 6:20].***

***... You have all been bought and paid for ... [cf. I Co 7:23]***

***... remember the ransom that was paid to free you from the useless way of life your ancestors handed down was not paid in anything corruptible, neither in silver nor gold, but in the precious blood of a lamb without spot, or stain, namely Christ - Who, though known since before the world was made, has been revealed only in our time, the end of all ages, for your sake...' [cf. 1 P 1:18].***

This gift of grace strengthens the bond and the relationship between humanity and God. The dignity of creation depends on the level of participation in the Godly, in the divinity. The gift of Grace/Vocation is described in Peter's Second Letter:

***...In making these gifts, He has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them you will be able to share the divine nature...*** [cf. 2 P 1:4].

The challenge is to become a New Creation:

***... Adam prefigured the one to come ... [cf. Rm 5:12, ff.]***

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<sup>18</sup> Part IV. Chapter 1. One's own Perfection [## 47-48] - Part 2. Concerning Perfection in Ecclesiastical Studies [## 49-50].

<sup>19</sup> cf. "Nota" di P. Stofella a CF # 165: "... il Praecipuum Munus Sodalium e' delineato ed affermato in Cost. 185 - {da Suarez}.

<sup>20</sup> cf. CF # 185: "...haec specialis gratia huius vocationis potentior est omnibus periculis et difficultatibus..."

**...as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, so we, too, might live a new life...** [cf. Rm 6:3-11].

**... the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth... [Those who love him] they are the ones he called long ago and intended to become true images of His Son...** [cf. Rm 8:23,29].

**... as death came through one man, in the same way, the resurrection of the dead has come through one man... we will be modeled on the heavenly man ...** [cf. I Co 15:20-28, 35-49].

**... we are turned into the image we reflect...** [cf. 2 Co 3:18].

**... And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation ...** [cf. 2 Co 5:17].

In a homily welcoming in the new Year of 1803, Fr. Bertoni seems to have referred to some of the aspects of this 'New Creation':

**... 'Create in us a new heart'!** [cf. Ps 51:19]... Who else can produce out of nothing, or call someone to new life - other than God alone...? <sup>21</sup>

In his homily for the Sunday 'in Albis', April 5, 1807, Fr. Bertoni developed beautifully a kind of New Creation brought through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are Fr. Bertoni's comments:

**... If we are planted, in-grafted into the similitude of Jesus' death [cf. Rm 6:3], we will also be in His resurrection... Just as the body of Christ, buried in the ground, had the salvation of the world as its fruit, so we, too, through our own repentance may be buried in penance to bear fruit in justice... Our lives are now hidden with that of Christ [cf. Col 3:3]. This blessed fruit has already been produced - it must now be allowed to come to maturity ... if you wish to see me, said the holy Eleazar, look for me in the wound in the side of Christ...' <sup>22</sup>**

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<sup>21</sup> cf. Pagine di Vita Cristiana, pp. 128,ss.; per l'originale, cf. MssB I, # 735: "...Cor mundum crea in me, Deus. Ps 50:12. Ah, Creator mio, mio vero principio, mio Dio! Ecco che per la sola mia lingua tutte queste creature vostre al cospetto vostro prostrate, fiducialmente insieme unite in un solo desiderio, con nuova e forte istanza vi pregano: createci un cuor mondo. Perciocche' e chi e' mai che possa far mondo chi trasse dall'immondizia fin la sua origine, se non voi solo, mio Dio? Anzi, chi e' mai che possa produr dal nulla e chiamar a nuovo essere cosa veruna, non diro' cosa si' buona com'e; la grazia vostra, che monda, purifica, rabbellisce i nostri cuori, se non voi pur solo, mio Dio?"

<sup>22</sup> cf. MssB I, ## 1308-1309: "...Questo e' in consiglio del nostro Apostolo, perche' procede Rom 6:5: Se noi siamo piantati nella sua similitudine della sua morte, lo saremo anco della risurrezione. Col nome di piantagione, sotto v'inferisce anche il frutto che si aspetta in noi e da noi. Siccome il corpo di Cristo in terra sepolto ebbe per frutto la salute del mondo, cosi' noi pure, sepolti nuovamente nella Penitenza, abbiain riportato il frutto della giustizia, dell'adozione, della santificazione, d'innumerevoli doni; riporteremo anche in seguito il dono della risurrezione.

"Intanto la vita nostra e' nascosta con Cristo in Dio, Col 3:3. Prodotto questo frutto felice, convien stagionarlo. Potrem dire ancor molto di questa pianta della morte, ma gia' senz' avvederci avendo tocco un piu' lieto motivo del frutto della vita, e racchiudendo egli pure qualche difficoltà

It is in this context of Creation/Grace that Fr. Bertoni understands vocation. Believers do accept the nothingness from which everyone is called forth by a loving Creator - and an extraordinary goodness is divinely breathed into every human being. In his Hymn to Wisdom, Paul may allude to this:

***... take yourselves for instance, brothers, at the time when you were called: how many of you were wise in the ordinary sense of the word - how many were influential people, or came from noble families?***

***No, it was to shame the wise that God called what is foolish by human reckoning and to shame what is strong that he chose what is weak by human reckoning... those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones that God has chosen... the only knowledge that I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about Him as the crucified Christ... [cf. I Co 1:26, ff.].***

Fr. Bertoni makes note of this ideal in his original Constitutions<sup>23</sup>:

***... Since the Apostle says: 'For I am determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified' [cf. I Co 2:2] - and since Christ said of Himself: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End' [cf. Apoc 1:8]...***

### **Devotion to the Sacred Heart**

Fr. Bertoni's charism flows out from the Most Blessed Trinity: beginning with the traditional teachings regarding the Indwelling of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Eucharist, Fr. Bertoni discerns the hand of the Trinity in everything – He sees it also expressed in his own devotion to the Sacred Heart, celebrating God's love. St. Gaspar mentions the Sacred Heart several times in his Diary:

### **2nd JULY 1808**

***[2.] Feast of the Sacred Heart. During Mass, at Consecration, at Communion and throughout the whole thanksgiving time, many tears of compunction and affection. In particular during Communion I felt for a moment as if my spirit was snatched away from all creatures, at the service<sup>24</sup> of its Creator.***

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a primo aspetto per intenderlo, così' troncando per amore di brevità' ogni parola sul primo, passiamo la fretta al secondo..."

<sup>23</sup> **CF # 51:** "Cum dicat Apostolus: 'non enim judicavi me scire aliquid inter vos, nisi Iesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum' (I Co 2:2); Christus autem de seipso dixerit: 'Ego sum Alpha et Omega, Principium et Finish' (Apoc. 1:8)..."

<sup>24</sup> **Web-site Note:** For the first time in this document, St. Gaspar uses the word ossequio [cf. obsequium, in: Rm 12:1, ff.] – one of Fr. Bertoni's favorite words. Cf. 'Published Studies' under St. Gaspar Bertoni's *Trinitarian Charism of Hope*, on thw Web-site [www.st-bertoni.com].

The Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was introduced in 1765 and quickly adopted in Venice and in the Venetian Republic. In 1808 it was celebrated on the 2nd of July because on its established day, namely Friday 24<sup>th</sup> of June, the liturgical calendar required the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. On this July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Church was within the Octave of the Holy Apostles Sts. Peter and Paul. On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, there was also observed the Feast of the Visitation of Mary Most Holy to St. Elizabeth.

All of this in no way lessens our interest in the fact that In his entry on this Feast of the Sacred Heart, we have the first indication of some characteristic mystical gifts which God was going to grant to Fr Bertoni<sup>25</sup>. If we may say, here one sees what theologians call **Piety as a gift of the Spirit**<sup>26</sup>. Hence, the many tears of compunction and affection. Compunction is intended here as a blend of *spiritual illumination* and a consequent feeling of one's own inadequacy in front of the divine. What stands out here is that gift of **the spirit snatched away from all creatures, at the service [obsequium] of its Creator**. To this experience Fr Gaspar had contributed also by his own spiritual attitude<sup>27</sup>.

St. John of the Cross teaches that "the soul cannot receive the light of divine union unless it first rejects affection for creatures". He also teaches that "every soul who wishes to climb the mountain of the Lord in order to make of himself an altar for the offering of pure love, of praise and service [*ossequio*], should have already fulfilled three conditions. The first is that it rejects from itself all affections and desires which are foreign to God. The second is that it should purify itself from the consequences of those affections which still remain by continually denying them and doing penance. The third condition is that it should change *habits*: only then the Lord himself will clothe it anew. Through such divine favor the soul will finally be free from

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<sup>25</sup> **Web-site Note:** Fr. Stofella notes that the Sacred Heart is also near Fr. Bertoni's final entry in his Journal [cf. June 26, 1813 he also noted a mystical grace, his ecstasy regarding the Sacred Heart on May 30, 1812]. For Fr. Bertoni, his devotion to the Sacred Heart often served as his vehicle for the presentation of his integral understanding of the Paschal Mystery - both its sorrowful aspects as well as its glorious dimensions. A few days after his May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1812 ecstasy, he spoke on the Sacred Heart - emphasizing the wound in the side retained in Christ's Risen Body [cf. MssB 1755-1778] [cf. J. Henchey, 'Una Speranza Missionaria formata ed expressa nelle sue divozioni e nel suo servizio ecclesiale', in: *Symposium Bertonianum*. Verona: Edizioni Stimmgraf 1990, pp.143-160. This idea is found in his parish sermons [cf. MssB ## 464; 475; 490;494; 517; 1300; 1305; 1308; 1312; 1314; 1315; 1317; 1318; 1322; 1759; 1771, , ff. In his Letters: MssB 9510; 9689; 9707. In his preaching to priests and seminarians: MssB ## 2632; 2635; 2637; 2647. It is found often in Fr. Gaspar's Meditations on Primum Regum, based on St. Gregory the Great: MssB ## 4899; 4957; 4984; 4991; 4999; 5094 and 9707 - among other texts. The integral theme of the Paschal Mystery is found from his earliest written documents: his parish sermons up through his last letters to Fr. Bragato [cf. Web-site. *Stimmate Integre*].

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un Modello di S. Abbandono*, pp. 53, 186.

<sup>27</sup> **Web-site Note:** there is offered a reflection on the Ignatian spirituality contained in the word *obsequium* - cf. this web-site, *Studies on St. Gaspar's Compendium Rude*.



the old tastes and desires of the earthly man and will receive a new knowledge of God<sup>28</sup>.

Fr. Bertoni had admired the **detachment from all created things** in the patron Saint of his priesthood, namely Saint Ignatius of Loyola – and certainly for the reason of imitating him. He had copied the following extract from his *Life*: "Ignatius' heart was entirely detached from all created things which he loved only in God, while loving God in them. He used to say that:

*...these are the true attitudes of those who leave the world for Christ: to forget as much as possible the things of the earth in order to better keep in mind those of heaven...*<sup>29</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's entire *Journal* is permeated by this spirit of total detachment.

### **26th JUNE 1813**

**[178.] I heard a sermon on the Sacred Heart with affection....**

This note too is not complete. One might ask whether this affection is one of those strong spiritual experiences of gifts of Prayer filled with love, gratitude, zeal and humble *confusion*... or just an ordinary enthusiasm. If he wrote it in his *Journal* it is more probable that it was an extraordinary affection. It is, as we like to say, *the secret of the King!* However we like to remark that as this ***Spiritual Journal*** opened, practically, with the Sacred Heart and reached its climax with the Sacred Heart. It is fitting that it should end with the Sacred Heart. That is something which is worth noticing.

### **Sermon on the Sacred Heart:**

A few days after the second citation above, Fr. Bertoni **preached** for the Feast of the Sacred Heart. Among his thoughts, we find the following:

**...The humanity of Jesus Christ is not adored separately and for itself; but always as united to the divine Person, and because of this; the Incarnate Word receives with his flesh a single and identical adoration...**

**The object of the Feast of the Sacred Heart consists in that wonderful and truly divine union of realities, formed both of that human and wounded heart of Jesus, as well as of His most holy soul, through which His heart lives, and also by the Person of the Divine word... His heart is the symbol and the seat of those sufferings and the anguish endured by that heart...**

<sup>28</sup> John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. C. 4, 1; c. 5, 7. Roma 1940: Ed. Opere, pp.17, 24, f.

<sup>29</sup> Mariani, *Life...* Book 4, c. 2, pp. 337.

The prudent and most wise Spouse of Christ, the Church, made ingenious by her love, most ardently yearns to see her Spouse adored and loved and still seeks more universal and appealing means, as well as simpler and more efficacious incentives to bring this about... such as the Infant in the Crib, the dying Christ on His Cross; but also His Blood, His name, His Wounds ... the Cross...

...It has never been the custom of the Church to solemnize with a proper Mass and Office the divine attributes, the interior virtues and abstract perfections of Christ - but, only under some sensible object that would clearly represent these, or some fact evident to the senses, or some mystery that would the more vividly impress itself. For example, the Church does not venerate the patience of Christ without a symbol, or mystery: as Wounds, the Passion, the Cross...

Jesus' love is much better symbolized by His Divine Heart ... The open side, after His death, customarily shows us that Heart, the same Heart wounded by the lance, that wound preserved in His glorious body make of it such an appealing, evident, divine symbol, that it is impossible to venerate the wounded heart without remembering and venerating His immense love... The abyss of misery calls out to the Abyss of Mercy... <sup>30</sup>.

## SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE EUCHARIST

25th DECEMBER 1808

[93.] During the three [Christmas] Masses: recollection and an experience of the great benefit of [my] vocation. What a great blessing it is to become oblivious and stripped of all created things. To seek only God. How much did God honor and love His humiliated Son. Oh, what a responsibility do we have to do for Him, partly at least, what He firstly did for us.

Christmas fell on Sunday that year. Fr. Bertoni was overwhelmed by the blessings he had received, which he shares through brief hints and interjections.

The benefit of his Vocation is to be understood as total Vocation: a vocation to the priesthood and a vocation to holiness. When he contemplated mystically the stripping and humiliation of God he felt he could justify his own ascetic work of self-

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<sup>30</sup> cf. Gaspare Bertoni, *Sacro Cuore*. June 5, 1812, in: *MssB* Vol. II, ## 1755-1778. For the Italian, cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, CSS, *Vita e pensiero del Beato Gaspare Bertoni agli albori del'800 veronese [1800-1816]*. Roma: Postulazione Generale degli Stigmatini 1977, pp. 387, ff.

denial which appeared no longer as a sacrifice but rather as a grace and a privilege. One feels that God was showing, there, much gratification.

What is left for us is perhaps to pick up quietly that spiritual surprise with which Fr Bertoni could contemplate: **how much did God honor and love His humiliated Son**. He made comparisons and concluded for himself and for us: **What a responsibility do we have to do for Him, partly at least, what He firstly did for us**. May Fr. Gaspar obtain for us the grace to be struck by awe at God's action.

## CONCLUSION

The Stigmatine life is an **obsequium** to God's Mercy [cf. Rm 12:1, ff.] – comparable to the Eucharistic Offertory. An ardent student of **St. Thomas Aquinas**, Fr. Bertoni was also much influenced by the Constitutions and the spirit of **St. Ignatius of Loyola**, and his Apostolic Mission to the Church. In the Ignatian Constitutions, the entire Part VII is dedicated to the “**Missions**” and the frequent recurrence of the **obsequium** as described there by the Jesuit Founder and his **servitium, auxilium, obsequium**. In the Ignatian charism, the Missions of the Holy Father are the “intention of the Fourth Vow” [CSJ n. 605]. The “Mission” is defined in the *Epitome* of Part VII [n. 612].

The Stigmatine ideal was described by the second Superior General, Fr. Giovanni B. Lenotti [1871-1875], as a parallel to the Company of Jesus, which is in a special way dedicated, directed to the service [**ossequio**] and to the dispositions of the Roman Pontiff, as the Stigmatines are **in obsequium Episcoporum**:

... It is clearly seen that Fr. Bertoni's intention was to have instituted a Congregation, which, just like the Company of Jesus is in a special manner dedicated, orientated toward the service [**ossequio**] and to the dispositions of the Roman Pontiff, this Congregation would be dedicated and determined in a manner that is quite special and signed by its service and **ossequio – assistance** - of the Bishops ... Our men do not make a vow of obedience to the Bishop, but they seek in every manner that they can to assist him, to help him, **obsequiously**, and are in a particular manner dedicated to him ...<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> cf. G. B. Lenotti, “Flnis: Missionari Apostolici in Obsequium Episcoporum”, in: *Collectanea Stigmatina. Collezione di documenti e studi riservata agli Stigmatini*. Roma: Curia Generalizia 1961, pp. 408, ff.: “...Si vede chiaro che l'intendimento del P. Bertoni deve essere stato di istituire una Congregazione, la quale, come la Compagnia di Gesù' e' in modo speciale dedicata, indirizzata all'ossequio e alle disposizioni del Romano Pontefice, avesse ad essere dedicata e determinata in modo tutto speciale e segnalato al servizio ed ossequio dei Vescovi ... I Nostri non facciano il voto di obbedienza al Vescovo, ma cerchino in ogni guisa che possano aiutarlo, assisterlo ossequiosamente, in modo particolare a lui dedicati ... Due le principali armi del Missionario: la spada della Divina Parola e la spada dell'Orazione... La Spada della Divina parola: ... nel confessionale, nelle carceri, sul pergamo, sul palco, dagli altari, negli Esercizi, Missioni, Oratori, Ritiri, conversazioni familiari, ecc., animandola dallo Spirito del Signore...”

It is in his second Constitution that St. Gaspar presented his Stigmatine ***modus hs missionary modality***, of ecclesial Service - the ***special manner ... quite special manner ... in every manner they can*** of assisting Bishops:

2. The Manner of Achieving this Goal: [the Apostolic Missionaries are] ***to work under the direction of, and dependent on the Ordinaries of those places in which the Missions may be offered. The Missionaries are to be totally submissive to these Bishops, concerning all that pertains to the exercise of their Apostolic Endeavor. The Missionaries are to receive their permission beforehand from them, along with the necessary faculties, always observing the guidelines set down by these Ordinaries concerning the places and the time in the exercise of their apostolate.*** [From the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation, December 20, 1817].

One of Fr. Bertoni's own images in the following/imitation if Christ was the persevering effort to "***draw a portrait of Jesus Christ***" <sup>32</sup> in one's own life. Fr. Bertoni achieved this in his personal life by offering his service to God, acceptance of long illnesses and his entire life as a Holy Abandonment. For him, ***obsequium*** is a key expression of this spirituality. As Christ's own ***obsequium*** redounded to the glory of the Father - so Mary and Joseph, the Holy Spouses offered their precious ***obsequium*** to Christ. Fr. Bertoni presented the challenge of offering an ecclesial service, an availability to the Church, through his ***in obsequium Episcoporum***, in the assistance of Bishops. For the Apostolic Mission, the bishops incarnated the divine will for the Stigmatine Founder in the choice of the specific service this community is called to render.

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<sup>32</sup> Personal Diary, *Memoriale Privato*, February 26, 1809, in: *Lo Spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni*. Verona: Stimmatini 1914. Reprinted 1977, p. 229: "Dobbiamo fare un ritratto i noi stessi di Gesu' Cristo..."