

The Mystery of Human Suffering



Fr. Gaspar Bertoni suffered serious illnesses during all his life.

Isaiah 40:4-7 [11]: A Suffering Sage

Rev. Joseph Henchey, CSS

In the Solemnity of St. Gaspar Bertoni, 2017

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THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN SUFFERING

Isaiah 40:4-7 [11]:

A. A Suffering Sage¹

Introduction:

[1] Once more, the Canticle starts off with the Servant's own monologue. In this, he presents himself as the Lord's faithful Disciple, entirely available, dependent on the Lord. He comes across as a Prophet and a Sage. In the full picture of the 'Servant', he does manifest characteristics of the 'prophetic' vocation, as well as that of a Wisdom teacher.

[2] He gives a clear indication as to the source of his Wisdom: *each morning he awakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple*. The Lord Himself has opened his ear. Perhaps more than a reading, or a meditation on the Scriptures [available for all the 'servants of the Lord'], there seems to be here a hint at a direct instruction on the part of the Lord Himself. The Servant listens to this with total docility and with no hesitation. The overall scope of this teaching is to fortify those who are 'wearied', discouraged. This 'audience' seems to go back to the First Poem: ... *the Servant does not break the crushed reed, or quench the wavering flame...* [49:4]. These would be the Israelites, crushed by the years of exile, and strongly tempted to give up the faith. The servant is sent to them, to strengthen them, that they *might renew their strength like the eagle's*.

[3] The Servant discovers that the Mission to the lost tribes of Israel is a harsh service [cf. 4, ff.]. Nonetheless, the Servant offers himself to it without reserve. He seems to go a step beyond Jeremiah – who rebelled at the harsh lot that was his:

... I said: Ah, Lord, look, I do not now how to speak [1:8] ... do not be dismayed... brace yourself for action. Stand up and tell them all I command you ... they will fight against you, but shall not overcome you, for I am with you... [cf. Jr 1:8, 17, ff.].

... You have seduced me, Lord God... the Word of the Lord has meant for me insult, derision ... Lod, I have committed my cause to You... [cf. Jr 20:7-11].

[4] The Servant is convinced that he is fortified by the Lord God, and so is ready to weather the blows and the insults of his enemies. The Servant manifests an imperturbable confidence in the Most High, and this support was also offered to

¹ cf. A. Feuillet, Ancien testament. Paris: Gabalda, o.c., pp. 131, ff.

Jeremiah [1:18; 20:11, ff.] – and the same promise is given to all the Suffering Servants/ Sages of the Most High: *I will be with you!*

[5] The fundamental theme of the Third Canticle is the constancy of the Savior in the dispensation of a doctrine that has come from God, and which strikes its listeners with force. There is a certain insistence upon the message, and the doctrine which it communicates.

[6] There is much discussion whether verses 10-11 belong to this Poem – the JB seems to separate them. Most do consider them a kind of moral exhortation to follow after the Servant. For completeness' sake, we will treat them as part of the Fourth Canticle.²

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The Text

Much like Jeremiah before him – and Paul long after him – the Servant offers us a brief glimpse into his own life through the autobiographical data he supplies here. The Servant, relying so totally on his God and urging with great insistence that his compatriots accept the invitation to convert, sees himself the butt of difficulties, ridicule and shame. Yet, he renews his unshakable faith in the Lord. The over-all picture that is given here may be summarised as follows:

- an avid listening to the lessons of God, so that the prophetic message will indeed be the Word of God;
- his dedication to the faithful transmission of the word to the discouraged;
- the inherent sufferings in any true 'service' of the Lord;
- his protestations of fidelity, his statements of confidence, and the certitude that he is in no way at 'odds' with the Lord.

†

vv. 4-5:

a. The fundamental reality of which the Prophet is assured is the intervention in his life of the One he names here four times: the Lord God. He claims that the Lord has bestowed on him His very own Spirit: ... *and now the Lord God, with His Spirit, sends me...* [48:16]. Here the Servant repeats insistently that the Lord God informs him and assists him. It is the Lord God, and no other, who has given him an

² cf. Feuillet, o.c., pp. 131, ff.

ear and the tongue of a disciple: the Servant has been placed in the School of God, where he has been taught to teach capably in his turn. God freely commits secrets to him which he had not chosen to communicate before: *You had never heard, you did not know, I had not opened you before-hand...* [48:8].

b. The Lord made him attentive – and now the Servant will make all Israel listen, for he is to be the Teacher of the Lord's Word to the People. Each morning, the Master will address His attentive disciple – so that in His turn, the Servant might be able to sustain his fellow Israelites, by communicating this message to them. The special object of the Servant's preaching will be the 'discouraged'. His will be a Mission of comforting, consolation, of those who are presently suffering the Exile. His special sphere of interest will be the down-trodden: ... *He gives strength to the wearied, he strengthens the powerless...those who hope in the Lord God renew their strength, they put out wings like eagles ... They run and do not grow weary, walk and never tire ...* [40:28, ff.].

c. By the intermediary, His Servant, the Lord would like to prepare all the sons/ daughters of Israel to become one day His disciples.

v. 5: a Mission of this magnitude and intensity will not be easy. It will demand that the Servant should give himself to the service of the Lord and, at the same time, to the service of his brothers and neighbors. God is calling him now for the service of his exile neighbors. The Servant does not 'flinch' from this service to his fellow-exiles. Many of his predecessors did not carry through on their share in the mission: ... *they revelled, they grieved his holy Spirit...* [63:10]. The Servant will manifest an even greater intrepidity than Jeremiah, and will not voice his complaints. He will undertake his difficult Mission in the firm faith that it is all 'possible.'

v. 6: this aspect of accepting the shameful blows struck at him is a clear preparation for the passion of Jesus [cf. Mt 26:67; 27:30, *par.*]. The Lamentations speak of this: ... *to offer his cheek to the striker, to be overwhelmed with insults ...* [cf. Lm 3:30]. The sufferings here are not only painful, but are a real attack on the dignity of the person: *To spit in one's face* is considered the height of insult [cf. Nb 12:14; Dt 25:9; Jb 30:10]. Not even this shameful treatment could discourage the Servant.

v. 7: what strengthens the Servant in this dark hour is the conviction that the Lord Himself aids him: .. *the Lord is coming to my help...* [v. 9]. Being so sure of the divine presence, the Servant will not be overwhelmed by the outrages which crush him. The Prophets are indeed promised the help of God in their difficult hours:

... I , for my part, today will make you into a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of bronze, to confront all this land... [cf. Jr 1:18].

... You must deliver My words to them, whether they listen or not... eat what I am going to give you... [cf. Ezk 3:7, ff.].

The Servant sets his face like flint – not unlike Jesus Whose face was ‘fixed’ towards Jerusalem. He will show the same intensity for good which the rebels have exercised for evil.

vv. 8, 9: the Servant invites his opponents to appear with him before the divine tribunal. He claims that his ‘Vindicator’ [*GO’EL*], his Redeemer – is at hand. The invitation to appear before the tribunal is an old one: *they appeared before Moses ... the priest ... and the whole community ... Moses took their case before the Lord God ...* [cf. Nb 27:2, ff.]. The Lord not only ‘helps’ but He extends His justice, i.e., He declares ‘just’ - and shows that the Servant is ‘right’ in preaching salvation. And the Lord will bring His ‘justice’, i.e., hasten the day of salvation, will establish the truth of the message and the authenticity of the Servant’s Mission. Far from being ‘triumphalistic’, the Servant nonetheless, will be vindicated, not in himself – but, because of the sanctity of his message: his adversaries will be discarded like worn-out clothing. No one will ever be able to defeat those whom the Lord has sent. Paul seems to have had this in mind when he wrote:

... After saying this, what can we add? With God on our side, who can be against us? Since God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up to benefit us all, we may be certain that after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything He can give. Could anyone accuse those that God has chosen... [cf. Rm 8:31-34].

v. 10: these next two verses are entitled: ‘Exhortation to follow the Servant.’ There are those commentators who would end the Third Canticle at v. 9. For completeness, we will add the exhortation:

a. Justified by the Lord Himself, Second Isaiah was able to invite his fellow country-men and women to follow him. He addresses his appeals to those exiles who Fear the Lord, those who obey Him, who listen to the voice of His Servant, the Prophet [cf. Dt 4:30; Ezk 3:7]. Even if they have had to struggle for a long time in the darkness of exile [cf Ps 42:7; 49:9], they will place their trust more than ever before in the Name of the Most High. They will learn to rely on His tenderness, His constancy, His mercy and fidelity. There is an Exodus theme here [compare Ex 33:19, 34:6 and Is 48:9]: *... For the sake of My name, I deferred My anger – for the sake of My honor, I curbed it...*

b. What the Prophet has done first – trusted in the Lord and in His Word – he now communicates to God’s People: let Israel trust in the Name of the Lord, let him lean on his God.

v. 11: not all do choose to follow the Servant and listen to his preaching. Not satisfied with just not listening, they become aggressive. In the historical context, some of the exiled population may have feared reprisals from their Babylonian captors: they have feared the position of privilege that they had achieved in the non-believing society. The ominous note with which the Canticle ends is indeed a good preparation for what is coming. The warning for non-acceptance is stern.

Summary

[1] As the Servant speaks here, one day Jesus of Nazareth will also speak. There are many points of contact between this anonymous Prophet, struggling with his People in Babylon – and the Prophet of Nazareth, Jesus Christ. The evangelists had no hesitation in emphasizing these points of contact between Jesus and this Servant.

[2] Like the Servant, Jesus has come for the ‘weak’, and the ‘down-trodden’ [cf. Mt 11:28]. He tells them that the Father has taught Him [cf. Jn 8:28, 40]. He does ‘fix His face’ toward Jerusalem [compare Is 50:7 and Lk 9:51]. Jesus predicts shameful treatment, even including being covered with spittle [cf. Mk 10:32, ff.; 14:65; 15:19, *par.*]. In His darkest hour, Jesus expresses the fact that the Father is with Him, and that He is to bring about His glory and that He will indeed achieve justice [cf. Jn 8:46].

[3] Jesus also predicts that those who remain obstinate in their sins, will die in them [cf. Jn 8:24]. Even in the midst of His agony, He remains certain of the Father’s love, and He invites His friends to pass-over with Him from the darkness into the light [cf. Jn 8:12]. The confidence that Jesus shows is not only that of a Servant, but that of the Son of the Father.³

[4] Jesus was tormented as was the Servant in this Canticle [cf. Mt 15:15-19]. There is more than abundant proof of the connection between Isaiah and the Evangelists on several accounts.

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³ For these pages, cf. Bonnard, o.c., *Le Second Isaïe ...* Paris: Gabalda 1972, pp. 233-236, *passim*.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 - The Servant's Ordeal / Triumph⁴

Introduction

[1] This Fourth Canticle is the most important of all. The interpreter is not faced with the problem of knowing when it begins or ends, as these lines of demarcation are rather clear. This Fourth Hymn appears to have been almost inserted as a unity where it is presently found. The difficulty of the Poem is internal to it – but this is also its beauty and its depth, in view of the great mystery it propounds.

[2] The experts point out that the Greek words chosen by the Evangelists to portray Jesus are the very terms found in the LXX of Is 53: the predictions that the Son of Man will have much to suffer, that He will be rejected – are terms familiar to Greek students of Isaiah [compare Lk 9:22 and Is 53:3; cf. also Mk 9:12].

[3] Jesus' claim that the Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve – and to give His life as a ransom for the multitude [cf. Mk 10:45] is inspired by Servant terminology. Jesus refers to the *Scriptures being fulfilled*, in the predictions of His Passion, and often the words used would lead the student to Is 53 [cf. vv. 10, 12]. The attitude, then, of the suffering Jesus is often expressed in terms reminiscent of the Suffering Servant.

[4] Jesus' being included among the 'guilty' or the 'sinners' [cf. Lk 22; 37; Mk 15:27] is found also in Second Isaiah.

[5] The words for the Institution of the Eucharist [*this is My Body which is given for you ... This is My Blood ... This is the New Covenant in My Blood, which is shed for you, for the many, in remission for sins*: - are 'Servant' inspired. Under these variants, the principal idea given is that Jesus has suffered for the remission of sins, which is the sacrifice of the Servant [cf. Is 53:10-12].

[6] In giving us the Cup of the Covenant which contains His life offered in Sacrifice of Expiation, Jesus cites various expressions in Scripture:

- in this one expression, we are brought back to Sinai - we are united to the New Covenant of Jeremiah [31:31-34];
- we are united with the Servant who pours out a sacrifice for the entire universe;
- we are united with Is 61 and Second Zechariah [cc. 9-14], Psalm 22 and Daniel.

⁴ cf. Feuillet, o.c., pp.132-138; Bonnard, o.c., pp. 53, ff.; 280, ff.

The Eucharist, then, is a marvelous synthesis of the OT. Now, for a reflection on this Fourth Canticale:

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The Preamble

Jesus is indeed the Servant raised up on the Cross and then elevated in Glory, higher than all else [cf. Ac 3:13; Ph 2:9], because also in His Passion He had been so disfigured. The crowds who had seen Him scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified and were horrified at His appearance [cf. Ga 3:13] – one day will be full of admiration, for they will contemplate an event without precedent [cf. Rm 15:21]: the One Who had known all this shame is now in eternal glory.

v.13: the Canticale opens with a kind of ‘pre-existence’ parallel with Christ: the Servant will ‘prosper’, be ‘lifted up’, ‘exalted’, ‘raised’ – to great heights. Because the suffering is so intense, the glory will be all the greater, as this ordeal was met with infinite divine love.

v. 14: the crowds are ‘appalled’, ‘astonished’ – kings are ‘speechless’, as this has never before been told, never been heard. This over-whelming stupor is caused both by the intensity of the suffering – as well as by the sublimity of the eventual glory.

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1. The final words of v. 14 present a special difficulty: ... *so disfigured did he look that he no longer seemed human* ... The JB footnote here offers a special reading: ...*by my anointing, I took his human appearance from him...* the first part of the following verse: ... *so will crowds be astonished at him* ... - is sometimes rendered: ... *He will asperse the numerous peoples* ...

2. Mistaken by the crowds as one who is at least ritually ‘impure’ [further ahead, it seems that he is even to be considered to be leprous], the Servant hardly seems the one to purify the multitudes of sinners. The reference to the ‘aspersion’ [if that reading could stand] would lead the reflections back to Moses, who conducted the ritual of aspersion with the Blood of the Covenant, on the assembled multitudes on Sinai:

... half of the blood Moses took up and put into basins, the other half he cast on the altar ... [After reading the Book of the Covenant to the listening People] *Moses took the blood and cast it towards the people ...* [cf. Ex 24:6,ff.].

3. In this way, Moses had sealed the Sinai Covenant by sprinkling the chosen representatives of the Chosen People with the Blood of the victims. In like manner,

Second Isaiah presents the Servant who will spiritually sprinkle the countless multitudes with the blood of his own martyrdom which will then purify them. The Servant is indeed the Covenant of the People and the light of the Nations [cf. Is 42:6]: he is being presented as the New Moses.

4. The Prophet Ezekiel also foresaw a metaphorical aspersion as the means of sharing in the benefits of the messianic era that was to come: ... *I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart and a new spirit ...* [cf. Ezk 36:25, ff.]. The *Miserere* also prays for this: ... *wipe out all my guilt ... God, create a clean heart in me, put into me a new and constant spirit ... purify me with hyssop until I am clean, wash me until I am whiter than snow ...* [cf. Ps 51: 7, ff.]. Jesus' words of the institution of the Eucharist recall the aspersion of Moses: ... *This is My Blood, the Blood of the Covenant ...* [cf. Mk 14:24, f., par.].

5. However, this reading of the TM: ... *he will asperge numerous peoples ...* is rendered by the JB: ... *the crowds will be astonished at him ...* - which is the reading of the LXX. Some have said that the LXX translators were swayed in the presence of this difficult text to render it more in accord with its immediate context: ... *kings were speechless before him ... who could ever believe what we have heard ...?*

6. A further support for the 'aspersion' interpretation would be a similar text found at Qumran of this passage of Isaiah, which is also rendered this way in the Syriac text: ...*he will purify the numerous peoples ...* - there is a text from the Pentateuch using this Hebrew verb found there in the sense of the *asperges*:

... The anointed priest is to carry a little of the blood of the bull into the Tent of Meeting. He is to dip his finger in the Blood and sprinkle the veil before the Lord seven times ... He shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it over the veil of the Lord seven times before the Lord ... [cf. Lv 4: 6, 17].

7. It should also be pointed out that the situation of the Servant of the Lord appearing in this terrible state has evoked the wonder of the by-standers all through Scripture [cf. Jn12:37, ff. - the unbelief of the Jews]: ...*As Isaiah says: Lord, how many believed what we proclaimed?* [Rm 10:16] - ... *those who have never heard about him will see him, and those who have never been told about him will understand...* [cf. Rm 15:21].

The Expose' of the Mystery: The 'Ordeal' [cf. Is 53:1-9]

v. 1: who could ever believe what we have heard, and to whom has the power of the Lord God been revealed?

This seems to indicate that what we have here is a revelation that comes from on high, which is so overwhelming that hardly anyone can believe it. The verses which follow put before the reader and the listener a group which speaks: the assembly. It speaks in the first person plural: *us ... we*. Some would see here an identity between this apparently anonymous collectivity and the 'kings' and 'crowds' noted in the verses above. However, there is some difficulty with this, for nowhere is it revealed that non-believers would come to understand the mysteries of salvation better than the children of revelation. The preceding Canticles have let it be understood that the coming of non-believers to the Covenant is the principal cause of the drama. This unfolds in Palestine and this chapter gives an account of it. The author does not make clear whether the 'assembly' is a representative 'elite' – or, simply the grouping of the Chosen People. The divine revelation will make more clear what the mystery is. It seems to be a liturgical gathering, noted in the Psalms: ... *let us go to where he is waiting and worship at his footstool ... He I will make a horn sprout for David ...* [cf. Ps 132: 6, ff.].

v. 2: like a sapling he grew up in front of us, like a root in arid ground. Without beauty, without majesty, we saw him, no looks to attract our eyes... The mystery is now being presented to those who will have great difficulty in believing it: ... *what panic there would be if you were to understand what it meant...!* [cf. Is 28:19]. The mystery is placed in the perfect tense of the verbs – the wretched servant is compared to a shoot coming up from brambles in the arid desert soil. There might be here a reference to the Messianic stock of David: ... *A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse, a scion thrusts from his roots on him the spirit of the Lord rests ...* [cf. Is 11:1, ff.]. Or, there may be the idea here of the Messiah as the best of the 'vine' of Israel, uprooted from an abundant soul, and brought out into the desert: ... *Let me sing to my friend, the song of his love for his vineyard...* [cf. Is 5:1 +]⁵ The future of Israel is tied to this vine, this root – this is the promised Davidic Dynasty, which will come to new life in the Person of the Savior.

v. 3: ... *a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a man to make people screen their faces; he was despised and we took no account of him ...*

⁵ cf. the JB note of Israel as a vine chosen and then rejected, is found first in Ho 10:1 – and will reappear throughout Jeremiah [2:21; 5:10; 6:9; 12:10; In Ezk 15:1-8; 17:3-10; 19:10-14. Cf. also Ps 80:8-18; Is 27:2-5]. This will come to full growth in Jn 15 – cf. also Dt 32: 32, f.; Si 24:17.

a. This verse prolongs and accentuates the description of the great mystery of 'abasement'. There is a veritable accumulation of expressions indicting rejection. Eye-witnesses are said to turn away from him and this has led to a two-fold interpretation:

- the more common view is that people turn away in horror or disgust from this suffering of the Servant;
- a second view, which might be more in accord with what follows – this Servant hides his own face in accord with an ancient prescription: ... *a man infected with leprosy must wear his clothing torn and his hair disheveled; he must shield his upper lip and cry: Unclean, unclean!* ... [Lv 13:45]. All of this 'elaborate ceremonial' was a signal visible from afar, for the passers-by to keep their distance.

b. There is a tie here with the Psalm of Abandonment experienced by Christ: ... *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me... yet, here am I, now more worm than man, scorn of mankind, jest of the people, all who see me jeer at me, they toss their heads and sneer...* [cf. Ps 22:1, 6, ff.].

v. 4... *and yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours were the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God and brought low ...*

a. This theme of leprosy is prolonged in this verse – in fact, some would translate this: we thought of him as a leper, struck by God and humiliated. The word used here can either mean 'blow', or 'leper': the purification of lepers [cf. Lv 14] is very similar to the purification ritual for sin on *Yom Kippur*: but in place of the scape-goat sent away with the sins of Israel burdened upon it the priest lets fly two birds – or, immolates one and gives the other its freedom – supposedly taking away the leprosy.

b. Leprosy is the terrifying malady considered in ancient times to be a punishment permitted by God for the most horrible crimes:

... The anger of the Lord blazed out at Miriam ...He departed, and as soon as the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam, a leper, white as snow! Aaron looked to her; she had become a leper ... [cf. Nb 12:9, ff.]

... While Uzziah was raging at the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead. They quickly turned him out, and he himself was anxious to go, since the Lord has struck him... [cf. 2 Ch 26:19, ff.].

... Purify me with hyssop until I am clean... [cf. Ps 51:7].

... the priest must offer sacrifices for sin; and perform the rite of atonement for uncleanness over the man who is being purified. After this, he must immolate the holocaust, and send up holocausts and oblations on the altar. When the priest has performed the rite of atonement over him in this way, the man will be clean... [cf. Lv 14:19]

c. The 'leprosy' of the Servant is not to be understood in the literal sense, but rather figuratively. Leprosy is here the symbol of all our spiritual maladies which the servant has willingly assumed.

v. 5 *... he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him, lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed ...*

a. The previous thought is developed here – the Servant makes the offering for our peace by assuming the burden of the sacrifice. Peace and Healing really are messianic goods to come at the end of time.

b. *The one who was pierced:* will be a later prophecy of Zc: ... *They will look on the One whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as for an only child, and weep for him as people weep for a first-born child...*

c. Peter will quote the great paradox about the wounds that will heal, a sure sign of the messianic times.

v. 6: *... We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and the Lord God burdened him with the sins of us all...*

The example of the Good Shepherd presented by the Prophet Ezk seems present here: *... I myself will pasture my sheep ... I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded, and make the weak strong again ... I shall be a true shepherd to them... [cf. Ezk 34:11, ff.].*

v. 7: *... harshly dealt with, he bore it humbly, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers, never opening its mouth ...*

The Servant is presented as enduring the slights and the hurts with meekness. The comparison with the Lamb led to the slaughter-house, of course, is taken from Jeremiah:

... I, for my part, was like a trustful lamb, being led to the slaughter-house, not knowing the schemes they were plotting against me. Let us destroy the tree in

its strength, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name may be quickly forgotten ... [cf. Jr 19:11, ff.].

v. 8: ... by force and by law he was taken; would anyone plead his cause? Yes, he was torn from the land of the living, for our faults struck down in death...

No one seemed to understand what the Servant was about – there seems to be here another reference to Jeremiah – who did not know the schemes they were plotting [cf. Jr 11:19]. The Servant suffers FOR our faults – he was taken on himself the leprosy of others' faults.

v. 9: ... they dug him a grave with the wicked, a tomb with the rich, though he had done no wrong and there had been no perjury in his mouth...

This does present a number of textual difficulties. Some would change the word 'rich' for the 'wicked' – others wonder if there is not some prophecy here of the royal burial of Jesus. [There is a *motif* of kingship throughout the Johannine Passion.

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The Triumph [vv. 10-12]

Presentation: the Servant is now to be rewarded for his heroic generosity, and this may have been introduced in one interpretation of v. 9: *a tomb with the rich*, although this is not accepted by all.

v. 10: The Lord has been pleased to crush him with suffering. If he offers his life in atonement [asham], he shall see heirs, he shall have a long life and through him what the Lord God wills, shall be done.

a. This verse shows that the sufferings of the Servant have not been in vain. They cannot totally be explained by the hatred of his fellow human beings, but all of this must be read from the perspective of a divine plan, that has freely been accepted. The death of the Servant has had the effect of an expiatory sacrifice, which the Servant has offered of his own free will. *Asham* as is known, is a technical term from the 'P Tradent'ⁱ, and it means the sacrifice of reparation which is offered after a fault, which might even have been 'involuntary': ... *this is how the priest is to perform the rite of atonement over the man, and he will be forgiven...* [cf. Lv 5:15].

b. Furthermore, this *asham* denotes in particular that sacrifice imposed on lepers whom the priests have discerned to have been delivered from their malady: ... *there is a law to be applied to a leper on the day he is purified ...* [Lv 14:1-32]. The Victim that is offered in substitution should be a lamb to be immolated: ... *Then he must take one of the lambs and offer it as a sacrifice of reparation ... if he is poor and*

cannot afford all this, he need only take one lamb, the one for the sacrifice of reparation ... [cf. vv. 12, 21].

2 These verses are sometimes interpreted as meaning the voluntary penal substitution.

v. 11: So many aspects of these verses are vague and mysterious, and this may even have been the knowing choice of the unknown author of these lines. There are various references to a posterity following after the Servant [cf. the preceding verse: *... he shall see his heirs ...* - and now here]: *... His soul's anguish is over; he shall see the light and be content. By his sufferings shall My Servant justify many, taking their faults on himself ...*

a. The 'posterity' will evidently be 'spiritual'. The plan of God will prosper because of the Servant. Similar things have been said earlier with reference to Cyrus: *... He will fulfill My whole purpose ... [44:28] - ... I have spoken and summoned him, and prospered his plans... [48: 14, f.].*

b. There are those who interpret 'light' as the Servant coming to life anew. He will be restored into full happiness.

c. As the words of God had introduced this Fourth Canticle [cf. Is 52:13-53:12] – now God speaks once more in praise of His Servant's 'service', that he has 'justified', served the multitudes. Some would translate the word 'sufferings' in v. 11 as justifying the multitudes, as 'doctrine', 'knowledge'. [cf. JB footnote].

v.12: *...Hence, I will grant whole hordes for his tribute, he shall divide his spoils with the mighty, for surrendering himself to death and letting himself be taken for a sinner, while he was bearing our faults, those of many, and praying all the while for sinners...*

a. This final line of the Canticle continues the contrast between the glory that has come to the Servant after the terrible humiliation. The promise of the numerous 'spiritual progeny' continues here. The 'high and the mighty' will all be a part of the 'spoils' of the Servant – it seems to mean that the spiritual empire of the Servant will extend further than all the conquered territories of the great military achievements.

b. One more time the Prophet returns to the theme of the death and humiliations of the Servant: *... he will pray all the while for sinners.* This is the perpetual role of mediation by the eternal Servant of the Father.⁶

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⁶ Cf. Feuillet, *Ancien Testament ...* Paris: Gabalda 1975, o.c., pp. 132-138, *passim*.

B. DOCTRINAL REFLECTIONS ON GETHSEMANE

[I] Enrichment for Spirituality

Introduction

[1] Jesus Christ took on Himself the sufferings and sins of the world. Therefore, the problem of evil can be looked at from various points of view: the great mystery of human pain, and the continued proliferation of sin and malicious evil. In coming to grips with this, modern theology ponders deeply the Mystery of the Cross and its ramifications evening the life of the Most Blessed Trinity.⁷

[2] The Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane signify fundamentally the same truth. All three in substance relate: even before the physical tortures of the Passion were underway, Jesus was suddenly plunged into the deepest, over-whelming anguish. This sudden agony seems to have been in violent contrast with His previous state of mind.

[a] reflecting on this mystery, with the aid of other biblical data, it can be noted that the words used by the Evangelists to describe this extraordinary Agony, give the distinct impression that what Jesus endured in the Garden was not merely for fear of His own life. What happened in Gethsemane is more the extraordinary revelation of the contact of the All Holy with sin. Gethsemane for Jesus was a messianic trial – in fact, this is the culmination of His entire Messianic Mission. This Mission had been inaugurated at the very beginning of His public life, in the two scenes that are intimately connected among themselves and with Gethsemane: Baptism and the temptations.

[b] Therefore, by common accord, the Gethsemane accounts clearly suggest, on close analysis, that the trial of Jesus in Gethsemane is far more than human fear and anguish. Any unfavorable comparison with the ‘calm death’ of Socrates would not stand up, when one reflects on the Mystery of Gethsemane, with the aid of OT texts, and the understanding of what this mystery of the agony rally means. Socrates died stoically for a principle – while Jesus died for the salvation of the entire world.

[c] The abandonment on the part of His Father in no way indicates Jesus’ separation from the divinity in the constitution of His being, His human nature hypostatically united to the divinity. This was never suspended.

⁷ J. Moltmann, *the Crucified God*; J. Galot, SJ, *Il mistero della sofferenza in Dio*. Assisi: Cittadella 1975.

[d] From a careful exegesis, the theologian is taught that the whole mystery is intimately tied in with the mystery of human iniquity. Sin is expiated by the death of Jesus – for the One Who suffers here is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Jesus of Gethsemane and the Passion in general is the fulfillment of the Servant of Isaiah prophecy [cf. Is 53] and Dn's Son of Man.

[e] The accounts of Gethsemane further show that this Agony of Jesus in Gethsemane is presented as inseparable from the release without precedent, of the forces of evil. This terrible trial Jesus conquers by His vigilant prayer and abandonment to the Father's Will.

[3] The few lines from Heb [5:7, ff.] might be read as a reflection on the Mystery of Gethsemane. A contemplation on these verses would indicate that the prayer of Jesus had a two-fold intention:

- one was conditional, which concerned Jesus personally: *IF it is possible, let this Cup pass*;
- the other was absolute, and had as its object the divine plan of salvation. This prayer, which expresses what constitutes Jesus, was fully heard. In His struggle, and as the terrible passion looms before Him, Jesus makes an unreserved act of abandonment to the will of His Heavenly Father. Jesus never takes this back.

[4] Even the OT shows a God 'wounded' by the refusal of humanity to choose Him over sin. It shows God almost 'suffering' and yet so full of kindness, slow to anger [cf. Ex 34:6; Ps 103], that the Plan of Redemption gradually is unveiled. It is the sharing of divine love, that will liberate humanity from slavery to sin.

[a] Jesus in His Passion, and first of all, in His Agony in Gethsemane, shows Himself frightfully vulnerable. Motivated by the love of God, He endured in the name of all of humanity, the price of redemption. In His full acceptance of the Father's Plan for redemption, Jesus won for humanity their full acceptance by God.

[b] In the last of the Servant Poems, he is compared perhaps to a leper [cf. Is 53:3, ff.]. We find a prophecy of Jesus in this, livid and bruised for our iniquities, the sins of the world – but, by His wounds, ours are healed [cf. Is 53:4, ff.].

[c] Jesus is also the fulfillment of Ps 69, a lament - *...more people hate me for no reason that I have hairs on my head...!* [cf. v. 4]. This lament was traditionally applied to the Messiah. The Ps presents a just person who suffers unfairly – he describes himself as sinking into the swamp.

[d] Therefore, whether it is the comparison to leprosy, or that of being buried in the mud – symbols of the sins of humanity – Jesus is overwhelmed by the mystery of evil, beginning in Gethsemane, culminating on the Cross, but emerging victoriously in the Resurrection.

[5] There is really no parallel in human history that can stand up to this unique situation. Early Christianity did find something of a parallel in Socrates. His death did represent a message of hope and a lesson for his admirers. It is said that Plato took inspiration from Socrates in the description of the just man. However, in the final analysis, Socrates died in a way for his own principles, and the 'just man', unfairly treated, as presented by Plato, remains an example of moral goodness. Yet, no other human has ever 're-capitulated' all of humanity in himself: by His unique graces, Jesus is the Head of the human race. No other death would have any claim on transforming deep within the spiritual situation of human beings. All of humanity was 'condensed' in Jesus Christ. The whole People of God were reduced to Him alone in Gethsemane – from this grain of wheat that went into the ground and died, the New Israel is born.

[6] Yet, along with their fundamental agreement concerning the Mystery of Gethsemane, the Synoptic accounts of the Agony in the Garden are not mere useless repetitions. All of the events of the life of Jesus manifest such a richness that no human description of the expression of them would ever exhaust the mystery. The different evangelists made no pretension of exhausting the meaning of the mystery they were treating. Each one of them concentrated on certain aspects, contemplating various doctrinal realities in their presentation. A prayerful study of each one of them allows the careful reader to penetrate the more the doctrinal perspectives proper to each of the evangelists. A superficial reading might lead one to think that they are all saying the same thing.

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1. Matthew: his account espouses in full the general orientation of his Gospel: the Gethsemane account is eminently ecclesial. In this account, there seem to be intentional reference to the *Our Father*, that prayer, *par excellence*, of the Christian community as it is turned toward the Heavenly Father. Jesus lived this prayer as He communicated it to others.

a. In Mt [cf. 26:36] one may see at least a veiled reference to the heroic sacrifice of Abraham [cf. Gn 22:5]. The heroic abandonment of the aged Patriarch then became the standard, the model for the true People of God. Each believer, each of the faithful is invited to recall how Abraham represented the beginning of the People of Israel, the Chosen People of God. When all had run away, Jesus alone

remains as the only one left of the authentic people of God. The New People of God would be born from Him.

b. Mt's Gethsemane account brings out graphically the BEING WITH Jesus in the terrible encounter with the ordeal. Twice in the relatively brief Gethsemane account Jesus tells His disciples: *Watch with Me ... Could you not watch with Me one hour...?* [26:38-40]. The coming of Jesus into this world signifies that God is fulfilling the prophecy of *Emmanuel* – God truly wills to be with his people, so much so that He set up His tabernacle among us. However, this being with His People on the part of God is also an invitation for some kind of a response. The disciples also have to make their decision to be with Jesus. For this reason, Jesus has established a Church, making Himself One with the world of humanity, to reconcile its sinfulness with God. Mt's invitation is that the disciples remain close to the Church, which is called to continue His Mission in time. The disciple is called to give him/ herself entirely to the Church, its prayer and its mission, contemplating her teachings, and bringing results of that contemplation to the far ends of the world.

2. Mark: the second Gospel is not as ecclesial, but the evangelist's approach is more Christological. Jesus is always presented as a kind of epiphany of Messianic Power. In His divinity, Jesus is a proclamation of the scandal of the Cross – the tragedy is that this transcendent Messiah has to come to know the terrible humiliation and a shameful death. Mk takes special pains to bring out repeatedly all through His Gospel that the revelation brought by Jesus concerning the mystery of His own Person always runs up against the lack of comprehension by His Chosen Ones.

a. Gethsemane constitutes the summit of this revelation and this total lack of comprehension. The Hour of Jesus has come [cf. 14:35]. It is even implied that the Passion of Jesus serves as a kind of anticipation of this judgment. This is an expiating anticipation, suffered by this Son of Man, who will judge humanity at the end of time.

b. Even the three specially chosen, privileged disciples – the same ones who had witnessed the Transfiguration – remain closed to this mystery unfolding before their very eyes. In the Garden of Olives, Jesus comes when unexpected, just as He will come to humanity, at the end of time. The warning for the disciples of all time is that these disciples in Gethsemane were asleep when He came [cf. 13: 33-37]. In bringing out so emphatically the lack of comprehension of the disciples, Mk expresses consciously a lesson of relying on their strengths alone, to accept divine revelation, and most particularly, the whole Mystery of the Passion and Death.

c. The Christians of all time will be invited to return to this teaching of Mk. The mystery of the Suffering Servant will always be a kind of stumbling block, a scandal, a stupidity, a folly [cf. 1 Co 1:23]. No one will ever be able to fathom this mystery unaided – and even with the elevation of grace and the theological life, no one will ever be able to comprehend this extraordinary mystery of the theological life, no one will ever be able to comprehend the extraordinary mystery of the weakness of God., His love for humanity, expressed in such poignant terms, from Gethsemane on, in a particular manner. In this sense, in our own times, the account of Mk merits its own particular reflection.

3. Luke: is both Ecclesial and Christological:

a. The Gospel: the Christology and ecclesial perspectives of Lk are particular to him. To come to grips with the profound message of Lk, it might be helpful to keep these factors in mind:

- In this third Gospel, no disassociation may be made from Ac. These two books really constitute a single work in two volumes. The object of the Lucan message is salvation obtained by God for the world, the New Israel, in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- Lk has made a personal conception of Salvation History, in three stages:
 - the time before Christ;
 - the time of Christ;
 - the time of the Church – covered in Ac.

These three 'times' follow the same plan: the time of Jesus is the central one in the triptych: this central scene is the recipient of all that went before, and the mirror or open window on all that will come in the future.

b. The Acts of the Apostles: in conformity with this idea, the Agony of Gethsemane in the 3rd Gospel appears at the central scene in the mystery of salvation. All the sufferings of the Prophets and the Just, the *anawim* of the OT, simply announced those of Jesus – and all the sufferings that follow – beginning with the martyrdom of Stephen – reflect those of Jesus, and are united with His. The martyrdom of Stephen, the apostolic sufferings of Paul, his and Peter's martyrdoms: in all of this, the early Church is called to contemplate what it means to be *baptized INTO Jesus Christ*. In Lk's eyes, Jesus is not merely the most perfect martyr – He is the King of them all, in that in them, all other human beings take strength to endure

whatever it is that discipleship holds in store for them: that of living and dying for the reign of God.

4. Modern exegesis: has contributed immensely to the deeper understanding of these Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane. With the passing of time, and with notable success in our own, the theological exploration of Sacred Scripture has moved with impelling power.

a. The mystical and spiritual writers of the ages have pondered often on this mystery of Gethsemane, and often with great imagination and inspired insight. Modern research has confirmed many of these mystical insights and deepened them even further.

b. The scientific study of Scripture demands great effort and talent on the part of these exegetes. It imposes great sacrifices on them, and long and hard study. Occasionally, one hears that it hardly seems worth the while to go into all this complicated explanation of the Scriptures and that in the past, the Scriptures were read with profit, without bringing up all kinds of troubling and challenging questions.

c. Such reasoning, though, would simply deny one of the fundamental characteristics of the Word of God: its vitality, seeking to be understood, to challenge toward conversion. Precisely because it is God's own word, each age is invited to fathom it, to contemplate, study and experience, in and through fidelity to the Magisterium [DV 8]. This concerted effort in our own time is bearing much fruit.

d. Speculative theology finds itself at the point of encounter between these great biblical discoveries and the application of philosophy. One of the modern accusations is that the theology of the past was not biblical enough. And it can be admitted that sometimes speculative theology found itself referring its own system of rational speculation over the impelling data of God's own word. Today's tendency is the opposite: the emphasis seems to an almost unilateral biblical approach, along with the sociological background of today's world situation. Theology will always seek to understand the faith – and faith seeks to be grasped intellectually and translated morally, spiritually into daily life.

e. The Mystery of Gethsemane makes its strong appeal in every age to those who strive to fathom the terrible reality of human pain. In our own time with all of the immense and laudable developments, the riddle of pain remains one of the most perplexing of all. In our own time, Gethsemane also makes a strong appeal to those who experience the terrible Dark Night of powerlessness – the apparent endlessness of mental struggles – the terrible fears for the future. While many might echo the prayer of Jesus that if it is possible, all of 'this' might pass – the lesson of

Gethsemane will always remain that each follower of Jesus Christ is called to address the Act of Total Abandonment to the Father, this lived lesson of the *Our Father* and Mary's *Fiat*: it cannot be as we might will, but as the Lord God wills!⁸

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[II] The Mystery of Christ's Suffering and that of Humanity

1. The problem of human suffering 'embarrasses' the well planned order of Creation, as well as the technological advances of our time. In this perplexing torment of humanity, the need of a sound 'philosophy', an intelligible 'mind-set' to meet what 'is' – and even more, of a profound biblical contemplation, show themselves to be of the utmost importance. In our faith, we believe that divine revelation – understood in its global message, culminating in the Person of Jesus Christ, is the ultimate explanation of human life.

2. As part of our contemplation of Gethsemane, some coming to grips with this mystery of human suffering seems to be in order. All the more perplexing is the mystery when it is human suffering, or the slaughter of the innocents of today, commemorated liturgically so soon after the hope-filled, joyous Good News of the Nativity of the Savior, Lord, of the world.

a. Some attempts to explain' human suffering are the following;

- suffering does remain an 'evil', and should be alleviated at all costs;
- nonetheless, it can afford one the possibility of deepening his/ her understanding of the human condition. In this sense, suffering is the school of God –it enables one to progress in the understanding of the sublime Mystery of God. Suffering, therefore, is *paideia*, it can afford a *certain wisdom*;
- suffering purifies, it is redemptive;
 - it enriches, bringing one into an ever greater solidarity with most others: it can deepen one's relationship with humanity and its Savior;
 - it can also open one up toward eschatological contemplation: we do not have here a lasting home.

⁸ For these pages of the notes, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Getsemane*. Paris: Gabalda, pp. 230, ff., *passim*.

b. Philosophy advances the rather surprising statement that evil in general is not simple absence, but it is a deprivation of a good that should be found in being. Considered as a privation, then, evil does not 'exist' for some philosophers. Yet, anyone who confronts it has a profound experience of this deprivation. Corporal suffering, moral pain, crowned then with death, are among the most terrible realities that human beings have to face. Certain sufferings have led to rebellion, the loss of faith. The problem of massive evil of the innocent provokes terrible questions for thinking humanity.⁹

c. In a lived experience, the philosophical idea that evil is really an absence, and that it does not have an efficient, but only a deficient cause, would not offer much consolation. In our faith, we do believe that God is not the cause of evil.

3. Abraham Heschel: this Jewish rabbi has made serious attempts to come to grips with the problem - the Rabbi's beautiful studies have made a contribution of understanding *pathos* in God, as in his *The Prophets*:

... Impressive as is the thought that God is too sublime to be affected by events on this insignificant planet, it stems from a line of reasoning about a God derived from abstraction. A god of abstraction is high and mighty, First Cause, which, dwelling in the lonely splendor of eternity, will never be open to human prayer; and to be affected by anything which it has itself caused to come into being, would be beneath the dignity of an abstract God. This is a dogmatic sort of dignity, insisting upon pride rather than love, upon decorum, rather than mercy.

... In contrast with the *primum movens immobile*, the God of the Prophets cares for His creatures, and His thoughts are about the world. He is involved in human history and is affected by human acts. It is a paradox beyond compare, that the Eternal God is concerned with what is happening in time [cf. Is 53:5]. The grandeur of God implies the capacity to experience emotion. In the biblical outlook, movements of feeling are no less spiritual than acts of thought...¹⁰

4. The Book of Job: is consecrated to the Wisdom Tradition and the struggle with the problem of evil, the suffering of the innocent. The conclusion, at least a partial one – is the fact that human reasoning, even that steeped in sacred Scripture, can never appease certain human sufferings: *For huge as the sea is your affliction, who can possibly cure you...?* [cf. Lm 2:13].

⁹ cf. Elie Weisel, *The Night*.

¹⁰ cf. *The Prophets*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, pp. 259. cf. also 'The Theology of Pathos', o.c., pp. 221, ff.]

a. In extremely bold language, Job [and others] curse the day of his birth [cf. Jn 3:1, ff.]. His friends try to calm him down, using the traditional explanations, often based on earlier divine revelation. However, Job still cannot understand his situation. His revolting situation is no way alleviated. Suffering remains, humanly speaking an intolerable enigma, if one expects that his/ her explanations of it are meant to alleviate it. It is a common human experience that human beings are powerless to offer consolation in the times of terrible distress. This is a drama of salvation that goes on between the individual sufferer and God: hope is that virtue by which the individual meets his/ her human limitations, by abandoning one's existence into the hands of God.

b. The Book of Job has been read with immense profit through the ages: for the suffering and distress of the innocent continue to plague human consciousness. Job boldly proclaims the emptiness of all human reasoning to the learned of his own time, and of all times:

... How often have I heard all this before! What sorry comforts you are! Is there never to be an end to your airy words? What a plague your need to have the last word is! I, too, could talk like you, were your soul in this plight of mine. I, too, could overwhelm you with sermons ... and speak words of encouragement until my lips grow tired. But, while I am speaking, my suffering remains –and when I am not, do I suffer any the less? And now ill-will drives me to distraction ... [cf. Jb 16:1, ff.]

b. One astonishing aspect of Job is that even after these 'tirades' of Job, God still seems to respond. While the divine answers are not directly in response to the problem of suffering, neither are they abstract reflections on the beauty of creation. It is still necessary that even the sufferer admit that he/ she may be talking more out of ignorance [cf. Jb 38-41]. If there is any divine condemnation, it might be more those who would try to offer consolation from their own position of strength. To be pardoned, they have to appeal to the one who has suffered: *... I burn with anger against you and your two friends, for not speaking truthfully about Me as My servant Job has done ... he will offer prayers for you... [Jb 42:7, ff.]*

5. The Jerusalem Bible: would associated Job with the Suffering Servant of Yahweh [cf. Is 53]. In truth, the image of Job is only one type of the future Passion and Death of the Lord. What they may have in common is that their trial as made their intercession efficacious. Both of these OT figures indicate clearly that God is close to His Suffering Servants. He is part of their human experience. The abyss of creature-hood calls out to the best of human minds and hearts, for coming to a greater sense of solidarity with the world.

6. The extremely cruel situation experienced by Jeremiah is also among the OT attempts at an explanation. It is possible, at least in the view of some interpreters, that Is 53 reflects the recently martyred Jeremiah. There are great comparisons that might be made between Jeremiah and Job:

- Jr 20:14-18 and Jb 3:1-16; 10:18, ff.;
- Jr 12:1-13 and Jb 21: 7, ff.

Job seems to echo the complaints of Jr: ... *My brothers have been fickle as a torrent, as the course of a season stream* ... [cf. Jb 6:15; Jr 15:18] - applied to God.

7. The People of God needed the NT revelation to take them further along this unveiling of the mystery of human pain:

a. However, it should be noted from the outset that the Son of God did not become incarnate simply to solve the riddle of human suffering, or to give some explanation for it. The Incarnation is much more the revelation of divine love, in response to human need – but, basically, it is inspired by absolutely sovereign love.

b. It is true that the God of love *set up His tabernacle among us*, and is like us, in all things, save sin. The Lord has become part of the immense tragedy of human history, bringing to a sanctifying and elevating sublimation.

c. St. Augustine offers an extraordinary insight [although his authorship is doubted by some] in a commentary on the Good Thief. He manifests astonishment that the Good Thief could have recognized the Savior of the world, hanging from a Cross, sharing his wretched fate. His ‘recognition’ of Jesus does not come so much from the studies of the Sages, but far more from the recognition that Jesus gave to him sharing his fate: Jesus had looked at him, and in His look, the Good thief understood!. The Good Thief was able to ‘see’ what had been denied Jeremiah. He is thus offered as a ‘model’ for all suffering Christians and human beings in general. In their trials, human beings are never alone. Baptism gives us the relationship in order to be crucified with Jesus – this does not mean: ‘along-side of’, nor, merely ‘in the company of’. This was the situation of the Good Thief. In Baptism we are indeed configured to Jesus Christ, and truly live in Him, and He in us. The Christ of the Agony of Gethsemane and of Golgotha has made His ‘own’ all the sufferings of all times. He is mysteriously ‘present’ in the joys and anguish of His people. Jesus gives to all suffering, all life and all death – a particular meaning and immense value.

8. It is true that with the coming of Jesus Christ, the NT offers an incomparably richer teaching on the sufferings of human beings, far beyond the most sublime heights of the OT. However, far more than this, the NT places one in intimate

personal contact with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and truly man. the Jesus of Gethsemane and Calvary is in some way united to every human being [cf. GS 22] – and invites each person to respond to this coming of His into our world. In a good sense, it can truly be stated that all the physical sufferings and the moral agony of human beings are present to Jesus in His own Agony.

a. The OT Psalms that treat of the anonymous Just persons who have suffered throughout the OT centuries of preparation, all culminate in the Person of Jesus Christ. They were all figures preparing the way for the Suffering servant/Messiah, Who would take the burdens of the world and all its wounds into His own life. Beginning perhaps with the ‘peak’ point of OT suffering, the Servant Poems with extraordinary clairvoyance speak of One Who was yet to come, Who would make of His own life the *asham*, the atonement holocaust [cf. Is 53:10].

b. This Servant has taken on Himself our maladies [cf. Is 53:4: perhaps the full meaning of these *maladies* would be that the word serves as a figure for sin]. The Prophet is thinking that this Servant is taking upon Himself the faults of humanity, was being charged at the same time with their suffering. The over-all biblical idea of suffering is that it does have some connection with sin, either the originating change of orientation, or actual sin. But, this does not mean that all human suffering is punishment for some specific sin.

c. Is 53 [according to A. Eichrodt] indicates basically the ultimate messianic victory. The Servant promises the definitive victory for humanity’s over-all suffering, all sin. The ‘*Proto-evangelium*’ has already promised this victory, when the serpent would be defeated [cf. Gn 3:15].

9. The total victory of Jesus over sin, suffering and death, was already anticipated in various ways during His public life.

a. this victory implies a break with sin [cf. Mk 2:1-2, par.; Lk 7:36-59]. Forgiveness of sin is made manifest in seeing a lame person walk – seeing this, it may be easy to believe that sin has been forgiven. The miracles He performed were also signs, teaching expressions. The miracle indicated the power Jesus had to pardon. All His miracles are bound intimately to His message. They express the deeper meaning of His coming; they are the reign of God in act.

b. In healing the sick and in raising the dead, the implication is that the redeemer has taken on human suffering and has conquered it. Sickness and death came into this world through sin – by manifesting His absolute power over them, Jesus reveals his power also over sin, which caused them.

c. In the presence of Jesus, death loses its terrifying aspect. It is almost like a 'sleep' [cf. Mk 5:39; Jn 11:11-15].

1.] There is a special text from Mt [cf. 8:16, f.] which applies a line from the Suffering Servant to Jesus: ... *Ours were the sufferings He bore, ours the sorrows He carried* [cf. Is 53:4] ... *through His wounds, we are healed* ... [v.5].

- ... *That evening they brought Him many who were possessed by devils. He cast out the spirits with a word and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah ... He took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us...*
- The translation found here in Mt is from the LXX which translates 'sins' rather than 'sickness'. It would seem that Mt has taken this translation directly from the Hebrew. Mt does not use the words sicknesses and diseases anywhere as a euphemism to designate the sins of humans. From this, some would conclude that perhaps the idea behind Isaiah's original text of Is 53:4, the Prophet really meant our sicknesses, our physical, and mental, sufferings.

2.] This interpretation of what the Suffering Servant bore offered by Mt seems somewhat surprising. It would not seem to be enough to state that Jesus 'took on' our sufferings in this context, merely by some kind of a mental act of 'sympathy'. It is not enough to say either, it would seem, that the motivating force moving Jesus to heal was that He 'felt sorry' for those who suffered.

3.] A deeper insight might be the fact that in every suffering human being, there is the face of Christ. Mt's interpretation of Is offers a profound theological reality. Jesus, the Suffering Servant, has come to take on Himself the expiation of all sin. Furthermore, He also comes to alleviate the terrible effects of all sin. Jesus has come to 'heal'. The prophecy may already be present in Is 53:4 – Jesus will also become 'one' with all suffering humanity.

10. A statement in Mt [cf. 23:24-36; cf. also Lk 11:49-51] speaks of the suffering of the innocent: ... *this is why, in My turn, I am sending you the prophets and wise men and scribes: you will slaughter and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and hunt from town to town...*

a. In Lk's perspective of the Agony of Gethsemane, there was implied the union in Christ of the Prophets of all ages, as well as the anonymous innocent just through the OT centuries. All the innocent blood from the beginning of the world,

from Abel on down, is re-dressed in the terrible Agony and the ultimate glorious victory of Jesus Christ in the resurrection.

b. Lk places the Passion of Christ at the center of religious history of humanity, and sees it as the example and the source for the martyrs of all the subsequent ages, as well as for all those who preceded Him.

c. These reflections would lead almost of necessity to the Servant of is 53 –the culminating pet of both the Martyrs and the prophets of the OT, a kind of idealized Jeremiah. The Agony of the OT centuries finds an extraordinary model in the Servant of the Lord.

d. The Passion of the Servant seems to be some kind of synthesis of the prophetic movement that preceded him – and perhaps a kind of type for the martyrdom spirituality [cf. Maccabees] which followed him. The Servant himself was the Covenant, and also the atonement offering the expiatory sacrifice. His offering would have an unheard of fecundity for sinful humanity. His oblation would be of immense messianic benefit for the perfect reconciliation with God.

11. The Apocalypse: is to be read in a similar way as this text of Mt [cf. 23:34-36], but with a broader perspective, Keeping in mind its strictly eschatological orientation, it offers a complement to the Gospel perspective. All the blood of the anonymous just, shed so unfairly even to the end of the world, all the unjust sufferings that have ever been endured are now, or ever will be – of all innocent victims, are recapitulated in Jesus Christ, the suffering messiah, the Immolated Lamb, prior to the beginning of the world. All the despotic powers [symbolized perhaps by the prostitute, Babylon] that will ever shed innocent blood, all of these innocent victims can find their redress in the Lord Jesus Christ, ascended now to the right hand of the Father. John uses the technical word *immolated*: to describe the Passion of the Lamb, but also that of all the other victims who have innocently suffered [cf. Rv 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8; 18:24].

Summary

[1] Christian reflection sees a two-fold participation in the sufferings of Jesus Christ:

- the freely chosen, accepted participation in the sufferings of Christ: effort to be associated with their Master;
- the involuntary participation of so many who have to suffer without ever striving to understand the mystery that overwhelms them.

[2] The saints of all ages have entered into this mystery, willingly trying to offer themselves in union with Christ, striving to penetrate the mystery of His Person and Mission. In their minds and hearts, these believers through the centuries have made the conscious choice to renew their Baptism of being immersed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Agony of their minds and bodies, in the abyss of their apparent dereliction, in faith, they cling to their privileged heritage. The Beatitude announced by Jesus Himself: ... *Blessed are those who suffer persecution for My sake* ... These words and the belief that in some mysterious manner, all suffering is a closer imitation of the life of Jesus, sustain so many.

[3] Those who experience this terrible Night – the apparently endless spiritual winter, those who seem to have been reprov'd in their entire earthly existence [cf. Kafka's *trial*] – are, in faith, called to share in the destiny, to drink from the same Cup as the Lord Jesus.

[4] The redemption of Jesus is indeed already complete. The price of salvation has been paid in the death of Jesus. As Head of the human race, Jesus has recapitulated in Himself all the sufferings of all human beings. In the mysterious divine will, humanity has not been 'dispensed' from suffering to win its own redemption. However, the mystery of Jesus has made all sufferings meritorious of eternal life. Those who do suffer are never really alone.

[5] All human sufferings in some way have already been experienced in the life of Jesus. By the grace of the theological life, all human existence comes to share intimately in the very life of Jesus. Human suffering is a con-crucifixion, leading toward a con-resurrection. The People of God are redeemed and then are called to participate in this mystery of redemption, communicating, sharing it, in each passing age. The Cross of Christ remains central to Christianity: *Ave Crux, spes unica!*¹¹

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[III] Gethsemane and Moral Evil

1. Of, perhaps, even greater complexity, is the human evil that is chosen. It has often been stated that our age is unique, also because of the loss of the consciousness of sin, in massive and profound proportions. The Agony of Gethsemane reveals a sublime mystery: basically, that of the divine love toward humanity. But, at the same time, it reveals the reality of sin in dramatic manner. Humanity is deeply moved by leprosy, cancer, paralysis, tragedies of all kinds: often

¹¹ For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*. ib., pp. 238-248, *passim*.

the effects of sin, when it is violence, are deplored – whereas, the mystery of iniquity is largely ignored.

2. Plato offered a profound insight when he stated: the just person might be subjected to poverty, to maladies, or other misfortunes. However, the very misfortunes might even prove to have been, in the long run, a good. For anyone who wishes with all his might to be just, cultivates virtues, becomes similar to God, in so far as this is possible for a human being. Plato maintained that it is a far greater evil to commit an injustice than to suffer one.

3. The Greeks had a rather bland sense of sin - even though Pilate, on this point, might have gone further than even Aristotle.

4. It is really only with divine revelation, through firm faith in the one God, Creator of the universe, that one comes to understand that by sin, a human being rebels against God. In so doing, the creature revolts against the Creator, the author of order, and destroys in oneself, in so far as this is possible, the purpose for which God has destined all of creation [Gilson].

a. The revealed concept of sin stems from the unfolding of the divine plan for creation. In creating a hierarchy of values, humanity alone was made to the image and likeness of God. The Creator lavishly bestowed His gifts on His specially chosen creatures. When humanity turned from God, He immediately promised a redeemer – and, in the fullness of time, the Savior came, co-equal, co-eternal, with God, His beloved Son.

b. It is in this revelation that humanity comes to understand its mysterious grandeur, despite its innate misery: made from the dust of the earth, but also by the hand of God. ‘Sin’ is an enormous deviation in that it eliminates grace, and the possibility of eternal glory.

5. The perplexing problem for faith in this regard also stems from the fact that Jesus has come, has saved the world, by conquering sin and death. Faith teaches that His redemption is universal and efficacious in a sovereign manner. In this context, the problem of willful evil presents many difficulties to simple faith.

a. In any discussion on sin, or evil, traditionally philosophy has separated God from any ‘causality’ in it. As Sovereign God, God is in no way responsible for human sin. In the order of nature, He could will, permit, physical maladies and sufferings for the sake of a more perfect good. But, there can be no association of God with moral evil. Traditionally, it is taught that God may ‘permit’ it – as is noted in the Holy Saturday liturgy: ‘happy fault which merited such a redeemer!’. The sole

cause of sin is the ill use of the outstanding privilege that God has given to humanity in creation. One of the great gifts that God has bestowed is the faculty of adhering, or not, to the Will of God.

b. Three extremely difficult questions continue to plague the thinker of faith:

1.] THE INCREASING PROLIFERATION OF EVIL: With Jesus' total victory over sin and death, how does one explain the apparent endless, increasing proliferation of evil, violence, injustice? It seems as though the expiating and redemptive intervention of Jesus had never occurred. There are those who conclude that we are now living in a post-Christian era.

In mystical literature, classical as well as the more modern, there is profound regret that humanity is not more open to the advances of divine love. In the Ignatian charism, the *sentire cum Ecclesia*, the association with the Church in her struggle to become more and more the reign of God, opens broad horizons for an ecclesial spirituality. The revealed message is full of realistic hope: *where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more* [Rm 5:20]. Whatever the actual situation of society responding to the broad variations of view of those who even reflect on it, through it all, is the merciful love of God. Gethsemane reveals the horror for sin – and even more, the universal extension of divine mercy. In general, there are the usual extremes:

- Exaggerated Optimism: this is sometimes manifested in the non-biblical understanding of divine mercy. There is repeated insistence throughout Scripture on the pressing need of conversion – the demands of a jealous God. In recent times, the whole dogmatic question of the last ends of humanity has been much under discussion:

Vatican II: '...Since we do not know the day, or the hour, on our Lord's advice, we must constantly stand guard. Thus, when we have finished the one and only course of our earthly life [cf. Heb 9:27], we may merit to enter into the marriage feast with Him to be numbered among the blessed [cf. Mt 25:31-46]. Thus we may not be commanded to go into eternal fire [cf. Mt 25:41], like the wicked and slothful servant [cf. Mt 25:26], into the exterior darkness where *there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth*'... [cf. Mt 22:13; 25:30] [LG 48].

A Recent Letter on Eschatology: *Recentiores Episcoporum Synodi*, May 17, 1979: '... The more recent Synods, consecrated respectively to the themes of evangelization and catechesis, has taken cognizance of the fact of the necessity of a perfect fidelity to the fundamental truths of the faith ... the Church, in faithful adherence to the NT and to Tradition, believes in the happiness of the

just, who will one day be with Christ... She also believes that an eternal punishment awaits the sinner, who will be deprived from the vision of God, as well as the repercussion of this punishment in the whole being of the sinner ...She believes in what pertains to the Elect, in their eventual purification which is preliminary to the vision of God. This purification, however, is totally different from the punishment of the condemned. This is what the Church means when she speaks of hell and purgatory...¹²

Hence, it would not be in accord with the 'integral teaching' of the Church to maintain that the humiliation of death alone – or, the sufferings inherent in the human condition alone – are sufficient to merit eternal life. Nor is it in accord with her traditional belief and authoritative interpretation of the divine word, that God is merciful and would forgive all. The condition of conversion remains an essential part of the Covenant of God's Mercy.

- Exaggerated Pessimism: there is always the temptation to see all of life in an extremely bleak manner – the 'Catholic' view is different as noted by the Holy Father's reflection on Gethsemane:

... The events of Good Friday and, even before that, the Prayer in Gethsemane, introduce a fundamental change into the whole course of the revelation of love and mercy in the messianic mission of Christ. The one who 'went about doing good and healing' [cf. Ac 10:38], and 'curing every sickness and disease', now Himself seems to merit the greatest mercy and to appeal for mercy, when He is arrested, abused, condemned, scourged, crowned with thorns, when He is nailed to the Cross and dies amidst agonizing torments [cf. Mt 9:35] ... Christ, as the man who suffers really in a terrible way in the Garden of Olives and on Calvary, addresses Himself to the Father – that Father whose love He has preached to the people, to Whose Mercy He has borne witness through all of His activity ... Indeed, this redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and love, since justice is based on love and tends toward it ... In the Passion and Death of Christ – in the fact that the father did not spare His own Son, but 'for our sake made Him sin' [cf. 2 Co 5:21] – absolute justice is expressed – for Christ undergoes the Passion and the Cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes a super-abundance of justice, for the sins of men are 'compensated by the sacrifice of the Man – God.

¹² *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 6, ## 1528, ff., & 1543.

Nevertheless, this justice which is properly justice ‘to God’s measure’, springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love. Precisely for this reason, the divine justice revealed on the Cross of Christ is ‘to God’s measure’, because it springs from love and is accomplished in love, producing fruits of salvation...the divine dimension of redemption is put into effect not only by bringing justice to bear upon sin, but also in restoring to love that creative life and holiness that comes from God. In this way, redemption involves the revelation of Mercy in its fullness...¹³

2.] THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY: this is a second extremely difficult matter for the faith. There is a modern fascination with Personified Evil with films concerning diabolic possession continue to attract the attention of extremely numerous audiences. Some modern exegesis would eliminate the very existence of the ‘devil’ and also of the ‘angels.’

Throughout the public life of Jesus, there are recorded several confrontations with Satan, the prince of this world. It seems that the Powers of Darkness were unleashed in a furious manner in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Underlying the drama of Gethsemane, there is the evidence of the struggle with Satan. Nonetheless, Scripture presents Calvary as the final battle, the deciding contest, in which the Prince of this World is defeated [cf. Jn 12:31; Rv 12:9; Heb 2:14, ff.]. This final victory was already anticipated by the many exorcisms worked by Jesus, and also the many instances in which He so easily forgives sin. In healing the sick, and in raising the dead, Jesus was giving a glimpse of the culmination of the final times: *no more separation, no more sadness, no more death* [cf. Rv 21:4]. All of this wondrous activity foreshadowed and clearly promised eternal salvation.

The existence of the Church – just like that of her Founder, runs right through the repeated assaults of the Powers of Darkness and the Satanic forces. The struggle in faith is that this continues to happen [with greater or lesser success]. Despite the final victory, already won by the Founder of the Church. While the ‘spectacular’ manifestations of Satan are extremely rare [Fr. Congar, OP offered several cautions regarding the too ready acceptance as ‘diabolic’ unusual manifestations of evil, or sickness] – the Powers of Darkness indeed live up to their name. So much of their influence is far more subtle, massive, lasting: ... *The devil was a murderer from the start; he was never grounded in the truth; there is no truth in him at all: when he lies, he is drawing on his own store, because he is a liar, and the father of all lies* ... [cf. Jn 8:44].

¹³ Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*. November 30, 1980, # 7.

The Modern Magisterium has spoken of the powers of darkness with some clarity with a long document published during the Holy Year, 1975:¹⁴

... Therefore, it remains certain that there exists a demonic reality, concretely attested to by that which we call the mystery of evil. This remains even today an enigma which envelops the life of Christians. We do not know any better than the Apostles why it is that the Lord permits it, nor how He makes use of it in His designs. However, it could very well happen that in our civilization, taken over by secular horizontalism, the unexpected explosions of this mystery offer a less partial sense of it.

Those rampant manifestations of evil oblige human beings to look further, higher, beyond the immediate manifestations. Through the threat and the preponderance of evil, which impede our pathway, we are permitted to discern the existence of a future to be worked out, and therefore, to turn toward Christ, to listen to the Good News from Him, His salvation offered as a grace ... [# 1393].

The reality of the evil One leads some to doubt the real victory in Gethsemane and on Calvary. To state, without explanation that Jesus has triumphed definitively over the Evil Powers, seems hard to accept when one reflects on the world situation. The Apocalypse – perhaps tempered somewhat from Paul's enthusiastic explosions in the freshness of his dramatic conversion, offers a hope that is most realistic. In no way does the Apocalypse 'water down' the harshness of the ordeal that is expected:

... The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil, or Satan, who had deceived the whole world, was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him... [cf. Rv 12:9].

... then I saw a beast emerge from the sea... he had a fatal wound ... but that is why the saints must have constancy and faith... [Rv 13:1-10].

... Then I saw a second beast [Rv 13:11, ff.] .].. a woman riding the beast ... [Rv 17:1, ff.].

Implicit here is the revelation that even though the Powers of Evil will eventually be defeated, before the final battle, the Devil will know many victories. The Immolated Lamb [cf. Rv 5:5], perhaps a symbolic expression of the wounded Servant [cf. Is 53], will definitively conquer the great Dragon [cf. Rv 12: 7, ff.]. Even with the repeated defeats, the Beast comes to emerge again and again. This 're-emergence' of the 'defeated animal, can in no way be compared with the

¹⁴ The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, June 26, 1976 in: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 5, ## 1347-1393

resurrection of the Lamb. The 'beast' already is mortally wounded, his/ her days are counted [cf. Rv 12:12]. The final destiny: *...Then, the devil, who misled them, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are, and their torture will not stop, day or night, forever and ever ...* [Rv 20:10].

In faith, we hold that between the power of the son of God and that of the Devil, there is no comparison. The Apocalypse presents this in dramatic fashion in these recurring ordeals with the Beast. Although mortally wounded, the power remains formidable. Almost in the very moment of His own supreme ordeal, Jesus states: *... I have told you all this so that you may find peace in Me. In the world, you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world ...!* [Jn 16:33].

We have been created without our cooperation – but, the 'second creation', redemption, depends on the free cooperation of the redeemed. In the battle, or the ordeal, the Lord has not dispensed these He has called from the struggle. The Chosen People of God are all invited to participate in this terrible struggle for the cause of God in their own and others' lives. The struggle announced in the message of hope right after the fall [cf. Gn 3:15] will be anticipated in by all. The promise is, though that this struggle will be crowned with success. The Letters in the Apocalypse are a demand for conversion, and a promise of final victory.

3.] THE REALITY OF CONDEMNATION: in this connection, this is the third aspect of this difficult aspect of the faith. There is a very challenging problem of equating this revealed reality with that of divine mercy. In Gethsemane, there is a profound revelation of divine reaction to sin – it can never co-exist in one with the thrice Holy God. The appeal is that all accept the merits and grace of Divine Redemption.¹⁵

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Suggested Reading on this Discussion

GEACH, Peter, *Providence and Evil*. The Stanton Lectures 1971-2. Cambridge University Press 1977.

HEBBELTHWAITE, Brian, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*. NY: Hawthorne LTD.

HICK, John, *Evil and the God of Love*. Great Britain: Collins 1979.

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¹⁵ For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*, o.c., pp. 248-255.

[IV] Gethsemane and the Trinity

1. Gethsemane, as the Passion and Cross in general, reveal the unfathomable mystery of divine love and mercy, on the one hand - and, at the same time, they make known to the person of faith the terrible mystery of iniquity. Those truths: divine love and human sin, the Agony of Gethsemane and the Passion in general proclaim in an astonishing manner. There is no progress possible in the Christian way, unless there is a personal encounter, and a coming to grips with the Passion of Jesus Christ.

2. It has been said [H. Bergson] that the Christian mystics are but imitators and those who continue in an original outstanding – but always incomplete – manner, the mystery of the Suffering Christ, the Christ of the Gospels in all His fullness. In the work of theology, exegesis, all of this is at the service of the word, inviting authentic imitators and witnesses of the unique savior of the world. There is a strong appeal within the word of God itself, to re-present to the world of today the genuine witness of Jesus Christ.

a. There is always a great danger in theology, on the intellectual level, that it remains merely speculative – and on the spiritual level, that it do very little in one's life. The Gospels and the Word of God in general – the divinely inspired Tradition, and the many traditions through the Age of the Fathers, Doctors and Doctoresses of the Church, all are a Gift from God Himself. This magnificent doctrinal and spiritual tradition is not intended to communicate abstract thoughts, no matter how beautiful they maybe. This great tradition has as its purpose that humanity might come to know God more profoundly, experience Him more fully. Jesus is the Icon of the Most Blessed Trinity, and is the Revelation, *par excellence*, of the inner life of God – the greatest gift of all, for which all of God's gifts were given. What is called for by these special passages of scripture is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

b. The Incarnate Son of God has given His life for the People His Father had chosen His way of salvation that leads through the resurrection to eternal glory, has to go the Way of the Cross. All the saints had their own *icon*, living image of the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. No one of these was complete, nor were all of them together – but, the Person of Christ became very real, 'incarnate' in their lives. The extraordinary examples of charity, missionary generosity were inspired by the self-forgetfulness of Christ. This aspect of his love, expressed in human terms through the drama of Gethsemane and the Passion in general, reflected the Father's love for His People.

c. In Lk's account Mary is almost identified with Christ: ... *and your own soul a sword will pierce...* [2:35]. In this scene, the Passion of Jesus and the Compassion of His Mother come across as one drama. Along-side the New Adam, Mary is the New Eve. The 'help-mate' promised to the First Adam [cf. Gn 2:18], the 'woman' of Gn 3:15 are fulfilled in the NT revelation where Mary cooperates so intimately in the redemption of the world. Here communion with the suffering Christ, the real sufferings accompanying the birth of the New Israel – are all the fruit of the mystery of the Cross [cf. Rv 12:2; Jn 19:25, ff.].

3. In this mystery, and more particularly in its presentation, it has often proved difficult to avoid the excesses of what some authors call *dolorism*. This would be the glorification of suffering as such, almost as though to present it as a separate value. The Agony in Gethsemane, the Passion, the Cross – all of these were milestones to be surpassed on the way to the Father's glory. The over-all scope of this in the divine plan is that human beings be associated with the eternal life and happiness of the Trinity. St. Thomas wrote: The Knowledge of the Trinity in unity is the end and the fruit of our entire lives.¹⁶

a. The NT never separates Gethsemane and Calvary from Easter- on the Cross, Jesus Himself speaks of Paradise, this day. The resurrection permeates the entire NT.

b. All deaths are meant to be united with that of Jesus, Who is united in some way, with every single human being. Suffering is accepted only in the light of association with Christ, who has resurrected and is with the Father for all eternity.

c. The Christian is called by the central mysteries of the faith to look on the most harsh sufferings, the most desperate human situations – trying always to change those realities, whenever, wherever possible - to see all in the perspective of the redemptive drama of Jesus Christ – all leading toward the resurrection. As Christ has already resurrected, it is in the power of this new life that each believer is called to do all that can be done, to lessen the on-going passion and death in society. The contemplation of faith does not end with the Passion of Jesus – it begins here in a developed life of prayer, to come through the resurrection to reflections on the very nature of God.

4. Others might exaggerate suffering from a dogmatic point of view: it is not unusual today to read theologians who make the Cross more of a suffering from a dogmatic point of view: it is not unusual today to read theologians who make the Cross more of a symbol than a reality to convert the believer. Some see that suffering

¹⁶ I. Sent., c. 2, q. 1.

was already 'built in', constituting, the divine act of creation. The suffering of Jesus is but a reflection of Suffering in God. A Japanese scholar, Kitamari [after the US dropped atomic bomb on Japan] has written a study on the *Theology of the Pain of God*. The German scholar, Jurgen Moltmann has written *The Crucified God*, Pain in God is traditionally [from Origen?] connected with the revealed fact that God is Love [cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16 – the title of Pope Benedict VI's first Encyclical]/ Jesus is revealed as suffering out of love. This has also as its goal to shift emphasis from the Greek idea of the *a-pathetic divinity*, to the more biblical idea, expressed in the many anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms: God as 'angered, regretful, grieving'. It might be said from the outset in this much discussed theological question that the biblical revelation concerning pain and suffering associates it as a deviation [which these theologians criticize in the use of Hellenism as the vehicle for explaining in human terms some grasp of the mystery of God] of applying to the realm of the infinite, *what eye as not seen, nor what has ever entered the human mind*. Nonetheless, some of these insights have opened up further avenues of reflection on the central mysteries of Christianity.

5. Human suffering is indeed re-capitulated in that of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, all of Sacred Scripture – explicitly a few times, but implicitly throughout – presents humanity as a unique creation, made to the image and likeness of God: this leads to sublime theological reflection:

a. A human being may 'know' God in a variety of ways:

- through analogy: or the kataphatic procedure: offering imagery to describe God – the way of affirmation, through causality.
- through negation, the apophatic approach: *nox illuminatio mea...*
- through eminence: whatever created perfections, or goodness there may be found – all exist in an eminent manner in God.

b. Some would apply these categories to the mystery of suffering, and its presence, or absence in God:

- through the way of affirmation: Scripture presents suffering as a disorder, a deviation. Therefore, one would state categorically, as Greek philosophy does that *Actus Purus* cannot suffer, or be passive, receiving, in any way.
- through the way of negation: this would respond that God cannot be indifferent ['apathetic', in the sense of 'non-caring'] toward the world He made out of love, mercy – He cannot have withdrawn in an 'eternal sabbatical'. Therefore, in some way, God may be said to suffer.

- through the way of eminence: there is something heroic and good about any who would suffer for others, who would lay down one's life for both friends AND enemies. In this sense, the sufferings of Jesus Christ offer an insight into the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity.

c. There is something of the 'image and likeness' of God in anyone who has to endure suffering, and in all who endure death. Divine revelation would make it impossible for one to think of the God of Mercy, who is also the Supreme Good, as indifferent, unperturbed – *apathetic* - by human conduct.

d. The 'tireless' mercy of God, confronting human sin, is one of the truths that appears the more clearly in Sacred Scripture. Mercy does imply some 'feeling' in the human consciousness, being often compared to maternal love for a helpless child.

... The second word which is the terminology of the OIT to define mercy is rephidim. This has a slightly different nuance from that of hesed. While hesed highlights the marks of fidelity to self, and of 'responsibility' for one's own love [which are, in a certain sense, masculine characteristics], rahamim - in its very root denotes the love of a mother [rehem is the mother's womb]. From the deep original bond – indeed the unity – that links a mother to her child, there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love. Of this love one can say that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an exigency of the heart. It is, as it were, a feminine variation of the masculine fidelity to self expressed by hesed. Against this psychological background, rahamim generates a whole range of feelings, including goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding, i.e., readiness to forgive ... ¹⁷

d. Mercy denotes that one can indeed 'feel' the misery of another, and one is thus moved, through com-passion, to bring some alleviation to it. J. Maritain has said that it would be absurd to think of a God Who would be indifferent to human misery. Maritain believed that, if the ideas of a God - Who would suffer human ills even more than humanity itself suffers them – such a concept of God could have broad implications for faith in the world. Maritain did criticize St. Thomas' idea of Mercy [cf. I, q. 21, a.3]. where the Angelic Doctor states that is Mercy in God only according to the 'effect' that it produces, not according to the 'effect of passion'. For Maritain, it is impossible not to attribute mercy to God, as being moved by human misery.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives In Misericordia*, # 4 - with its extended Footnote, # 52.

e. A God Who would be 'inaccessible' to human trials cannot be the God of Christianity, so fully revealed by Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and on Calvary. While it is truly an anthropomorphism to say that God truly suffers, it is also not truly 'biblical' to think that He is indifferent, or that He is above all weakness. This would imply remove from God all feeling for humanity. When one admits that God is Love, there has to be some effect and affection on the part of God for those He loves.

f. Modern theology has found an excellent text from Origen, in one of his *Homilies on Ezechiel*. Origen noted: the Father Himself is not impassible – when one prays to Him. He has pity and compassion. The Father suffers from a passion of love [cf. 6:6]. The late Cardinal DeLubac, SJ, in his Commentary on Origen, calls this an 'astonishing text, most admirable!' Origen was well acquainted with the idea of 'impassibility' in God, and elsewhere, he sustains this. At least in the aspect of God's love for humanity, there can be attributed something like suffering in God.

g. However, there are some modern theologians who also speak of suffering in the proper sense, as being attributed to God. And that in the life of the trinity itself, there would have to be 'suffering' in the proper sense – otherwise, the trinity would be 'closed in on itself'.¹⁸ So far, such ideas are far from full acceptance by theologians –with the exception perhaps of a number of 'Liberation Theologians'.¹⁹

6. The Mystery of Gethsemane and the Mystery of the Cross are associated intimately with the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. This is so by the very nature of these mysteries: they revolve around the over-all Mystery of Divine Love. The Cross and the Trinity shed light one on the other.

a. The Mystery of Redemption is revealed to us as the Son of God becoming Incarnate to offer the price of our salvation. While the human nature of Jesus suffered and died, as assumed by the Divine Person, the Eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit intervene in this Mystery of Divine Love. The rooting of the Cross in the life of the trinity can go even further. It is not only by reason of human sin that the return of Jesus to the Father implies an abyss of suffering. The whole mystery of the Cross becomes a revelation of the ineffable relationship of love that expresses the intra-Trinitarian life.

b. Another image of this is the Lamb that has been immolated from the constitution of the world [cf. Rv 5:6]. This immolation might also be understood as designating His Eternal Mission expressed as loving obedience, constitutional filiation.

¹⁸ J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.

¹⁹ Cf. Leonardo Boff, OFM, *Passione di Cristo / Passione del Mondo*. Cittadella.

c. The Christological formulas of the NT, particularly those of Jn [which seem to be the most 'transcendent' of all, while without ever ceasing to refer first of all to the historical existence of Jesus and to His messianic activity] also reveal to us something of the divine Being which is the source of this salvific intervention of His life. It is thanks to the redemption wrought by Jesus that in Jn [cf. 1 Jn 4:7-16] that we can come to understand the wondrous nature of God is Love.

7. In His Passion and Death, Jesus out of love for humanity and the Father, abandons of His own free will, His own human life. This means that through the revelation implicit in this total self-giving, Jesus has chosen to merit for us and to communicate to us, something of His relationship toward the Father. By His death and Resurrection, Jesus has bestowed on all, male and female alike, something of His filiation, His unique relationship to the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus, God makes of us all sons and daughters of the Most High [cf. Jn 1:12].

a. That which the drama of His Passion and Death reveal is not only how much God loves us but there is in this a revelation of how much Jesus loves the Father – and this leads to the very heart of the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity: *...But what the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing directly what the Father has told Me ...* [Jn 14:31].

b. In His Passion and death, Jesus 'experiences' as man that which He lives eternally as the son of God in the Trinity – i.e., His complete dependence on the Father in love. Between His stripping on Calvary, and the gift that Jesus makes of Himself through the Gift of redemptive Incarnation, Jesus makes of Himself the perfect Gift:

- to the Father, by the freedom with which He offers Himself;
- to humanity, by the totality of the Gift.

c. Furthermore, this reveals the perfect Self-giving that exists eternally in the Most Blessed Trinity. The Divine Persons 'give' of themselves in some way, thus establishing in human terms, the awesome mystery of their eternal relationships.

d. The Gift of Self to God and to others becomes, then, the fundamental law of the Christian life, and its basic reason for being. This new law has its source in the life of Jesus Himself. In His Self-giving for the redemptive Incarnation, Jesus has provided the 'source' for missionary generosity until the end of time.

e. Calvary and trinity can never be disassociated – and in these culminating mysteries of the life of Jesus the faithful are given the most outstanding revelation of the inner life of God Himself, active through all eternity.

8. Most Christian theologians will agree that the Cross of Jesus Christ is the most characteristic element of the Christian life and faith. In the death of Jesus on the Cross, there are made 'visible' throughout all of history, the eternal relationships of love with God and for humanity.

a. There are re-capitulated in Jesus the tragic history of all human suffering and anguish from the beginning, through to the end. Along with being the revelation of the Trinity, Jesus is likewise the 'model', the 'paradigm' of human life. In the secularized present century, a sense of 'transcendence' has been lost along with the loss of the sense of sin. In an age of corrosive contestation, all the moral and religious values struggle for acceptance. In the present threat of massive, militant atheism, Christian faith is being drawn back to those 'fundamentals, if recent publications in the field of theology are any indication.²⁰

b. While remaining throughout life a citizen of two cities, the believer is tending toward home, eternal life. In any of the 'scientific' or 'political' insights which the genius of humanity might discover, these will need to be tempered, purified with the vision of the Cross.

c. There is no authentic presentation of the faith of the Church that would neglect those aspects of the life of Jesus Christ. Human love which is not a gift of self, and not marked profoundly by the sign and the blood of the Cross, will only be really a caricature of authentic love.

9. The urgent demand of conversion of mind and heart before the world situation, that is being pressed on the believer from all sides, asks that this vision be channeled through the Mystery of Gethsemane and Calvary, along the way to the resurrection. It is in contemplating these 'ultimate mysteries' of the Love of Jesus Christ that one will come to the great abyss of Divine Love. In the contemplation of these mysteries, one will come to understand how much each human person is loved by God. Often, in an age of statistics, and massive world tragedy, one loses sight of the unique image of God in each human being [cf. GS 22], accustomed as the modern mass media makes one, to think of the masses. The infinite Love of God is poured out [cf. Rm 5:5] for each human being. Furthermore, one will come to understand the terrible effects of sin from reflecting on Gethsemane and Calvary re-lived by

²⁰ cf. the Document on *Fundamentalism*.

many in our own time. The refusal of the love of God leads to the rejection of other human beings – and the lack of love for others, puts the love of God out of reach.

a. The Wisdom of the Cross, the Mystery of divine love in Gethsemane, while remaining pure ‘folly’ for so many offer profound insights into our ultimate destiny. These mysteries are the source of an invincible optimism – and paradoxically, will show the absolute poverty of human means. While the difficulties which face governments and the Church do seem insurmountable, the mystery of the Cross will assist anyone seeking the Lord, to believe that a better society is still possible. Paul preached this biblical optimism with unflagging zeal [cf. 1 Co 1:22-25; 2:1-5; 2 Co 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 12:9, f.].

b. The Church is called to be a ‘leaven’ for society, to build the world up into the mystery of Jesus Christ. Should the Church ever lose its savor, and become absorbed by the society which at times seems to be engulfing it, she will indeed become ‘irrelevant’. The Hope of the Church is in the Crucified Christ, who has risen!

c. The suffering Christ, presented to us by the Gospels, is not One whose career, or mission, ended on Calvary. nor will the Church ever believe that only the ‘ideas’ of Jesus Christ have resurrected, but not His humanity. He is *truly risen!* The Jesus of the Gospels is not a distant historical personality – nor, merely an idea, a message, that has been raised on high. He is the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, Incarnate for the Mystery of Salvation, whose self-offering tells us of the Trinity, and offers a model to be followed.

10. A task of capital importance is for the Christian to re-discover Christ Jesus. There is the powerful appeal to adhere personally to Him, Who in some way is already present in each human being.²¹

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FINAL SUMMATION

Introduction:

[1] The Synoptic accounts present themselves as faithful witnesses of the oral tradition. They do represent an integral part of the Revelation concerning the Agony of Gethsemane. A number of modern scholars have minimized these accounts:

²¹ For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*, ib., pp. 255-263.

- some [e.g. Bultmann, Lescow, Ebeling] have written that Gethsemane is a legend created by faith, or by liturgical needs;
- others [the Catholic, R. Brown] state that Gethsemane – as it [and the temptation scene] is presented by the Synoptics – is a kind of ‘synthesis’, of a number of prayers offered by Jesus as presented by the Synoptics – not excluding His prayer actually offered in Gethsemane – all then brought together here.

[2] Without entering into the relative merits [particularly R. Brown’s view] the presentation here has been that these accounts are historical. However, it is also most clear that each of the Evangelists had his own ‘reason’ and audience for writing. For the combined characteristics, it does seem that one could draw these conclusions:

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Apologetical – Exhortatory Traits in the Gethsemane Accounts

In general, it can be stated that one of the characteristics of the early preaching of the Church is that it did not present itself as a simple exposition of past events. Much more, these writings are ‘gospels’ – a ‘message’ something that would have particular value for all the listeners, who were far removed in time and space from those capital events of the Mystery of Redemption. To communicate a message would be indeed historical, in that this is the Word of God, communicated to humanity, as an indication of Covenant Friendship, leading to eternal life. However, they would not be history in the precise sense that one would think of that word today. There is a gathering of OT data used artfully to show that Jesus indeed is the fulfillment, that all happened in accord with the Scriptures, and the divine plan.

Gethsemane is presented not simply as a chronicled event, or as something that might be of passing interest, or even something that was meant to increase piety. It is rather an announcement of the message that the Suffering and Death of Jesus was in conformity with the Divine Plan: that this reveals both the enormity of sin, and the infinity of Divine Love.

1. Apologetic-Christological Elements

a. From a Christological point of view, the announcement in Gethsemane centers primarily around the two prayers of Jesus: one that is imperfect, and one that is perfected. Jesus is presented as deep in anguish facing His terrible ordeal of the Passion and Death. He asks – IF it is possible- that this Cup might pass from Him.

Then, He withdraws His condition, and simply asks for the total fulfillment of the Father's Will in an act of abandonment.

1.] This attitude of Christ which is ultimately expressed in the full acceptance of the Father's Will, is inline and fulfills much data from the OT. His anguish is found in an old translation of Ps 42. There is much speculation that other Psalm prayers were fulfilled in this revelation of the Agony and Passion of Jesus. The moment that Jesus is *handed over* into the hands of the enemies of His Father, there is much evidence that this is the unimagined fulfillment of the Canticles of the Servant, particularly the 4th one [cf. Mk 14:41; Mt 26:45 – and Is 53:10-12; cf. also Jn 12:23, 34; Is 52:13]. There is likewise recourse to Dn's Son of Man theme.

2.] This NT interpretation would bring together the two major OT Christological themes, that of the Suffering Servant and that of the Son of Man. Many are of the belief that Jesus did indeed see Himself in this light. [Bultmann believed that all of these interpretations were 'post-Easter readings.']

3.] There is hardly any doubt that the Early Church saw Jesus as the Messiah and read His passion and Death in the light of Is 53, and the various Psalms of the Persecuted Just Man. Compare the following:

Mk 14:61; 15:5 & Is 53:7;

Mk 15:29, 34 & Ps 22:2, 8;

Mk 15:26 & Ps 69:22.

However, it would hardly seem that the later community would have made these connections, unless they came to it through apostolic authority, which receive this directly from Jesus.

b. this does not mean that regarding the very Night of Gethsemane all of this was crystal clear. It is highly probable that when the Evangelists compiled their accounts, after the Event, that they called on the oral traditions that went right back to Jesus Himself. Jesus indeed was the Suffering Servant the Son of God, the Son of Man.

c. This teaching of the tradition that goes back to Jesus is a departure from the main-line Judaic thought. Here we have an announcement of the Christian 'Good News': the Hour has come, the Son of Man is being handed over into the hands of sinners! Up until this moment, the 'Hour' had remained hidden [cf. Is 49:2]. Before the glorious coming of the Son of Man, He now comes in His suffering, in fulfillment of the Father's Plan.

d. Christian preaching, that went right back to that of the Lord Himself, could see in Jesus the suffering Son of Man [cf. Dn 7:25]. Jesus appears at the head of His suffering People, His saints. What is concluded from all this is the suffering messianic people and the son of Man, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh are indivisibly united here.

e. So, the tradition concerning Gethsemane is not merely a 'chronology of facts', but it is a theological and spiritual interpretation of this great mystery of salvation, unfolding before their eyes. Jesus had fulfilled in Himself the prophecies – His 'anguish' is in accord with the Divine will, and through it, and the Death which follows the Plan of redemption will be completed, then in the resurrection.

f. Jesus 'begins' here the messianic times with as Son of Man suffers as the Servant of Yahweh. Jesus also makes His own the sufferings of all times – and all those who will come after Him, may find in the Mystery of Gethsemane a great ray of hope.

2. The Gethsemane accounts show evidence of a *Paranesis*:

a. In the Book of Dn and in rabbinic Judaism, much mention was made of the eschatological trial of the saints. In this tradition, the Messiah, as the Son of Man, handed over, hold the first place. In this tradition, the suffering Messiah, betrayed into the hands of sinners, is the Head of the New People of God. This tradition did not merely prepare for a Christological reality, but it intended to 'move' its adherents to a response in faith, to offer a vital adherence to the message. In this tradition, doctrine is not separated for this exhortatory *paranesis*. This is evident in a number of biblical passages retained in NT revelation [cf. Jn 12:29, f.; Lk 22:40-45; Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26: 36-46; cf. also Heb 4: 15, f.; 5:7]. This application to the faithful of the *tribulation/ trial* of Jesus seems to have been a basic element of the oral tradition, and then it was presented in a different way in accord with the purposes of Mk, Mt, Lk, Jn and Heb.

b. A good part of the *paranesis* centers around the term *temptation/ trial*, used in intimate connection with the Hour and the Son of Man. This bestows on the whole passage a kind of eschatological spirit. The scene of Gethsemane indicates a kind of apocalyptic situation, in which the decisive battle with *Belial* occurs, and with this is the ultimate victory; salvation is acquired for the New People of God.

1.] In Dn, the eschatological situation of the People of the Saints is described as a situation in which the saints will have to be put to the test [cf. Dn 7:25; 12:10].

2.] The community of Qumran also was deeply impressed with the idea of an eschatological trial coming to test the faithful. There was to be a terrible conflict between the Children of Light and those of the Darkness.

c. In this kind of context, one might understand more deeply the urgency of Jesus' words: *Watch and Pray!* This is the exhortation directed also to the community, and to the disciples of all times. With the Hour that dawned with the Passion and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Final Times indeed have been inaugurated. It is not an injunction just to 'watt', but much more an appeal to be imbued with the urgency of the eschatological times. The formula is: *watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.* The watchful prayer is the necessary means for the obtaining of the necessary assistance. Gethsemane, therefore, is a moving lesson of encouragement, a *paranesis*.

d. This exhortatory character of the Gethsemane account might also appear more forcefully when one considers the impact of these passages on the Early Church. This is a dramatic lesson for the Christian community as it waited the 'long time' for the return of the Lord. The whole community is being put on 'emergency measures' to watch and pray, through the centuries, that the little flock might not be put to the test. The Gethsemane Account is a revelation of the awesome eschatological temptation... *the man who thinks he is safe, must be careful that he does not fall. the trials that you have had to bear are no more than people normally have. You can trust god not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trial, he will give you a way out of it, and the strength to bear it ...* [cf. 1 co 10:13]

c. The appeals for watchful vigilance and prayer are found throughout the Apostolic preaching:

- Gospels: cf. Mk 13:33-37; Mt 24:42, f.; 25:13; Lk 12:37-39; 21:36.
- Epistles: cf. Rm13: 11-13; 1 Co 10:11-13; 16:13, 21; 1 H 5:5-10; 1 P 5:8, ff.

From this, it appears that the exhortations to vigilance, not to let oneself be taken over by sleep, and to resist to Powers of Darkness through to the end – is one of the main points of early Christian preaching. Thus, Gethsemane is an actual message, perennial in its freshness, needing to be fathomed with each passing generation. Now the son of Man is *being handed over* - *Pray* so that we will not enter into the *temptation/ trial*. All of this is an invitation to follow Jesus right through to the end.

Summary

The Gethsemane tradition is presented as having these following characteristics: apologetic, Christological, exhortatory. The inspiring motivation behind the various accounts of the Gethsemane Agony was that of announcing the Mystery of Jesus. He is revealed as the Messiah, who achieved, through suffering, the prophecies of the OT, and carried out the divine will of the Heavenly Father. All of this is presented as an exhortation to the 'post-Easter' community, awaiting the Risen Lord's Return. Gethsemane is an essential part of the following of Jesus Christ.

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[V] Gethsemane and History

Introduction:

[1] There can be no doubt for a believer that Jesus prayed in the garden with his disciples, and was arrested there, following the Last Supper. This information unanimously attested to by the gospels [cf. Mk 14:26, 32, 43, 46; Mt 26:30, 36, 47, 50; Lk 22:39, 47, 54; Jn18:1, 3, 12]. The first reading of these accounts would give the appearance that this is historical – but, it is also more than that. The Evangelists are not only telling us that Jesus went into the Garden to pray, and was captured - they also describe a number of details concerning the Agony in the Garden, in accord with what they, too, had received from the oral tradition of the Early Church.

[2] The Gospel accounts were written in the light of the resurrection and of faith, in the Person of Jesus Christ. The early *kerygma* of the Church reflected on the full story of Jesus, as this was further contemplated in the light of His glorious resurrection. Therefore, the early commentators of this tradition presented the life of Jesus for the faith of the Apostles and all who would follow them – and also for the edification, to inspire the persevering witness of those who would follow Christ until the end of time. Thus, the account is interspersed with OT citations, very familiar to the early centuries and there is much evidence that these accounts were also meant as exhortations.

[3] In faithful compliance with the integral teaching of the Church, a believer would not think of Gethsemane as the invention of the early community. There are those who do maintain that so many of the details could not have been 'eye-witnessed' – and, therefore, its 'historicity is doubted. There are those who think of the Gethsemane account as a highly 'tailored' synthesis of some of the teachings of Jesus, inserted here at the introduction of the Passion, as a key to its interpretation.

[4] The traditional belief of the Church, though, has seen in Gethsemane great insights into the Mystery of redemption: the encounter of the infinite Mercy of God with the horror of sin. There is in Gethsemane the great lesson on Prayer, the need to watch and pray always, as a kind of urgent message for the Church of all times. The idea of a Suffering servant, the Son of God, the Messiah, goes back to the earliest levels of the tradition. In the last analysis, so much of Gethsemane is based on the convictions Jesus had of Himself.

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1. The Agony

a. this aspect of the Mystery of redemption is found only in this particular sense in the Gethsemane accounts. The announcement of His Passion, in which Jesus predicted that He would be handed over into the hands of His enemies is repeated many times. But, the terrible anguish, the particularities of His ordeal in Gethsemane, are found only here. There seems to be a conscious reference at least to the LXX tradition of Ps 42, seen more as a prophecy. This aspect of the Messiah – one who would suffer as Servant and also be subjected to the terribly degrading humiliations, was indeed a scandal to the faith up to that time.

b. It is precisely these aspects of Jesus 'agony that represent such a startling 'break' with the pre-Christian tradition. There is evidence on the part of the writings of the Church that this whole mystery is being 'elevated' that it might somehow participate in the eventual 'Lordship' of Jesus [cf. Mt 26:53; Jn18:1-11]. Perhaps this very 'break' with so much that was held as sacred and 'safe' would be one of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of this passage.

2. The Witnesses

a. Some of the interpreters who would deny this story [as the account of the temptations] rely on the fact that there were no eye-witnesses. However, some of the biblical data would allow one to contest this to some extent [cf. Mt 16:36, ff.; Mk 14:32, ff.]. the disciples were not always asleep – the fact that Jesus went off' a little would not mean that they would have been cut off totally from what was happening.

b. It does seem that the evangelists also wanted to stress the presence of the same three disciples who had witnessed the Transfiguration. This seems to be an effort on the part of the tradition to show that indeed there were witnesses. Lk shows the distance to have been about a 'stone's throw'. This still would have allowed contact with the events of the Garden.

c. There seems also to be the conviction that an event of such drastic implications: the witness of Jesus, the shame He endured, the total departure from all that the Messiah was supposed to have been - would need very authoritative witnesses. So, we have Peter, chosen by Christ as the Rock – John, the Beloved – and James, His brother.

3. The Disciples' Sleep

a. The exhortatory nature of this whole scene presents this 'sleep' in such contrast with the vigilant prayer of Jesus. The words Hour, temptation/ trial and Son of Man are eminently eschatological, as is the frequent contrast between to watch – and to sleep. This finds its confirmation in the frequent apostolic exhortations that the Church should live in urgent expectation for the coming of the Lord. Paul states: *this is the hour to wake from slumber* [Rm 13:11; 1 Th 5:6]. When he speaks of vigilance [cf. 1 Co 16:13; 1 Th 5:6; Cf. also 1 P 5:8], the exhortation is not really concerned so much with physical sleep.

b. Likewise, in the Gethsemane accounts, the real appeal is not so much to wake up literally: but, to overcome torpor, laziness, tepidity, the lack of comprehension – which demands long attention and continuing effort. To go along in a kind of lived tepidity, the noon-day devil, failing in vigilance, is what would lead to the succumbing to the final ordeal.

c. What is found in Gethsemane is not merely some kind of parable, a kind of dramatization of the urgent appeals of the early Church: *blessed are they whom the Lord will find awake at His coming!* Gethsemane cannot be reduced to some kind of 'plan' for the early Church. In the traditional acceptance of the Church, Gethsemane was a real happening, and the early Church used it to present the mystery of Jesus Christ as a model to follow.

d. Even the sleep of the Apostles - in a time of such crucial importance in the life of Jesus whom they loved dearly – gives the whole account a ring of authenticity. It would seem that if all of this were just some 'pious tale', much would have been done to enhance the authority of those closest to Jesus. For, after all, when these accounts were first being read and pondered, these early Church leaders would be claiming obedience over the lives of the adherents to this new and demanding way. rather than presenting themselves as legendary models, the early preaching showed the Apostles – and the Witnesses of Christ of all time – what they truly are: sinners, redeemed by the mysteries in which they participated.

4. The Prayer

a. There seems to be no valid doubt that the Gospel accounts truly present Jesus as having prayed, and that He really did ask His Father for the favor that the Cup indeed pass from Him. The Evangelists even seem to bring out a certain progress in the Prayer of Jesus, a great encouragement for the disciples of all times. A gradual penetration of the great mystery of the Father's will for the universal salvation of humanity.

b. Once again, there is an element that would indicate a certain surprising weakness in Jesus. He seems at first, over-whelmed with fear – on closer reflection, this 'fear' is no merely horror for what was awaiting Him, but much more the eschatological ordeal had arrived. Jesus appears here in supreme weakness, the weakness of the great High priest, chosen from among men, to redeem the world. In this way, Jesus had a real experience of weakness.

c. Therefore, the *Our Father*, the model of all Christian prayer, consigned to the Church in Baptism – shows that this is the central prayer of the Church, indicating intimate familiarity. The Father, through Baptism, also becomes the *ABBA* of all those who will share in Jesus' filiation [cf. Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6]. Jesus addresses His Father using the very words that the early Christian community is instructed to pray to Him: *All things are possible* to the Father, seems found in Mary's *Magnificat*, along with her earlier *Fiat*. There is almost a liturgical acclamation, perhaps going back to the Psalms. [cf. Ps 24:7, ff.]. the Christian community witnesses from the very lips of Jesus, the author of their faith, these fervent words of prayer. This prayer comes to the Early Church, then, as a special gift of the Spirit. In all of its weaknesses, the Church is strengthened by the Spirit to use the very words of Christ to express their adoptive relationship to the Merciful Father.

d. Jesus' own prayer – once the object-lesson of His lived example [cf. Lk 11] is thus handed on to the Community. The very prayer of Jesus – His very words become the expressions of the Early Church. While they may not have heard all that Jesus said to the Father, each of the three times He went back to prayer, they still 'heard enough' to hand on to the Church this extraordinary 'exegesis', presentation of all that the Lord's Prayer really involves. The prayer of Gethsemane is just a 'confirmation by example' of the lessons He taught in His public preaching – cf. Mt 6:9-13, 33; 7:7-11; Lk 11:2-12; 12:31]. Only that prayer that would place the Father's will as the supreme value has any chance of being heard.

5. The three acts of prayer respond to this superlative, this witness of intensity – there are other *three's* that come to mind:

- three indications of the betrayer [cf. Mt 26:20-25];
- three denials of Peter [cf. Mt 26:29, par.];
- three questions of Pilate [cf. Mt 27:20-23];
- three-fold derision of the Crucified [cf. Mt 27:39, f.];
- three signs after the death of Jesus [cf. Mt 27:312-61].

The three-fold insistence on the prayer of Jesus would indicate to the early Church its redemptive value, its intensity, its perseverance.

6. The Angel: in the apocalyptic battles, the divine assistance makes itself present [as is known, particularly from the literature of the Maccabean martyrs]. God Himself is behind the 'Angel of Yahweh'. The presence of the Angel in Gethsemane would be an indication of the profound reality, the deeper mystery that is being unfolded in Gethsemane. Jesus has conquered, with divine assistance, because of prayer and the Lord God has responded. There is also a catechetical spirit here: God will be with His Church in her prayer.

7. The Sweating of Blood: Jesus is the ideal 'battler' here, engaged in the mortal combat of the final ordeal. The Blood of Gethsemane enters into the Price of our redemption. To endure this extreme Agony, Jesus is as the Church is called to be, in her fidelity to prayer - is always assisted by the Father. While many would see this bloody sweat as a kind of 'athletic euphemism' because of the truly technical, medical terms used by Lk, others see it as an extraordinary phenomenon. Gethsemane is a projection of the ultimate gift of Calvary.

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CONCLUSION

The Mystery of the Agony of Gethsemane- steeped in the OT traditions, as the fulfillment of all the innocent Just, who suffered and died through the centuries of preparation, is also the support and strength of all who will come after. For the Church, Gethsemane offers a realistic hope: the Church and her people will know the ordeal, but will be comforted in the strength of the final victory of Jesus Christ.

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Amen!

C. THE SUFFERING OF St. GASPAR BERTONI

[Reflections by Fr. Cornelio Fabro, CSS

[I] Historical Background:

1. More striking and perhaps more pleasing are those saints who experienced a clamorous conversion – who enjoyed a universal way of influence, and were geniuses in religious organization and social activity. Fr. Bertoni, however, was nothing like any of these, or at least does not seem cut from the same cloth. The incisive motto that he had heard from his old teacher and benefactor, Fr. Nicholas Galvani, and which he often repeated [from the old Veronese dialect]: *buseta e taneta* [live as in a little den, an unnoticed lair]. This dialectic turn of phrase would be a rendition of St. Paul's description: *the hidden life with Christ in God* [Col 3:3].

A contemporary author has written of him with some intuition that he had been attracted by the contemplative life of Fr. Bertoni as this comes across the pages of his personal spiritual diary and his letters to L. Naudet:

“... The true greatness of God's work in him is often not revealed externally, as one that would shine through the success of his undertakings, or in the importance of the Institute which came to light through him. God certainly does not deceive but works most especially in the depths of his soul and perhaps made of him one of the greatest saints of the past century...”²²

2. This was a life, that of Fr. Bertoni, about half of which was spent on the Cross, with his long and painful illnesses, “... *under the irons and the knives of the doctors* ...” as he himself often preferred to write, in a joking manner, especially to Fr. Bragato. This seems to demonstrate a capacity of endurance that amazed and moved even to tears the surgeons themselves. The documents speak of some 300 inflictions of deep lancing and incisions on his flesh in order to diminish a kind of cancerous growth which had invaded his right leg.

3. This piercing of his flesh which afflicted him debilitated him noticeably as he got older even up until his death. The medical specialist who in our own times, is required under the direction of the ecclesiastical superiors, was present for the recognition of his body [as part of the process of canonization]. He noted a pronounced curvature, and a severe calcification of the vertebrae in his spinal column. This phenomenon must have cost him – in the judgment of the specialist who examined his exhumed body - spasms of considerable pain.

²² Divo Barsotti, *Magistero dei Santi*, Roma: 1971, p. 17.

4. And it was from his bed of pain, in which he had been confined for long months and even entire years, he continued his teaching by example and offering counsel to those souls who had recourse to him: bishops would seek him out, prelates, princes, members of noble families, priests as well as the humble and simple people of his time. He also continued to give courses of spiritual exercises and conferences. He continued to study and to write – and especially did he suffer and pray during the many interminable nights of insomnia, very often meditating for an entire hour – as he once manifested - the words of the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the individual mysteries of the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross.

5. Through all this, the question arose as to whether or not he had reached the level of infused prayer. Would it have been that his soul had advanced with giant steps forward along the mysterious paths of active and passive purification? That which is certain that in approaching Fr. Bertoni, this constituted for all a special experience as of finding a solid footing in a world of certainties and of supreme hope. The very sight of his person, even prior to hearing the comfort of his word, placed one in tranquility and in greater harmony with the will of God, and enkindled in so many a genuine love for the Cross of Christ.

6. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove justly wrote for the second centenary of the birth of Fr. Bertoni, observing that this Act of Abandonment “...can be compared to that which had been offered as a Victim to the Merciful Love of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and to that prayer in which Elizabeth of the Trinity synthesizes her Trinitarian doctrine...” He also observes that this is a matter of the traditional doctrine which can be noted in St. Francis de Sales [especially in his *Theotimus*, Books VIII & IX].

7. Bossuet had already written a *Discours sur l’acte d’abandon a Dieu*, in which the author takes his inspiration the classic on the doctrine of the abandonment which is that of DeCaussade: but one can also remember the great Fenelon, who was well known to Fr. Bertoni, in which he recalls precisely the image of the baby in its mother’s arms, as Fr. Stofella also noted.

8. In fact, Fr. Bertoni had recommended to Leopoldina Naudet:

“... Blessed is the one who would lose himself in this abyss! the one who would cast himself courageously and ship-wrecked into this great ocean! A child is never more secure as when asleep holding on to its mother’s neck, he abandons every other thought and concern for himself. The infant does not see, nor hear nor does he speak. But the Mother sees for him, hears and speaks and works. And whenever she wants to, she may awaken the child, and remain nearby...”

9. Fr. Bertoni's beloved disciple, Fr. Marani states: "... We must always go behind God and never ahead of him... my most beloved Father and Founder said this frequently and constantly practiced it..." Fr. Gaspar's first biographer, Fr. Giacobbe, who remained close to him in his last years, noted: "... This practice of allowing all to God and nothing to man was something in him that was so ordinary and habitual that it might be said ... that this was like the identification card and norm for all of his thoughts and affections, as it was of his every operation and plan..."²³

10. And Fr. Bertoni wrote further to L. Naudet:

"... What a blessed virtue abandoning oneself is, when we cannot act we entrust ourselves to the omnipotent arms of divine Providence: but it is a more perfect and consummate virtue when indeed we can, and in fact we are called upon to do something [according to the order established by Divine Providence] – and yet never cease to be equally and totally abandoned into His ..." [Lettera 38].

11. This is a doctrine, that of holy abandonment, which finds its way back to the probable source in the Ignatian spirituality in that complete indifference presented in the *Doctrine spirituelle*, of Fr. Lallemant and of the Jesuits of his kind. But one would have to seek from sources prior to that of the Benedictine Abbot, Dom Columba Marmion, confessor of Cardinal Mercier. This has come to the fore again in the publishing of his master-piece, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk* [c.13], and also in the Italian edition of his *Letters of Spiritual Direction* [p.161] .

12. Another noted Benedictine, Fr. Eugene Vandeur, has written a commentary on the Lord's Prayer, with the title: *L'abandon a' Dieu*. There is nothing in this doctrine - which is the sum of ascetical mortification of nature, and the elevation of the soul, to the point of mystical death, through the active and passive purifications - that would bespeak of fatalism, or Eastern, or Protestant or pantheistic quietism. What this ideal means is a participation in the abandonment of Jesus Christ to the Will of His Father in Garden of Gethsemane ["*not My will be done, but Yours!*" – Lk 22:42] – even to the His invocation on the Cross ["*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!*" – Lk 23:46]. This is that total turning upside down of life, like the transferal, one might say, of human freedom into the total subjection to God according to that incisive expression of Bossuet: "... If there is anything that is capable of rendering free a heart and to place it completely at free, it is the perfect abandonment to God and to His will..."²⁴

²³ cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono*. Verona 1951, pp, 210,ff.

²⁴ This is a text from the classic by the Cistercian, V. Lehodey, *Le saint Abandon*. Tr. It. Firenze 1954, p. 520.

13. The characteristic or the authentic originality of Fr. Bertoni's grasp of this seems to be that of being more lived than theorized. It seems to spring from that unconditional self-emptying of his soul into the Mystery of the Incarnation. This derives from that interior thrust of his of transcending every adherence to creatures, which is at the same time, as a placing of himself at the total disposition of the will of God for the salvation of his brothers and sisters, in every occasion and at all times.

14. If it may be permitted to an obstinate reader and translator of Søren Kierkegaard, a contemporary of Fr. Bertoni, in discerning a certain consonance here with the mystical life of abandonment. In his *Great Diary*, Kierkegaard observes that in the life of the Spirit, it is not so much a matter of becoming 'adults', as happens in natural life, but that of becoming children once again, and to "pray like children". This demands considering oneself less than nothing before God but as babies. Obviously, the terms 'baby, children' here do not indicate that bio-psychological infancy but rather that of the spirit which consists in the total self-giving of one's own freedom to God and with all the strength of one's soul. In a commentary on Ga 1:7, Kierkegaard observes:

"... For us, to progress in the interiority of our relationship to God, this is manifested as a kind of proceeding backward. In other words, one does not approach God directly but if only if one comes to grasp ever more profoundly our infinite distance from Him..."

15. As a result, one does not begin to become ever more like children, so that then one might be more confident with increasing age: in order to then to become [spiritual]children. It is not this one simply becomes more child-like [Diary, Ital. N. 2722]. In an earlier text, which seems to be a kind of poetic compendium of the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of Grace, he wrote: "... It is like when we give something to a child: and, in order to make the child content, we suppose that it is really he who instead is giving to us that which we have given to him and therefore it is ours. Thus, our relationship really is not like this, because God at the same is the One Who is giving the complement. Therefore, it must always be when a father or a mother have helped the child to write a little letter of well-wishes for one's birthday, and then they accept this as his gift for that day..." [n. 1533].

16. A stronger expression of his is of a metaphysical nature, from a text of 1850: In the context of sensible and exterior realities, the object is something other than the manner: there are several manners to do something – and a person might succeed in finding the best possible manner.... In relationship to God, the 'how' is the 'what'. Whoever does not place himself on relationship in the manner of the most absolute abandonment does not place himself in relationship with God. With

respect to God one cannot use as his principle only to try 'up to a given point' because God is precisely the negation of all that is 'up to the certain point'. The text begins with the affirmation: "...To place oneself in relationship with God, to be genuinely religious without ever experiencing a wound – and I confess that I find this inexplicable..." [n. 2936].

17. There is, then this consonance of Kirkegaard with Fr. Bertoni which goes back to their common font, the New Testament. Furthermore there are traces of common readings of Catholic mystics, such as *The Imitation of Christ*, St. Therese, St. John of the Cross, Fenelon, St. Alphonsus de' Liguori...²⁵

†††

Conclusion:

A Life totally for the Church

[1] The actuality of the figure and the undertakings of Fr. Bertoni can be summarized in two simple phrases: ... *A Man totally Evangelical and totally ecclesial.* His was a soul permeated with the spirit of the Gospel, and devoured by his zeal for without boundaries. We learn from Fr. Lenotti that his principal study was Sacred Scripture, of which he knew much by memory. As a result his ordinary manner of speaking was fully scriptural. In the nearly iconoclastic fury which has attacked the sacred text on the part of some modern criticism, the docility of the Saints to the Word of God from which they drew for the light to overcome the arduous trials of spirit and to develop their grand enterprises for the glory of God.

[2] It was from the sacred text that Fr. Bertoni traced also that basic imperative, or that Christian distinctive characteristic of contrast with this world: "... *I have chosen you out of this world...!*" In explaining this passage in the Spiritual Exercises he preached to the clergy, he applied to the priest that which Bourdaloue had directed to religious:

"... he [the priest] has to be detached from and crucified to the world, one needs to repeat that which the Apostle St. Paul writes; '*...The world is crucified to me and I to the world...!*' For since I am a priest, if the world does not permit coming in harmony with my principles - and I very easily find agreement with its maxims, then I am a priest only in name. "*... If I should please men, I am not Christ's servant...!*" In order to be as priest indeed, and in truth, it is required that I should be in the world as in a state of suffering. It is necessary that the

²⁵ **Translator's Note:** in these last few paragraphs, Fr. Fabro offers a real theological presentation of Holy Abandonment, and provides excellent sources for further reflection.

world should be my Cross, as I will infallibly be a cross to this world. The reason is due to the contrariety of sentiments and of principles that will be found between the world and me, as long as I want to comport myself as a genuine priest ...”²⁶

[3] These are sublime words, especially for today. Fr. Bertoni’s times, as was stated at the outset, were quite different from ours. However, the sufferings of humanity, the crisis of faith, the situation of the Christian on this world ... seem to intensify all the more as these realities impact every age, at every turn of human progress. The manners of thinking change, and also the prospects of civility: the trajectory of life towards the gulf of death, and being overwhelmed by the same enigmas, no matter what the number and the qualities of elements that work in its mutating arch.

[a] Today, hope is much magnified and this is good: however, for us, it has to be a Christian hope, it needs to address believers upward toward those immutable goods and yearn for that Augustinian Sabbath that will never end. Therefore hope must be nourished by faith, and must flow forth within its certainties’, and not get diverted into the earthly swamps rivet itself in some kind of a “foolish flight.” This needs to be a hope which enkindles one toward the elevation toward God and in the service of one’s neighbor.

[b] Fr. Bertoni was one who was malleable, but firm at the same time. He knew how to ponder the signs of his times, he read and had others read the daily newspapers as something most useful from which one might draw new avenues for the apostolate. However, he observed in his Diary: “... *It is necessary to enter into the house of another in a manner so that what we might learn then to lead others to ours.*” This is a rule of realism and of boldness, it seems to us and not just another form of *aggiornamento* of the Church in this world, or some other format of ‘dialogue with this world’, which have often amounted tactics of equivocal compromises. What needs to be concluded from all this is a service of fidelity to the salvific Truth with respect to the mystery of freedom.

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²⁶ R. P. Bourdaloue, *Ritiramento spirituale ad uso delle comunita’ religiose*, presso Niccolo’ Pezzana 1742, p. 28.

[II] THE WITNESS OF THE “MODEL”

[MIRROR – COPY – FOLLOWING - IMITATION - EXAMPLE] OF GOD, JESUS, APOSTLE,
MARTYR

[Titolo: Gaspare Bertoni, testimone del soprannaturale

Fonte: volume unico “*SYMPOSIUM BERTONIANUM*” ,

Pontificia Universitas ANGELICUM, 28 ottobre 1989,

Ed. Stimmgraf, Verona 1990, pp. 36-60]

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INTRODUCTION: Perfection and Imitation

[1] ‘Witness is a term, both anthropological and privileged, that permeates and is of interest to the most elevated and constitutive levels of conscience, beginning with its first manifestations of being in the world. It reaches even to the depths of those movements of the *Ego*, in order to be brought to the heights of human relationships with God, both on the natural level, as well as that on the supernatural in the Magisterium of God with Revelation. This is especially applicable with redemption, through that grace merited for us, by Christ with His Passion and Death.

[2] A witness is one who attests [through one’s own proper and direct knowledge] the reality of a fact, the truth of a principle, and commits to this attestation the dignity of one’s own person within the social life. Thus, ‘testimony’ is the most valid existential support in the affirmation of the truth in the individual and social life. It attains its exterior guarantee of morality and of honor when it is accompanied, as happens in legal processes, by the pronouncing of an oath which is the social seal of the truth of the testimony. Its first and absolute foundation is its reference to God, the Prime and Absolute Truth: the modern States which have abolished God in their Constitutions, as has Italy, entrust to the personal honor of the citizen, who only with the greatest difficulty can become inclined to testify against himself – i.e., to recognize one’s own errors to the harm of one’s own interests.

[3] Only in the sphere of the Christian religion is truth guaranteed by ‘witness’ its double aspect, both objective and subjective, i.e., as far as the reality of the reality and of the object are concerned, and dependent on the sincerity of the fact because the Christian is committed to tell the truth before God. He is the Truth by essence, from which nothing escapes, and Who one day will render His judgment. The Christian, therefore, makes a ‘leap’ of quality because each recognizes as Judge the

Man-God. This Incarnate Truth has appeared in time in order to redeem humanity from sin: to Him is reserved the final act of history.

[4] Thus, Christ has become, through the Incarnation, the first Witness of the Father to humanity and for the salvation of all, the sole Savior from sin, Advocate and Judge at the same time: He is the essential Witness because He is the eternal Truth, before the beginnings of history, and who is as Truth in time, because He is the Author of the salvation of humanity immersed in history.

1. THE STAGES OF THE DESCENT

The descent, given the infinite distance, departs from God, Who is the Incomprehensible, but He is also the One and Only from Whom the initiative might finds its beginning.

1]. The first Model is God Himself: *Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect!* [Mt 5; 48] And it is this which to the light of reason is the least comprehensible and possible but here it is proposed as the source of exuberance of good and good itself, the doing of good, as the context states and is available to all. He is the Model of effusion and profusion.

2]. The second Model is presented in the first Person, and He is the Word made flesh: *I have given you the example so that as I have done for you, you will do for one another* [Jn 13:15]. The hypostatic union provides the guarantee of the accessible reality of the invitation of the One who has fallen into temporal reality can lift on high, even to God Himself, this reality and to transfigure it in an act of love.

3]. The third Model is the Apostle himself who received from Christ Himself the message of truth and has fulfilled it even to the sacrifice of his life: *martyr*, i. e., the witness of choice united to Christ in the reality of life and death. In fact he states: *I beg you to become imitators of me as I am of Christ* [1 Co 4:16].²⁷

a. Therefore, there are three models: God, the Word Incarnate and the Apostles? The answer is 'no', at least on the existential level – but rather three moments in the elevation towards the ultimate foundation, and three stages in the descending-ascending transformation of the Model in solidarity with God in Christ, thanks to the preaching of the Apostle-'Martyr', *par excellence*.

²⁷ «Indeed, you know how necessary it is that you imitate us..” (2 Thess. 3,7). And our remaining among you is so that we might give to you the form to imitate [???] (2 Thess. 3,9).

b. The “Model” demands conformity, imitation, repetition... on the level of the freedom of love ... However, this is lacking for the absolute emergence in quality between the Creator and the Creature, between the Savior and the sinner, by reason of the distance between the two extremes is infinite since it is a difference of quality – Creator and creature, Holy and sinner – which interrupts every bond and rejects every affinity...it is an abyss: but over this Abyss which is God Himself according to the repeated affirmations of St. Catherine of Siena. He has set up a “bridge” which is the Incarnate Word.²⁸ It is on the principle of this bridge that the ‘Principal of Model’ functions.

[c] Now the conformity with the Model is the ‘practice’ of love that God wills and awaits from His creature and which the Word realizes with grace. And as the Word ‘repeats’ in fullness the Truth of the Father and the Spirit repeats to the full the mutual love of God for humanity, and that ineffable thrust of love of humanity for God. ‘Belonging’ is a static word which within the existential sphere of freedom can be said to be ‘repetition’ in the strong sense of ascent of the creature to the high point with God and with the transformation of the sinner into an [adoptive] child of God.

4]. In other words this is the ‘transcendental metamorphosis’ and this in two stages: from run to reparation and from reparation to transfiguration, when God will be all things in Christ [1 Co 15:28], in the restoration of the universal order.’ ‘Renewal’ is a term that is understood in the biblical sense: it is more than ‘repetition’ in the ordinary sense which occurs on the horizontal level. It is also even more than ‘Revolution’ that crushes opposition and creates disorder and victims. ‘Repetition’ is precisely the ‘Renewal’ on the part of God, of His Plan of Salvation and includes newness, surpassing the past... as a projection beyond time into a light that does not know of setting. *Behold, I will make new all things.* [Rv 21:5].

5]. The Model precedes us, animates us, urges us onward, ahead and above.

a. The theological models just indicated, transcend us: God, Christ, the Apostle, they all leave us at an insuperable distance because they attain, on different levels, the Infinite. And further, they have their orientation toward us, they have descended to us to make us walk along with them and thus they become our Models: rather, they are models in an intensive sense, in so far as they grasp us and welcome us into the center of the life of the spirit, which is that active, critical moment’ of freedom, or the commitment of imitation

²⁸ *Dialogo*, La dottrina del ponte, 26-28, ed. Cavallini, Roma 1968: pp. 57 ss.

b. And here the dimensions of existence develop into the infinite as the tensions of the spirit, between doing and not doing, and of doing this action or that other one: here there is placed the radical choice which is the responsibility of every individual. Here the Model presents itself which the Gospel proposes for the re-establishment of the reign of God.²⁹ Fr. Bertoni lived the demand of Model even to the extreme extent of the ‘Heroicity of Virtues’, as recognized by the Church. This is the ultimate characteristic of perfection that the believer might attain here on earth in “*The Imitation of Christ*”, and thus to be transfigured into the life of God in Christ.

c. For this arduous journey of the soul there is needed a guide which for the baptized - and others could not be – as has been seen – and this is no one other than the Incarnate Word Himself, Who is the Model in His essence. As God, He guarantees the infinity of perfection - and as Man, He traverses for us that pathway of grace in order to reach with robust love the supreme summit of the Cross.

d. Fr. Bertoni experienced this from the very dawn of his priesthood with extraordinary rays of light and love which reached ecstasy. This is of interest to us now, the beginning of the first steps up this ‘delightful mountain’ which he expressly indicates to us with His ‘Model-Principle.’ He emphasized the humble but faithful practice of the examination of conscience which is typical exercise of his realistic anthropology of Ignatian inspiration, which embraces the entire life-project,³⁰ as a totality.

6]. The Model-Principle thus becomes, in Fr. Bertoni’s text, the “Mirror-Principle” to be applied with power realism of movement – and this, certainly in such a context – from on high to the depths, i.e., finds its beginning from God and from Christ, the Divine Model. This takes into consideration from our lowly condition of our daily concrete actions the circumstances and situation of new life. And that attentive visit, routine and loyal, into the garden of one’s own soul. Each one needs to pause without giving in to the indulgence of that hurly-burly situation of one’s chaotic life, disordered and sometimes disheartening – much like the chaotic vine of Renzo’s vine in the classic, *Promessi Sposi*.³¹

²⁹ The Middle Ages have provided an original exposition of the work, in the *De imitatione Christi*. It is thought today, with valid arguments to support the idea, that this was composed by John Gerson (cf. crit. ed. di Tiburso Lupo, Città del Vaticano 1982. It was presented as “the master-piece of Christian asceticism and mysticism”, p. VIII s.). One might point out that in this work the complete absence of the Mother of God, while one might indeed savor the Eucharistic material in Book IV.

³⁰ S. Teresa suggests this through individual actions, e.g., prayer, while eating, praying before undertaking any action. (*Obras completas*, B.A.C., 8 ed. Madrid 1986, s. v. p. 1466 b).

³¹ Let us give a hint here for the delight of those interested in botany: : «It was a filthy mess of stinging nettles, of ferns, of tares, of weeds, of wheat powder, of wild oats, of green poke-weeds, of dandelions, of sour vinegar,

a. One's resolution ought to be concrete and adhering to the reality and one can only offer his own life in this way, if he is truly a person who has had first made his way on the same pathway set out for us now. When he jotted the text of July 30, 1808 in his spiritual diary, Fr. Bertoni was just about 31 years of age. He was in the full blossoming of his youth aflame with zeal and totally immersed in his own self-giving to that essential Love for his God and for Christ. He experienced this with his perennial joy as the fortunate minister. This text at this stage he was already a master of Ignatian asceticism, which goes back to the ancient cenobites, the practice of the examination of conscience.

b. Let us read now that 'principal' text in this regard of Fr. Bertoni:³²

... In order to make the examination, it is necessary to take a saint of the same vocation as a mirror: then one would discern that he would have enough to confess every day: all that is lacking from that perfection is a defect...

c. This text is simple in its context and leads one to think that Fr. Bertoni would go to confession every day, as other Saints did - and among these is St. Gemma Galgani³³. These saints desired to make spiritual progress within the limits of the possible, and they also practiced this out of their hunger induced by grace and that burning aspiration for interior purity. This self-comparison with a Saint is always available and is the first small step for one's rising up and ascending from below to on high. The Saint fore-chosen as one's 'Model', stands by the aspirant to holiness in order to urge each one onward, and also stands on high in order to offer some judgment – but not only this but also to comfort us, console us... and therefore never to leave us alone in the spiritual combat and so also stands along-side us, and goes on ahead of us with the light of the spirit, in order to wrap us, according to the circumstances, with those most subtle bonds of grace.

d. Therefore, as Christ is the means of the reconciliation of humanity with God by delivering us from sin and introducing us into the life of grace, so, the Holy 'Model' of one's own vocation, attracts us to Himself and commits us with the grace of the essential Model Who is Christ Himself, to live in Him, i.e., in His imitation, and to live in Him through a Covenant of love.

of dried panic-grass, and many other plants; such, as I would like to say, that the peasant of every land made of it all something important each in his own manner, giving the name of the mess to be that of his very own herbs, or something similar» (c. 33, ed. Bacchelli-Scarpa, Milano 1934, p. 527 s.). This description continues and should be read in its entirety.

³² *Memoriale privato*, ed. G. Stofella, Roma 1962, p. 28.

³³ For a documented analysis of this, consult our work: *Gemma Galgani: testimone del soprannaturale*, ed. CIPI, Roma 1986.

“A person in quest of perfection would have to find one whom he would hold in veneration, whose authority would also render even more holy his unseen life. How happy is the man who would emend his own life and not only when another was present, but also by just thinking about him! How happy is the one who could venerate someone in this manner, that only the memory of him would suffice to compose and re-order his conduct! One who is so capable of venerating another, is also, he, too, immediately worthy of admiration

7]. The Contemporaneity, or Imitation as the Principle of Christian ‘Model’ according to Kierkegaard: this is the ‘Single’ person before God and Christ

a. Here the reflection is on the strictly Christological principle: the Chicana ought to become a contemporary in life with Christ, and each one ought to witness this against the ‘Mob’ [*Maengde*] who condemned Christ. The Christian must be the ‘Single’ person, in opposition to the ‘others’ and to the ‘Mass’ [crowd] and to being a ‘number’³⁴.

b. However, this concept is also in real contrast with Stirner’s idea of the ‘Unique’ or the ‘Superman’ of Nietzsche which truly are at odds with the principle of immanence [all of the same nature] with the pride of dominion and disdain. The ‘Mob’, or the ‘Crowd’ for Kierkegaard is chosen anonymity, the sundering any sense of responsibility – like the ones who derided Christ and spit on Him. The ‘Mob’, ‘Crowd’ thus incorporates the metaphysical principle of that evil that wishes to corrupt the ‘Single’ person, who alone would not have the spirit to rage in violence against the Holy ... Therefore, also Christ Who was crucified, and it had been the unruly ‘Mob’, Crowd to cry out to Pilate: *Crucify Him, let Him be crucified!* [Mt 27:23, f.]

c. The ‘Mob’ is, in human life, the principle of evil. The ‘Single’ person turns toward the Crowd in order to break it up, to reduce it ‘Singles’, and their communication is for the ‘Single’ person³⁵. To hold on to the Mob as valid, is to deny God. The ‘Single’ can [and should] be every person – this is the Christian principle and to the ‘Singles’, was dedicated, the *‘Edifying Discourses’*, the only writings that Kierkegaard published in his own name. It is the ‘Single’ person who in the masses, constitutes the qualitative difference’. For this reason, Kierkegaard admires and esteems in the Catholic Church the worship of the Saints [those glorious men and women, *de Hellege*]. They are the ones who provide the exact criterion of that which

³⁴ On the existential level, these are all synonyms. (Cfr. N.J. Cappelorn, *Index dei «Papirer»*, Copenhagen 1976, Bd. XV, pp. 234b-235a, 312a-315a.

³⁵ *Det Enkelte*.

the New Testament Christianity really is. It is for this reason, that merely mortal humanity would like to put them to death [4056]³⁶.

d. But if we want to save ourselves, we have to live as they [2144] followed Christ, the Model, *par excellence*. By now, in Protestantism, the time for saints has already passed, the ascetics, the martyrs are no longer chosen as Models but it is the Philistines who are being canonized. It has been affirmed that in the 'established Church', in dependence on the State, virginity is combated as well as is the cloistered life. This began with Luther, who in the end [in the very last place, in Kierkegaard's] the real person responsible for the degeneration of Christianity [4413]. And his cry is digestible: Listen to me, o Pope! [2145, 3054].

e. The cause of such a great catastrophe has been the abandonment of the 'Model-Principle', or the 'imitation' of Christ, which Kierkegaard, with an expression that is particularly original, he calls 'contemporaneity' [*Samtidighed*], which recalls 'as though present' from the text of Epicurus cited by Seneca.

f. The master-piece that Kierkegaard has dedicated to contemporaneity with the 'Model', is the *exercise of Christianity*, of Anti-Climacus [1849], and truly expresses the reality in act of the Imitation as this is then emphasized continuously in his *Papirer*.

g. This is the decisive Christian category [1809] and consists in seeing, and accepting this 'Single' Person, Jesus Christ, and the Son of God and it is therefore in the acceptance of the 'essential paradox' [853, 2805].

h. This is the martyrdom of the spirit suffered first by Mary and then by the Apostles [2573, 3649, 2967, 3833] As a result, 'contemporaneity' is the sole relationship of spirit what can be had with the greatness and therefore with Christ, Who is the essential Model since this implies the transformation of one's own "I" into Christ:

- (1) through a continuous comparison [as Fr. Bertoni also wanted] between my own life with that of Jesus Christ the Model [1924],
- (2) to make experienced the need of having recourse to the Model so that He might have Mercy and grant His grace.

'Contemporaneity' is therefore the expression of the authentic life of the Christian, directed toward the Model and consists in seeing the presence of Christ in the sick, in the poor, in the victims of injustice, in the suffering of every type... This is

³⁶ These bracketed numbers refer to the Italian Edition, 3rd ed. Of the *Papirer* (Brescia 1981 ss.).

therefore a duty and a grace of Christ that one has when he expresses readiness to 'be crucified along-side Him' [1983, 2074].

i. It is not therefore to eliminate suffering, but to achieve with it the imitation of the Model [3076]: it is therefore that 'situation which demands the supreme effort' during the life of Christ [1836] When Christ was crucified, all the Apostles fled, the only 'contemporary' of Christ at that moment has been the Good Thief [Lk 23; 28, ff], crucified along-side Him.

j. Protestantism has eliminated the requirement of the 'Model' with the pretext of grace, and has contributed to producing the proletariat [2509]: 'Luther is therefore contrary to an apostle because instead of preaching Christianity in the interests of God, He has bent it – as later would likewise do Goethe, Hegel, Mynster... – in the interests of humanity [3910, 4129]. And so, Protestant Christianity has been reduced to 'rigmarole', as has Catholicism [3780]: it continues to make bandits trust in grace. [3613].

8]. The Christian "Model-Principle

Abraham and Mary: the 'models of faith and of total dedication to God.

Thus, the dialectic of the Model becomes the authentic life of the freedom of the Christian, but in the opposite sense willed especially in the end, by Luther, in collusion with secular principles and those enjoying them. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, does not pay heed to the Epicurus-Seneca idea of 'Model', but sees the advance of the life of faith according to the *way of the Cross* and looks constantly to the example of the saints.

However, beyond all the Saints and of the corresponding extraordinary 'Single' person, stands the Model of the Virgin Mary, whom he could approach even to his reading of *The Glories of Mary*, of St. Alphonsus de Liguori – in sharp contrast with the Protestant tradition. Mary, the Virgin Mother is the sublime Mother of God [113], the pure Virgin from whom Christ was born [121]. She conceived in time, overshadowed as she was by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God [205]. Mary is the Model of religious silence who conserves the secret of God also with her Spouse, Joseph [1531]. Mary is especially the example of fortitude, in her following of Christ, when the Prophet Simeon [Lk 2:25 , ff.] announced that her soul was to be pierced by a sword [2573, 3649]. And also as she stood by the Cross.

9]. Kierkegaard's "Exercise in Christianity"

And Kierkegaard sees the example of Mary's faith following the path of the Patriarch, Abraham. He is our father in the faith – ready to sacrifice in obedience to

God his son [cf. Gn 21]. This heritage leads her to exclaim a prophetic hymn honoring the Virgin Mary: *Who in this world was ever as great as the Full of Grace!* [Lk 1:28], the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary?"

10]. Kierkegaard's Childhood Impressions

There follows then his moving admiration:³⁷ 'And yet, how is she spoken of?' Kierkegaard seems to be thinking here of the Protestant conception: 'Her greatness, he comments, does not derive from the fact of her being [proclaimed] 'blessed among women'... Certainly Mary brought into this world her Infant; yet this marvelous reality was accomplished in her in the manner of other women and that [as Kierkegaard reasons] was a time of anguish, suffering, of paradox but of all this, other men and women knew nothing and would have come to their judgment by appearances, as the phenomenon would have founded their judgment of the reality. Her situation is incomprehensible for all for all: "The Angel of the Annunciation] was certainly a serving manner, but he certainly was not a servile servant – as the common grasp of this mystery might wish – that the knowledge of all this was brought to the other women of Israel in order to say to them: 'Do not disdain Mary, for that which is accomplished in her – this 'extraordinary happening' – is the work of the Holy Spirit. If indeed that Angel had come solely to Mary and no one would have been in a position to comprehend it... Mary does not need the world's comprehension, just as Abraham did not require tears. She was not a heroine, nor was he a hero. However, both became even greater than heroes and heroines by not fleeing from suffering and pain, rather it all took place through these.'

And such, but even on a still superior level was the Model, Christ in His time: would there be such thing as be in terror when one sat down to table with Him? There was not anything so easy as to become an Apostle!

Therefore, there is in this situation of Mary and, even before that of Abraham, with all respect to the 'contemporaries', an abyss of distance. There was not anything so easy as to become an Apostle! And yet, they remain Models of the faith. Let us say, though, that this was a bit of difference for the Apostle [Peter] who was scandalized at the prophecy of the passion and this provokes the tremendous correction from Christ: *'Get behind Me, Satan, you are a scandal to Me! Because you do not judge as God does, but more like men do!'* [Mt 16:22, f.]

Here the paradigm of classical Model is left behind at an infinite distance. For this reason, Paul could say and with more right not only of Abraham, but along-side

³⁷ Cfr.: *Fear and Trembling*, Problematika I, s.v. III: « Can there ever be a suspension of ethics?», p. 117ss. (tr. it. Milano, Rizzoli 1986, p. 92 ss.).

Mary: *'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ'* [1 Co 4:16; 11:1]. After the Incarnation, in fact the means of the relationship of humanity with God is not just anyone, but rather the Virgin Mary and the Apostle to whom, God, and through Him Christ Himself, has entrusted the presentation of the Model who needs to ascend even into the Heart of the Beloved to exclaim: 'I die because I do not die!³⁸ 'And the unknown Doctor of Love had preceded him, the Pseudo-Dennis who says of his Disciple, Hierotheus that he had not only known the divine realities, but experienced them.³⁹

And this is the high point of the divine instruction of God with the soul and St. Thomas Aquinas comments:

... Just as if some virtuous person, out of the habit of virtue which he/she has in affection, is perfected to rightly judging those matters which pertain to virtue - so, too, the person engaged in the divine realities, receives divinely the right judgment concerning the divine. And therefore, such a person is subject out of compassion for the divine, i.e., from all that which by loving divine realities, this person became joined to them [and so if the union of delectation might be called 'com-passion' it is at the same time a passion]. Thus, Hierotheus is *most perfect*, i.e., he is instituted into that union of faith regarding these matters, i.e., as that which he says about these, he is joined by that union of faith; I mean; the *un-teachable*, i.e., that which cannot be taught by any human magisterium; this is *mystical*, i.e., hidden, because it exceeds any natural conjunction. [And now follows a theological explanation:] – And so, as in only a few can we understand the many and blessed visions, i.e., those divine revelations of *powerful deliberation*, i.e., of that virtuous discussion of that Hierotheus, even though on many other matters has he spoken, nonetheless these that follow, he says in praise of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

11]. The 'Model Principle' in Fr. Bertoni's Spiritual Diary [July 1808-June 1813]:

The text of Fr. Bertoni which the most closely reveals 'the following of Christ' seems to be that brief note-book that has come down us with the title, *Memoriale Privato*. This runs from July 1808 until June of 1813,⁴¹ and that pertains to that experience of his early priestly maturity.

³⁸ St. John of the Cross, *Opere*, Roma 1963, p. 1043.

³⁹ Hierotheus is not only learning about the divine, but is suffering them.» (*De div. nom.* I, 9; P.G. 3, 648. Cfr *S. Theol.* q. I, a.6 ad 3 e *Comm. S. Thomae*, n. 19).

⁴⁰ Hieroteus non modo discens sed etiam patiens divina» (*De div. nom.* I, 9; P.G. 3, 648. Cfr *S. Theol.* q. I, a.6 ad 3 e *Comm. S. Thomae*, n. 19).

⁴¹ This Note-book has since been published, in an integral edition, with historic-ascetical notes, under the care of Fr. J. Stofella in: «*Collectanea Stigmatina*», vol. IV. fasc. I, Roma 1962.- The most abundant texts are those

The original text was a note book of much discontinuity and quite varied in style for his personal use and it gathers, more by means of hints than by systematic developments. It includes thoughts and impressions which enflamed and illumined his spirit. The writing style does not present any concerted effort at continuity, and his themes seem to show their any connection with what he lived on any given day. It can be derived in this text of Fr. Bertoni that the theme he jotted down would have resulted from his reflection at the moment, as with the examination of conscience [or his "Model-Principle"] that we have tried to analyze in presenting some insights in similar texts from Seneca-Epicurus.

The similarity of these texts is quite evident, but the distance of the experiences derived are experiences of an infinite distance. This derives from the horizon, of that life both on the human level and that of God. Furthermore; Fr. Bertoni's texts seem to ignore the gradualism of the divine communications described by the spiritual masters. The young priest was *living* directly this reality and was immediately lifted to a sublime level, which seems to be that of ecstasy with a total and immediate participation.

2. Mystical Experiences:

1]. "The Feast of the Sacred Heart:

During Mass, at the consecration, Communion and during the thanksgiving afterward, there were many tears of compunction and affection: in particular, at Communion I experienced for a moment, as though my spirit was detached⁴² from every creature in deferential service [*ossequio*] of its Creator." [p. 207]

There seems clear here that the phenomenon of ecstasy had occurred.

2]. "After Mass, during the thanksgiving, I experienced a most vivid sense of faith in the presence of our Lord and much confidence: there was further a sentiment of offering with Him some disturbances for Him and with Him" [p. 108].

Does this mean further that the great 'Enemy' did not leave him in peace: is this the only hint of this possibility? There are also other texts where Fr. Bertoni speaks of vexation'.

that go from July 1808 until May 1809; the most abundant single text is that of May 1810; from January 1811 to its closing in 1813, there is emphasized particularly the text of May 30, 1812 (p. 183): he notes his a before the Crucifix, a scene of most sublime elevation.

⁴² «Ec-stasy' is that term of mystical theology in the sense of separation, detachment from every created reality in order to concentrate on God and in the meditation - contemplation of the divine mysteries of the faith.

3]. “At St. Joseph’s Convent. At the base of one’s own nothingness, one finds God. Experiencing some sublime reflections, there came over me a profound self-knowledge. In the evening, on seeing an image of the Most Blessed Trinity, there was much reverence for the three Divine Persons. The eternal Father, Who stood there with open arms explained His mercy to me, and the ready communication of his gifts, etc... [pp. 211, f.].⁴³

4]. Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises. In a visit with my companions to the altar of St. Ignatius, I experienced much devotion and recollection and some tears, even though it was a short visit. It seemed to me that the Saint gave us a warm welcome and invited us to promote the greater glory of God as he had accomplished, and by same paths, even though not trying to undertake all those manners that he was able to employ. It seemed to me that he had wanted to say [could this have been an interior locution?]: Onward, soldiers of Christ, gird yourselves with fortitude, take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, *and fight with the ancient serpent*. Make come alive once more my spirit in you and in others through you [p. 213]...

This seems to have been the first motion toward founding the Congregation.

5]. Meditation. Death. The past no longer exists. The Future has not yet come.

Only the Present is here and it is in my power. To live from day to day, even from the morning until noon, and from noontime until the evening, and to do everything with the greatest possible perfection. Perhaps there will be no other time to glorify God.”[p. 214]

This is a profound declaration on the precariousness of existence.

6]. Meditation. The Kingdom of God. I experienced a strong movement to follow closely our Lord even at the cost of life, through poverty and shame’

And he continues on the same day:⁴⁴ “The celebration of Mass was very recollected with sentiments of reverence. and I taught Catechism with much zeal and

⁴³ The 9th of October is in the same context – his 31st birthday; however, he writes with depth and seven greater emotion: : During Mass, at the Secret prayers at the *memento* for the living , I experienced a kind of opening of my intellect and a coming to know just to Whom it was I was speaking. I noted a deep affection and an intensification of charity in praying. Then there were certain thrusts of my heart toward God, as those these were imposed by the Spirit in God. The experience was like that of a person who suddenly runs into a dear friend who had not been seen for years At the first sight of him the desire was to greet him with great affection... Then, ...”

^{44 bis} September 25th., still in the year 1808, p. 414. – he is speaking here about the teaching and careful explanation of Catechism to adults on the truths of Faith.

persuasion, and even some eloquence. The Lord began first to come to me by having me remember that His Divine Son preached in Jerusalem totally fasting, and then He returned only in the evening to Bethany. This moved me much to love and to my work; and while explaining these matters as a kind of preamble opened up for me, all the ways were open to me for an even more persuasive discourse.” [September 17, 1808, pp.214, ff.].

There is in these lines an indication of his intimacy of life with the ‘Divine Model.’

7]. The following entry is for ten days later: “Meditation. Incarnation. Sentiments of gratitude to the Blessed Trinity and a yearning for correspondence to Jesus Christ. I was already obliged to love God even before He became man: how much more so now!” [ib.] [Fr. Bertoni seems to be experiencing an intensifying penetration of the mystery of the Incarnation.

8]. [On the following day, he noted:] “Meditation and afterward. A desire and humble petition for martyrdom, and a great internal exhortation”. [Still further:] “In the evening, feelings of pardon. There was a sentiment of intense love for the most Holy Trinity in giving to us the Son. I experienced great tenderness towards this mystery and at the same time a vibrant faith and desire for union and for an association in His, with a petition of sufferings and shame, with a petition for the grace of suffering, and of being disdained for Him.” [p. 215]

There seems to be an increasing desire of greater depth on his participation in the life of his model.

9]. [There follows in this same rhythm on September 29th:] “There came a deep knowledge of what it means to suffer something out of love for God. ‘*Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice’ sake. Blessed are they who are cursed and abused and as others reject your name as so evil, and they speak all kinds of calumny against you, falsely on my account Rejoice in that day, for your reward will be great in heaven!*’ [This is a relatively ‘free’ rendition of Mt 5:11-12].

[He seems to be alluding here to contrasts and opposition to his ministry, and might there have been also some calumny? However, the Lord comes soon to console him].

10]. In fact, on October 9th, his birthday, celebrated on the Feast of the Maternity of Mary, he experienced much and needed increased space for his spiritual life: in pages that are resplendent with graces received, are all mixed in with sufferings for

sins, the divine touch of what was received on his First Holy Communion, all come together in the total plan of life:

a] “During Mass, during the Secret’ prayers, at the ‘*Memento*’, I experienced an opening up of my intellect to come to know just Who with Whom I was speaking, with an intensified affection and expansion of my heart in praying. Then, there were certain thrusts of my heart toward God, under the impetus of the Spirit into God. It was much like the sudden appearance of a person who had not been seen for a long time, and at the first sight of this old friend there the desire to cast myself into his welcoming embrace.”

b] Second stage: ‘There came then the desire to prolong the visit⁴⁵ and the impetus to be able to reach the Supreme Good. However, feeling some fear of vanity, since I was in public, I had recourse to the consideration of the gravest of sins⁴⁶, and so there increased both the desire for goodness and a love that dissolved into tears that were very sweet and that lasted even until after Communion. And meanwhile there was a great growth in faith, confidence, at the same time, with humility and loving reverence.’

c] Third Stage: “Finally at Holy Communion I experienced very intense devotion and sentiments like those I experienced on my First Holy Communion day when I was a child – and I do not remember any such experience since then. This recollection lasted about an hour even after Mass, and remained until

This recollection from his boy-hood days is both wonderful and significant. Would this imply that as a boy he had an experience of an ecstasy of vocation and total consecration to the love of union with the Incarnate Word?

[This experience was repeated with an interior voice on October 24th:] While making the way of the Cross, at the First Station I came to understand: If I allow myself to condemn the innocent One, why do you – so guilty of thousand fault – want with such solicitude to be among those who justify themselves in everything?” [p. 219]

Let us then encounter also that transforming experience of Hierotheus noted above, that we have taken under consideration with the reflections of St. Thomas as our Guide. The scene, or back-drop for Fr. Bertoni’s note, is that *privileged place* of

⁴⁵ This seems to have been the experienced of an ecstasy as an action of perceptible immediacy.

⁴⁶ There is noted here that motion of deep love among the saints who considered themselves to be the greatest sinners, beginning with St. Paul (I Tim 1, 15). However, it is surprising that this situation is repeated in those Saints whose way of life is considered to have been totally innocent. (On this matter of the depths of supernatural love, cf. C. Fabro, *Gemma Galgani: testimone del soprannaturale*, Roma 1987).

the Holy Mass: “During Mass, I experienced brief insights, but quite vivid, a deep sentiment of the divine Presence, trust, love and the desire to transform myself into Him, and that Jesus might live in me, and no longer just myself. After Mass, this grace of union did not last. But, it did return as I was making my way along the street, tending to some family matters, must as it was when I was in Church.”⁴⁷ [p. 219]

[III] SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

1. [The Necessity of the Divine Lights in order to progress]: “Do not do anything, if it is not accomplished for the glory of God and for His holy love from this principle, proceeds disdain for the world ... the proclamation of all vices!” [p. 234]

[War on one’s own defects]: ‘I can’t’ in the matter of mortifications, said by spiritual persons, sounds really bad: the reason is that in God, one can do all. If one would like to cover with the name of ‘cross’ that has come from heaven, as the lack of mortification, and under a false veil almost taking pleasure in a choice of one’s own will from heaven, one would take delight in his own faults.’ [p. 212].

[The advantage of some temptations]: “It is necessary to prepare oneself for greater temptations and in order to make reparation for defects already committed, means that one has arrived where God is calling us” [p. 213].

2. [To commit oneself to spiritual progress]: “I experienced the inspiration to combat the little defects and at other times, those that are greater: and to ascend toward virtue with all diligence because the time in which I am able to serve God constantly grows shorter, as it does to promote His glory, and to sanctify myself” [p.216].

The desire to imitate Christ in poverty, and in the pinch of poverty” [p. 218].

3. [The Example of the Laity]: “It is a great mystery to see such holiness among seculars, and so much imperfection and vices in a priest’ [pp 221].

[Penalties of Pride]: “Pride and vainglory are one vice the deformity of which the just comprehend and they experience for it all the horror of the most tragic effects imaginable: as a result, even at the slightest appearance of this, and all the generosity of their spirit is as much weakened as one sees for the acquired virtues, or the stronger gratuitous gifts: living in dread as the rich do, and the wealthy even

⁴⁷ On October 27, he noted almost in passing, his being almost in ecstasy: in the first point of the Examen at noon, i. e., during his thanksgiving *prostrate on earth with the sight of heaven* [the Author’s italics]: intense sentiments of the divine presence toward love and self-giving.” (p. 219).

more the rapacity of thieves, who would despoil them of their wealth, and would suddenly leave totally empty their spiritual cashbox." [p. 220].

You will experience a conversion of the mind: however, it is not that easy regarding the will."

4. [Interior purification]: "If one would consider how great an evil sin is, such a one would never commit even one of them." [p.227- "When one first does not make meditation well, it is not even possible to speak well of God" [p. 226] – "Any habitual sinner is in a bad state for the past, and even worse for the present, and most disastrous for the future" [p. 333]. – "Take on the spiritual path, which is a narrow one and one of penance. *'I will not remember your sins, and I will show you how it will be necessary for you to suffer for My name.'*" "Very few are they who would understand that which God would do for them if He were not impeded in His plans by them." [pp. 240, f.]

5. [The Essence of the following of the Model]: "*Watch and pray!*" - In these words may be found all the teachings of Scripture and of the Gospel. – '*Watch!*' This means to be well equipped and strong: but without weapons. Such a one will not resist if attacked: such a person will be overcome."

'Pray!' This means to be well armed: but asleep: if one is assailed this persons will be despoiled of all weapons and killed through betrayal.- '*Watch and Pray!*' this is the well equipped and strong man, and one who is armed and thus cannot be conquered.' [p. 240].

6. [The Ecstasy of Love]: "While praying before Mass, I was overtaken a little by sleep and I heard it being said to me from the Crucifix: *Look at this, My heart!*" This message provided me with a marvelous insight to understanding, a great and unexpected ardor of soul, and thus ascending within to grasp the beloved object indicated. I experienced a kind of tremble run throughout my entire body. My eyes and mouth were closed but my soul seemed wide awake and full of joy. It seemed that my soul wanted to be separated from my body, and I seemed to be dying and rejoicing at the same time.

Turning again another time, as though the action of turning in desire toward the One Who was saying this, and the tremble was renewed within me and as the effect of a difficult death; after all this my spirit within me was uncertain as to what should be done, as it seemed that if I continued on in this experience I would be surely dead, or at least I would be removed from communion with my body, being then impeded. Joy remained in the hands of the Lord. I found much quiet as though in that moment I would die; and in an instant I felt that my soul had been restored for

the use of my senses, as before” [pp. 241, ff.]. The effect of all this was a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, much affection in the Holy Mass where my soul discovered sweet tears in Holy Communion and after deep recollection and sweetness that permeated the entire day with an experience of an increase of the theological virtues” [pp. 251, f.]. [There seems to be described here the light, the amazement and the joy of an ecstasy].

With the transforming activity of divine grace and the consequent experience of the Indwelling in his soul of the three Divine Persons in which his soul delighted. His soul undertook his final journey to giving himself over completely to His Beloved. He seems here to be experiencing the rising above all earthly ties that would deviate him from casting himself without reserve into the Heart of Christ. In all this, the Divine Model remains always present to the eyes of the soul, and his following after his Model also in the pastoral activity of the moment, that of preaching - this continued as long as his health permitted him to do so.

However, it is above all in the thirty years and more of his last illness, that Fr. Bertoni was ascending ‘the Ladder of Paradise’ which for him consisted in the total immolation of himself with his attention riveted continuously on his divine Model fixed to the Cross. Christ, the Incarnate and Crucified, drew him forward in ‘that thirst for suffering’. He, too, confined to his bed of real suffering for a thirty year period, he lived his mission in that segregation of love, day in and day out, engaged in ‘repeating’ and copying within himself the pathway of immolation and of similarity with his Divine Model. It is true, as is seen, that he had recommended, for the profit of his own soul, the choice of his Model’, which he found in ‘a saint of his own vocation’ and it seems that he had chosen above all through the admonition he experienced in ecstasy, at the altar of St. Ignatius, a model of universal commitment for Christ in building up and defending the Church from her enemies of yesterday and today, outside and within the Church.

But, Fr. Bertoni’s ‘witness’ has a special character, all his own. His recurring serious illnesses which took up almost the entire space of his long life, give testimony to this. During all this, he entertained visits from people in powerful positions, prelates, humble priests and people of the world ... none of these visits could interrupt the testimony of the Cross in his body lacerated as the ‘Suffering Servant of the Lord’, described by Isaiah. In all of this, he kept his attention riveted on the Martyr-Saints, whom he had proposed for himself that of imitating them with that fullness and totality of spirit, the amazes us. At the same time, this witness of his exalts us in filial joy and the special light that was shed on the mystery of the pilgrim Church in a *wicked world*.

The 'Ladder to Paradise' which is the Cross, is the throne of the immolation of the Word made flesh, in order to cancel the stain of the sins in this earthly life of so many Christians, whose bodies may still be listed in the Church, while they steadfastly keep, yesterday and still today, their souls outside the Church, even though they may not be actively combating her with her enemies. And so, the visible Church, which has become the stage of activity of that theater under the sway of the 'enemy', which the Devil is, and he seeks – and, at times, this still happens and it is that of suffocating and confounding the invisible dimensions of the church of the 'elect' [if such were possible]. For sure, during the slow unfolding of time of his painful illnesses, he felt often left quite alone with God in the solitude of his suffering. Fr Bertoni would often think of the lacerated Church, suffering under those instigations of the Evil One, horrified by so many betrayals, so much weakness, oscillations, flights, persecutions more or less disguised, but always going on in the Church herself.

The 19th Century was a great time for the witnesses for Christ but also of serious betrayals of Christ. Heresies in dogma, repeated giving in and shameless manifestations against morality, rampant materialism – yesterday just like today – in all circles. The political catastrophe, outside the Church, has caused a spiritual catastrophe inside, through the triumph – which is but a prevarication – of anti-Christian ideologies! Many of these were not only anti-Christian but – standing with the old principle of Seneca and Epicurus with which our reflections here began – many of these proved to be inhuman, totally anti-humanity, in that they were so opposed to the universal moral standing of which each one is moved to raise up one's contemporaries and to aspire toward the model.

So, what sense could a reflection such as this one have for today: a Witness for the Supernatural? The position yesterday and for always, takes place when the Church gives her authoritative judgment on the heroic practice [of following the 'Model'] regarding the life of the soul. The decision falls on the harmony ['the logical belonging of a predicate to the subject': i.e., the Church affirms that true fidelity, as that of our Father Bertoni, is lived in conformity to the precepts and the admirable examples of our Savior Jesus Christ. This authoritative judgment has already been given substantially in the Decree of Heroicity of his Virtue. He has further received a two-fold witness from God with the miracles required and approved for these definitive steps toward Beatification and Canonization. And so it is that it is God Himself Who works the miracles: in fact God is the sole creator of the universe, and he can insert Himself and can also interfere – i.e., by suspending, changing, intensifying – the comportment of the Laws that He Himself has conferred on nature.. And the Church, thanks to the research of the experts regarding the quality of experience, formulates the judgment on the reality and even on the 'fact' that has

taken place in the miracle. And the miracle constitutes the 'testimony' on the part of God Himself, or His direct intervention to work out, for our edification and 'example', His Servant in the halo of light of the Church.

And it is to this which contributes on the foundation of the 'judgment on the fact and first obviously, on the heroicity of the virtues, the investigation and the decision of the Church. And it is therefore the point in which there are encountered, *de facto*, the finite and the infinite, time and eternity.

Merely to 'state' a fact is not necessarily 'to comprehend' the course of its becoming, but simply attests to what has already taken place. 'To affirm' [and deny] is a term in continual use and of obvious understanding in so far as it attains an historical reality understood in space, and placed within the time of our existence. 'To comprehend', on the other hand, invests a complex constellation of factors, antecedents and consequences of the event in question, the presence of which and its action, i.e., the factors of its presence and situations of action, escape us altogether. And this is true also in the order of the events that are simply natural: chemists, meteorologists, biologists, physiologists – as also [and perhaps above all?] those multiple relationships that they have among them and which constitute the very course of nature. It is not any accident that St. Augustine affirms that these constitute a manifestation of the omnipotence of God much more surprising than the 'exceptions' constituted by so-called miracles."

However, we do not know the intrinsic 'how' of natural events, and there is not therefore any wonder if we do not know the 'how' of miracles which are facts which transcend the dynamism, i.e., the forces and the laws of nature. And it is this transcendence, when it is declared with authority [there is always a 'because', a reason behind such a declaration] therefore which passes the pertinent judgment rightly on the part of the Church. We can say that this stops at the *extrinsic* judgment regarding the fact, i.e., the holiness of the fact, and does not pretend, nor would it ever be able to do so, unless through a special revelation of God Himself, so make a pronouncement on the 'becoming' of the 'intimate being' of the transformation and transfiguration in to God and into Christ of a creature. In order to do this one would have to know, to penetrate, accompany, and contemplate from within ... the origin the operation of grace in the soul: this would be, in its own way, in the most sublime elevation of knowledge and of love, a participation in the very same blessed happiness which is the object and the term of that operation. This, in so far as it can be understood regarding the divine economy of salvation we can know this only 'in our eternal homeland' when we will be able to know – in order to rejoice and to thank God - the Plan of His divine mercy which has chosen us without any merit of our own, before the constitution of this world [Ep 1:4.]

Therefore, our distance from the supernatural is infinite and this is not only because God in His infinity remains inaccessible. But it is also due to the fact - and above all else - that the gift of Salvation that comes to us through the grace in the Blood of Christ, is completely gratuitous. This has in the creature - because of the reality of sin and its existential consequences, namely, the corruption of the sensitive and spiritual powers - uniquely the weighty store of negative and sinful premises or tendencies. It can be that the explicit knowledge of this negative baggage flees from all knowledge, yet it is reality makes itself present to each one with the two-fold weight both of limitation and of anguish. Such is man. As with the direct experience of his greatness, emerging over the cosmos and over all the material reality that surrounds us, provides a counter-weight in the daily experience of evil, vice and defects. And from all this too often does dominion flee, from those sins which are derived from it.

However, this is a 'dialectic experience, or one that is a negative-positive which freedom can be addressed toward a two-fold result, toward both evil and good. This leads either to perversion or to the holiness to which the Gospel invites us, and toward which St. Paul does not cease to exhort his faithful. It is true that the final result *is hidden with Christ in God* [1 Co 2:7]. However the Saint knows well human misery from his own point of departure. At the same time he takes note of and distinguishes the grace which draws him toward God and moves him to abandon himself into mysterious – but, quite clearly noticed – impulses and motions like the bird who takes off in flight and ever yearning for more. This can all be said and recognized as the consciousness of the supernatural, always on the level of *because*. The *what* and the *how* [and this latter even more] these all remain hidden to the human being way-farer.

And the *because* is sufficient to present the Saint [and in a broad sense every soul in grace] as the witness to the supernatural. It is true: here the paradox returns. The supernatural "transcends" the capacity of nature, both in the senses as well as in the intellect. But also the holiness of the Saint transcends nature, it surpasses the capacity of the normal faculties with their perfection of acting and that heroism in suffering. It does so in the 'imitation' of the Divine Model that each holds before himself: the Saint thus becomes the continuous surpassing of the *nor is there ever anything further*, not only from the Stoic and Epicurean view, but also of the 'Heroic Virtue' remembered by Aristotle.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ One can rather recall that 'divine instinct' (θείαδευμή) of the young Aristotle, which was accepted and developed to its height in the progress of the spiritual by St. Thomas (cf. C. Fabro, *Le «liber de bona fortuna» de l'Éthique à Eudème d'Aristote et la dialectique de la divine Providence chez Saint Thomas*, Revue Thomiste 1988, p. 566.

As we stated from the outset, the 'Saint' repeats in him/ herself the divine life of an active repetition, and not purely that in some abstract paradigmatic sense, and neither is it purely out of some privilege and characteristic of nature. Holiness in a human life can only take place through the elevation of grace and through a conformity in act of one's own life with that of God in Christ. And it is this 'Model' Fr. Bertoni proposes for us, and proposes it as the '*life in [of] Christ*'. The life of a Saint, therefore, unfolds not only on a diverse level from the ordinary, but breathes the very atmosphere of God and enters into mystery, in the ineffable, incomprehensible end-result in human history which is the exemplary life of the Incarnate word [the Essential Model].

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CONCLUSION

The 'Loving Experience of the Model' in the life of Fr. Bertoni.

At the outset we have recalled the comparison in the presentation Manzoni made of the life of the Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, with his enchantment of divine grace: *like a little brook... which flows limpidly and casts itself into the river* [c. 22]. The river of Fr. Bertoni's life and grace had been God, one and only, and totally in the lived Mirror of the Word. The texts of his Spiritual Diary authorize one to speak of spiritual, authentic experiences, but endowed with surprising characteristics. They did not follow some fixed trajectory, and they present themselves right away on a rather sublime level. And they flow along in fits and starts as sudden bursts of flames from a volcano. As these texts proceed along, rather than pausing to take delight in them, they seem to explode on the scene and at the end, even his very words seem to have been interrupted. Would this be the effect of the divine wave overflowing its banks into his spirit? And, as we have noted, divine communications pertain to a period that is relatively brief and they follow, as was pointed out, a clear trajectory of a clear expression.

For almost fifty years, Fr. Bertoni would hide in silence, the recurring phenomena of his interior life; it is true that this would burst forth in his sermons, in his correspondence, and in the guidance to souls of every age and social level – from the young men in the Oratory, to priests and bishops, from those condemned to death as well as the founders of religious families, including the great Anthony Rosmini. The last mentioned was able to declare that at the beginning of the foundation of his Institutes, he went to see Fr. Bertoni who: *...after having seen the rules, he provided me with a most efficacious encouragement, dissipating my every*

*doubt. So it is that in some manner, this enterprise has also been born in their house*⁴⁹. For reasons such as this, Fr. Bertoni was called an 'angel of counsel.'

Such experiences were most vibrant, much like spurs and flames, which reached the depths of one's soul. In this, our conclusion to these reflections may serve as a kind of a confirmation, just a few brief hints would suffice: the characteristic is that they have as their center the Eucharistic mystery, was though his life something like an expansion, or indeed, an effect of the Real Presence. The forms of this 'divine contact' are many and varied. Here are some examples: "... many tears of compunction and affections" – 'a most vivid sentiment in the presence of our Lord [after Mass] and the sentiment further of offering myself to suffer with Him... experiencing very sublime reflections concerning God, but a profound recognition of myself.'

In ecstasy at the altar of St. Ignatius he wrote"... much devotion and recollection with a great internal sweetness and some tears..." – and this was followed by energetic references of invitation addressed to the Saint. He experienced a powerful stimulus to work with perfection and a vivid sentiment of the fragility of human existence. He wrote: "... I experienced a strong movement to follow more closely our Lord at the cost of my own life for His poverty and shame He endured. During his teaching of Catechism he felt that ... there were opened for him those paths even to being able to arrive at a persuasive lesson. This almost seems like the level of a rapture.

The visit to St. Ignatius' altar was decisive for the foundation of his Congregation: "...Onward soldiers of Christ, bind yourselves with boldness.' There follows then a powerful thought on death. His catechism experience of September was strong 'union with the divine Son.' As a kind of preamble there were opened for him very easily those paths even to providing a most persuasive lesson. There followed then certain thrusts of 'suffering and being rejected for Him'. And he experienced an understanding what a great gift it was to suffer something for the love of God.' The most intense, though, seems to be that of October 9th, which needs to be reread often in its entirety for the depths of his experience of the supernatural in this young priest already having reached a high point in loving contemplation.

Likewise, for the intensity of impression, these stimuli toward holiness inundated his soul even to the ultimate purification of consuming love. It is just something of a pity and a real loss and disappointment for us to find his very sudden interruption [actually in the middle of a word] of that 'Story of a Soul' of this excellent

⁴⁹ Written from Stresa, on the 28th of March 1846. Cfr. C. Fabro, *L'enigma Rosmini*, Napoli 1988, p. 68.

testimony of his, enraptured by grace toward that two – fold and contemporaneous giving of himself to the priestly ministries and to that union with his beloved Model.

Also the life of Fr. Bertoni, like that of not a few other Saints, followed on the supernatural destruction of that school of English deism and of French Illuminism, of the 17th-18th centuries. This life of this Saint is rather the source of much light and comfort for Catholic piety. It is particularly relevant today for the Church which is hemmed in on every side by blatant secularism, even of the most delicate fibers of theology and ascetical practice.

We can recollect the supernatural experience of our Founder in a few words, which he pronounced very close to his death and after an entire lifetime spent in a real laceration of his flesh, in a response he gave to the Infirmary who was taking care of him: *I need to suffer!*⁵⁰

This remark implies a total conformity to Christ crucified. This is not simple acceptance, nor resignation, nor passive acceptance. This rather is an expression of his desire to suffer anew an increase, an intensification, to descend into the very depths of suffering and love for Christ Crucified. This is the supreme testimony on the part of a soul regarding the supernatural reality which, at its culmination, is the Folly of the Cross.

And here concludes our salutary, fragmentary analysis of the Saint from his own documents. These are certainly not self-seeking, reticent or vague comments – they are rather rich and splendid in character.

Fr. Bertoni can indeed say with the Apostle: And I make up for what is lacking to the passion of Christ [Col 1:24] - And this would be complemented by this other line, *our conversation is in heaven* [Ph 3:20]. These would be all part of that mysterious halo provided by that formula cited at the beginning, of Pseudo-Denis, for the disciple Hierotheus: ... 'He is taught not only by learning, but also suffering the divine realities...'⁵¹

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the first manner, or form of divine wisdom, as a lived experience – which does not proceed through argumentations, but '...by means of inclination: just as one who has the habit of virtue, rightly judges about those matters which are in harmony with the virtue to be performed, to the extent that

⁵⁰ This particular is taken from the first biography of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni: : «Notizie biografiche intorno al sacerdote don Gaspare Bertoni» di don Gaetano Giacobbe » (Proc. Apost., vol. II, p. 644).

⁵¹ S. Th. I-II, 68, a. 6 ad 3um; a. 2. This is the theological reflection on the texts from 'Etica Eudemea'.

such a person is inclined toward these...' It is an Augustinian principle to maintain: my inclination, is my love – I am weighed down by that wherever I am borne.'

The supernatural which is presented to us and penetrates the consciousness of the saint is unveiled as an effect of the Gift of Wisdom, according to the Angelic Doctor through which while virtue '... is ordained simply toward operating well, the gifts are ordained to this that through them we confess Christ, principally in so far as He has suffered these things, because in His Passion the gifts of this kind have principally shone forth.' Therefore the gifts operate in the soul in so far as the soul is moved from on high and is moved by An 'instinct and motion of the Holy Spirit...'⁵² So, while the theological virtues work *under the command of reason*, 'the gifts of the Holy Spirit are indeed habits, by which a person is perfected to obeying promptly the Holy Spirit.'

This holds true in particular for the Gift of Wisdom through which '... a person is endowed with judgment through the Holy Spirit.'⁵³ And the soul of Fr. Bertoni seems to us as having been able at this stage of his life that to have been invaded from his childhood years and moved by the continuing and secret stimuli of this superior wisdom as the vital form of his thinking and acting.

In this way, it can be said that Fr. Bertoni's entire life had been a 'Witness to the Supernatural' which had been lived in a continual asceticism under the continuous and intensifying mystical graces. It amazes one, though, when it is noted that his direct witnesses who for almost a half a century had lived with him at the enclave of the House of the Stimate have not left any testimony whatsoever of the extraordinary charism of the Founder, as they shared with him the hidden way of such a sublime gift of God.

However, we can conclude that the testimony of the reality of the supernatural in Fr. Bertoni's entire life where it is objectively rather difficult to speak of 'stages': from the very outset of his apostolic beginnings, and going back to his First Holy Communion which left in his spirit the flaming sign of his special predestination. This he lived and breathed the supernatural in fullness as his life moved on. Perhaps it was not in fact in his First Holy Communion that he had experienced the divine shaking of his soul. And it is really unimportant whether the unveiling of the experience of the supernatural that Fr. Bertoni lived and was concentrated in the two great mysteries of the Faith: that of the Trinity and of the Incarnation and he maintained all the time, the centrality of the Eucharistic Mystery.

⁵² S. Th. I-II, q. 68, a. 3.

⁵³ S. Th. I-II, q. 68, a. 1.

For it was often during the Eucharistic celebration that his soul dilated, and proved to be deeply moved, that he became ever more opened to receiving the sublime communications.

For the reality of these conclusions it does not seem that there can be any doubts: his intellect and his will were moved to action, but so, too, was his delicate sensibility in so far as his consciousness of the divine comes directly to the forefront, as a real phenomenon of his real world. However, it does seem, and differently from so many others privileged in the life of the spirit, that this phenomenon was not transferred from this interior realm to the exterior. There were no apparitions of figures, with objective characteristics of colors and sounds.

It might also be said that the more these phenomena of exterior presence are evident, it is because of the intense interior presences in the form, if there may be permitted the expression: of 'attractions' of the possession of the human soul on the part of the Divine Host in the form of a singular penetration even to his taste for the ineffable sweetness. So, outside of the participation of the external senses - and indeed, with the explicit exclusion of them, such as ecstasies, both real and evident in the descriptions that have come down to us. His writings are indeed authentic Documents of the Supernatural.

For us, there remains a great empty space, which is the silence regarding his interior life maintained by his followers who lived with him for almost a half a century. This emptiness, however, in some way is filled for us from the record of the Calvary of his Martyrdom that was almost continual, harsh and even cruel, from those terrible maladies that he both supported and loved in the superior joy of his secret with God and of his total conformity with his crucified Savior.

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IV. AN 'EVERY-DAY' WITNESS ILLUMINED IN PRAYER

]Titolo: *Gaspare Bertoni, Una vita illuminata dal soprannaturale*

Fonte: Ed. Ta Stigmata,

Collaboratori Bertoniani,

Roma, ottobre 2009]

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Prologue

[1] There is a declaration of Holiness which the Church in her pilgrimage through history makes regarding some of her sons and daughters. This is the most sublime recognition of the 'witnesses of the supernatural'. Here there are surpassed the limits of essence and existence in their dimensions and demands draw with anxiety and anguish always open in the life of men and women through time, that appears as a glimmer the Infinite. This can be the 'second transcendence': the first is that of the apparition to happiness which urges us on through the multiple paths of life with a continuous alternating of projects and hopes, of joy and bitterness, of enthusiasm and discouragement. In brief, this is the 'struggle of the contraries' according to one of the most ancient formulae of philosophy. The fact that it is a way of continuous tension, strong aspiration at least for those who seek to give a meaning to the adventure of their own lives, to the marvelous inexhaustible interrogation of history, of poetry and above all of philosophy on the significance of the meaning and of the scope of one's freedom. This first transcendence has been interviewed and projected by philosophy 'from the beginning, is now and always' – seeking to respond to the question: 'what is being'⁵⁴?

[2] Is there something beyond the phenomena, or is everything reduced to the immensity of those infinite spaces which brought horror to Pascal, or to the inexorable flight of time which overturns everything, and when deprived of senses, reduces human history to nothing more than an 'account made by an idiot?' Such pessimism, however, does not seem justified: while the records of human history are full of dark pages, yet at the same time, there are not lacking those that have been truly luminous. While it is true that the centuries succeed one another in wars and errors, it has also known dawns and non-times of light and beauty! Times of truth and heroism...: if the plant seems to be overcome by wayward winds yesterday as well as today - there are not lacking – even though so many of these have appeared scarcely as flashes of light - the intervening pauses of exultation and joy toward which every human being who believes in God and in the future life can collaborate⁵⁵.

[3] This angle of the light of reason, is comforted by the light of faith. From this witness of profound emotion that had shaken the consciousness of a genius of modern physics, that we can judge as 'natural transcendence'. Let us pass over now to 'supernatural transcendence' to that which bears us from the disheartening events of time toward that security of heaven, from the darkness of impending death to the nascent brilliance of eternal life. And this is the Christian announcement and

⁵⁴ cf. *Metaphy.* VII, 1, 1028 b 2.

⁵⁵ This is the demonstration of the existence of a personal God [St. Eth., I, q. 11, a. 3].

that space of the action of the Saints in which moves in that hiddenness as the Veronese dialect puts it: *^take to your dens, an unnoticed lair!*'

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1. This is the epitome of the life of Fr. Bertoni, which on reflecting about him, his was a life full of mystery: in his infancy, adolescence, as a young seminarian and priest, in his life of apostle and spiritual director both in the seminary, as well as in religious communities, embedded in that marvelous constellation of 19th century Verona. In this world would be included that major star, Anthony Rosmini, who has stated that his Institute was born at the Stimate. This *life hidden for centuries in God*, [Ep 3:9] is at the same time, most intense in its spiritual radiance. This could be said to be the essence, the compendium and more precisely the reality in act of his testimony to the supernatural.⁵⁶

There follows, then, a confirmation of the biblical test: *Direct me in your truth!* [Ps 24:5] – the supreme theologian makes a surprising declaration:

'... Of these matters there is confirmation not only from divine authority, but it is evident also from the teachings of philosophers: for Aristotle in his book on *'On Good Fortune'*, says this: the principle is not only reason, but something even better.' Then what could be better than science and knowledge other than God? And in accord with this, the very fortunate are called as those in response to an impetus, they are directed above reason. They have as their principle that He is better than one's own understanding and counsel. Aristotle begins with the statement that 'in a certain manner that which moves all in us is a divine principle – and he concludes distinguishing a two-fold species of fortune: one that is divine and the other that is natural. The former works – and is the expression that has particularly drawn the attention of St. Thomas – as 'by instinct'. St. Thomas speaks expressly of a *divine instinct*, which the speculative

⁵⁶ The actuality of this theme is attested to by an illustrious Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome, who, in response to the homage of the volume: *Gemma Galgani: Testimone del Soprannaturale* (Roma 1987), wrote to me November 3, 1987 " ... Your use in the title the word 'supernatural, which the 'Fathers' of Vatican II did not, unfortunately, did not choose to do! This resulted in so much confusion! – In fact, the term in question is absent altogether from the Index of the *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, IX ed., Bologna 1971. - However, the term is present in abundance as was easily foreseeable and was well known in the [almost official] correction of the Denzinger-Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. XXXII, Herder 1963. (cf. "*supernaturalitas*", is lacking in the Alphabetical Index of Names and Items" p. 904 b9. Among the 40 propositions condemned from Rosmini, the 36th pertains to the supernatural order which is reduced to the manifestation of being " in the fullness of his real form" (Denz-Sch. 3236). The proposition is taken from the *Filosofia del diritto*, Vol. II, Sez. II, C. 1, a. 2, ... 1: nn. 674-677 (ed. di Napoli 1845, p. 129 s.). However, the field of the testimony-experience of the supernatural has multiple forms, levels and manners and embraces the entire field of the Christian life even to those humble situations known only by God. Fr. Bertoni precedes us on this illumined path by the mysterious depths of grace.

principle suggests in order to offer his explanation for the action of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the soul in grace.⁵⁷

2. The Existential Problem of Witness

a. Witness – testimony – to testify are among the ‘fortunate’ terms such as substance ... cause. On the juridical level, there have been assumed those strong movements and actions from the point of view of the spirit even to the attaining the very activity of the intimate life of God and that of the Incarnate Word, as the Bible attests to us and in particular, Christ Himself in the New Testament.

b. Since the testimony of the saint and of the person in grace is a participation in the divine witness, as its point of departure as well as that of arrival, will be opportune to hint at its structure in the realization of the ‘divine economy’ in the plan of salvation for humanity. ‘To testify’ to the truth or to the falsity expresses the fundamental relationship of conduct in human honesty.⁵⁸

c. In the Old Testament the People of God bore within itself for protection and for its appeal of fidelity toward God, the *Tabernacle of Witness*, protected by two Cherubim [Ex 25:22] and its fundamental moral project was and still remains: Do not bear false witness! [Mt 19:22]

d. Moses and the Prophets served as the bearers and guarantors of the divine testimonies often confirmed by signs and prodigies: outstanding among many possible incidents was that of Elijah with the priests of Baal [cf. I K 18:19, ff.]

e. In the New Testament, witness stands at the center of the relationship of man with God and it is God Himself at the Baptism of Christ. Through the Voice from heaven, He attests: *This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased* [Mt 3:17].

⁵⁷ cf. the Treatise on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas in S. Th., I-II, q. 68, where St. Thomas also speaks of instinct and divine instinct (in art. 1 a good 4 times!), which he extends also to the uneducated and to children (cf. in this regard the commentary on Ps 8 [ed. Parm. 1863 t. XV, p. 168 a). Aristotle distinguishes two species of fortune: one that is divine, and the other natural: the former is the second instinct: it is of this that the Thomistic term of divine instinct develops. The latter, though, is that ‘beyond instinct’, and both are beyond reason.

⁵⁸ In Christian antiquity, the first object of veneration, along-side Christ, was the Martyr: “Der Martyrer ist die paradigmatische Kategorie für das was ein ‘Heiliger’ im katholischen Sinne ist” (E. Peterson, *Zeuge der Wahrheit*, in “Theologische Traktate”, München 1951, p. 221 nota 4). And in the intensive sense, the centrality of the position of the martyr in the life of the Church is in accord to Pauline theology: “Das martyrium ist gleichsam das Siegel auf die Verkündigung des Evangelium, die Vollendung des Apostolischen Auftrags, die Bekräftigung der apostolischen Autorität, es ist das Ja, das Gott zu der Wirksamkeit seiner Heiligen spricht, die besondere Gnade, die Gott der Autorität der privilegierten Kirche zuteil werden lässt” (E. Peterson, *Apostel und Zeuge Christi*, Auslegung der Philipperbriefe, Freiburg i Br. 1941, p. 4. cf. also pp. 19, f). Cfr.: S. Th. I-II q. 68, 1 e ad 3, ad 4.

Likewise in the Transfiguration there is heard a voice from the cloud which states: *This is my most dear Son, listen to Him*. [Mk 9:7].

d. In the 'Following of Christ' the 'witness' is one who endures persecutions, scourging and above all else, death for the profession of one's faith. The first worship of the ancient Church is that cult of Martyrs⁵⁹. However, the martyrs, through divine assistance, never failed and continue still today in the life of the Church, a pilgrim in this world and in expectancy of the coming of Christ as Judge and Savior.

e. Along-side these martyrs properly so called, the Church also recognizes the 'Witnesses of Christ'. This term would imply all of those children of hers who through the heroic practice of the theological and moral virtues, they show to the world the victory of divine grace over the passions and the errors of this world. Understood in this sense, the 'Witnesses' can be stated of all those Christians who direct their own lives according to the motions of the Holy Spirit. It is in this sense, that the Apostle, in writing to the faithful, calls them 'Saints'. The simple peasant of long ago referred to above could well belong to this humble, but no less noble, category of witnesses.

f. A section apart among these witnesses may be reserved for those Saints who were outstanding for extraordinary deeds, such as 'prophecies, miracles, ecstasies'. Such individuals manifest a particular intimacy of their relationship with God thanks to the comportment among their brothers and sisters in the faith. And it is within this existential category that Fr. Bertoni seems to us that he can be indicated and recognized, as a 'Witness of the Supernatural'. The frequent conversation in the post-Vatican II Church has been on the 'charisms' which might pertain to this type of reflection. These 'charisms' animate the supernatural life of Christians through the motions of grace and of their *divinus instinctus*, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as has been indicated.

g. There flows forth from the biography of Fr. Bertoni, when basing ourselves on the testimonies of the biographers and in the drawing up of his *Positio super Virtutibus*, we can immediately call to mind that which might be called the 'supernatural miracle worker' or the 'wondrous events' abundant in other Saints. For example, we might remember in the first half of the 19th century, the holy Cure' of Ars, and in the second half of the same century, that of St. John Bosco.

⁵⁹ In a. 2, the "*divinus instinctus*" of the Gift, in so far as it is distinguished from infused virtue, is that it leads to 'heroic and divine virtue' or rational ethics (Arist., *Etica Nic.* IX, 1, 1145 a 18, ff., with the citation of Homer for Hector]

h. However, in wanting to indicate the Testimony of the Supernatural in Fr. Bertoni's life, we ought to turn toward that which might be called the 'ambit of the every day' – meaning the exercise of one's immediate relationship with God, which I think we can characterize in three points: (1) ecstasies and extraordinary spiritual phenomena; (2) the heroic bearing up under physical sufferings; (3) the practice of holy abandonment.

i. The physical sufferings – or that 'thorn in the flesh', of which St. Paul speaks. Kierkegaard also offers his insights, in reference to serious illnesses, and some of these even mortal in nature. For Fr. Bertoni, the infection of his right leg obliged him to remain in bed for more than ten years, subjecting himself all the while with extreme patience and to the edification of even of his surgeon, to at least 300 episodes of lancing with the result of an almost the complete 'de-fleshing' of his limb. The practice of holy abandonment, then, in the last analysis, is the fundamental characteristic of his spirituality, which has already been studied in depth].

j. In this list, there only remains that there be presented some testimonies regarding the 1^o point above, i.e., on his ecstasies and extraordinary phenomena]⁶⁰.

k. Before passing over to a summary list of the most important such incidents, I would like to preface this with an elementary observation on that which can be said to be an 'apprehension, or a 'perception of the spiritual'. I would like to say that this pertains to the daily life of every normal conscience in its real framework, and this is:

1) The direct apprehension of the *distinction*, within that which can be said to be the phenomenological convergence, of one's "I" and the world, including in the world this is nature as society in the arch of civic development.

2) The direct apprehension of the *originality* of the spiritual life like the activation of the intelligence and the will to which are considered as a *preparation* also the sensational functions and activities with regard to the outside world and above all to that internal realm of fantasy and of memory, as well as the sentiments which accompany all this.

⁶⁰ In Catholic spirituality, there is always presupposed a certain personal relationship", and therefore there is often some confusion with the extraordinary phenomena as described by the Lutheran theologian, Rudolf Otto in his original reflection: *Das Heilige* (München 1947 – the English translation is: *The Idea of the Holy...* Oxford 1926, re-printed]). This study was inspired by the Kantian work, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* ed alla *Gefühlstheologie* – in turn, this work found its inspiration in a Jacobi, Schleiermacher, Fries.

3) The realization of *the autonomy of the freedom of each person* as a subject of responsibility and therefore of attribution of the choices of good and of evil, of the just and unjust in the ethical sphere.

l. In the existential analysis, which considers the profound dynamism of freedom, the very first place belongs to holy abandonment. With this, the creature, moved by grace and urged on by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, one places the totality of his/ her person with its affections and projects in the continuous and total dependence on God. IN this life, one needs always to remain in a fervent expectancy of any divine hint which is generally manifested above all in the will of superiors. This implies a complete mortification of one's own "I". This is that intimate martyrdom of the soul which is the first and most radical in the soul for the creature. This invests and sustains in the depths of one's own consciousness to be subjected to the divine will. This also includes the martyrdom of exceptional physical sufferings to which Fr. Bertoni responded and corresponded with increasing desire for even greater sufferings. This was evidenced even on his death-bed when, he was questioned by the Infirmarian if he needed anything, his response was; 'only to suffer!'.

m. This under the extreme crucible of suffering, he was consumed by his life of conformity to Christ Crucified, of Whom, punctually, every Friday evening, in the Church of the Stimate in Verona, he meditated with the faithful on the august mystery of the Passion and Death of the Lord, also during the prolonged and more dolorous phases of his illness.

3. The Problem of the Personal "I" and the Examination of Conscience

In virtue of the freedom of choice, the "I" is the first structuring and is therefore, the powerful principle of belonging, upon which is founded that masterpiece of the spiritual life which is the examination of Conscience. The text from Epicurus, cited by Seneca, is surprising to many who know it.

Fr. Bertoni speaks of this personally and expressly in his *Memoriale Privato* [his own personal spiritual diary] making use of his "Model-Principle". He writes: *In order to make the examen of conscience, it is necessary to find a Saint of the same vocation, as a Mirror: and then one finds matter to confess every day: all that is lacking to that perfection is a defect* [entry for July 30, 1808. Ed. G Stofella, Roma 1962, P, 28].

4. The Bertonian experiences of the Supernatural

a. Therefore, this is – as a conclusion of the preceding observations- the moment or the point in which freedom and grace operate, keeping present the

theological demand that freedom is sustained by grace, but also that grace, as expressly also St. Thomas recognizes, works through freedom.

b. The principal document in order to orientate us toward the ideal of Fr. Bertoni as a 'Witness of the Supernatural', would be his notes he jotted down throughout his *Memoriale Privato*. To this there may also be added, those more detached texts, in that they are directed toward other persons. Such would be his Collection of Letters [*Epistolario*], his Sermons, and various other notes⁶¹ that have come down to us.

c. Notable, too, are those pages which bear on them the judgment of his examination of books, through the task asked of him by his Bishops – as well as those copious notes which seem to present a vast *apologia* projected by him on the papacy. There are then some further notes from his personal letters late in his life. For our purposes here, the task is to bring out the most significant characteristics of Fr. Bertoni's soul, qualified by a competent theologian, Divo Barsotti who has preceded me with his comment that Fr. Bertoni was 'one of the greatest mystics of the 19th century'⁶². This idea seems to result from his *Memoriale privato*.

d. The exact expression of this scholar is the following: ... the *Memoriale Privato* of Venerable Bertoni is one of the greatest documents of Italian spirituality in the 19th century' [p. 23], We, too, will begin here by calling to mind some of his texts, which directly interest us, in full accord with the ideas of the great theologian of the Saints quoted here, that Fr. Bertoni's ideal of 'conformation to Christ in His Passion is a characteristic that seems specifically Italian in his spirituality [p. 28]. Here we will present these texts in a chronological order in order to grasp the spontaneous order

⁶¹ The *Memoriale Privato* has been edited as an *Appendix* to the new edition (a cura della Postulazione) of the "*Spirito del beato Gaspare Bertoni*", [Verona 1977, pp. 207-242]. The critical edition with its ample commentary was compiled by Fr. Joseph Stofella, in the Stigmatine series, "*Collectanea Stigmatina*", [vol. IV, fasc. 1 (Roma, Curia Generalizia 1962). The Compiler notes in his conclusion that: ... the source for an ulterior *Memoriale Privato* is the epistolary correspondence of the Servant of God with the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet". She was the Foundress of the *Sorelle della S. Famiglia*. He directed her spiritually in the years 1811-1819. To this may be added those hastily drawn notes found in the Correspondence with don Luigi Bragato, his beloved disciple, much loved and who served as the confessor of the Empress at the Court of Vienna and then at Prague. In all this there is reflected the spontaneous expression of the Servant of God in the period of the years 1835-1848 where Fr. Gaspar) presents unintentionally his own moral portrait (p. 189).

⁶² Divo Barsotti, Magistero di Santi (*Saggi per una storia della spiritualità dell'Ottocento*, A.V.E., Roma 1971, p. 11 ss.: "*Spiritualità di abbandono del Venerabile Bertoni*", p. 11 ss.). His precise comment regarding Fr. Bertoni is the following: "In the History of Italian Spirituality he stands out in it as a figure of notable relief. He is perhaps the most interesting in his city (p. 12). On the following page, the Author qualifies him as a 'master of notable greatness, even if not of notable originality.' His originality much more than in his doctrine, is in his tone. His greatness is in the power of his synthesis. While it is true that this is bit too schematic, it is yet one that reveals the simplicity and the security of his intuition of the faith' [p.13].

of his affections: the comments in italics indicate the immediacy of his original experience.

1) The Feast of the Sacred Heart [July 2, 1808]: "... at Mass, I shed many tears of compunction: in particular, at Communion I experienced as for a moment, as the spirit was detached from every creature..."

2) July 11th: "... After Mass, during the thanksgiving, I experienced a most vivid sentiment of faith in the presence of our Lord, and much confidence: there was also a sentiment to offer myself to suffer with Him, and for Him..." [This is the attraction of his of conformity to the suffering Christ, [I think] of the Franciscan school].

3) July 24th: "... During Mass I had from the Lord as a gift, an actual continuous oblation of my work to the Sacrifice, with much sweetness.

3) August 24th: "... while experiencing the most sublime realities of God, I received a profound self-knowledge ... that evening, on seeing an image of the Most Holy Trinity, I experienced much reverence toward the three Persons – the eternal Father who stood there with His arms opened. He seemed to explain to me His mercy, and the easy communication of His gifts. [The picture of the Father with his arms opened, reminds us of the celebrated painting by Durer].

5) There was another Trinitarian experience on September 27-28th:

[27th] A sentiment of gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity and of correspondence to Jesus Christ.

[28th] A desire and humble petition for martyrdom [he would have this throughout his long and painful infirmities]. There was an intense internal exhortation. That evening, I experienced a sense of pardon [in visiting the Most Holy Sacrament], with a sentiment of intense love for the Most Holy Trinity, in giving us His Son, and great tenderness toward Him together with a most vivid faith, and an intense desire for union. This was accompanied with the yearning for an association in His sufferings, and shame: with a petition of graces in order to suffer and to be disdained as He was. [The illumination returns on the next day]

[29th] There was profound knowledge of the great good that it is to suffer something for God..."[and there follows the citation from Mt 5:1012].

e. There was still a further experience of the Trinitarian mystery on December 11th: at the *Te Igitur*, of the Mass that day, Fr. Bertoni offers a text of intense emotion where there are distinct experiences first of sentiment and then of compunction.

f. September 15th: this important entry in his personal spiritual diary notes his visit to the altar of St Ignatius [this was once the Jesuit Church of St. Sebastian] with his companions that would seem to indicate a more explicit beginning of the Congregation: "... I experienced much devotion and recollection with an *intense internal sweetness and some tears*, even though the visit was a short one. *It seemed to me* [this strikes one like the onset of an ecstasy] – "and the Saint offered us a good welcome." 'It seemed to me that he wanted to tell us ...' [This apparently indicates a type of immediate contact of spirit].

September 25th: While teaching Catechism, "... there was opened up for me all avenues to the point of offering a convincing lesson.'

g. October 9th [his birthday] - there is recorded here what is perhaps his most intense and revealing experience:

"... During the Mass, at the secret prayers, about the time of the *Memento*, there was a kind of deepening of my intellect to understand just to Whom it was that I was speaking. I experienced great affections and an intensification of charity in praying. Then, there were certain inspirations of my spirit toward God, as though they were an impulsion of my spirit toward God.

"It was much like a person who suddenly meets an old and dear friend, whom he had not seen for a long time. At the first sign of him, there was the impetus to cast my arms around him to embrace him. Then there came desire that increased the view, and the impetus of being able to reach out toward the Supreme Good.

"However, all this while I was fearful of some vanity, being in public as I was. In this, I had recourse to the thought of very grave sins. All this, then, intensified as well as the knowledge of His goodness and His love that I dissolved into tears that were very sweet and which lasted even after the Communion. Meanwhile, faith and confidence increased all the more, together with humility and a loving reverence. Finally, during Communion, I experienced very intense devotion, and *sentiments* similar to those on my First Communion day as a boy, and I do not remember of ever having again. This recollection also lasted then for about an hour afterward, and remained throughout the afternoon."

[This was certainly a memorable day, that birthday of his in 1808]!

h. The entire second half of October is simply full of such impressions. On the 13th, he quotes St. Thomas on the presence of God: '... He is therefore within us,

and there is no need for us to go outside in order to search for Him... Having nourishment already in the house, one does badly when he goes outside to look for it ... [Then] I experienced an intense sentiment of this and deep recollection ... along with the deep desire to please His Divine Majesty..." [On the 22nd, his desire for suffering increased]: "... There was joy in adversity, and in the consequences of real poverty and the offering for greater expressions of shame and of suffering, if He would have considered me worthy ..." [This ardent spiritual climate of ecstasy continued through the 27th]: "...prostrate on earth in the sight of heaven..."

i. Leaping ahead to the new year we find his exceptional Trinitarian experience of January 11, 1809. This may be the vertex of his contact with the supernatural: "... During Mass, at the Consecration, I experienced a sentiment that was quite vivid of the presence of Christ like that of a friend who speaks to another friend, and likewise, of the presence of the Father. And feeling in a certain manner further the distinction of these divine Persons in one sole Nature, with intense reverence and love..."

j. The year 1811 proved to be somewhat scarce in his spiritual diary. However, during the year 1812, there is an entry that was more intense and revealing what might be divided into different moments [beginning – development – effect]:

1^o [The Beginning]: While praying before Mass, I was overcome by a bit of sleep, and I heard a voice from the Crucifix saying to my heart: "Look at this Heart of Mine!" this message immediately gave way to a marvelous enlightening of my intellect, along with profound ardor. Suddenly, there arose in my heart the spirit in order to see the lovable object that had been painted out to me. And I experienced running throughout my body a kind of *trembling*,⁶³ and I realized that my eyes and mouth were closed, while my soul was much alive and full of joy."

2^o [Development]: "It seemed as though my soul wanted to be divided from my body [the ecstasy]; it seemed as though I were dying and at the same time, rejoicing [mystical death"]; returning a second time, the act of directing myself with desire toward the One Who was speaking with me, there was renewed that *tremble* as the effect of a sweet and painful death. Hence, my soul was uncertain, as to just it ought to do, in that it seemed that if this situation were to continue, my soul would be dead, or at least taken from communion with the body. At that time it seemed impeded and I committed myself with joy into the hands of the Lord. In this I

⁶³ "Brivido": this is the Italian word used to present this experience of an intense and prolonged shiver, tremble (Devoto-Oli, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Lemonnier, Firenze 1971, p. 322). There seems to be here a humble analogy of the transverberation recorded about St. Teresa of Avila and Padre Pio.

experienced much quiet as though from that very moment my soul was dead.." [this seems to reflect St. Paul's experience, *I desired to be dissolved* ... [Ph 1:23].

3^o [Effect]: "... then I experienced a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart with intense affection during the Holy Mass where my soul discovered also sweet tears in Holy Communion, and after intense recollection and sweetness all day, this resulted in an intensification of the three theological virtues..." [this was clearly a day of much exultation and supernatural rapture].

These experiences, no less than those perhaps more spectacular than those of others saints, are exceptional witnesses of the supernatural. However, authentic testimonies and experiences in the form of powerful emotions are accessible to every believer in daily life: during prayer and religious ceremonies, the participation in Holy Mass, during the practice of the Way of the Cross and the Hour of Adoration, on the occasion of funerals and of particular events [such as religious vestition or profession, the first Holy Communion, as for our own St. Gaspar and for priests at their ordinations].

In all these as well as in other similar circumstances there can flourish for every believer such experiences and even the achieving of the witness of the supernatural. The fainting of St. Gemma before the Crucifix and the surprise at the emotion of the child Kierkegaard at the sight of the Crucifix in the window of the window of the second-hand book-store all mixed in with the heroes of history.

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CONCLUSION

Let us conclude these brief citations on this prime and extreme word: "Love". This is also the joy of the truth that is possessed in that purity of soul in the desire for suffering. The 'characteristics' associated with Fr. Bertoni's "Witness for the Supernatural" seem to be most sublime:

1] ... his was an experience that was sublimely Trinitarian and Christological: therefore, flowing from the very heart of the dogma, but a transfiguring realization of work on grace;

2] ... this was achieved primarily in a Eucharistic context, during the celebration of Holy Mass. There needs also to be noted his profound consciousness of sin, as the effect of the illumination of grace received through suffering;

3] ...with characteristics of ineffable immediacy, such as that of his often referred to *sentiment* [experience], which is proper to the mystics. In him, there is his

recording of an elevated form of a mystical *tremble*, *shiver*, and he sometimes mentions breaking out in tears. One of these experiences occurred when he received the celestial beam of his recollections of his experience of his First Holy Communion day as a child.

He experienced this *tremble* in the intensive spiritual moments of his life, from his union with the beatifying presence of God. His soul experienced a kind of amazement and was nearly overcome in the fullness of joy that came to him, almost making him think that he was dying in the Lord. All this seems to be the vertex of mystical experience, in his recorded coincidence of opposites, of life and death. It seems to reflect the well known saying of St. John of the Cross: 'I die because I do not die!' The external world had disappeared for him and his soul seemed to dilate beyond all measure.

This 'sentiment' of Catholic mystics derives from the presence of faith, animated by charity of the revealed mystery [e.g., the most Holy Trinity, the Incarnate Word, the Eucharistic presence]. This stands at the opposite end of the Protestant *Gefühlstheologia* that Schleiermacher has theorized in his "sentiment of dependence", from his "Der christliche Glaube", preceded by Jacobi and followed by Fries, Rudolf Otto with his school (Cr. C. Fabro, *L'uomo e il rischio di Dio*, Roma 1967, p. 172 s., 178 s., 390 ss.). The so-called "*anthropological shift*", diffused in the Post Vatican II era bespeaks the irrationality of this tendency.

One might also consider as a properly 'mystical' character and particular effect of grace the experience described by Pascal in his *Le Mystère de Jésus*. He refers to this his meditation on the Agony of Christ in the Garden⁶⁴. This was dated on November 23, 1654 [in the edition cited above, pp. 142, ff. This was the Feast of St. Clement as Pascal expressly noted. However, apart and different from modern aberrations, in Pascal there is noticeable the work of sanctifying grace, and of the supernatural motion of the Gifts of the holy Spirit.

I want to conclude as St. Thomas:

To this life everlasting may the Lord Jesus Christ, blessed God for ever, bring us! Amen.⁶⁵

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⁶⁴ Cr. *Pensées et Opuscules*, ed. Brunschvicg minor, Paris 1917, nr. 553, p. 574 ss.

⁶⁵ in *Symbolum Apostolorum Exposit.*, a. 12, nr. 1018 ed Taur., p. 217 b.).

D. THE SUFFERING OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE THEOLOGY OF SOREN KIERKEGAARD

[C. Fabro, CSS]⁶⁶

Introduction:

1. Today, as is known, the so-called 'existential theology' is raging everywhere: by this fascinating term, those who make use of it, mean to call to mind the vital testimony of the martyrs of the saints. Yet, in the end, it has signaled an over-turn of the proclamation of the end of all that is sacred. This is the ear of secularization and of that theological anthropology. This seems to be diluting the Christian message of that 'conversion' in order to accept in each heart the reign of God, to be sought for and found in those terrestrial mirages of the consumer society.

2. For so many, the question immediately arises in the many nearly overwhelmed by the emptiness of the age: how did we ever get to this point of such earth-shaking shift, or how did the age get so blinded by such a mistaken mystification? What we have witnessed is the pouring out of the New Wine of the Gospel into old wine jars, confusing in their of economic and sociological mirages, of striving to resolve the ever-pervasive and omnipresent evil. This seems to have sprung from that evil of obscurity called sin, by shifting all superior goals toward that commitment to that vindication of social justice, which seems to be the mind-set of the rampant rage of so much of post-Conciliar theology of the North. There is something of the evangelical liberty seen as the giving of one's soul to God, but only in that total independence from all authority. For many interpreters, this would be one of the principles of Martin Luther over-powering all else – which called for a brought about the dissolution of religious vows, celibacy- and placing under discussion – even placing him under constant accusation – the very authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

3. The danger, which in our time spreads everywhere almost totally unchecked, like the spread of oil on a carpet, not something that began in our own age. The last three centuries have seen this reaction surface change-explosions a rebellions, and din the Church that was one particularly harmful called 'Modernism'. This is boldly opposed in the intrepid intervention of St. Pius Xth with his Encyclical of 1907, entitled *Pascendi*. It is not difficult to take note in the present time, the man centrifugal movements on all levels of the anthropological secularism that is everywhere so pervasive, In so many of these movements, much inspiration has

⁶⁶ *Momenti dello Spirito*. Vol. II. Assisi: Sala Francescana. 1983, pp. 314-320

been drawn from the themes and principles of that Modernism on a that is ever more radical and universal.

4. It is not the intention of these humbles lines of thought to come across as polemical, but only in the effort of providing some expression for those heart-felt sentiments for those matters which we believe have brought irreparable harm, and which these theologians are inflicting upon Christian minds and hearts, by proposing the message of Jesus Christ, while stripping it of its essential Mystery of the Cross, of its revealed renunciation of this world and its very fragile goods, in order to engulf the Christian in those cases of only terrestrial concerns.

5. We would like simply to propose a testimony of a re-vindication of the authentic message of the Cross, of truly Christian suffering, on the part of Soren Kierkegaard. He certainly was one of those profound students of the Mystery of Christ of all time. He proclaimed, by rooting himself in the most genuine tradition of Christian spirituality and mysticism, the great need for the Christian to imitate the Man-God in the renunciation of the world and in following Him along the Royal way of the Cross, according to that golden booklet of the Middle Ages that bore that title.

6. As is known, Kierkegaard offered a scathing critique of that Protestant Christianity and Luther himself. For Kierkegaard Luther did not play integrally the evangelical views dealt through Luther, by eliminating asceticism, the religious life, celibacy. In Kierkegaard's opinion these views were much more in accord with this world, and they lead to the refutation of the living of the *scandal of the Cross*. Many of Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses gyrate around this theme, especially that jewel of a composition called the Gospel of Suffering, accessible now to Italians through the long-time efforts of Fr. Cornelio Fabro. But it is above all in his Diary that the author's aspiration for that authentic Christianity of conformity with Jesus Christ is manifested in the intensifying splendors of a continual ascesis even to the deepest yearning of *I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ* as found in Paul.

7. In these few lines I would like to be limited in a very shallow and passing manner, his Christological master-piece of the Exercise of Christianity [1850]. The theme here is the refutation of that Christ which the world has perpetrated and continues to do so in these centuries, including all of Kierkegaard's relatively short life, and which so permeates his message.

The most remote and profound origin of his life-long experience could very well be indicated in a precise experience of Jesus Christ. This seems [!] to have taken place during the childhood years of the great philosopher/ theologian as he stood before the window of an old-clothes dealer. He made 'Melancholic Dane' loved to

return to that childhood memory and he made this unusual suggestion: take this small child, put it with the most celebrated portraits of the time: along-side a great man on his horse, with his three-pointed hat, whether it be Alexander the Great, or Napoleon, or someone like them. Mix up these images with that one in the window of the Crucified. The child might ask who are these, this One? Tell the child that this is the most loving man who ever existed. The child might then ask: But why, then, did they kill Him? Why? Oh, would to God That when one becomes old, that he would be a person who would retain something of his childhood! What a moving experience would he realize as he passed along the big window of the junk collector, and along with the other citizens of Nuremberg, this man might also catch sight of that sketching among the others in that window.

8. This impression may be found at the beginning of his *Exercise of Christianity*. And it dominates him almost like a suspended accusation on that Christianity grasped with the impetus of the style of the ancient Prophets: this same incident returns throughout his book, but the style is less restrained and his reflections on this experience become the more ample. However, in the conclusion the impetus of his protest picks up its ancient prophetic tone and returns in all the vehemence of his soul:

... Once that child of long ago became a young man, he would never forget that childhood impression, but he would come to understand it in a different manner: he would come to grasp the fact that it is not possible to realize the proposals of his earlier years, when Christ has already been forgotten for 1800 years. But, he might come to think with the same passion of the necessity of battling against the 'World; that spits on the Holy, the Sacred, and against that 'world' which crucified Him, that Love and one that asks that the brigand be pardoned.

9. Whenever that child would reach mature adulthood, he would never have forgotten the impression he received in his childhood, but he would come to interpret it in a different manner. He would no longer want to lash out: because he might say that then I would have no similarity whatsoever with the Humiliated One. He did not strike back not even when he was hit. No, and now He desires but one thing only: to suffer possibly almost as much as He did in that world where the philosophers have always called the 'better world'. However, let us say that what is true in philosophy would also be true in theology – that world crucified Love and cries out: release Barabbas! How often in situations of much lesser account the world has shown that not only the one who wills humanly that which is good in consecrated to suffering, but also - out of love for the contrast so dear to the world and to emphasize the more just how much the world stands at opposite ends of good – that it is easy to imagine that among one's contemporaries, that wretched being, that

abject being who, through a spirit of contradiction, comes to be acclaimed – so let this be!

10. If the spectacle of that lowering of Himself could at all move one to compassion in this manner, could it not also move you? IF this sorrowful scene so shook the Apostles, who did not know anything, nor did they want to know anything else if not Jesus Christ, and Him crucified? [1 CO 2:2] Why could this scene, then, not move you? From this it does not follow that you will become an Apostle – what temerity this would be! No, but you could at least become a Christian. If that spectacle of Him suffering moved those glorious saints who the Church remembers as its fathers and teachers – and yet who did not want to know, anything other than the Crucified Christ, as St. Paul records. You will not in this way become one of them, what presumption this would be!! But, you might be able to become for this at least a 'Christian.' Why is it that this spectacle of the Humiliated Christ moved them in such a drastic way? The reason is that it is because they loved Him so!

11. Therefore, through love they discovered His sufferings: since only He Who loves can ever comprehend that He indeed was Love Incarnate, and only such persons could ever come to grips with the extent of His sufferings, the depths of that harsh, tremendous martyrdom, and the depths to which He suffered: how harsh it was, and how lacerating the Passion was O how much He suffered! If this scene does not move you, it is a sign that you do not love Him yet.

12. How much He suffered and how just was His cause. And who knows whether sooner or later, this terrible spectacle might even succeed in inspiring you to love Him. Since this is the way it is, seek to be able to contemplate this scene one more time and then this might move even you to the point of being willing to suffer like He did – this scene from on high can attract to the One who draws all to Himself.

[13. Certainly, Kierkegaard does not enjoy a good press among our modern theologians with that 'progress' which hastens them along to 'de-mythologize' the Gospel. What this really means is to hide the Cross and to remove from the message of Christ that thorn of compunction, to silence that repentance from sins, and on the horror of the eternal judgment. However, is not all this a clear symptom that this theology, up until now, unknown in the history of Christianity, and it is presently betraying the Christian message?

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[I] Learned Obedience through Suffering

'... He learned obedience from that which He suffered...'⁶⁷

[His 'Edifying Scriptures' represent a gigantic Kierkegaardian production, the direct purging out of his own profound aspirations which are found in Christianity and especially in the consideration of the Person and the Doctrine of Jesus Christ – his preferred themes. This present text is taken from his third elevation in his Gospel of Sufferings [1847] which considers the principal stages of contemporaneity with Christ.]

1. Christ learned obedience: since His will was certainly from all eternity, in full accord with that of His Father, His free decision was the will of the Father. However when He came in the fullness of time, it was then that He learned obedience from that which He suffered. 'That which He suffered' occurred when He came among His own, and they did not know Him [cf. Jn 1:11]. It was at this time that He went about in the humble figure of the [Suffering] Servant of the lord of Is [cf. Ph 2:7].

2. He carried in His mind and heart the eternal Plan of God, while His discourse availed Him naught at all. When He – in Whom alone there is possible salvation - he was 'superfluous in the mind's eye of the world He had come to save. When He was absolutely unable to change anything, when no one even paid any attention to Him, when He was more a mere object of the wretched flirting of curiosity [cf. Lk 23:8, ff.] :

... 8 Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign. 9 He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. 11 [Even] Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. 12 Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly. 13 Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, 15 nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. 16 Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him."

3. And further when evil charges were leveled against Him with savage vehemence, and He was handed over to death - truly the One Who alone could bring

⁶⁷ ib, pp. 318-320

genuine life. And no one was struck with horror in seeing Him reduced to an object of curiosity, as when the Savior of the world only succeeded in this world to the low level of drawing only the curious and the ne'er do wells! The worker might leave his work briefly just to see Him pass by – a merchant might rush outside his shop to take a look, and the passers-by might deign to cast a glance drawn to a look of curiosity. The vinegar was not in the estimation of the Holy One of Israel a more bitter drink [cf. Mk15:38] than was the stupid attention drawn to the 'do-nothings' and the indigestible half-hearted attention of the curious – where is in Truth, the Crucified One is the Only Way, Truth and Life. Less bitter for the Holy One was the boldness of sin, over His being taken over by empty curiosity.

4. True indeed! He learned obedience from what He suffered: from all that which He suffered when He, Who had within Himself every benediction, was considered malediction, a curse for any who would draw near to Him and for each one who had recourse to Him, as well as being a torment for His contemporaries. But, he was also a searing torment for the few who loved Him when there had to be heaped upon Him the most fearsome decisions, which just had to be like a sword that passed through the heart of His own Blessed Mother [cf. Lk 2:25] – as well as for all the disciples He was indeed as Crucified Love.

5. He served as a torment for those wavering – the many who perhaps in the depths and hidden there in the secrecy of their hearts, there might have been the whisper of a desire that they might seize the meaning of the truth of His message but yet they did not have the strength to unite themselves to Him. As a result, for such as these all this bore a distinctive weight and burden of having lived as His contemporaries. He was surely a torment for the wicked by the mere fact that with His own purity and holiness, He just had to make known the thoughts of their hearts [cf. Lk 2:35], which made them more blameworthy than they had previously been. What a heavy experience of suffering: to have come into this world, meant to be as its savior, only to be considered a stumbling block [cf. 1 P 2: 7, ff.].

6. He learned obedience from all that He suffered: from. All that He suffered as He certainly sought out – as He was obliged to seek out the disdained company of sinners and Publicans, when no one dared to recognize Him in public – when curiosity broke out into the shaking of heads, and the presumed witness of the times said: How stupid He is! Out of compassion, there may have been the shrug of shoulders – but pride would dominate and He would be thought of as one Who had come and His lowly state sadly prompted others to avoid Him. There might be a well-to-do-person who would avoid Him, so that this 'busy' man might not be committed to Him. It might even be a better person who would render a kind of half-hearted service to Him in order not to waste such a person's 'valuable' [?] time. When the time would

come that no one would believe that he would have any duties toward the son of God – but would join the anonymous ‘crows’ for whom all is permissible as one defending him/herself any claims that the Suffering Lord has on every person. This mystery goes on even when the beloved Disciple, the trusted friend who dipped his hand into the dish with Him: all denied Him in the end.

7. Jesus learned obedience from that which He suffered and He learned it from all that He suffered when Pilate stated authoritatively: Behold the man! It was not so much as it was just because of the savage rebellion of the People – not was it just that the infuriated mob blinded in their perception, came to insult Him grievously – No, the deep insult was in the person of those in authority, one who was a personality of command over this crowd. The likes of His trusted companion, Judas, sold Him out for just 30 pieces of silver [cf. Mt 26:15]. Out of shabby personal respect, Pilate was trying to worm his miserly way out of a jam – he was hoping to show this Poor Soul, who was whipped and scourged, and drained – he was trying to manipulate the crows to show some compassion so Pilate would ‘look good’, but this only infuriated the crowd the more. Jesus was much like the later literary figure of Dorian Grey - his own sins were kept from his own body, but found their mark on his portrait. In Jesus case, our sins and those of all time, found their way on to the ICON of the Invisible God the perfect ICON of the Father – He showed the results of human sin in His divine, lacerated flesh.

8. And so, the entire earthly sojourn of Jesus was a very heavy total suffering – there was never a suffering like His – due to the union of the divinity in this perfect human flesh. There is no tongue that could ever do adequate justice even in describing this. But, precisely for this Jesus reached in suffering the most severe level so that He could learn a divine lesson through abject human experiences. Usually when one suffers the underlying reason among the reasons why, there is always some culpability - at least of original sin, not to speak of the many human sins of the ordinary person. There is even some admiration for one who suffers justly for his own sins and bad choices in life. But, the meek Jesus committed absolutely no sins!

9. When it is the biblical ‘Just Man’ [cf. Ps 22] who suffers in total innocence, this in some ways opens the human mind and heart to seek some explanation – why? Jesus in this ‘learned’ obedience from that which He suffered. He prays: *Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from Me, but not My will be done, but Yours!* [cf. Mt 26:39].

10. The first act of obedience is to have said these words – and the second is to have drunk to the dregs this Chalice. If He had simply drained the Chalice of suffering, without saying anything, His obedience might not have been perfect. IN

order for obedience to be perfect it demands and more than all else, that prayer of petition, and that humble, anguished petition: if this is the Will of God, and if there is no other way in which the same purposes might be achieved in the Father's mysterious plan. And so we all know from revelation: that He entire life, His whole terrestrial sojourn had been one of obedience, and an obedience even unto His death on the Cross. [cf. Ph 2:7].

11. He who came as the only Way, Truth and Life had no real reason to learn anything, yet He did 'learn' this one reality, he removed the veil from this personal, divine: 'obedience'! So intimate is the relationship of obedience with the eternal Truth that He who came as Incarnate Truth Itself, learned obedience!

FINAL SUMMATION

Introduction:

[1] The Synoptic accounts present themselves as faithful witnesses of the oral tradition. They do represent an integral part of the Revelation concerning the Agony of Gethsemane. A number of modern scholars have minimized these accounts:

- some [e.g. Bultmann, Lescow, Ebeling] have written that Gethsemane is a legend created by faith, or by liturgical needs;
- others [the Catholic, R. Brown] state that Gethsemane – as it [and the temptation scene] is presented by the Synoptics – is a kind of 'synthesis', of a number of prayers offered by Jesus as presented by the Synoptics – not excluding His prayer actually offered in Gethsemane – all then brought together here.

[2] Without entering into the relative merits [particularly R. Brown's view] the presentation here has been that these accounts are historical. However, it is also most clear that each of the Evangelists had his own 'reason' and audience for writing. For the combined characteristics, it does seem that one could draw these conclusions:

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E. Apologetical – Exhortatory Traits in the Gethsemane Accounts

In general, it can be stated that one of the characteristics of the early preaching of the Church is that it did not present itself as a simple exposition of past events. Much more, these writings are ‘gospels’ – a ‘message’ something that would have particular value for all the listeners, who were far removed in time and space from those capital events of the Mystery of Redemption. To communicate a message would be indeed historical, in that this is the Word of God, communicated to humanity, as an indication of Covenant Friendship, leading to eternal life. However, they would not be history in the precise sense that one would think of that word today. There is a gathering of OT data used artfully to show that Jesus indeed is the fulfillment, that all happened in accord with the Scriptures, and the divine plan.

Gethsemane is presented not simply as a chronicled event, or as something that might be of passing interest, or even something that was meant to increase piety. It is rather an announcement of the message that the Suffering and Death of Jesus was in conformity with the Divine Plan: that this reveals both the enormity of sin, and the infinity of Divine Love.

1. Apologetic-Christological Elements

a. From a Christological point of view, the announcement in Gethsemane centers primarily around the two prayers of Jesus: one that is imperfect, and one that is perfected. Jesus is presented as deep in anguish facing His terrible ordeal of the Passion and Death. He asks – IF it is possible- that this Cup might pass from Him. Then, He withdraws His condition, and simply asks for the total fulfillment of the Father’s Will in an act of abandonment.

1.] This attitude of Christ which is ultimately expressed in the full acceptance of the Father’s Will, is inline and fulfills much data from the OT. His anguish is found in an old translation of Ps 42. There is much speculation that other Psalm prayers were fulfilled in this revelation of the Agony and Passion of Jesus. The moment that Jesus is *handed over* into the hands of the enemies of His Father, there is much evidence that this is the unimagined fulfillment of the Canticles of the Servant, particularly the 4th one [cf. Mk 14:41; Mt 26:45 – and Is 53:10-12; cf. also Jn 12:23, 34; Is 52:13]. There is likewise recourse to Dn’s Son of Man theme.

2.] This NT interpretation would bring together the two major OT Christological themes, that of the Suffering Servant and that of the Son of Man. Many are of the belief that Jesus did indeed see Himself in this light. [Bultmann believed that all of these interpretations were ‘post-Easter readings.’]

3.] There is hardly any doubt that the Early Church saw Jesus as the Messiah and read His passion and Death in the light of Is 53, and the various Psalms of the Persecuted Just Man. Compare the following:

Mk 14:61; 15:5 & Is 53:7;

Mk 15:29, 34 & Ps 22:2, 8;

Mk 15:26 & Ps 69:22.

However, it would hardly seem that the later community would have made these connections, unless they came to it through apostolic authority, which receive this directly from Jesus.

b. this does not mean that regarding the very Night of Gethsemane all of this was crystal clear. It is highly probable that when the Evangelists compiled their accounts, after the Event, that they called on the oral traditions that went right back to Jesus Himself. Jesus indeed was the Suffering Servant the Son of God, the Son of Man.

c. This teaching of the tradition that goes back to Jesus is a departure from the main-line Judaic thought. Here we have an announcement of the Christian 'Good News': the Hour has come, the Son of Man is being handed over into the hands of sinners! Up until this moment, the 'Hour' had remained hidden [cf. Is 49:2]. Before the glorious coming of the Son of Man, He now comes in His suffering, in fulfillment of the Father's Plan.

d. Christian preaching, that went right back to that of the Lord Himself, could see in Jesus the suffering Son of Man [cf. Dn 7:25]. Jesus appears at the head of His suffering People, His saints. What is concluded from all this is the suffering messianic people and the son of Man, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh are indivisibly united here.

e. So, the tradition concerning Gethsemane is not merely a 'chronology of facts', but it is a theological and spiritual interpretation of this great mystery of salvation, unfolding before their eyes. Jesus had fulfilled in Himself the prophecies – His 'anguish' is in accord with the Divine will, and through it, and the Death which follows the Plan of redemption will be completed, then in the resurrection.

f. Jesus 'begins' here the messianic times with as Son of Man suffers as the Servant of Yahweh. Jesus also makes His own the sufferings of all times – and all those who will come after Him, may find in the Mystery of Gethsemane a great ray of hope.

2. The Gethsemane accounts show evidence of a *Paranesis*:

a. In the Book of Dn and in rabbinic Judaism, much mention was made of the eschatological trial of the saints. In this tradition, the Messiah, as the Son of Man, handed over, hold the first place. In this tradition, the suffering Messiah, betrayed into the hands of sinners, is the Head of the New People of God. This tradition did not merely prepare for a Christological reality, but it intended to 'move' its adherents to a response in faith, to offer a vital adherence to the message. In this tradition, doctrine is not separated for this exhortatory *paranesis*. This is evident in a number of biblical passages retained in NT revelation [cf. Jn 12:29, f.; Lk 22:40-45; Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26: 36-46; cf. also Heb 4: 15, f.; 5:7]. This application to the faithful of the *tribulation/ trial* of Jesus seems to have been a basic element of the oral tradition, and then it was presented in a different way in accord with the purposes of Mk, Mt, Lk, Jn and Heb.

b. A good part of the *paranesis* centers around the term *temptation/ trial*, used in intimate connection with the Hour and the Son of Man. This bestows on the whole passage a kind of eschatological spirit. The scene of Gethsemane indicates a kind of apocalyptic situation in which the decisive battle with *Belial* occurs, and with this is the ultimate victory, salvation is acquired for the New People of God.

1.] In Dn, the eschatological situation of the People of the Saints is described as a situation in which the saints will have to be put to the test [cf. Dn 7:25; 12:10].

2.] The community of Qumran also was deeply impressed with the idea of an eschatological trial coming to test the faithful. There was to be a terrible conflict between the Children of Light and those of the Darkness.

c. In this kind of context, one might understand more deeply the urgency of Jesus' words: *Watch and Pray!* This is the exhortation directed also to the community, and to the disciples of all times. With the Hour that dawned with the Passion and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Final Times indeed have been inaugurated. It is not an injunction just to 'wait', but much more an appeal to be imbued with the urgency of the eschatological times. The formula is: *watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation*. The watchful prayer is the necessary means for the obtaining of the necessary assistance. Gethsemane, therefore, is a moving lesson of encouragement, a *paranesis*.

d. This exhortatory character of the Gethsemane account might also appear more forcefully when one considers the impact of these passages on the Early

Church. This is a dramatic lesson for the Christian community as it waited the 'long time' for the return of the Lord. The whole community is being put on 'emergency measures' to watch and pray, through the centuries, that the little flock might not be put to the test. The Gethsemane Account is a revelation of the awesome eschatological temptation: ... *the man who thinks he is safe, must be careful that he does not fall. the trials that you have had to bear are no more than people normally have. You can trust god not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trial, he will give you a way out of it, and the strength to bear it ...* [cf. 1 co 10:13]

c. The appeals for watchful vigilance and prayer are found throughout the Apostolic preaching:

- Gospels: cf. Mk 13:33-37; Mt 24:42, f.; 25:13; Lk 12:37-39; 21:36.
- Epistles: cf. Rm13: 11-13; 1 Co 10:11-13; 16:13,21; 1 H 5:5-10; 1 P 5:8, ff.

From this it appears that the exhortations to vigilance, not to let oneself be taken over by sleep, and to resist the Powers of Darkness through to the end – is one of the main points of early Christian preaching. Thus, Gethsemane is an actual message, perennial in its freshness, needing to be fathomed with each passing generation. Now the son of Man is *being handed over* - *Pray* so that we will not enter into the *temptation/ trial*. All of this is an invitation to follow Jesus right through to the end.

Summary

The Gethsemane tradition is presented as having these following characteristics: apologetic, Christological, exhortatory. The inspiring motivation behind the various accounts of the Gethsemane Agony was that of announcing the Mystery of Jesus. He is revealed as the Messiah, who achieved, through suffering, the prophecies of the OT, and carried out the divine will of the Heavenly Father. All of this is presented as an exhortation to the 'post-Easter' community, awaiting the Risen Lord's Return. Gethsemane is an essential part of the following of Jesus Christ.

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1. Jesus often prayed in the Garden

[1] There can be no doubt for a believer that Jesus prayed in the Garden with his disciples, and was arrested there, following the Last Supper. This information unanimously attested to by the gospels [cf. Mk 14:26, 32, 43, 46; Mt 26:30,36, 47, 50; Lk 22:39, 47, 54; Jn 18:1,3, 12]. The first reading of these accounts would give the appearance that this is historical – but, it is also more than that. The

Evangelists are not only telling us that Jesus went into the Garden to pray, and was captured - they also describe a number of details concerning the Agony in the Garden, in accord with what they, too, had received from the oral tradition of the Early Church.

[2] The Gospel accounts were written in the light of the resurrection and of faith, in the Person of Jesus Christ. The early *kerygma* of the Church reflected on the full story of Jesus, as this was further contemplated in the light of His glorious resurrection. Therefore, the early commentators of this tradition presented the life of Jesus for the faith of the Apostles and all who would follow them – and also for the edification, to inspire the persevering witness of those who would follow Christ until the end of time. Thus, the account is interspersed with OT citations, very familiar to the early centuries and there is much evidence that these accounts were also meant as exhortations.

[3] In faithful compliance with the integral teaching of the Church, a believer would not think of Gethsemane as the invention of the early community. There are those who do maintain that so many of the details could not have been ‘eye-witnessed’ – and, therefore, its ‘historicity is doubted by some. There are those who think of the Gethsemane account as a highly ‘tailored’ synthesis of some of the teachings of Jesus, inserted here at the introduction of the Passion, as a key to its interpretation.

[4] The traditional belief of the Church, though, has seen in Gethsemane great insights into the Mystery of redemption: the encounter of the infinite Mercy of God with the horror of sin. There is in Gethsemane the great lesson on Prayer, the need to watch and pray always, as a kind of urgent message for the Church of all times. The idea of a Suffering servant, the Son of God, the Messiah, goes back to the earliest levels of the tradition. In the last analysis, so much of Gethsemane is based on the convictions Jesus had of Himself.

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2. The Account

1] The Agony

a. this aspect of the Mystery of redemption is found only in this particular sense in the Gethsemane accounts. The announcement of His Passion, in which Jesus predicted that He would be handed over into the hands of His enemies is repeated many times. But, the terrible anguish, the particularities of His ordeal in Gethsemane, are found only here. There seems to be a conscious reference at least

to the LXX tradition of Ps 42, seen more as a prophecy. This aspect of the Messiah – one who would suffer as Servant and also be subjected to the terribly degrading humiliations, was indeed a scandal to the faith up to that time.

b. It is precisely these aspects of Jesus' agony that represent such a startling 'break' with the pre-Christian tradition. There is evidence on the part of the writings of the Church that this whole mystery is being 'elevated' that it might somehow participate in the eventual 'Lordship' of Jesus [cf. Mt 26:53; Jn18:1-11]. Perhaps this very 'break' with so much that was held as sacred and 'safe' would be one of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of this passage.

2] The Witnesses

a. Some of the interpreters who would deny this story [as the account of the temptations] rely on the fact that there were no eye-witnesses. However, some of the biblical data would allow one to contest this to some extent [cf. Mt 16:36, ff.; Mk 14:32, ff.]. the disciples were not always asleep – the fact that Jesus went off' a little would not mean that they would have been cut off totally from what was happening.

b. It does seem that the evangelists also wanted to stress the presence of the same three disciples who had witnessed the Transfiguration. This seems to be an effort on the part of the tradition to show that indeed there were witnesses. Lk shows the distance to have been about a 'stone's throw'. This still would have allowed contact with the events of the Garden.

c. There seems also to be the conviction that an event of such drastic implications: the witness of Jesus, the shame He endured, the total departure from all that the Messiah was supposed to have been - would need very authoritative witnesses. So, we have Peter, chosen by Christ as the Rock – John, the Beloved – and James, His brother.

3] The Disciples' Sleep

a. The exhortatory nature of this whole scene presents this 'sleep' in such contrast with the vigilant prayer of Jesus. The words Hour, temptation/ trial and Son of Man are eminently eschatological, as is the frequent contrast between to watch – and to sleep. This finds its confirmation in the frequent apostolic exhortations that the Church should live in urgent expectation for the coming of the Lord. Paul states: *this is the hour to wake from slumber* [Rm 13:11; 1 Th 5:6]. When he speaks of vigilance [cf. 1 Co 16:13; 1 Th 5:6;,. Cf. also 1 P 5:8, the exhortation is not really concerned so much with physical sleep.

b. Likewise, in the Gethsemane accounts, the real appeal is not so much to wake up literally: but, to overcome torpor, laziness, tepidity, the lack of comprehension – which demands long attention and continuing effort. To go along in a kind of lived tepidity, the noon-day devil, failing in vigilance, is what would lead to the succumbing to the final ordeal.

c. What is found in Gethsemane is not merely some kind of parable, a kind of dramatization of the urgent appeals of the early Church: *blessed are they whom the Lord will find awake at His coming!* Gethsemane cannot be reduced to some kind of ‘plan’ for the early Church. In the traditional acceptance of the Church, Gethsemane was a real happening, and the early Church used it to present the mystery of Jesus Christ as a model to follow.

d. Even the sleep of the Apostles - in a time of such crucial importance in the life of Jesus whom they loved dearly – gives the whole account a ring of authenticity. It would seem that if all of this were just some ‘pious tale’, much would have been done to enhance the authority of those closest to Jesus. For, after all, when these accounts were first being read and pondered, these early Church leaders would be claiming obedience over the lives of the adherents to this new and demanding way. rather than presenting themselves as legendary models, the early preaching showed the Apostles – and the Witnesses of Christ of all time – what they truly are: sinners, redeemed by the mysteries in which they participated.

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CONCLUSION

The Mystery of the Agony of Gethsemane- steeped in the OT traditions, as the fulfillment of all the innocent Just, who suffered and died through the centuries of preparation, is also the support and strength of all who will come after. For the Church, Gethsemane offers a realistic hope: the Church and her people will know the ordeal, but will be comforted in the strength of the final victory of Jesus Christ.

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Amen!

END NOTES:

ⁱ Author's note: "P Tradent" - as n the NT there are four Gospels, Mt, Mk, Lk and Jn - in the Pentateuch there are four "Traditions" or "Tradents" [substitute for "traditions" to avoid confusion!]- Jahwist - Elohist – Deuteronomist - Priestly - known as J-E-D-P - the "P Tradent" was the final editor in the Pentateuch.