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THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHARISM OF FATHER GASPAR BERTONI



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HOMAGE

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ABBREVIATIONS

CIC	Code of Canon Law
CF	Original Constitutions of St. Gaspar Bertoni
cf.	confer
CS I-IV	<i>Collectanea Stigmatina</i> , 4 volumes of documents describing the history and the spirit of the Community.
Epist.	<i>Epistolario</i> - a collection of St. Gaspar Bertoni's personal letters – published by the Stigmatines in Verona, 1954.
ET	<i>Evangelica Testificatio</i> - an Exhortation to Religious by Pope Paul VI, 1971
LG	Lumen Gentium – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in Vatican II
MP	<i>Memoriale Privato</i> - personal Spiritual Diary of St. Gaspar Bertoni
MssB	<i>Manoscritti Bertoni</i> - the original writings of St. Gaspar Bertoni [5 volumes]
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> - document on Religious Life in Vatican II.
PVC	<i>Pagine di Vitae Cristiana</i> - the published Parish Sermons of St. Gaspar Bertoni.
Summ. Add.	<i>Summarium Additionale</i> - Vatican collection of documents pertaining to the life and writings of St. Gaspar Bertoni
ST	<i>Summa Theologica</i> of St. Thomas Aquinas

INTRODUCTION

As history unfolds, humanity needs Christ's testimony to be encouraged to follow Him, in order to be fulfilled as persons and assist in the building up of the world in accord with the love proposed by God.

In addition to this, in the bosom of the Church herself, we know that there have been many men and women of God who have been authentic renewing powers. With their examples and charisms, they continue being for the Church, both an invitation and a stimulus for fidelity to the Gospel and following the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

In Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, declared Blessed by the Church, is One Who should always stand out, particularly in the figure of a human being, created according to the image of the Lord. Until the end of time, human beings living among one another will need to have this image before their eyes. This will be accomplished with the power of the Creator Himself who acts in singular manner through anyone who will place himself close to the Master, to radiate His love to weak human nature. We see in Fr. Gaspar such an image, one that is always more encouraging and interesting, in proportion as we come to know him better.

The second Vatican Council reminds us:

"From the infancy of the Church, there have existed men and women who strove to follow Christ more freely and imitate Him more nearly by the practice of the evangelical counsels. Each in his own way, these souls have led a life dedicated to God. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, many of them pursued a solitary life, or founded religious families to which the Church willingly gave the welcome and approval of her authority. But whatever the diversity of their special endowments, all who are called by God to practice the evangelical counsels and who do so faithfully, devote themselves in a special way to the Lord... As a consequence, impelled by a love which the Holy Spirit has poured into their hearts (Cf. Rm 5:5), these Christians spend themselves ever increasingly for Christ, and for His body, the Church (cf. Col 2:24).

"Hence, the more ardently they unite themselves to Christ through a self-surrender involving their entire lives, the more vigorous becomes the life of the Church and the more abundantly her apostolate bears fruit".¹

Gaspar Bertoni was just such a man, wise and faithful to God. He received an enormous abundance of God's gifts. He used them in the service of the Church and of humanity, in his own time. Nonetheless, he has left an indelible mark of his charism for his spiritual heirs, the religious of his own Congregation, the diocesan clergy, other men and women religious and the laity, if they will absorb his spirit and keep before themselves the dynamic, interior, renewing strength to assist the more in the planting

¹ *PC I.*

of the Kingdom.

His life, his activity and his writings testify to his value in the time that he lived and his influence even today. The worth in knowing him is a progressive effect the more one discovers the subtle nuances and the great riches for anyone who would choose to be faithful to the Lord in the present time.

This study has a general aspect and one that is more specific. The first refers to that enrichment in one's entering into the knowledge and absorbing the characteristic value of a life of special consecration.

"Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, and are totally dedicated to God, who is supremely loved. By a new and special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's Kingdom, for the honor of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory".²

For religious, the matter of social justice deepens in their knowledge and living of the characteristic values of their own consecrated life.³ And for the laity, the knowledge of the proposal of the Christian life made and witnessed to by the saints is a source of sanctification and a help in planting the Kingdom of God.

On the other hand, the Church herself states:

"It is the prerogative of the competent authority in the Church.... To do what is in its power to ensure that institutes grow and flourish according to the spirit of their founder and to their sound traditions".⁴

As members of the Church and specifically, as religious, we share in the responsibility that the spirit of Founders be progressively absorbed and lived for the common good.

This present study, under its specific aspect, aims precisely at cooperating in this, in a particular dimension, not yet sufficiently known, as the title indicates.

To comprehend in depth the person and the work of Gaspar Bertoni it is necessary to come to understand the power that impelled him at each moment, and specifically, his charism. The explanation of his profound holiness, from the utilization of his many gifts, to the leadership he channeled totally for the good of the Church, can only be grasped in Fr. Bertoni under the light of the Holy Spirit. It will be important to accompany the unfolding of the entire human, cultural and spiritual foundation of this man of God, in order to see how he responded in the light of the Spirit, in living out his charism.

² *The Code of Canon Law*, # 573.

³ In order to be a prophetic sign religious have to witness to the power of living the value they have embraced. cf. *Lumen Gentium* 45.

⁴ *Canon* # 576.

It is also to be pointed out that the font and the force of a charism derive from the Holy Spirit.⁵ This is the scope of this present study, aspiring to be of some help in the comprehension of Fr. Bertoni's charism.

It is worth-while, then, to show the root, the "sub-soil" of the great spiritual edifice of this man of God, Fr Gaspar Bertoni. The Spirit acts how and when He chooses, even when not comprehended nor observed. He cannot be measured with mere human standards, or interpreted with a simply natural outlook. Nonetheless, it is not possible to ignore His notable interventions in a whole life-time lived out under the supernatural inspiration, as occurred in Fr. Bertoni.

The historical conditions suffered by this man of God serve only to point out that the ship of life can pass through violent storms in the light of God's presence. We will see in these the power of the Spirit that shaped a special vocation.

The Word of God was the sustaining force of his life and preaching. The fathers of the Church offered constant light to him. Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius of Loyola, and Alphonsus Liguori permeated his fiber, with a deep mark in his culture, his spirituality, his theology served as the basis of the inspiration for the foundation of his Institute.

At each step as it unfolded, and in every influence received, he pondered it all with the measurement of one who receives a reasonable weight in his baggage, as one who was formed with the standard of God's will. The influences that he received, he did so conscientiously. We see this in his being formed in the spirit of Ignatian abandonment and availability, assumed as his own "standard", or characteristic.

In the First Part, then, we will have the opportunity to see how, through his devotions, his docility to the Holy Spirit was expressed.

In the Second Part, will be seen the transparency of the Holy Spirit's activity in his charism. In the following of grace, in contemplation, in humility, in abandonment to God, in the life of the religious community, in the discernment of God's will through events, he gradually grew in the unfolding of his charism as the founder of his Institute, to serve the Church. In every phase and in each of these times, there may be perceived his motivation and stimulus as coming from grace.

A characteristic of Fr. Gaspar, therefore, is the force of the apostolic mission flowing out from the Spirit, Who was most generous toward him with the bestowal of His gifts. On his part, he never stinted on the effort to correspond to these, and with them, to serve the local Church, in close collaboration with his Bishop, whom he believed the Holy Spirit had called to rule His Church.

⁵ cf. Jn 14:15, f., and Rm 8.

In Fr. Bertoni, there is resplendent the life of humility, which moved him to make use of the gifts received, in order to give more prominence to God. As God may be clearly seen in one's neighbor, he and she must be promoted, loved and served. Fr. Bertoni's charism, then, is made clear, with the help of the Holy Spirit, within the dynamic of serving the Church and neighbor, through his cultural, natural riches, received in a special way by the Founder of the Stigmatines.

FIRST PART

THE FONTS OF FR. BERTONI'S CHARISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning, there was already emphasized the pre-requisite for the source of a charism, which is the Holy Spirit. He bestows His gifts on those He chooses. He does this for the service of the human community. The utilization of such gifts for the benefit of others is indispensable.

In Fr. Gaspar's life, it is evident that the gifts received were not without fruit, as the parable the talents teaches.¹ He seems to have received the "five" talents and developed these. It was not easy for him. It cost him an entire life-time of indefatigable effort to correspond to the gifts he received.

He was not a person already born a "saint", manifesting an "impossible", witness. This might seem to be the case for anyone who did not know him. Following the "path" of his vocation, it is evident how he faced every problem with incredible strength of will and sustained by the Spirit of God, to whom he continuously turned and gave himself without reserve.

In his life, not everything blossomed. On the contrary, it seems incredible that he had such strength to be able to succeed in the entanglement of some situations in which he found himself in different phases of his life. The configuration to Christ brought him to live the whole paschal dimension of the Lord with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

We will look at, then, some of the aspects of the problems he experienced by him, especially in his family, social and ecclesial life. These form a kind of human framework for the development of his charism as Founder. Then there will be seen the theological and spiritual content absorbed by him, through the influence of doctors, saints and apostolic personalities.

Further on, we will have the opportunity to explain the meaning of abandonment and availability for the specific exercise of the charism of the "apostolic missionary" with docility to the Spirit.

Finally, the occasion will be offered to explain his devotions, indicative signs for the love-service in the living out of his charism.

¹ cf. Mt 25:14, f.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONDITIONS

1. FAMILY SITUATION

At his birth, on October 9, 1777 in Verona, Gaspar Louis Denis Bertoni lived in St. Paul's Parish, in the Campo Marzio section, with his parents, Francis Louis Bertoni and Brunora Ravelli, his paternal grandmother, Matilda, her two other children, Anthony Mary and Paula, as well as with a Grand-uncle, Father James and Ignatius (a Notary), and Aunt Teresa.

His father, at the time obtaining the diploma to be a Notary, lived as the administrator of the family goods, in the country. However, due to his difficulties and limited competence, he accepted the division of the property and broke with the family. He moved with his wife and son, Gaspar, to Gombion of Cladiero.¹

His mother, who was also the daughter of a Notary, had a good education and was a woman of much judgment and faith.² She was able to bring up her son well, despite the family problems during his first ten years.

His grand-uncle, Fr. James, exercised a positive influence on Gaspar. Fr. James died in June 1785.

Young Gaspar's temperament showed itself to be affable, tranquil.³ However, the subsequent events had such an influence on him that he seemed to be more reflective and pensive.

In March of 1783, a little sister was born, and given the name, Matilda. However, she died of an illness in November of 1786. In June 1787, his grand-uncle, Ignatius, also died.

The death of little Matilda had a profound psychological impact on his mother, Brunora – who, in time, did inject something of her fear in young Gaspar.⁴

The father showed that he was unable to conduct the administration of his goods further, and was helped in this by his brother-in-law, Charles Ravelli, and by his friend, Fr. Anthony Pandolfo. In this way, the family expenses were controlled.

¹ cf. Joseph Stofella, *Il Ven. Gaspare Bertoni* (Verona: Scuola Tipografica PP. Stigmatini 1951), pp. 9-12. cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare Bertoni* (Rome: General Postulation of the Stigmatines 1975), pp. 9-14. These two others will only be cited according to their surnames and these works only with the first few words of the titles.

² cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.* p. 26.

³ cf. *Summarium Additionale*, of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Positio super virtutibus Gasparis Bertoni*, Vol. II (Roma: Guerra et belli 1960), Doc. XX, p. 314. From now on, this will be cited as Summ. Add., along with the number of the document and page.

⁴ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*, p. 113.

These problems of finances and the family inheritance would prove to be a great torment for Gaspar. In order to help resolve them, he renounced his own inheritance from his uncle, Anthony Mary, in favor of his father. Besides, as far as expenses went, he accustomed himself with having very little. What really interested him, he noted in his spiritual diary:

*“To seek only God, to see God in all things: this is to make oneself superior to all that is just human”.*⁵

In the midst of this entanglement of financial matters in the bosom of his own family, God instilled into his heart the value of gratuitous service. Later on, this would brand his own life and his legislation, in the form of *gratis omnino* in the ministry, that was proper to his charism.

He experienced the hardships of a genuine poverty with this mother, once that his father, out in the country, in Caldiero, did not always provide what was necessary to maintain them in comfort. This was also due at the time to the devastation brought by battles that raged in the area. He received much practical experience through all this, in living a poor life. Furthermore, his father even separated himself from his mother around 1808, due to his difficult character and his poor administration of the family goods.⁶ This suffering for both mother and son were brought in line with their project of faith.

Meanwhile, there was noticeable in Gaspar the ideal of following after the suffering Christ. He wrote:

*“Joy in adversities and in the consequences of real poverty, with thanksgiving to the Lord, and the offering for a greater part in shame and suffering, if I should be found worthy of these. This spirit is the best gift and I really think that I am unworthy of it. May God always be praised !”*⁷.

Both mother and son were treated very unfairly in the matter of the family inheritance. They depended on what was due to them, and so had to initiate court proceedings against the father. In this whole matter, the profound respect due to him was safeguarded. The mother’s duty was to look out for her son, and he felt obligated to take care of her.

Brunora Ravelli died in February of 1810. Due to his father’s situation, Gaspar left his family home and committed himself totally to the spirit of the words: “Our Father, Who art in

⁵ “Cercar Dio solo, veder Dio in tutte le cose: questo è un farsi superiore a tutte le umane cose” – (cf. *MP*, July 30, 1808).

⁶ cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.*, pp. 65-73; cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Ven. Gaspare Bertoni*, vol. I (Roma: Postulazione Generale degli Stigmatini 1971), pp. 128-9 and 434-6).

⁷ “Allegrezza nelle avversità e conseguenze della povertà reale con ringraziamento al Signore e offerta a cose maggiori di obbrobrio e di pena se me ne degnasse. Questo animo è il miglior dono, di cui me ne reputo affatto indegno. Sia lodato Dio sempre”. cf. Joseph Fiorio, *Lo Spirito*; cf. also *MP*, October 22, 1808.

heaven..."² He also left his home parish, and came to Sts. Firmus and Rusticus parish (called St. Firmus Major).³

In December of the year 1813, his father also died, comforted by the sacraments of the Church.

Regarding the whole problem of his family inheritance, on the basis of which was founded the canonical title of "Ecclesiastical Patrimony", required to satisfy the stipulations in order to be ordained a priest, the whole estate had evaporated.⁴ All of this meant only a headache for poor Fr. Bertoni. In 1815, he officially designated as his "Ecclesiastical Patrimony" a piece of property that had nothing to do with his inheritance from his father, of which nothing remained to him. By this means, however, he was able to have a tranquil conscience before the canonical requirements.

Throughout his whole infancy, adolescence and early years, young Gaspar had a normal development. There can be noted his most brilliant effort in compensating for a series of difficulties he lived through with the diligence in his studies and spiritual growth. He attended the early level of school at St. Sebastian's (conducted by the ex-Jesuits, who had been suppressed as an Institute in 1773). His spiritual director at that time was Fr. Louis Fortis, who would later become the first Superior General of the Jesuits after the reinstatement of the Company of Jesus. At the age of 12, he became a member of the Marian Congregation. There he received a solid spiritual formation. He learned, through Fr. Fortis, to struggle against his predominant fault,⁵ and to do everything for the glory of God. The spirit rewarded him with uncommon understanding and wisdom. He succeeded well in his studies and showed himself to be solid in the faith with pure conduct.⁶

At the same time that he frequented his courses in Science and Philosophy, he did not set aside his study of letters. He studied under Fr. Anthony Cesari, who held him "in high esteem as one of the most beautiful intelligence and having a special taste for the ancient masters".⁷

An expression of his true vocation might be found in the poetic verses he composed in honor of St. Aloysius:

"If you try to see him, you seek in vain
If first you do not love him: and this, he reminds you
That he speaks to the heart, but sweetly and slowly.
Keep your ear attuned, should the noise of the crowd
Deafen you. Go out, abandon Your home-land, your home, your own, that distract
you".⁸

² *Summ. Add.*, Doc XX, p. 118; cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.*, p. 69.

³ cf. *id.*, Doc. VI, n° 3, pp. 29, 30.

⁴ cf. *id.*, p. 34.

⁵ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*, p. 16.

⁶ cf. *ib.*, pp. 19, f.

⁷ *Summ. Add.*, Doc XXII, p. 214 and Doc. XXVI, p. 315.

⁸ "Se tu cerchi vederlo, il cerchi invano
Se pria non l'ami: e questo ti ricorda

When he had completed his courses at the municipal school of St. Sebastian's young Gaspar could have followed a brilliant career, studying at the University of Padua, as his Uncle Joseph did. However, his intentions were not confined to activities projected merely to this world. There remained for him to make the definitive choice: which path to follow?

In the storm of difficulties, he never allowed himself to be led by the impulse of the moment: he reflected, prayed, sought counsel, hoped for some sign from God that would result from the conducting of events in his surroundings. This was his practice throughout his life. He learned to make the effort to respond to the fundamental question that would always recur: what is it that God would want from me?⁹ In his view, it was necessary to have the freedom to be able to act in harmony with the Spirit of God.¹⁰ He had to be attentive always, and not place any obstacle to His grace.¹¹

2. SOCIAL AND ECCLESIAL BACKGROUND

When Gaspar Bertoni first saw the light of day, peace and serenity reigned in his native land, both from a social as well as a religious perspective. However, it would not last long. The consequences of the French Revolution arrived there, and proved to be a disaster in every aspect.¹² Since it was well to do and in the middle of the cross-road of communication between Lombardia, Venice and Austria, Verona was likewise the most accessible to the influences of the new ideas.

The first French canon shots, terrorizing the population, were heard in Verona around Easter of 1797. From then on, one did not live in peace for a long time. There was a struggle for leadership between Austria and France.¹³ With the cannonades, there arrived also the destruction of family, human and Christian values... There developed the theory that all was "valuable" that destroyed and corrupted humanity from within. In all of this mire, however, fortunately some "lilies" were preserved. In Gaspar Bertoni, one of these may be seen.

From a material perspective, the difficulties were not insignificant, especially for those with fewer means. Even in the abundant harvest of the year 1801, the Bertoni family was not fortunate. Their planted fields were visited (in Caldiero and Illasi) by a devastating storm.

Ch'Ei parla al cuor, ma dolcemente e piano.

Tendi l'orecchio adunque, e se t'assorda

Il rumor delle genti, esci, abbandona

La patria, il tetto e il popol tuo ti scroda." (cf. Stofella *Il Ven.*, p. 30)

⁹ cf. Gaspare Bertoni, *Manoscritti*, 5 volumes (Roma: Stigmatine General Curia), transcribed by Fr. Louis Benaglia 1984) – cf. 6 meditations for the retreat in 1806, preached in St. Paul's campo Marzio, Verona.

Meditation 1: "The end of Man" – MSS 3888, 3889, 3890. From now on this work will be quoted MSS followed by the number in the margin for each paragraph.

¹⁰ cf. Parish Sermon 20, "The Law of the Gospel", August 21, 1803, the 12th Sunday after Pentecost – MSS 839.

¹¹ cf. MP, May 18, 1810.

¹² cf. Gaetano Romano Morono, "Verona", in: *Dizionario Storico-ecclesiastico*, ed. 1959, p. 302.

¹³ cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.*, p. 10.

Along with this, were the continuous orders of requisition of grain and animals to maintain the troops scattered about through the country-side.¹⁴

In 1802, Fr. Gaspar courageously initiated the work of the Oratories, seeing the need of forming in a Christian manner, the youth who had been abandoned to the turmoil of the lassitude of moral customs, and to find their own way through it all.

The city was divided into two hostile factions of occupying armies. Freedom of access from one to the other part was prohibited.

While the political and economic aspects were disastrous for the inert population, the moral and religious aspects were disconcerting. A good part of the clergy was ineffectual and gave way to despair.

In the midst of such a situation, one either gave into the pervading discouragement, or became a prophet-martyr. However, Fr. Gaspar was not born to take on all this with only his own strength. He stated:

“Whenever a certain faction arises and raises a banner hostile to the Prince, then all the subjects become soldiers.¹⁵ Whoever, does not take up arms in the defense of the divine honor, is not a faithful subject in these times”.¹⁶

In the Concordat of 1803, it was declared that there would be no suppression of any Ecclesiastical Foundation without the intervention of the Holy See. In reality, though, Napoleon Bonaparte, in 1805, confiscated the goods of religious orders, diminished the number of parishes in the principal cities of Italy, fused religious orders with one another, and suppressed the lay corporations.

In Verona, the 37 parishes became 10. Confusion reigned. For all practical purposes, religious freedom was taken away.

Fr. Gaspar’s father, with the nationalization of all the convents, became indebted to the state.¹⁷

Although at first Fr. Gaspar’s Marian Oratories were not included in the prohibited lay corporations, they watched very carefully, and all freedom was taken from them.

¹⁴ cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, Vol II (Roma: Postulazione Generale degli Stigmatini 1975), p. 112.

¹⁵ “Quando esce qualche fazione e inalbera stendardo contro del Principe, tutti i sudditi sono soldati. Chi dunque non prende l’armi a difesa dell’onore Divino, non è suddito fedele in questi tempi.” – cf. Parish Sermon 21, “The Divine benefits”, New Year’s Eve 1803 – preached on St. Stephen’s day in the Ven. Church of St. Paul’s, Campo Marzio, on the left side of Verona – MssB 861).

¹⁶ “Eppur se a molti mancano l’armi della lingua, a tutti è pronta l’arma sicura dell’orazione” – Parish Sermon 21, ib. (MssB 862).

¹⁷ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*, Vol. II, p. 500.

The disappearance of the religious goods, the closing of churches, the suppression of confraternities, and the bad example of certain priests, the diminution of parishes and vocations Jansenism... all of this lessened the religious fervor of the people.

Fr. Gaspar's Marian Oratories developed vigorously up to a certain point, as there were many priests involved in them. However, they alarmed the police and in this time, from the year 1807 on, Venice fell under the Kingdom of Italy, including the area where Fr. Gaspar exercised his ministry. The Oratories came to be looked upon as "religious masonry, erected with true Jesuitical spirit". Their founder was watched closely, and had much to suffer. In this regard,¹⁸ Fr. Giacobbe wrote:

"The obstacles and the hindrances that were brought to bear by the malice or the envy of the enemies of the common good against his holy undertaking of the Marian Oratory were neither few, nor insignificant. As has been already pointed out, he was the first to establish one in St. Paul's Campo Marzio. It would not be good to say who it was who did this, nor describe the evil that was brought to bear, nor the artifices and instigation that were employed and attempted to overthrow and extinguish that endeavor, which did so much good among the young".¹⁹

Thus Fr. Gaspar had to lessen the exterior displays of the association that had been organized, and its activities outside the Church walls. Further, it had to be restricted to the parish confines. Nonetheless, his courage did not wane, as he knew in whom to place his hope. In fact, later on, in 1814, with the fall of the French domination that suppressed the Marian Oratories, Fr. Gaspar could act more freely. From St. Firmus the Oratories were spread throughout the whole city and Diocese.

It is well known that Fr. Bertoni inserted himself within the situation of the people and the Church he served, suffering with both, which was particularly due to his spirit formed in the school of the divine Master. He suffered with the irreligiosity of the dominators, the restriction of the ecclesiastical ministries, the laxism and secularism on the part of the clergy, their self-aggrandizement through disobedience to the Pope, the participation of priests in politics,²⁰ the disciplinary and moral decadence of the seminary.

3. THE CHALLENGE OF A FRAGILE PROJECT

Considering the entire problematic situation through which Fr. Bertoni was passing, as narrated above, one cannot overlook the restrictions imposed upon him by his physical health. Through illness, he became indeed a living martyr. For him, as he was accustomed to call it, this was "the school of God".²¹

¹⁸ Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*, Vol. II, p. 544.

¹⁹ *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, pp. 471-2.

²⁰ cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.*, p. 14.

²¹ cf. Joseph Stofella, *Epistolario del Ven Servo di Dio Gaspare Bertoni* (Verona: Scuola Tipografica Missioni Padri Stimmatini 1954). – (cf. Letter 45, June 1, 1814 – *Epst.* P. 109). From now on, this is the way the founder's

In 1812, at the height of his enthusiasm and apostolic commitment, he suffered a severe attack of military fever, with its fistulas appearing over his body. In the following year, he suffered a serious relapse.

In 1822, there appeared a tumor on his leg. With the passing of time, he submitted to more than 300 lancing, without anesthesia; it is hard to know how he endured it all. With utmost simplicity, however, he wrote:

“The Lord is keeping me in bed, under the knife. May He be praised! ‘I will bless the Lord at all times’ (Ps 30:2). As long as he is served, this suffices for me. However, I do ask for your prayers, so that God might continue to give me patience; ‘without Me you can do nothing’ (Jn 15:5).²²

From the year 1842, until drawing his last breath (in 1853), his illness did not diminish its intensity, and he remained in bed the last two and half years.

Furthermore, difficulties never left him in his project of gathering with his companions to form a religious community (an Institute, in the technical sense), in order to assist the local Church with the force of religious life. Hence, the pressing questions; how, when, with what means could it be done? Would it be an endeavor willed by God? What about the prohibition on the part of the dominating political power? Indeed, he recorded his Spiritual diary on July 23, 1809.

“The devil tries with all of his power to upset the Lord’s work”.²³

Precisely on September 15, 1808, he experienced an initial inspiration as Founder.²⁴ And in these very days, Napoleon struck a blow against Pope Pius VII, taking from him temporal power by annexing the Papal States to the French Empire.

Fr. Bertoni was much perplexed with his choice of a life that implied tremendous responsibility. He witnessed the unworthy example of many priests who, rather than being sources of salvation, had become conductors toward perdition. On March 5, 1809, he recorded in his Spiritual Diary:

“Those the Devil seeks to lead to perdition, he makes them feel sure of themselves”.²⁵

And again, on September 15, 1809, he wrote:

“The priestly dignity makes one tremble”.²⁶

letters will be quoted.

²² “Il Signore mi trattiene in letto e sotto i ferri e i coltelli. Sia benedetto! ‘Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore’ (Sal 30, 2 – Vul.). tanto che sia egli servito, e ciò mi basta. Mi raccomando però alle sue orazioni, perché Dio mi continui la pazienza che mi dona: ‘Sine me nihil potestis facere’ (Bv 15.5)” – (cf. Letter 114, May 11, 1827 – *Epst.* P. 209).

²³ “Il demonio tenta a tutto potere di stornar l’opera del Signore”.

²⁴ cf. *Collectanea Stigmatina* IV (Verona: Scuola tipografica Missioni PP. Stigmatini 1962), p. 152. From now on this will be cited with the abbreviation CS.

²⁵ “Diabolus quos perdere vult securos facit” – (cf. *MssB* 5200).

Fr. Gaspar took stock of his entire project, with the strength, the means and the possibilities he had at his disposal. It was a real challenge to take on a vocation that found its possibility only in the response of love, facing the unknown, and yet all permeated by his loving analysis. Everything seemed to be crashing around him in ruins: his family problems, as we have seen, the political, economic, social, ecclesial situation, his personal health problems, which gave no adequate support for his challenging projects. All his plans seemed from the outset destined to fall.

However, to the contrary, he was convinced in his vocational choice, trusting entirely in the Lord, who was able to bring everything to a conclusion:

“Above all, we have to be sure that we do not fail the Lord, being sure that on His part, he will never fail us”²⁷

He was fully cognizant of what was before him:

“It is necessary to prepare for a great battle with the powers of Hell.

“1. There is needed humility to draw help from Heaven: ‘Put on the armaments of God so that you can withstand.’

“2. There is needed detachment from everything, so that the Devil might not be able to snuff out the endeavor...”²⁸

It is true that the challenge before him was great, but no less true that God is superior to every challenge. This was his conviction, in citing the words of St. Paul:

“I can do all things in Him Who comforts me”.²⁹

For his part, Fr. Gaspar gained his fragile forces and recognized that it would be most necessary to make every effort and some options:

“To follow Christ is like building a tower: renunciation may be compared to the expense and the materials”.³⁰

Indeed, would there come to him the strength to take on his vocational project in all of his own personal vicissitudes as well as those of his times and where he worked – without his being presumptuous, and without the whole endeavor falling into ruin and failure ?

²⁶ “La dignità del sacerdozio fa tremare”.

²⁷ “Dobbiamo sopra tutto vigilare di non mancare noi al Signore, sicuri che dalla sua banda Ei certo non manca.” (cf. *MP*, December 2, 1808).

²⁸ “Bisogna prepararsi a una grande guerra coll’Inferno. 1. Ci vuol umiltà per attrarre dal Cielo gli aiuti: Induite armaturam Dei ut possitis sustinere. 2. Distacco da tutte le cose, perché il Demonio non abbia in che afferrarci...” – (cf. *MP*, July 24, 1809).

²⁹ Ph 4:13 – (cf. Meditation 8, I Kings 1:28 (1 S), December 1810 – *MssB 5084*).

³⁰ “Seguir Cristo è la torre da edificarsi: la spese e i materiali sono la renuncia”. – (cf. Retreat to the newly ordained, Confessors, September 1810, 6th day, “Three Classes” – *SS 2529*).

The truth of the matter is that in all of his undertakings, Fr. Gaspar designed his projects with a strength that came to him from no other source than the Holy Spirit.

In his vocational choice, from his earliest years, these very words that he preached later, could very well have been applied to him:

“When a young man finds his joy in God, and in the things that pertain to his glory – when he rejoices at hearing about the conversions of people – when his heart truly expands in prayer, and comes to pray all the more intensely to him God for the extension of His glory for the conversion of non-believers and sinners; when in his discourses and conversations he ponders these realities and proposes them with spirit – when he recognizes in himself, a great proof from the Holy Spirit in this joy, given to him in order to be very well disposed to the ecclesiastical vocation”.³¹

He is convinced that his vocation was not the result from the impulse of nature alone but that, through his discernment, he perceived it to be really a gift of the Holy Spirit.³²

The one possibility he really feared was that of placing an obstacle in the way of God’s action. Once he had accepted the challenge of his call, even to the founding of a religious Institute, he was convinced that God’s plan would not fail:

“Very few are they who understand what God would accomplish in them, were He not thwarted by them in His designs”.³³

In this manner, Fr. Gaspar became a great collaborator with God in his plans reserved for him. In brief, Fr. Charles Zara’s words are to the point:³⁴

“Such was the hope that he had in succeeding in a work that God Himself and inspired, that he reached the point of being able to say that even if he had known for certain that tomorrow the end of the world would come, he would have continued on in his work today. And in order to inspire his afflicted sons with this kind of confidence, he would say to them: ‘Courage, let’s trust in God, and leave it all up to Him, Who can do everything.’”

It can be said truly that Fr. Gaspar ‘hoped against hope’.

³¹ “Quando un giovinetto si allegra in Dio e delle cose pertinenti a sua gloria, quando si allegra udendo conversioni di anime, quando dilatato il suo cuore nell’orazione prega assai caldamente il suo Dio per la estensione della sua gloria nella conversione degl’infedeli e peccatori; quando ne’suoi discorsi e colloqui queste cose medita con i spirito e propone, ei riconosce in sé in questa letizia una gran prova dallo Spirito Santo, a lui data d’essere molto ben disposto alla ecclesiastica vocazione.” (cf. Meditation 8, *ibid.* – *MssB* 5053, 5059; cf. Meditation 11, 1 Kings 2:11 (1 S), New Year’s day 1811 – *MssB* 5184, 5189).

³² cf. Meditation 15, 1 Kings 3:1 (1 S), January 1811 – *MssB* 5429, 5432, 5437 and 5449).

³³ “Pochissimi sono coloro i quali intendono che Iddio farebbe di loro se Egli non fosse ai suoi disegni da essi impedito” (cf. *Mp*, May 18, 1811).

³⁴ *Breve Cronaca della Congregazione delle Stimmate di N.S.G.C.* (Verona: Scuola tipografica “Casa Buoni Fanciulli” 1917), Vol. 1, p. 66.

CHAPTER II

GOD, HIS WORD AND THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

1. GOD, THE FOUNDATION OF BEING AND ACTING

Dependence on God is the fundamental and fulfilling reality of a human being who docilely accepts being led by Him.¹ In this regard, Fr. Bertoni affirms :

“... Supreme and sublime benefactor ! Look at the dependence that our whole being recognizes from Your goodness ! Just see how much concern your solicitous goodness extends all around us ! And now, my listeners, you will understand the force of those words of the Apostle (Ac 17 :28) : ‘in Him, we have our being’. We are indeed in God as in the One who conserves us in being, in every single instant, by granting it to us. And not only do we have ‘our being in Him’, but ‘in Him we also live’, in Him we do live, as He, in like manner, conserves for us that life that He gave us even beyond our simple being.”²

In God there is the joy of those who find in Him deliverance from all evils.³ Love for Him is the source of movement for every human response. Whoever loves Him, commits all his effort to inspire his neighbor to do the same. It is the apostolate of love that makes a mission out of accomplishing everything for the glory of God, Who has loved us first.⁴

Whoever strives for “God alone”⁵, finds Him in one’s own self, and in the “self” or the other. A human being, without God, is really nothing. To discover Him within ourselves, it is necessary to be emptied of self, to reach personal “nothingness”. Then is God found :

“In the depths of one’s own nothingness, one meets God”.⁶

¹ cf. Parish Sermon 21, “The Divine Benefits”, For the last day of the year 1803, delivered on St. Stephen’s Day, in the Ven. Church of St. Paul, Campo Marzio, Verona on the left side – *MssB* 844-846, 851-859

² “O sommo ed eccelso benefattore! Ecco qual dipendenza riconosce il nostro essere dalla vostra bontà! Ecco qual cura trattiene la vostra bontà sollecita intorno a noi! Adesso intenderete, uditori, la forza di quelle parole dell’Apostolo, *Act. 17, 28* . Ipso sumus. Noi siamo in Dio siccome in quello che ci conserva nell’essere, in ogni stante donandolo. E non solo ‘sumus in ipso’ ma ‘in ipso’ pur ‘vivimus’, in lui viviamo, conservando egli per egual modo a noi quella vita che oltre del semplice essere ci donò”. – (cf. Sermon 21, ib., *MssB* 847).

³ cf. ib., *MssB* 875.

⁴ cf. *MP* September 15, 1808.

⁵ cf. ib., July 30, 1808.

⁶ “In fondo al proprio niente si trova Iddio”. – (crr. Ib., August 24, 1808). In Fr. Bertoni, the consideration of this “nothing” is different from the way that St. Francis de Sales thought of the “inferior part” of the soul (characterized by its natural inclinations) – and the “superior part” (with its tendency toward good, to carry out God’s will). “In the depths of one’s own nothingness” for Fr. Bertoni seems to mean the self-emptying of all selfishness and the humble recognition of one’s own limits, in relationship to God. It means to begin with God, who really is at the core of the human person, where a human being encounters one’s own consistency, or reason for being – in Gaspar’s view.

“Francis de Sales, with these terms, gives a spiritual emphasis beginning with the psychological tendencies of each one’s “ego”. Fr. Gaspar more simply ties the human reality in with each one’s theocentric

For this same reason, we can find the reason for our being only in God. We are His temple.⁷ In every other, the configuration of God may be seen, independent of external appearances, limits and defects.⁸ Each one should be loved because God is seen in each.

The supreme law for humanity is justly love, the source of which is God. He, then, is the One Who gives impulse and meaning to human activity.⁹

The Holy Spirit vivifies us with love.¹⁰

In this manner, with dependence on God and assisted by the Spirit, we become a transforming force, and God acts within us.¹¹

To be always united to God is of a vital necessity :

“The Lord wills that we be mindful of Him, and that in Him should be our every thought and affection, perpetually fixed on Him, and recollected in Him”.¹²

Fr. Gaspar was looked upon as one who was an authentic witness of God, i.e., one who was truly convinced of God’s presence.¹³ For example, it was said of him :

“In all that was within him, as well as outside, he recognized only God, Who spoke to him through everything... he always seemed to be in prayer before the divine Majesty. Through his vibrant faith, he was and perceived Him present everywhere he went, and in all that crossed his path, and the different places he visited, he revered and adored God fervently and with humility of heart”.¹⁴

Love for the Most Holy Trinity inspired him with the sublime desire of union with the three Divine Persons,, in order to correspond in his love in harmony with that of Christ. In his spiritual diary on September 27, 1808, he recorded.

meaning. Francis de sales recognizes, as does Bertoni, the indwelling of God within the human heart. For this, the saint uses a variety of expressions, as “point”, “depths”, “center” of the heart, or of the soul, but with similar meanings. Specifically, “the depths of the soul” (for Fr. Bertoni, this is the “depths of one’s nothing”) means for Francis, “sincerely and profoundly”, “in the best place in the heart”. There may be seen, then, the use of similar terms, but without a precise coincidence of meaning in these two holy men. (cf. Tullio Poli, *Punta Suprema dell’anima*. (Roma: Università Gregoriana 1982), pp. 10 f., and 60, f.).

⁷ cf. Parish Sermon 8, “The Holy House transferred into our Hearts: or, Our Heart made the temple of God”, 3rd Sunday of Advent, St. Paul’s Campo Marzio, December 13, of the year 1801, for the solemnity celebrated for the Youth of the Parish, of the Translation of the Holy House Loreto, the sermon lasted 38 minutes – *MssB* 581.

⁸ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 547.

⁹ cf. Letter 51, December 21, 1814 – *Epist.* P. 122; cf. also Sermon 8, ib., *MssB* 575.

¹⁰ cf. Sermon 8, ib., *MssB* 580.

¹¹ cf. Gaspar Bertoni, *Pagine di Vita Cristiana*. (Vicenza: Stocchiero 1975), p. 205: cf. Parish Sermon 11, “Devotion”, April 20, 1801. (From now on this work will be quoted as PVC).

¹² “Il Signore vuole che ci ricordiamo di Lui, e in Lui stia tutto il nostro pensiero ed affetto perpetuamente fermo e raccolto”. – cf. Letter 36, August 31, 1813 – *Epist.* P. 96.

¹³ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XX, pp. 188, f.

¹⁴ cf. ib., Doc. XXVI, p. 331.

“Meditation on the Incarnation. There were sentiments of gratitude toward the Most Holy Trinity and of correspondence with Jesus Christ. I was already obliged to love God even before He became man ; and how much more now.

“In the evening, a sense of pardon. There were sentiments of great love toward the Most Holy Trinity in giving us the Son, and much tenderness toward Him together with much vivid faith, and the great desire for union ; along with the association with His sufferings and shame : with the petition for the grace to suffer, to be disdained for Him.”¹⁵

It should be pointed out that Fr. Gaspar’s love for God is of such a nature that nothing stopped him from seeking it, cost what it may. We saw in the previous Chapter that the moving force behind all his being and acting even in his having to experience incredible difficulties, could only have been the power of God, through His Spirit.

The responsibility that he felt to be the representative of the Son before the Father, in his quality as priest,¹⁶ and of glorifying God, was expressed in this way :

“What a great advantage it is to forget all else, and to give up the blessings of creation to seek the Lord alone. How God honors and loves His own humiliated Son ! What a debt is ours to do for Him what at least in part, He has first done for us !”.¹⁷

His theocentric life orientated his apostolic missionary spirit that he was dedicated to humanity, the Temple of God.¹⁸ Hence, he respected and loved the Trinity in the other’s being. It is impossible to uncover in him a contemplative vocation in the purely self-serving interior sense, nor was he totally an activist. He was a leader by nature, who truly wanted to serve others in whom he saw the image of the Creator. His imitation of Christ reveals this in a clear manner.

Through Fr. Galvani, he learned to accomplish everything “in order to be pleasing to God”.¹⁹

¹⁵ “Meditazione. Incarnazione. Sentimento di gratitudine alla Ssma Trinità, e di corrispondenza a Gesù Cristo. Io ero obbligato ad amare Dio anche innanzi ch’ei facesse uomo; quanto più adesso. “Sera. Perdonanza. Sentimento dell’amor grande alla Ssma. Trinità in darci il Figliuolo, e gran tenerezza verso di questo insieme con fede molto viva, e desiderio grande di unione; e di associazione alle pene, ed ignominie sue: con petizione di grazia per patire, ed essere disprezzato per Lui”. (Fr. Henchey notes that in Fr. Bertoni’s charism there is a Trinitarian emphasis – cf. Joseph C. Henchey, *Saggi sullo Spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, vol 3 (Roma: Curia Generalizia degli Stimmatini 1984), p. 17.

¹⁶ cf. *MP*, December 11, 1808.

¹⁷ “Che gran bene sia dimenticar e spogliar tutto il creato per cercar Dio solo. Come Dio onori, ed ami il suo Figliuolo umiliato! O qual debitoo è nostro di far per lui quello almeno in parte, ch’egli primo fece per noi!” (cf. *MP* December 25, 1808).

¹⁸ Letter 1 to Fr. Bragato, October 21, 1835 – *Epist.* P. 309, f. cf. Gaspar Bertoni, *Costituzioni* (Verona: Scuola Tipografica A.M.B. 1951), # 228. (To indicate the Founder’s Constitutions from now on, there will be used the abbreviation CF.

¹⁹ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Ven. Gaspare*, vol. I, p. 433; cf. also Meditation 11, 1 Kings 2:11 (! S), January 1, 1811 – *MssBB* 5196-7. Fr. Nicholas Galvani was a real father to Fr. Gaspar, even while being his teacher. He played a fundamental role in his becoming a Founder. As his spiritual guide, he assisted young Gaspar to grow in perfection through an austere and persevering life. Fr. Galvani offered to him the possibility of setting himself up at the

He had the experience of a relationship with the First Person of the Trinity as a true Father, and with the Second Person, as a real friend :

“At Mass, during the Consecration, there were rather vivid sentiments of Christ’s presence, like that of a friend ; and also of the presence of the Father : and feeling in a certain way the distinction of these divine Persons in one sole nature. Great reverence and love.”²⁰

The Third Divine Person, comes to us in baptism,²¹ is the font of charity²², bestows peace²³, is good²⁴, is the source of light and inspiration²⁵, dwells within us, His temple²⁶.

Fr. Bertoni offered equal praise to all three divine Persons²⁷. However, this God, Whom he loved without reserve, is demanding : He indeed acts and accomplishes everything, but does expect cooperation. The first step that Fr. Bertoni offered in this regard was that of not placing any obstacle in the way of His grace²⁸.

Commenting on the “obstacle” about which the Founder was concerned, Fr. Mario Zucchetto states :

“The greatest obstacle to our spiritual growth is ourselves, when we oppose the action of the Holy Spirit within us. Christ expressed a rather bitter regret when He said : ‘... by refusing baptism from John, the Pharisees and the lawyers had thwarted what God had in mind for them’(Lk 7 :30). It suffices for anyone to permit himself to be led, without creating obstacles ; to follow along the path of demanding love : to love without the any shadow of self-interest”²⁹.

A person positively cooperates with God’s grace by following after Christ³⁰, with the real effort of drawing in oneself His outline and taking up the Cross as He did³¹.

Stimate in order to found the Congregation in 1816. Two years later, he handed over to him his inheritance that included the Stimate, St. Teresa’s and the Convent next to the Church dedicated to the Trinity, tow other small places, a house for abandoned children, and part of his money. (cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XX, p. 117; cf. *ib.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 327; cf. Dalle Vedove, *Ven. Gaspare* vol. 1, pp. 305, f. and 428 f).

²⁰ “Nella Messa alla Consacrazione sentimento assai vivo della presenza di Cristo come d’un amico (che) parla all’altro amico: e ancora della presenza del Padre: e sentendo in certo modo ancor la distinzione di queste divine persone in un sola natura. Gran riverenza ed amore”. (cf. *MP* January 1, 1809; September 15, 1808; August 24, 1808).

²¹ cf. Letter 4, December 1, 1812 – *Epist.* P. 31.

²² cf. Letter 4 to Fr. Bragato, December 1, 1837 – *Epist.* P. 317.

²³ cf. Letter 12, January 9, 1813 – *ib.*, p. 50.

²⁴ cf. Letter 1, November 16, 1812 – *ib.*, p. 24.

²⁵ cf. Letter 43, perhaps January of 1814, rather than 1813 as noted. cf. *Epist.* P. 106.

²⁶ cf. *CF* 228.

²⁷ cf. Letter 10, December 21, 1812 – *Epist.* P. 44.

²⁸ cf. *MP* May 18, 1811 and December 17, 1808. (St. Ignatius speaks of collaboration with God’s Grace, in his *Constitutions*, # 814.

²⁹ cf. Mário Zucchetto, *Espírito de Doação Total* (Campinas: Grafica Educacional Divino Salvador, s/d), p. 22.

³⁰ cf. *MP*, February 29, 1809.

³¹ cf. *ib.*, February 22, 1809.

God's love in Fr. Gaspar led him not to look out for himself, for his own interested, for his own fulfillment anchored in his own person. For him, God was his "All". The Lord really was the whole reason of his "being". For this reason, sacrifice did not seem to matter to him. The only measure for his self-giving was to respond without measure. Docile to the Holy Spirit, he carried through on what the Spirit pointed out to him³². In this perspective, he wrote to Sister Naudet :

"I am the Lord, your God, strong and jealous (Ex 20 :5). This is God's love, active and committed, so ready to take over our hearts, that Hew alone would be our welcome Master, and not merely be received as a guest, unwilling received ! 'I am the Lord, your God'. You will remember that saying : 'I will be with you in Rome'. 'Strong' : this is the motive for our most trusting confidence in Him : 'I can do all things in Him Who comforts me'. The Lord is my illumination and my salvation : Whom shall I fear ?' He is 'burning with jealousy' : intense love leads to zeal : 'I am burning with jealousy for Zion'(Zc 8 :3)³³.

2. SACRED SCRIPTURE AND MISSION

In order to understand Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, in his existential roots, it is necessary to consider him pouring over the language of the Spirit of God in the Sacred Scriptures. If he indeed is a "man of the Word", faithful to God and too His mission, it is because he communicated with the Incarnate Word, the Word of God that he absorbed through the Bible. His profound love for God led him to seek carefully that understanding through which God speaks to humanity along its journey through history³⁴, and which culminates in the Revelation of the Word, throughout the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments. Proof of this is had in reading what he wrote, or what others testified concerning him.

He once preached :

"It is not human reason, nor the opinions of men, nor can it be the maxims of this world, or the dogmas of modern experience : but the Word of God is the unique and infallible rule of our thoughts, our activity, in order to achieve that supernatural and divine end to which we have been called"³⁵.

³² cf. the commentary that Fr. Stofella offers regarding these words of St. Ignatius, in *Epist.* P. 33, note 6.

³³ "Ego Dominus Deus tuus, fortis et zelotes!" (Ex 20:5). Ecco l'amore di Dio, attivo ed impegnato, ad impadronirsi così del nostro cuore, che Dio solo ci resti da libero Padrone, e non ci rimanga come un ospite colle mani legate! 'Ego sum Dominus Deus tuus (Ex 20:2). Si ricordi Vostra Signoria quell'Ego ero vobiscum Romae.' 'Fortis': questo è il motivo della nostra fiducia più sicura in lui: 'omnia possum in eo qui me confortat'. (Fil 4:13). 'Dominus illuminatio ea et salus mea: quem timebo?' (Sl 26,1). 'Zelotes': l'amore intenso si fa zelo: 'Zelotes sum Zion zelo magno'. (Zacch. 8:2). – cf. Letter 5, December 5, 1812 – *Epist.* P. 33.

³⁴ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 338 and 483, f.

³⁵ "Non la umana ragione, non le opinioni degli uomini, non le massime del mondo, non i dogmi della moderna esperienza; ma la parola di Dio è la regola unica e infallibile del nostro pensare, del nostro operare, per giungere al fine soprannaturale e divino cui siamo chiamati." – cf. Parish Sermon 35. "The Rule of our thinking and Acting", Epiphany 1806, St. Paul's Verona, on the left – *MssBB* 1214.

From his student days, he leaned to make the Scriptures his principal reading. And he was not contented in having read them through only once. He took much care in order to know profoundly their meaning, making a study of the better known commentaries of his time³⁶. His principle was :

“Careful attention, comparison, reflection on God’s words and deeds is the source of all knowledge and holiness”³⁷.

The divine word for him was the voice to which continual attention is due. It is the word of God ; it is light that enables us to see with security³⁸.

For this very reason, a modern writer, Divo Barsotti, has written :

“It would be difficult to find among our spiritual writers, at least in recent centuries, with a greater dependence on Sacred Scripture, than Fr. Bertoni”³⁹.

The conviction of not being able to live without this spiritual nourishment in no way led Fr. Gaspar to understand this salutary food, which the Word of God is, to be for him merely a rather selfish reserve for him who partook of it. The Word of God holds the power of the Spirit, which has transforming force. The Word of God is to be lived :

“Whoever is of God, listens to His Word (Jn 8 :47)⁴⁰.

“We ought to be persuaded that the word of God is food for the soul ; keep it because in time it will bear fruit (Ps 118 :11). The Word of God is like the master of the household, ‘which takes over, when it is grasped’ (St. Augustine). ‘Be doers of the word, and not listeners only, thus deceiving yourselves’ (Jas 1 :22)⁴¹.

God’s Word gives strength to all who are weak⁴², and leads to a life of faith and confident action⁴³. It was for him vital nourishment, like blood that ran through his veins⁴⁴.

³⁶ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XX, p. 182; and Doc. XXVI, p. 461.

³⁷ “L’attenzione, il confronto, la riflessione sulle parole e opere di Dio è la fonte d’ogni scienza e santità”. – cf. Meditation 4, 1Kings 1:5 (IS), December 8, 1810 – *MssBB* 4669.

³⁸ cf. Letter 3, November 26, 1812.

³⁹ Divo Barsotti, *Magistero di Santi* (Roma: A.V.E. 1971), p. 13.

⁴⁰ “Qui ex Deo est, verba Dei audit”. (Io. 8,27) – (cf. Notes from Rodriguez, Chapter 18. *Spiritual Reflections*. *MssBB* 8829.

⁴¹ “Esser persuasi che la parola di Dio è cibo dell’anima; conservarla perché a tempo dia frutto (Ps 118, 11). La parola di Dio è come l’amo, quod tunc capit quando capitur (St. Agostino). “Estote factores verbi, et non auditores tantum, fallentes vosmetipsos” (Jac. 1,22) – cf. Notes from Rodriguez, ib., *MssBB* 8830.

⁴² cf. Letter 32, June 28, 1813 – *Epist.* P. 86.

⁴³ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc XXVI, p. 461.

⁴⁴ cf. ib.; cf. also Joseph Henchey, *Biblical reflections towards a Spirit of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni*. (Typed Booklet, distributed by American Province). Book III, pp. 62 ff.

He wanted those who would follow him to allow it to penetrate them profoundly⁴⁵, that it be for them the source of truth⁴⁶, that it console the faithful, transmit Goodness, Wisdom and the Power of God⁴⁷.

It can indeed be read as Fr. Bertoni's own life's story. He maintained: "It is a great danger to hear God's to hear God's word without drawing fruit from it"⁴⁸.

Imbued with God's Spirit, and absorbed in His Word, he saw the needs of people, as he was always one who heard and lived what the Lord spoke. He understood that this Word was not to be hoarded selfishly, but was meant to be communicated. It has the power to transformation, as it is of God.

From him, the Word of God inspired him in his mission of announcing it. And how he announced it! To the youth, to the clergy and to the people in general⁴⁹.

He once remarked:

"No matter how difficult the undertaking, and how far it may exceed our strength; I certainly trust in the efficacy of the divine word, of which I am now the minister, and in the fervor of your prayers, with which I hope, my listeners, you might choose to follow my sermon; I can do no less than approach you courageously: I only beg you and appeal to you, silent Sinners, that if in these days, you should hear the voice of your God, do not harden your hearts. I have no doubt that same Jesus, in Whose name I preach, Who has put to flight in these days that mute Devil from that unhappy possessed person of the Gospel, would not be about to loosen your own tongues, once you put aside every empty fear"⁵⁰.

In his view, a preacher is only a mediator, an administrator⁵¹. Of himself, he is poor and powerless. The force of the Word that is transmitted is not his own. It is Christ's⁵². Preaching is to communicate God and has to be prepared⁵³.

⁴⁵ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc XXVI, pp. 461 f.; cf. *CF* 52.

⁴⁶ cf. Letter 168, January 19, 1830 – *Epist.* P. 269.

⁴⁷ cf. Letter 8 to Fr. Bragato, September 26, 1840 – *Epist.* P. 323.

⁴⁸ "E' un gran pericolo udir la parola di Dio e non cavarne frutto". (cf. *MP* February 22, 1809.

⁴⁹ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, pp. 338, 483, f., 565, f. cf. also Joseph Fiorio, *Vida de Ven. Servo de Deus, Pe. Gaspar Bertoni*. (Petrópolis: Vozes 1934), pp. 54, f., 70. F., 102. F., and 119, f.

⁵⁰ "Sia pur ardua l'impresa e le nostre forze gi gran lunga eccesa; io certo, confido nella efficacia della divina parola, di cui or sono ministro, e nel fervore delle vostre preghiere, con che, io spero, uditori, accompagnar vorrete il mio dire; non posso a meno di non mi accingervi con coraggio: Voi solo prego e scongiuro, mutoli Peccatori, se la voce del vostro Dio in questo giorno udite, a non voler indurire i vostri cuori. Del resto, io non dubito che quel Gesù stesso in cui nome io predico, il quale ha messo in fuga in questo dì un Demonio muto da quell'infelice energumeno del Vangelo, non sia per isnodare a voi pure, espulso ogni vano timore, salutarmente la lingua". – cf. Parish Sermon 10, "The sinner rendered mute by Shame, invited to Confession" – 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 21, 1802, preached in the ven. Parish Church of St. Paul's Campo Marzio, in Verona – an it lasted 27 minutes. It was repeated in St. Firmus Major, the last Tuesday of Lent in 1810, April 20 – *MssB* 615.

⁵¹ cf. Parish Mission, Sts. Firmus & Rusticus, May 4-26, 1816, "The Benefits of the Mission" – *MssB* 4030.

⁵² cf. Priests' Retreats, Mantua, October 4-13, 17-26 1816, "Vocation, Second Part" – *MssB* 3266.

⁵³ cf. Giuseppe Fiorio, *O Espírito do Bem-Aventurado Gaspar Bertoni* (Brasília: ed. regional Ltda., s/d), pp. 139 f.

The mission of preaching is carried out in union with, and for the assistance of the Bishop⁵⁴. He described it this way :

“Therefore, from these legitimate Pastors... whom the Holy Spirit has placed to govern the Church of God... we are to depend, and to await that the Word of God be proposed, explained and its meaning declared...”⁵⁵

In the Founder’s charism, the announcement of the Word will always be in close relationship with the assistance of the bishop. Hence, as is known, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, guided him in his ecclesial sensitivity.

The Word did not tie him, therefore, to any one place, to any single situation, or single type of ministry⁵⁶, as we will have the opportunity to see further ahead.

Finally, the Word of God in him is the touch-stone for the comprehension of his charism in the prophetic witness of his life, in a religious community and in the apostolic mission for the assistance of Bishops.

3. THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH AND OTHER SPIRITUAL MASTERS

The Holy Spirit acted in the charism of Fr. Bertoni also through the influence of the Fathers of the Church and the spiritual Masters, from whom he absorbed the intense theological, pastoral, ascetical and mystical vitality. The spiritual richness of this man of God is like an abundant and profound treasure, containing a pluridimensional foundation.

The Good Spirit, as he at times called Him, was forging his being to the point that there can be seen in him clearly that the holiness of the Lord is abundantly concentrated through his absorption of those riches afforded by so many spiritual Masters.

In his original Constitutions, may be seen at least 47 citations from the spiritual Masters, without counting the Apostles, and the Rules of other religious institutes.

Thus, in the matter of the preparation of his religious for the priestly ministry, he asked for two or three more years of study of the Fathers of the Church⁵⁷, as also the profound study, and even the memorization of Christian Doctrine, according to Cardinal Bellarmine - all for the purpose of entering deeply into the mystery of Christ⁵⁸. In addition to this, in

⁵⁴ cf. *CF* 1-2.

⁵⁵ “Da questi Pastori legittimi adunque, che lo Spirito Santo ha posto a regere la Chiesa di Dio... noi pender dobbiamo, e aspettar che ne venghi proposta e spiegata, e nel senso dichiarata, la parola di Dio”. – Parish Sermon 35, “The rule of our thinking and acting, Epiphany 1806, st. Paul’s Verona, on the left (*MssB* 1234).

⁵⁶ cf. *CF* 3, 5 and 57.

⁵⁷ cf. *CF* 40.

⁵⁸ cf. *ib.* # 51.

Constitution 53, he speaks of the necessity of the study of the Greek and Latin fathers, the theology of St. Thomas and the Moral of St. Alphonsus.

In Constitution 121, he presents the 12 grades of humility, in conformity with the rule of St. Benedict. This virtue is essential to grasp Fr. Bertoni as the model of one who genuinely wanted to have the presence and the action of God dominate in himself and in others. In truth, the Spirit molded him in humility, to be totally the servant of the Church.

He cited St. Basil to instruct his followers might apply themselves assiduously too study, without ever allowing themselves to be led on by mere curiosity, or of knowing for any selfish reasons⁵⁹. He called on St. Ambrose to teach that one should always be dignified, without yielding to affectation in one's conduct, and not being uncultured in speech⁶⁰. He remembered with St. Augustine, the necessity of being dignified and acting in conformity with the holiness of one's vocation, and without any hypocrisy of trying to give the appearance of being poor, simply to show off⁶¹.

He again called on St. Ambrose when speaking about the unaffected decor and religious poverty⁶².

Obedience, an essential virtue in the following of Christ obedient to His Father, is most pronounced in Fr. Bertoni, in his quest for the will of God, and particularly for the realization of his apostolic mission. Citing St. Jerome, he speaks of obedience and love for the Superior⁶³. The religious ought always to allow himself to be guided by the counsel of his Superiors and his elders, as Cassian mentioned with regard to orientation received from the Fathers⁶⁴.

The importance of the education of youth is presented according to the explanation of St. Basil⁶⁵.

Whoever is engaged in the sacred ministries, as St. Gregory stated, must allow himself to be led by the grace of God⁶⁶.

The evil of murmuring should not exist among the confreres, Fr. Gaspar taught, using the words of St. Basil⁶⁷.

St. John Chrysostom taught that the spirit of service should always hold sway over any airs of domination⁶⁸. In fact, the lesson of humility and the charity of service is strongly inculcated by Fr. Gaspar.

⁵⁹ cf. ib. # 123.

⁶⁰ cf. ib. # 129-130.

⁶¹ cf. ib. # 131 and 136.

⁶² cf. ib. # 134.

⁶³ cf. ib. # 147.

⁶⁴ cf. ib. # 151.

⁶⁵ cf. ib. # 166.

⁶⁶ cf. ib. # 186.

⁶⁷ cf. ib. # 194.

⁶⁸ cf. ib. # 195.

In discussions, the principle of humility leads the individual not to seek to have the first word, or to avoid the pride of having his own view prevail, as St. Gregory Naziansen taught ;⁶⁹ distensions lead to rancor, as Pope Boniface stated⁷⁰. To exaggerate situations, provoking others over trifles, runs contrary to St. Augustine's Rule⁷¹. According to St. John Climacus, stubbornness, which in general derives from pride, is a sickness⁷².

The particular friendship within a group, excluding some members of the community, is contrary to charity, in the words of St. Basil⁷³; it is a highly reproachable vice when it insinuates suspicions, defamation and envy⁷⁴. Exclusive friendship can be a danger for chastity. The same saint admonishes that anyone who offends public charity should be punished⁷⁵. This saint also states that each one should be honored according to his merit, without, however, any exaggeration⁷⁶.

Regarding charity, or fraternal community, Fr. Gaspar expanded on the teachings, especially of St. Basil, seeing in them practical and fundamental points for the life of his religious community⁷⁷.

The imitation of Christ and the Apostles, of capital importance for anyone who wants to follow Him, are expounded with the help of various spiritual masters, as the model of life and love.

For fraternal unity, according to Fr. Gaspar, obedience is a supreme aid, as he drew heavily for this teaching on St. Ignatius⁷⁸.

For the understanding and for the love of God, as was presented earlier, it becomes necessary to comprehend Him and to love Him in one's neighbor, who is His temple. To recognize God in the other is indispensable for a community life. In Constitution 228, he uses the words of St. Augustine :

"Let each honor God in the other, for you have been made His temples' ; because God alone is 'the One who makes brothers to live together in unity' ; and thus this uniformity aids greatly in making God known in all, and as a consequence, uniting all in God".

With St. John Chrysostom, he insists that the confreres converse together in common and that all have the same treatment and the same spirit⁷⁹, avoiding, as St. Bernard stated, singularity⁸⁰, as also, the acceptance of persons, in the words of St. Benedict⁸¹.

⁶⁹ cf. ib. # 200.

⁷⁰ cf. ib. # 201.

⁷¹ cf. ib. # 205.

⁷² cf. ib. # 206.

⁷³ cf. ib. # 208.

⁷⁴ cf. ib. # 209.

⁷⁵ cf. ib. # 210-211.

⁷⁶ cf. ib. # 214 and 217.

⁷⁷ cf. ib. # 218-220 and 226.

⁷⁸ cf. ib. # 224 and 284.

The care and charity toward the sick is emphasized with the teachings of St. Basil, St. Benedict, Pope Innocent III, St. Jerome and St. Augustine⁸².

Regarding hospitality, which should always be a strong point of any confrere of Fr. Bertoni and is already a distinctive sign of his charity, is expressed quite well in Constitutions 243-249, and is corroborated with the words of St. Basil, in Constitution 248. However, this saint also recalls to mind the spirit of poverty in the exercise of hospitality.

Brotherhood in community is assisted by the times of recreation and relaxation enjoyed together, thereby fomenting friendship. He states this, citing also St. Teresa in Constitution 251. He points out further that fraternity is exercised in interesting oneself in the other, as St. Jerome taught⁸³.

There should even be an interruption of work for relaxation and to attend to guests, as was recommended to Cassian, by the Abbot Abraham, as Fr. Gaspar remembered⁸⁴.

In Constitution 255, he called to mind the principal purpose of the Congregation, which is conversion. For this end with St. Ambrose he notes that one has to come to know how to use language, or silence (prudence in speech), in order to achieve this scope. In the following Constitution, he cites St. Thomas, St. Ambrose again and St. Basil, to reinforce the need of serious language, but jovial, agreeable, intelligent and totally bereft of vulgarity, and all permeated with the salt of evangelization.

Good news ought to be shared with others, for the purpose of increasing God's glory, as St. Basil stated⁸⁵.

Letter writing comes highly recommended by St. Basil and Ambrose, between the various communities, as St. Optatus and St. Augustine taught⁸⁶.

Commenting on St. John the evangelist, St. John Chrysostom taught: "That they may be one even as We are: Nothing can be compared to the union of wills... this is the excellence of charity..."⁸⁷

With St. Basil, Fr. Bertoni offers an admonishment regarding detachment from the world and from avoiding excessive familiarity with a view to living well the religious spirit⁸⁸.

⁷⁹ cf. ib. # 229-230.

⁸⁰ cf. ib. # 231.

⁸¹ cf. ib. # 233.

⁸² cf. ib. # 234-239.

⁸³ cf. ib. # 252.

⁸⁴ cf. ib. # 253.

⁸⁵ cf. ib. # 259.

⁸⁶ cf. ib. # 260-261.

⁸⁷ Union and fraternal love in community life is much insisted on by Fr. Bertoni. It is the fundamental point to live his charism, which is based on fraternal love, witnessed in a prophetic religious life. For him, God's Word begins to be lived in the house. Beginning there, each one shares with the others the contemplated truths, through the ministries. (cf. *CF* 266).

Yet, it is necessary to maintain a judicious contact with the laity, in accord with the teachings of St. Basil, St. Anthony, St. Athanasias, Surius, Sozomenus and Theodore⁸⁹.

Concern for salvation has to occupy the first place, in one's own regard, and in that of others, as St. Bernard maintained⁹⁰. In Constitution 6, the Founder reminds each confrere that he is to seek his "own spiritual perfection".

Furthermore, with regard to obedience, he is insistent on reinforcing this with the orientation drawn from St. Benedict and St. Basil⁹¹. Each one is to cooperate with his superiors in the fraternal correction of a confrere⁹². For all this, he also called to mind some guide-lines from Smaragdus and St. Ignatius.

In his spiritual diary, he also made note of some important points drawn from the saints, such as :

- He remembered, with Teresa, that one has to mistrust self, and have confidence in God⁹³.
- Before St. Ignatius' altar, he had the inspiration to found the Congregation, making the saint's spirit come alive once more, as the Founder (of the Company of Jesus)⁹⁴. On this point, in a special manner, we will have the opportunity to speak further ahead.
- The need of taking account of oneself is emphasized through a consideration drawn from St. Bernard in his letter to Pope Eugene⁹⁵.
- St. Thomas taught that anyone who has food already in the house (God) is foolhardy to go fasting looking for it elsewhere⁹⁶.
- In the view of both St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, many priests are lost⁹⁷.
- In St. Andrew Corsini there is had the example of what two saints said to him that salvation would depend on the four years of life that remained for him⁹⁸.
- St. Ignatius exemplified the need to cooperate with God's action and not to hope that He would do this all alone⁹⁹.
- The Devil employs both love and fear (two passions) to tempt us, as St. Augustine pointed out¹⁰⁰.

⁸⁸ cf. ib. # 267-269.

⁸⁹ cf. ib. # 274-6.

⁹⁰ cf. ib. # 283.

⁹¹ cf. ib. # 298-307.

⁹² cf. ib. # 308 and 313.

⁹³ cf. *MP* September 9, 1808.

⁹⁴ cf. ib., September 15, 1808.

⁹⁵ ib., the same date.

⁹⁶ cf. ib., October 13, 1808.

⁹⁷ cf. January 23, 1809.

⁹⁸ cf. ib., the same date.

⁹⁹ cf. ib., March 6, 1809.

- St. Bernard taught that God does condemn those who do not emend their lives¹⁰¹.
- Elias stated that it is necessary to correct defects with energy¹⁰².
- According to Fr. Seurin,, the work of God is impeded by following nature¹⁰³.
- In an action, one should not begin looking to give good example. Example is rather the consequence, as St. Paul of the Cross taught¹⁰⁴.
- St. Anselm of Canterbury prayed so that the Shepherds might be more concerned with the reform of the Church¹⁰⁵.
- St. Thomas of Villanova commented that God wants us to hear His voice¹⁰⁶.
- There is no fatigue where there is force of will, said St. Augustine¹⁰⁷.
- St. John Chrysostom remembered the necessity of a will applied with energy¹⁰⁸.
- St. Bernard noted that even among Christians it is becoming dishonorable “to live as Christians should”¹⁰⁹.

In his other spiritual writings, as in his catechism lessons, his letters and sermons¹¹⁰, he has an infinity of citations from the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, from the Saints, the mystics, theologians and spiritual Masters. These not only demonstrate his culture, his research and intellectual preparation, but also the spirit of holiness that he both lived and transmitted. From these, he drew a strength for union with God, formation of the religious community and a dynamism for his apostolic mission.

The sources are indeed many, but like water gushing forth from the same divine Spirit that gave him power for the implementation of his charism.

Thus, Fr. Bertoni, desirous of being a useful instrument of God for the assistance of the Church, on the basis of the Word of God, that he felt impelled to announce, he called on the example of so many saints, Fathers of the Church, so many spiritual Masters, as we have seen, seeking to assist the bishops (placed by the Holy Spirit) in their role as Shepherds. He sought only to follow God’s will in everything. He discerned a sign of this will, in what refers to the announcement of His Word, in the needs of the Church.

¹⁰⁰ cf. March 13, 1809.

¹⁰¹ cf. ib., March 16, 1809.

¹⁰² cf. ib., March 19, 1809.

¹⁰³ cf. ib., July 15, 1809.

¹⁰⁴ cf. July 17, 1809.

¹⁰⁵ cf. ib., May 24, 1810.

¹⁰⁶ cf. ib., id.

¹⁰⁷ id.

¹⁰⁸ cf. ib., May 24, 1810.

¹⁰⁹ cf. ib.

¹¹⁰ cf. Introduction to the Catechism, on the manner of receiving worthily the Sacrament of Confession, or Penance – lessons given by me, Gaspar Bertoni, in the year 1798, in the Church of St. Paul, Campo Marzio; cf. also “Elements of the History of States and Peoples – *MssB* 9845.

CHAPTER III

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA AND ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

1. THE INFLUENCE OF ST. THOMAS

As a profoundly studious man, Fr. Bertoni imbibed the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. He made of this a familiar object, one that he deeply appreciated and ready continuously, not only during his studies of theology, in his preparation for ordination, but also afterwards as a priest. He very often made use of the arguments of the Angelic Doctor in order to combat some of the theological positions of his time¹.

God, Who is the foundation of his whole being and activity, and in Whom Fr. Gaspar saw the whole reason of the being of his existence, is presented in the Thomistic writings in a way that offers a consistent basis for the defense of His existence, the presentation of His attributes, and the intimate communion of the Divine Persons in the same nature. This provided a consistent nourishment for Fr. Bertoni's own spirituality and preaching.

From St. Thomas Aquinas, he drew the basic lesson of the dependence of humanity on God and the limits of human intelligence :

"No faculty can in its operations surpass the limits of nature. However, if reason is the directing faculty of a person, it can indeed direct him to a natural happiness... In fact, St. Thomas teaches (I,1,1), man is ordered to God as to an end which surpasses the comprehension of reason"².

Fr. Gaspar drank deeply from the source of Thomas as "no other in his time", as Fr. Giacobbe, his first biographer, tells us³, as this can be inferred from his over-all theological outlook. This can be noted truly from the innumerable times that he quotes St. Thomas in his own spiritual writings. Despite this, it is not that easy to draw up a unified treatise of all that Fr. Gaspar culled from St. Thomas, other than perhaps by inference, or hypothesis. There can indeed be seen a general agreement in certain theological and spiritual points. This would already be enough for our purposes here, to have some feeling on the extent that the Spirit of the Lord enriched Fr. Bertoni through the influence of this renowned saint.

The importance of St. Thomas for our Founder can be deduced even from what he says in his original Constitutions :

¹ cf. *Summ. Add. Doc.* XXVI, p. 328 f.

² "Nessuna facoltà può nel suo operare passar i limiti della natura. Se la ragione però è una facoltà direttrice dell'uomo, potrà dirigerlo bensì ad una felicità naturale... L'uomo, infatti, dice S. Tommaso, I,1,1, l'uomo è ordinato a Dio come ad un fine che supera la comprensione della ragione." cf. Parish Sermon 35, "The rule of our thinking and acting", Epiphany 1806, in St. Paul's Verona, on the left – *MssB* 1215-6.

³ cf. *Summ. Add., Doc* XXVI, p. 328.

“They shall study the Holy fathers of the Church... Scholastic theology, and especially St. Thomas”⁴.

In the Angelic Doctor one can comprehend a plan for personal life, which has its source in God, a total dedication to him, as we have seen. Furthermore, beginning with this, one is led to love God configured in one’s neighbor, who is part of life in society :

“However, in the understanding of all the laws, it is friendship that ought to bring society together in a strong and gentle bond : St. Th. I-II, 99, 2,0 ; this mutual love based in civil communication unites in mutual manner the members, and the whole political body, to its head”⁵.

Confidence and total abandonment in God are the most emphasized characteristics of the Founder’s spirituality. It is in St. Thomas that there is encountered the great support for this, his special gift from the Spirit :

“St. Thomas calls hope, thus reinforced, with the name of confidence. The word confidence means principally this, that one hopes because he believes in the words of the one who promises him help... Confidence implies a certain strength of hope, proceeding from the consideration, which has generated a strong conviction of being able to achieve a determined good”⁶.

As a person immersed in God’s love, the much blessed Gaspar Bertoni lived and witnessed the language of humility which is opposed to pride⁷. This is combated so that each person would have only the true perspective of what he is, and precisely because of this, to place himself in the perspective of the Creator. He uses the same words of St. Thomas to say that pride is a disordered appetite, leading a person to elevate himself above what has been prescribed for him in the divine precepts and measurement⁸.

On the other hand, the Angelic Doctor speaks of humility correctly understood, which does not allow a person to situate himself above where he belongs, but which does not lead him to any extremes, which would be abjection⁹.

⁴ “Si studino i Ss. Padri... la Teologia scolastica soprattutto di S. Tommaso”. (cf. CF 53)

⁵ “Perocchè intendimento di tutte le leggi, è l’amicizia che deve stringere conforde vincolo, forte e soave la società: S.Th. 1-2, 99,2,0; e questo mutuo amore fondato in una civile comunicazione, lega con modo vicendevole le membra fra loro, e tutto il corpo politico all suo capo”. – (cf. Oration in honor of the Holy Martyr, Zeno, 8th Bishop and principal Patron of the R. City of Verona, delivered on the 18th day of August 1839, by the priest, Gaspar Bertoni – *MssB* 2112; cf. Parish Sermon 35, “The Rule of our Thinking and Acting”, Epiphany 1806, in St. Paul’s, Verona, on the left – *MssB* 1216.

⁶ Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono* (Verona Scuola Tipografica A.M.B. 1951) p. 203.

⁷ According to Fr. Gaspar, each one should be humble and grateful to the Creator for all that one is and has received. In contrast with this, pride makes one unsubmitive. – (cf. Retreat to the newly ordained, September 13, 1810. Third Day, “Three-fold Sin”, - *MssB* 547-571, especially 560; cf. also Retreat for 1806 in St. Paul’s , “Sin in the Angels and Adam”, *MssB* 3900-1

⁸ cf. Sermon 7, On Pride, ib., in *PVC* 138; *MssBB* 550-1.

⁹ cf. *PVC* p. 145. *Summa Theologica* (Roma: Paoline 1962) II-II, q.161, a. I c., and ad 2um. These references are

For a person to place himself in the dynamic of communion with God, it is necessary as Fr. Gaspar recalled with St. Thomas, that the fear of the Lord is expressed by not offending Him, in order not to be separated from Him¹⁰.

This is in conformity with the teaching of St. Thomas :

“If, out of fear of the penalty - as of Hell -we have recourse to mercy, being sorry for our sin, or if we abstain from sin, this is servile fear, a fear that is good, as the Decree of Trent has stated, and comes from the Holy Spirit”¹¹.

However, in this matter, Fr. Gaspar followed first St. Thomas, but then allowed himself to be orientated the more by St. Alphonsus. He learned that for confession, imperfect contrition is already sufficient for absolution of the sinner.

The fear of God, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is a conviction in Fr. Gaspar. He is sure that anyone who fears God is guided by the Spirit Himself¹².

Fear, however, has to be moderated by thought and action. When the fear becomes morbid, or excessive, it takes away the capacity to think, or act well¹³.

In the action of dedicating oneself to God, as St. Thomas stated, there is exercised devotion, which consists essentially in the will that is ready to dedicate itself to God, and commit itself to whatever pertains the more to His service¹⁴. Thus, the Founder preached :

“... the interior and spiritual acts in the cult of religion, are the principals, and pertain to divine cult of themselves ; the external acts have as their purpose that of supporting and are but means ordained to the internal acts”¹⁵.

Fr. Bertoni founded his Institute for a life of intense search for perfection and assistance to the Church in the salvation of humanity. He is convinced that every person seeks happiness : some look for it in pleasure, others in activity or contemplation. With St. Thomas, he fathomed the depths of the way of contemplation so that every action would have its base in God. Thus, uniting one to the other (contemplation and action), the apostolic mission achieves its results with the power of God¹⁶.

presented as FR. Bertoni made them. The Summa will be cited as S.T.

¹⁰ cf. Parish Sermon 2, “Fear of the Lord”, October 23, 1800 – in: *PVC* p. 154; cf. also *S.T.* II-II, q.19, a. 2 c.

¹¹ “Se per timore della pena – come dell’Inferno – ricorriamo alla misericordia, dolendoci del nostro peccato, o dal peccato ci asteniamo, questo è timor servile, timore che è buono, giusta il canone Tridentino e viene dallo Spirito santo” – cf. Parish Sermon 2, ib.: cf. also *ST.*, ib.

¹² cf. ib., Parish Sermon 2, pp. 154-5; II-II, q.19, a.6.

¹³ cf. Parish Sermon 26, “Conversion put off until the Point of Death”, December 26, 1804, in: *PVC* p. 51. *ST.*, II-II, q. 19, a. 6.

¹⁴ cf. Parish Sermon 11, April 20, 1801 – in: *PVC* p. 203; cf. *ST.* II-II, q. 82, a. 1.c.

¹⁵ “...gli atti interni e spirituali nel culto di religione, tengono luogo di principali e appartengono al divin culto di per sé; gli atti esterni hanno ragione di secondari e di mezzi ordinati agli interni”. – cf. Parish Sermon 36, “External Cult”, October 3, 1806 – in *PVC* p. 210; cf. *ST.*, II-II, q. 81, a. 7 c.

¹⁶ cf. Parish Sermon 37, “The Beatitudes”, November 1, 1806, in *PVC* pp. 218-9; cf. I-II, q. 69, a.3, c.; cf. *MssB*

In the activity of the quest for God, through living out His blessings, the reward is in proportion to the merit¹⁷.

God is the finality of every human being, as St. Thomas pointed out. He surpasses the comprehension of reason. He alone can reveal His truth to humanity and does this in Christ¹⁸. From here, develops Fr. Gaspar's efforts to follow Christ and to liken himself to him, in conformity with the Gospel :

"Eternal life consists in this that they might know You, the one true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent"¹⁹.

To form oneself on Christ requires the acceptance of the most difficult ordeal. As St. Thomas stated, the way that Christ took was the most tormented²⁰. Fr. Bertoni accepted the holocaust of himself. We know his life, and his confidence in the Lord.

In the offering of oneself, with the quest of spiritual perfection, the matter of chastity enters fully, with the total giving of oneself, and the sublimation of the tendencies of concupiscence of the flesh, of the sentiments and desires. The following might be appropriately quoted :

"According to St. Tomas, *De perfectione vitae spiritualis*, opus 17, 9, t. 19, 428/1 sqq., can be reduced to the headings : One on the part of the body, where the first root of past disorders is found. To wish for chastity, and not the rigor it requires is to want a fruitful vine and not the hedge of thorns. St. Dorotheus, Sermon 2, *Da sanguinem et accipie spiritum*. That is : the more there is taken away from the body some of its animal responses, so much the more must there be added the spiritual dimension. "If any priest is horrified at the name of penance, fasting, to the point that he does not even observe them as suggested too the people as a matter of precept, how will he ever be able to become pure ?"²¹

For Fr. Gaspar, the supreme beauty is God, who infinitely surpasses all the beauty of this world. One of these is loved only when a more beautiful reality is not seen. St. Thomas reinforced his conviction of making the power of grace prevail, which is superior to simple

1276.

¹⁷ cf. "The Beatitudes", ib., p. 221; cf. also I-II, q. 69, a. 4.

¹⁸ cf. Parish Sermon 35, "The Rule of our thinking and acting", Epiphany 1806, in: *PVC* p. 253; cf. *ST* I, q. 1.

¹⁹ cf. Jn 17:3 – cf. Parish Sermon 35, in: *PVC* 253.

²⁰ cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.*, p. 279; cf. *ST.*, III, q. 46, a.5, c; a. 6c.

²¹ "I rimedi hanno secondo S. Tommaso, *De perfectione vitae spiritualis Opus. 17, 9t. 19, 428/I, sqq.*, e ridursi a tre capi: 'Unum ex parte corporis', dove sta la prima radice de' disordini già trascorsi. Volere la castità e non il rigore è voler la vigna fruttifera e non la siepe di spine. S. Dorotheus, Sermon 2, 'Da sanguinem et accipe spiritum.' Cioè, quanto si toglie al corpo del vivere animalesco, tanto si aggiunge dello spirituale. Se alcun sacerdote s'inorridisce al nome di penitenza, di digiuno, tanto che non osservasse neppure quei talora che intimò al popolo di precetto, come potrà egli mai divenir puro?" – (cf. Priests' Retreat, Mantua, October 4-13, 17-26 1816, "Remedies against a dishonest Way of Life" – *MSS* 3600-1; cf. *S.T.*, I-II, q. 113, a.1, c. q.7,a.1,c.

nature. God is simply superior to humanity²².

The theme of Providence is a reality of great importance throughout Fr. Gaspar's entire life. From the spiritual Masters, as St. Basil the Great and St. Ignatius, he sought his arsenal. And not far behind in supplying him with a base, is St. Thomas. In his theology, God gives life to all creatures, by bringing them into existence from nothing, and then maintaining them in existence²³.

In a sermon on the dandelion and the cockle, the Founder drew his teaching from St. Thomas, reinforcing the action of Providence, which gives force and victory to what is good :

"Do you see, beloved, the reason why God supports the evil in this world ? Let your first source for a response be St. Thomas, *ibidem*, p. 181/1 : the good has a great advantage and always wins out over evil ; the reason is simple, in that good can always exist without evil, but evil can never exist without good. This is why God tolerates many evils, so that from this might come, and also might not perish, a great many goods"²⁴.

In order to follow after Christ in a vocational choice, one has to be disposed, according to St. Thomas, to renounce family, some earthly blessings and even one's freedom²⁵.

Whoever chooses to follow after Christ courageously, should do this joyfully, is the teaching of the Angelic Doctor²⁶.

Fr. Bertoni defended and promoted with all the power at his disposal the unity and truth of the Church. Furthermore, he was, "par excellence", a man of the ecclesial community. In defending this, he took his arguments from St. Thomas²⁷.

In his Constitutions, he treated length, the virtue of charity. He personally lived it with the first community at the Stimmat. He offers many guide-lines to promote it, and to avoid whatever may be contrary to it. With St. Thomas, he reproves vainglory, which does not foment love for others and for God²⁸.

Since love is the very core of a life of commitment to God and of the religious community, the Founder never tired insisting, with words from St. Thomas, on its necessity. In

²² cf. *MP* July 15, 1809; I-II, q. 113, a. 1, c.

²³ cf. Fiorio, *O Spirito*, p. 31; cf. *ST.*, I, q.9, a.2 c.

²⁴ "Vedete, o fratelli, la ragione perché Dio sopporti in questo mondo i malvagi? Con ciò sia che a prima fronte voi avete a notare con S. Tommaso, *ibidem*, pg. 181/1, che il bene ha un gran vantaggio e la vince sempre sopra il male; perché il bene può essere senza il male, non mai però il male senza il bene. Perciò Dio tollera molti mali perché ne vengano, o anche perché non abbiano a perire, molti beni". – (cf. "Parish Sermon 1, i.e., the exposition of the Gospel for the Vth Sunday after the Epiphany, the 24th after Pentecost. Preached in the Parish Church of Illasi, on November 8, 1801, and it lasted 20 minutes – *MssB* 1476).

²⁵ cf. Meditation 15, I Kings 3:1 (1 S), Jan-Feb 1811 – (*MssB* 5398).

²⁶ cf. Retreat to the Acolytes, Instruction 7, "On sadness in the Divine Service", May 1811 – *MssB* 4539, 4542-3.

²⁷ cf. *ST.*, II-II, q. 39, a. 1 – cf. Meditation 26 b, I Kings 8:1 (1S), April 7, 1811, Palm Sunday, - *MssB* 6031).

²⁸ cf. 7th day of retreat, "On Meditation", *MssB* 3158-9.

his view, love is simply the foundation of society²⁹.

To speak of mystical love, treating of the Espousals of Mary most holy, and St. Joseph, he used expressions from the Angelic Doctor³⁰.

Making use of the theological ideas of this saint, the Founder developed a sponsal theme which the Espousals of Mary and Joseph offer in order to inspire husbands and wives to a Christian way of life³¹.

Regarding the Most Holy trinity, the Founder speaks of divine love, mercy and goodness for humanity, created in His image and likeness. He moved the faithful from the consideration of their own poverty, as human beings, to turn toward communion with God which manifests itself in relationship with the three divine persons. In all of this, he made use of the teachings of St. Thomas³².

On the other hand, to remain in grace means to profit by His goodness, as Fr. Bertoni preached:

“The truth of this has been adequately treated by St. Thomas, 110,2,2: What is substantially in God comes to be present accidentally in the soul, which participates in His divine goodness”³³.

The love for the three Divine Persons led Fr. Bertoni to drink deeply of the tract on the Trinity according to St. Thomas, not so much as to have from it clear philosophical notions, as it was to come to love the Divine Persons with a genuine sense of filiation. He was like one who truly wanted to love his parents and to come to understand them more and more, despite not be able to comprehend all that passed in the depths of this teaching, or better, this mystery that involves the Persons of God. With the power of the Holy Spirit, however, gradually he was able to fathom more and more of the meaning of the action of the divine paternity, in the proportion which is given to faith and reason to do so; he was also able to be united to the Son, Who wondrously makes known the Father and sends the Holy Spirit.

Regarding the Third Most Holy Person of God, the Founder cites some passages from St. Thomas, in order to reinforce his thought:

“... In the Law of the Gospel, two realities should be taken into consideration: the principal reality, which is the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who communicates Himself by means of

²⁹ cf. *CS I*, pp. 257, f.; cf. *ST.*, III, q. 28, a. 1-3 and q. 29, a. 1 c.

³⁰ *Ib.*

³¹ cf. *ib.*, *CS I*, p. 257. Regarding the Feast of the espousals and what this meant for Fr. Bertoni, we will have occasion to treat further on.

³² cf. Parish Sermon 12, “Love for God to be imitated in St. Aloysius Gonzaga”, for the 6th Sunday of the saint, that fell on the IIIrd after Pentecost, June 27, 1802, delivered in St. Paul’s Campo Marzio – (*MssB* 657-9).

³³ “La verità è che così adeguatamente ne parla San Tomasso, 1-2, 110, 2,2: Quello ch’è sostanzialmente in Dio viene a farsi accidentalmente nell’anima che partecipa la bontà divina”. – cf. Parish Sermon 15, “The Beauty of Grace”, for New Year’s day 1803, delivered in the ven. Church of St. Paul’s Campo Marzio – (*MssB* 721).

faith in Christ. The second is the letter, or the writing of the holy gospel”³⁴.

This thought is clearly from the Angelic Doctor, who, however, was preceded by St. Augustine³⁵.

“Now, just as everything else is defined, and seems that it is constituted by that which is principal in it, as humanity by reason³⁶ – so, principally, the new law the very grace of the Holy Spirit granted to the faithful³⁷.

This aspect of the New Law makes up part of the development of the previous theme, based on Saints Thomas and Augustine.

Using the theme from St. Thomas, Fr. Gaspar offered this exhortation: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit who generates the fervor of devotion”³⁸.

And he added:

“Let us meditate, therefore, on this operation (in the psalms) that we should; on the heavenly rejoicing (in the spiritual canticles), which is what and how we should serve. So, therefore, the effect of the Holy Spirit is, in the first place, sacred meditation; in the second place, that spiritual exultation so that by frequent meditation, the fire might be enkindled in our hearts³⁹.

Finally, to see just to what extent St. Thomas served as a column of support for Fr. Bertoni, let us call to mind what he once said:

“The above doctrine is incontestable because it is from the Angelic doctor”.⁴⁰

2. IN THE FOOT-PRINTS OF A MODEL

In considering Fr. Bertoni, it is not possible to comprehend his charism without passing along the path trod by St. Ignatius. We will do this, in the first place, from a general perspective and under the prism of the spiritual affinity; and then, in a chapter dedicated to

³⁴ “Nella legge evangelica si devono considerare due cose: la principale, ch’è la grazia dello Spirito Santo, che si dà per mezzo della fede in Cristo. La secondaria è la lettera, ossia la scrittura del santo vangelo”. – (cf. Parish Sermon 20, “The Law of the Gospel”, for the 12th Sunday after Pentecost, in the Church St. Paul, Campo Marzio, on the left, August 21, 1803 – (*MssB* 824).

³⁵ *Ib.*

³⁶ *Ib.*

³⁷ “Ora, siccome ogni altra cosa si definisce e par che sia costituita da quello ch’in essa è principale, come l’uomo dalla ragione, così principalmente la legge nuova è la stessa grazia dello Spirito Santo data ai fedeli”. – (cf. “The Gospel Law”, *ib.*, *MssBB* 826).

³⁸ “Empitevi di Spirito Santo che genera il fervore della devozione”. – (cf. *CS* II, p. 466 – the Founder’s Spiritual exercises to the ecclesiastics, Instruction on Meditation, arguments from St. Thomas).

³⁹ “Meditiamo dunque su codesta operazione (in psalmist) che noi dobbiamo fare; sulla divina lode (in hymnis) che cosa e come dobbiamo servire. Così dunque l’effetto dello Spirito Santo è in primo luogo la sacra meditazione; in secondo luogo la spirituale esultanza perché dalla frequente meditazione il fuoco si accenda nei nostri cuori”. – (cf. *ib.*).

⁴⁰ “La suddetta dottrina è incontestabile perché è dell’Angelico”. – (cf. Retreat to the Newly Ordained, September 1810, First Day, Second Meditation: “The End of the Priest” – (*MssB* 2273).

the subject, we will speak more directly about the apostolic charism of both.

Young Gaspar Bertoni found in Fr. Louis Fortis, later the Superior General of the Jesuits, his first spiritual guide. Being formed in St. Ignatius' spiritual school, he chose this saint to be his model⁴¹.

Our Founder once wrote to Sister Naudet⁴² that it was necessary to listen to the counsels of right reason and submit them to the Sun of Divine Wisdom, as "that great Servant of God did, St. Ignatius of Loyola"⁴³.

It was Fr. Galvani, whom the Founder described as being "totally Ignatian", who offered him the Stimate as an opportune place to establish his Congregation under the rules of St. Ignatius⁴⁴. In fact, Fr. Bertoni did precisely that, and wrote his Constitutions which have the Ignatian spirit.

To see how this saint did influence Fr. Bertoni's spirit, in addition to his other writings, it would suffice to compare the spiritual diaries of both, despite the great differences between them.

Ignatius' spiritual diary is longer, despite the fact that it covers a more restricted time limit (from February 1544 to February 1545). A part of it was composed while the saint was preparing the Constitutions for his Institute⁴⁵.

A few of the characteristics of Ignatius' diary would be the following:

- great devotion to our Lady⁴⁶ and to St. Joseph⁴⁷
- detachment, and a profound spirit of poverty⁴⁸, with the rejection of material return⁴⁹: the choice of total poverty⁵⁰;
- great union with the Trinity;⁵¹
- the Trinity sends the Apostles on their mission⁵²;
- taste for the things of God;⁵³
- consideration of one's own insignificance;⁵⁴

⁴¹ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXXV, p. 658.

⁴² cf. Stofella, *Il Ven.*, p. 133; cf. *CS IV*, p. 63 – cf. Fr. Stofella's notes to the Founder's Diary, October 11, 1808.

⁴³ cf. Letter 39, November 1813.

⁴⁴ cf. Letter 54, August 17, 1816.

⁴⁵ cf. I. Loyola, *Autobiografia e diario spirituale*. (Firenze: Ed. Fiorentina 1959) p. 157.

⁴⁶ cf. *ib.*, pp. 159, 160, 162, 169, 171, 174-5, 179, 212-3.

⁴⁷ cf. *ib.* P. 161.

⁴⁸ cf. *ib.* Pp. 159-160.

⁴⁹ cf. Loyola, *Autobiografia*, pp. 163, 165, 174-175.

⁵⁰ *Ib.*, p. 186.

⁵¹ *Ib.*, pp. 162, 164-5; 167-8, 170, 177-184, 187-192.

⁵² *Ib.*, pp. 52 and 165.

⁵³ *ib.*, p. 176.

⁵⁴ *ib.*, p. 180.

- impulse to follow after Jesus;⁵⁵
- confidence in Jesus;⁵⁶
- to allow oneself to be guided by God;⁵⁷
- great humility;⁵⁸
- God indicates the path to follow;⁵⁹
- The search for God's will;⁶⁰
- Respect for the Holy Spirit.⁶¹

In his spiritual diary, Ignatius manifested a very special mystical sensitivity toward the celebration of the Mass.

Fr. Gaspar's "Private Reminiscences" (spiritual diary) is permeated with teaching and values which he repeats, for the most part, also in his other spiritual writings. He keeps before himself the perspective of the great effort needed in spiritual growth and the following of his holy model. In his spiritual diary, therefore, Fr. Gaspar may be more detailed in the exposition of his spirituality.

Just to show how Fr. Gaspar manifests sentimentsw that are quite similar to those of Ignatius, the following may be cited:

- great faith and confidence in God's presence;⁶²
- great love for the Trinity;⁶³
- the desire to imitate Christ in poverty;⁶⁴
- confidence in God;⁶⁵
- a sentiment of God's presence;⁶⁶
- a great desire to follow after Christ;⁶⁷
- the search for God alone;⁶⁸
- deep humility;⁶⁹

⁵⁵ ib., p. 186.

⁵⁶ ib., p. p. 191.

⁵⁷ ib.

⁵⁸ ib., pp. 210, 222, 225.

⁵⁹ ib., p. 212.

⁶⁰ ib., p. 215.

⁶¹ ib., p. 223.

⁶² cf. *MP* July 11, 1808.

⁶³ ib., September 27, 1808.

⁶⁴ ib., September 25, 1808; October 22, 1808; and July 17, 1809.

⁶⁵ ib., October 25, 1808 and September 23, 1809.

⁶⁶ ib., October 27, 1808.

⁶⁷ cf. *MP* October 10, 1808; February 1, 1809 and February 22, 1809.

⁶⁸ cf. ib., July 30, 1808; October 8, 1808; December 23, 1808; February 26, 1809; February 29, 1809; March 16, 1809; July 16, 1809; June 23, 1813.

⁶⁹ ib., September 5, 1808; August 19, 1808; July 1809; September 23, 1809; June 23, 1813.

- abandonment to God;⁷⁰
- devotion to Mary.⁷¹

In particular manner, there should be pointed out that Fr. Gaspar described in his spiritual diary, on September 15, 1808, a very special respect that he had for an inspiration that he received:

“During a visit with my companions to St. Ignatius’ altar, I experienced much devotion, and recollection with great interior sweetness. There were also tears, even though the visit was a short one. It seemed to me that the Saint welcomed us, and was extending the invitation to promote the greater glory of God, as he did, and by the same ways, although not in all those manners that he employed. It seemed to me that he wanted to say to us: ‘Onward, soldiers of Christ, gird yourselves with strength, take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the divine word, ‘and fight with the ancient serpent’. Bring my spirit to life again in you, and in others through you”.⁷²

3. THE IGNATIAN SPIRIT

We look now at some of points of the spirit of St. Ignatius in his Constitutions that were then brought to life again in by Fr. Bertoni in his legislation.

St. Ignatius recalled:

- It is God who guides the Company of Jesus. His law is the love that the Holy Spirit infuses into hearts. Providence does not fail. The Vicar of Christ is the one who directs it. The Constitutions help in living in conformity with the Institute⁷³.
- Above all else, the greater glory of God must be sought. It is up to each member to progress in the vineyard of the Lord with the help of eternal light⁷⁴.
- In the Constitutions, there are unchangeable points, while others are adaptable to the times, place, persons and situations. As much as is possible, there will be conserved uniformity among all the members⁷⁵.
- It is important to cooperate with the divine inspiration and vocation and that the laborers in the Company be multiplied⁷⁶. However, only those candidates

⁷⁰ cf. May 18 and 24, 1810.

⁷¹ ib.

⁷² “In una visita coi compagni all’altare di S. Ignazio molta divozione, e raccoglimento con gran soavità interna, e qualche lagrima, benché la visita fosse breve. Pareami che il santo ne facesse buona accoglienza, e ne invitasse a promuovere la maggior gloria di Dio, siccome egli fece, e per le stesse vie, benché non in tutti que’modi ch’egli poté usare. Parvemi che volesse dirci. Su via soldati di Cristo accingetevi di fortezza, pigliate lo scudo della fede, l’elmo della salute, la spada della parola divina, ‘et pugnate cum antiquo serpente.’ Fate rivivere il mio spirito in voi, e in altrui per vostro mezzo”.

⁷³ cf. Ignazio di Loyola, *Costituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (Milano: Ancora 1969), p. 92, # 136. From now on, the saint’s name will be cited and the word *Costituzioni*.

⁷⁴ cf. Ignatius, *Costituzioni* # 135.

⁷⁵ ib., # 136.

⁷⁶ ib., # 144.

should be accepted who are capable to achieve the purposes of the Company⁷⁷.

- The ultimate purpose of knowledge is to assist the souls of members and our neighbors.⁷⁸ Each one must retain the pure and right intention in study, seeking only the glory of God and the good of souls⁷⁹.
- If someone does not seem made for study, but is suited for the other ministries, he should be oriented toward them⁸⁰.
- It is a characteristic of the religious profession in the Institute, not to accept any material recompense whatsoever, for the spiritual ministries⁸¹.
- The Holy Spirit and prudence are communicated to anyone who trusts in the divine Majesty⁸².
- It is necessary to consecrate all one's strength to the virtue of obedience (especially to the Pope)⁸³. Christ Himself will be loved in the superior⁸⁴.
- Poverty is the defence of the Order. This defence is inspired in the religious orders by God. With religious profession, one promises to change nothing in the Constitutions regarding poverty, unless it is to make it more strict.⁸⁵
- In the house of the Company, there can be no fixed revenue (if a founder of houses should desire to leave some amount of regular revenue for the maintenance of the building, or the church, this would be allowed only in the case that otherwise that would not have the means to live)⁸⁶. The professed and the coadjutors should live on alms⁸⁷.
- He who has received gratuitously, should give gratuitously⁸⁸.
- In the church, there should be no alms boxes⁸⁹.
- Each one should be disposed to beg from door to door when obedience, or necessity, require⁹⁰.
- It is not permitted to hold back anything for oneself. Each one should be content with what there is in common.⁹¹
- Clothing should have three qualities: it should be neat, be in accord with the customs of the region when one lives, and not be in contrast with poverty. Each one should avoid being dressed in expensive cloth, so that all will live in humility, and for the glory of God⁹².
- Progress is required in the following after Christ. For this to be achieved

⁷⁷ ib., # # 147-189.

⁷⁸ ib., # 351.

⁷⁹ ib., # 360.

⁸⁰ ib., # 387.

⁸¹ ib., # 398.

⁸² ib., # 414.

⁸³ ib., # 547.

⁸⁴ ib., # 551.

⁸⁵ ib., # 553.

⁸⁶ ib., # 555.

⁸⁷ ib., # # 557, 569.

⁸⁸ ib., # 565.

⁸⁹ ib., # 567.

⁹⁰ ib., # # 239-240.

⁹¹ ib., # # 570 and 580.

⁹² ib., # 577.

there are recommended, along with charity, obedience, prayer, meditation, study, austerity and penance,⁹³ also the spiritual exercises and the frequent reception of the sacraments⁹⁴.

- The members of the Company are to be always ready to go to any part of the world, where they might be sent by the Pope, or by their own superiors. They should not take over the care of souls and the direction of religious sisters, or any other groups of women on a permanent basis as confessor, or spiritual director.⁹⁵ There is an explicit vow of obedience to the Pope.⁹⁶
- Each member of the Company is to make every effort to be a witness to his neighbor in the service of God.⁹⁷
- The members of the Company may even reside stable in some places, rather than constantly moving, whenever there is hoped that much good be obtained in the service of God.⁹⁸
- The availability to go (with the mandate of the Pope and of the superiors) has the finality of seeking to be subjected to Christ, and to His Vicar.⁹⁹
- It is opportune for the person who is sent that he receive adequate instruction on his mission.¹⁰⁰
- The Superior General ought to be attentive regarding the choice of the place, the finalities, the persons, the methods and the duration of the missions.¹⁰¹
- Regarding the good to be achieved, what is the more universal, is the more divine. Therefore, there is to be preferred for the mission, those persons and those places that are more propitious to the extension of good to the greater number of persons.¹⁰² Therefore, in the better choice of the works, the greater glory of God and the more universal good must be kept in mind.¹⁰³
- The members of the Company can occupy themselves with activities that lead to the spiritual and corporal well being of others through the exercise of mercy and charity. The choice should primarily fall on the former.¹⁰⁴
- Between the activities that are part of the specific are of the Company's endeavors, and others about which the Company may concern itself, the former are always preferred.¹⁰⁵
- Between those activities of a more universal influence (as preaching, lecturing), and those of a more limited influence, (e.g., hearing confessions, or giving retreats), in the case that both may not be done, the former are always

⁹³ ib., # 582.

⁹⁴ ib., # 584.

⁹⁵ ib., # # 588 and 803.

⁹⁶ ib., # # 602 and 605.

⁹⁷ ib., # 595.

⁹⁸ ib., # 603.

⁹⁹ ib., # 606.

¹⁰⁰ ib., # 612.

¹⁰¹ ib., # 618.

¹⁰² ib., # 622.

¹⁰³ ib., # 623.

¹⁰⁴ ib., # 623.

¹⁰⁵ ib., # 623.

preferred.¹⁰⁷

- Between those works of a more lasting nature and give greater promise of development, and those of lesser duration and more limited, the former are always to be preferred.
- The Holy Spirit and Providence assist in making the right decisions, but on the part of Superiors there is much need that they choose the persons well for the mission.¹⁰⁸
- In the transfers of the members of the Company, there should always be sought the glory of God and the universal good.¹⁰⁹
- The Superior ordinarily gives complete instruction in writing to anyone he sends on a mission.¹¹⁰
- The Company strives not only to assist its neighbors, by going to different places, but also by setting up stable houses (boarding schools).¹¹¹
- Before doing so by word, each should edify by the example of the integrity of his Christian life.¹¹²
- One's neighbor should be helped through the administration of the sacraments, especially confession.¹¹³
- Each should assiduously proclaim the divine word to the poor, through sermons, instructions, the teaching of Christian doctrine.¹¹⁴
- To make oneself useful also to people through pious conversations, counseling them through the Spiritual exercises.¹¹⁵
- To practice as well the corporal and then the spiritual works of mercy, such as: to assist the sick, visits, pacifying discords, to help the poor and the imprisoned.¹¹⁶
- The members of the Company should be united, above all through a union of hearts.¹¹⁷
- Whoever does not mortify his passions, does not support order and union.¹¹⁸
- Union in great part is exercised through obedience, which ought to be strongly maintained. Whoever is sent out, should be a person well exercised in obedience.¹¹⁹ Obedience has to be prompt, ready and devout¹²⁰. The members ought to let themselves be governed by the Superior, with subordination.¹²¹

¹⁰⁷ ib., # 623. The principle of the "more" the "greater" or the "more universal" is decisive in the choice of one apostolic activity, and in the choice of the person to carry it out.

¹⁰⁸ ib., # 624.

¹⁰⁹ ib., # 626.

¹¹⁰ ib., # 629.

¹¹¹ ib., # 636.

¹¹² ib., # 637.

¹¹³ ib., # 642.

¹¹⁴ ib., # 645.

¹¹⁵ ib., # 648.

¹¹⁶ ib., # 650.

¹¹⁷ ib., # 655.

¹¹⁸ ib., # 657.

¹¹⁹ ib., # 659.

¹²⁰ ib., # 659.

¹²¹ ib., # 662.

- From the Superior General emanates the authority of the provincials, and from these, to the local superiors. From the same head, and through his mandate, there arises the life of the missions.¹²² There ought to be love, obedience and mutual union and dependence among the members.¹²³
- The principal mutual bond for the union of the members is God's love.¹²⁴ Charity, goodness and virtue assist union, as also does the disdain of temporal goods. The greatest enemy of union is self love.¹²⁵
- Union is also abetted through internal uniformity of doctrine, judgment and will – and externally, by clothing, ceremonies at Mass and in all that it is possible to do so that all be compatible with the differences of persons and places.¹²⁶
- Those who do not study are to follow the doctrine accepted in the company, and this holds true for those who do study. The differences of opinion should not damage charity.¹²⁷
- Letter writing between superiors and the members is also a great help.¹²⁸
- The Superior General is for life, so that less time will be spent in general assemblies.¹²⁹
- The Company was not instituted with human means and cannot be developed without the hand of God, in whom and only in Him, is hope to be placed.¹³⁰
- To achieve the purpose of the Company, which is to assist souls to reach their supernatural end and to live its spirit, each one has to let himself be directed by the hand of God with goodness and virtue, especially charity, the pure intention of serving God and familiarity with Him in the spiritual exercises and to be zealous for souls.¹³¹
- Once the natural means have been brought forth, divine Providence helps in the conservation and in the development of the Company.¹³²
- Poverty is a bulwark for religious Orders. It keeps them in existence and in discipline and defends them from their enemies (the devil). It repels avarice, by not accepting revenues, properties or retributions of any nature whatever.¹³³
- Each is called to reject ambition, the mother of all evils in the community; this will be accomplished by closing the door against any dignity either within, or from outside the Company. Prelacies should not be sought, and only accepted under obedience. Each one should serve souls in conformity with the profession of humility and lowliness, and not deprive the Company of its members.¹³⁴

¹²² ib., # 666.

¹²³ ib., # 666.

¹²⁴ ib., # 671.

¹²⁵ ib., # 671.

¹²⁶ ib., # # 671 and 821.

¹²⁷ ib., # 672.

¹²⁸ ib., # # 673 and 821.

¹²⁹ ib., # 719.

¹³⁰ ib., # 812.

¹³¹ ib., # 813.

¹³² ib., # 814.

¹³³ ib., # 816.

¹³⁴ ib., # 817.

- Due moderation is needed in hard work, without the excesses or rigorism, nor of laxism, by preserving health sufficiently well.¹³⁵

- Charity and love should be maintained with outsiders, particularly with those who may be important for the opening or the closing of doors in the service of God and our neighbors. However, there should be no partiality toward some, even if they be princes or lords.¹³⁶

In his time, Fr. Gaspar brought out many of these points, in harmony with the Ignatian Spirit, while retaining his own originality and specific characteristics.

Fr. Bertoni made of his Constitutions authentic references of spiritual formation, bringing in innumerable citations from the spiritual Masters. Like St. Ignatius, the Founder permeated his whole work with the Spirit of God.

We can underline certain points, particularly those in regard to what Ignatius presents in his Constitutions:

- He insists on the following of Christ, and of forming oneself on Him;¹³⁷
- Like Ignatius,¹³⁸ he allowed himself to be led by the power of the Holy Spirit, as is seen here:

“Although the end of our Congregation, which is to serve the Church... we believe that its achievement does not derive from the strength of man, but from the grace of the Holy Spirit: for He Who has inspired and begun the work, will Himself see it through, when our own forces are unable to carry on...”¹³⁹

- He speaks of the glory of God in different places, as does St. Ignatius,¹⁴⁰ and also of carrying out the will of the Lord.¹⁴¹
- St. Ignatius speaks of unchangeable and also of changeable points in his Constitutions, according as the situations might demand.¹⁴² In his turn, Fr. Bertoni speaks of services to be rendered to the Church, what will vary in accord with different times and circumstances.¹⁴³ Both Founders, however, do agree on the availability and service to be offered to the Church, although their charisms are different, despite a number of similarities, as we will see in a later chapter.
- Fr. Gaspar, like St. Ignatius speaks of the need of following the Lord’s inspirations in the development of vocation. He does this explicitly in his preaching to the clergy.¹⁴⁴ In Constitution 35, he does this implicitly, treating of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.¹⁴⁵
- Regarding the acceptance of candidates, Fr. Gaspar is quite specific.

¹³⁵ ib., # 826.

¹³⁶ ib., # 823.

¹³⁷ cf. CF 51.

¹³⁸ cf. Ignatius, *Constitutions* # 134.

¹³⁹ “... essendo scopo della nostra Congregazione servire alla chiesa ... crediamo che la sua effettuazione non dipende dalle forze dell’uomo, ma dalla grazia dello Spirito Santo: poiché colui che ha ispirata e incominciata l’opera, egli stesso la condurrà a compimento, quando a tenerla in piedi le forze nostre non bastino”. – (cf. CF 185).

¹⁴⁰ cf. ib., # # 3, 65, 120, 125, 218 and 259.

¹⁴¹ cf. ib., # # 144, 147, and 149.

¹⁴² cf. Ignatius, *Constitutions*, # 136.

¹⁴³ cf. CF 57.

¹⁴⁴ cf. CS I, pp. 100 f.

¹⁴⁵ cf. MP July 23, 1809 and August 17, 1808.

Sometimes, it seems even more so than St. Ignatius.¹⁴⁶

- In his Constitutions, he does not speak explicitly about the promotion of vocations, as Ignatius does.¹⁴⁷ However, in a letter to Sister Naudet, he stated: "... the more that we are, so much the greater will be the divine glory, both for all of us, as well as for each one of us: by communicating and sharing with one another, charity increases and is multiplied".¹⁴⁸
We do know, in fact, that Fr. Gaspar was much dedicated to the promotion of vocations, with his sublime ecclesial spirit.¹⁴⁹
- Regarding intellectual, theological and spiritual preparation, the Founder is quite explicit. Like St. Ignatius, he wanted his men to be prepared and available for mission, under the mandate of obedience, for the assistance of the Pope. He decided that his followers should prepare themselves continuously, in order to offer the best possible service (within the capacities of the personnel) to the Bishop.¹⁵⁰ In this connection, he treated also of the means necessary to bring this about, such as a good library.¹⁵¹
- Like St. Ignatius, he speaks about taking care of one's health in order to serve better.¹⁵²
- He agrees with Ignatius and strengthens the idea that knowledge is to serve, and not merely for dilettantism, or curiosity.¹⁵³ The source of knowledge is God.¹⁵⁴
- Regarding the ministries to be carried out, like St. Ignatius, Fr. Bertoni reminds each one to commit himself as much as is possible, without, however, conditioning obedience.¹⁵⁵ The ministries for Fr. Bertoni are more specified, despite their broad sweep, with the possibility of change depending on the needs of the times. St. Ignatius accentuates much more the missions and the spiritual exercises, as we have already seen (without, however, forgetting other ministries). Fr. Bertoni does speak of the missions,¹⁵⁶ but presents the *Verbi Dei quodcumque ministerium*, with different forms: the administration of the sacraments, preaching, teaching catechism, counseling, exhortation, preaching retreats, promotion of associations, ministry to the sick,¹⁵⁷ dedication and assistance in the formation of the clergy,¹⁵⁸ the Christian education of youth.¹⁵⁹ What is most important for the Founder is the assistance to the Bishop, with the various ministries. As for St. Ignatius, what is important is that missionary availability (along with the various ministries, principally missions and retreats), in order serve people in the direct assistance

¹⁴⁶ cf. CF 9 and 32.

¹⁴⁷ cf. Ignatius, *Constitutions* # 144.

¹⁴⁸ cf. Letter 33, June 28, 1813 – *Epist. P.* 86.

¹⁴⁹ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc XXI, p. 207.

¹⁵⁰ cf. CF 49, 56-8.

¹⁵¹ cf. *ib.*, # # 60-61.

¹⁵² *ib.*, # 59.

¹⁵³ *ib.*, # # 49-50, 122, 124-5.

¹⁵⁴ *ib.*, # # 51 and 65.

¹⁵⁵ cf. CF 7, 56-8, 64, 74, 76-9, 141 and 143.

¹⁵⁶ *ib.*, 2, 7, 75-6.

¹⁵⁷ *ib.*, # 163.

¹⁵⁸ *ib.*, # 164.

¹⁵⁹ *ib.*, # 165.

offered to the Pope. The ministries, for Fr. Bertoni, as we have already seen, are varied, in conformity with the diversity of the times and circumstances.¹⁶⁰

- Fr. Bertoni is demanding, and is perhaps even more rigid than St. Ignatius when it comes to poverty and gratuitous ministry.¹⁶¹ However, he does not speak of actual begging, as Ignatius does.
- Stipends for religious services were not to be accepted (with the exception of stipends for Masses, as this was the general legislation of the Church), nor should there be boxes for alms, and contributions from any source, under personal titles, were not to be received.¹⁶² The *gratis omnino* of Fr. Bertoni¹⁶³ is a genuine Ignatian principle. Fr. Bertoni took it very seriously, as may be seen in his spiritual diary: “One principle is fundamental: poverty; then, all the other virtues”.¹⁶⁴
- All that is superfluous is not in harmony with poverty.¹⁶⁵ Common life requires participation in community poverty: everything is to be placed at the service of the community.¹⁶⁶
- Like St. Ignatius, Fr. Bertoni speaks of clothing. It should be simple, neat and clean, manifesting poverty and be suitable for the ministries that are to be exercised.¹⁶⁷ The clerical garb is to be in accord and in use among exemplary ecclesiastics among whom the members live.¹⁶⁸
- Common life is more emphasized in Fr. Bertoni. For Ignatius, obedience is what unites the members of the Company. Fr. Gaspar, however, emphasizes as an absolute necessity fraternal communion, for the prophetic witness of love in the following of the example of the Apostles and the first Christians.¹⁶⁹ He even uses the very words of Ignatius to characterize union under obedience: “Such union, for the most part, is achieved by the bond of obedience, says St. Ignatius (Const. P. VIII, c. 1, 3)”.¹⁷⁰
In fact, the obedience indicated by Fr. Bertoni is eminently Ignatian. St. Ignatius legislated a vow of obedience to the Pope. With his charism *in obsequium Episcoporum*, Fr. Bertoni does not ask for this with regard to the Bishop. Later on we will have occasion to explain this matter.
- Furthermore, regarding fraternal community and the love of brothers that should pervade, Fr. Gaspar goes even further. He dedicates a good fourth of all of his Constitutions to this matter, showing that the example of love proposed in the apostolic mission has consistency in practice, by beginning at home.¹⁷¹ Fr. Bertoni

¹⁶⁰ Further ahead, in Chapter IV, the missionary apostolic idea will be treated specifically.

¹⁶¹ cf. CF 3 and 6.

¹⁶² ib., # # 92-3, 102.

¹⁶³ ib., # 3.

¹⁶⁴ “Necessarii sumptus est paupertas: dein virtutes omnes”. – (cf. MP July 23, 1809).

¹⁶⁵ cf. CF 91.

¹⁶⁶ ib., # # 94 and 104.

¹⁶⁷ ib., # 137.

¹⁶⁸ cf. CF 6. To dress as the more exemplary clergy of a particular Church where the men might live, manifests a clear “feeling for the Church”. The spirit is to live, with her, that spirit of “abandonment”, in order to serve better.

¹⁶⁹ ib. # 6.

¹⁷⁰ “Tale unione in gran parte si compie per il vincolo dell’obbedienza, dice S. Ignazio.” Ib. 224.

¹⁷¹ cf. CF 187-314.

also emphasizes hospitality¹⁷² and care for the sick.¹⁷³

- For St. Ignatius, the members should even be ready to beg alms, whenever necessary,¹⁷⁴ for their own sustenance. He does not ask that retribution be given for the apostolic ministry, in order to be of edification to others¹⁷⁵ – but, it is possible to accept donations that are spontaneously offered.¹⁷⁶ Fr. Bertoni, as we noted earlier, follows this same spirit. He does not ask for retribution for the ministries and only accepts what is spontaneously offered for the maintenance, he does not leave this explained in the Constitutions.¹⁷⁷
- Availability is an essential virtue for St. Ignatius, and no less so for Fr. Bertoni. He writes:
“(The members) should be ready to go anywhere in the diocese and in the world”.¹⁷⁸
- As for St. Ignatius, for Fr. Bertoni obedience ought to be prompt, total, humble, with the abnegation of the will and judgment.¹⁷⁹
- The availability as taught by Fr. Bertoni is one that impels a confrere to submit himself to God’s will, through obedience to his superior.¹⁸⁰ This pertains to the Ignatian Spirit.
- In all things, the Founder’s confreres are asked to work for spiritual perfection,¹⁸¹ the service of God,¹⁸² the Church,¹⁸³ and the good of their brothers, who are the temples of God,¹⁸⁴ teaching them the truths that have been contemplated.¹⁸⁵
- Regarding humility, Fr. Gaspar learned from St. Ignatius to live it in the supreme degree, and that each one master it.¹⁸⁶
- In the spirit of humility and availability, Fr. Bertoni lived an unlimited confidence in Providence, and abandoned himself completely into the hands of God. This is reflected in his apostolic mission. He sought in this points of contact with the Holy Spirit Who was forming him. He was fearless in offering the whole property of the Stimmate to the Jesuits.¹⁸⁷ For Him, God was his all, and he experienced this in his work. It suffices that we do not place impediments in His way, but do whatever is possible on our part.

¹⁷² Ib., ## 243-249.

¹⁷³ Ib., ## 234-242.

¹⁷⁴ cf. Ignatius, *Constitutions* # 569.

¹⁷⁵ cf. *CF* 239.

¹⁷⁶ cf. I., ib.

¹⁷⁷ cf. ib., 3, 90-104.

¹⁷⁸ “Quocumque euntes in diocesi et mundo” (cf. *CF* 5).

¹⁷⁹ Ib., ## 141 and 143.

¹⁸⁰ Ib., ## 139-140, 145-151.

¹⁸¹ Ib., # 6.

¹⁸² Ib., # 3.

¹⁸³ Ib., ## 1, 185.

¹⁸⁴ Ib., ## 223 and 228.

¹⁸⁵ Ib., # 49.

¹⁸⁶ Ib., ## 120-121.

¹⁸⁷ cf. *CF*; also Meditation 7, 1Kings 1:24 (1S), December 1810 *MssBB* 5032; cf. also Meditation 16 b, 1 Kings 3:15 (1S) – February 1811 *MssBB* 5538; cf. also *Summ. Add. Doc.* XXVII, p. 579.

- St. Ignatius speaks of uniformity of doctrine within the Company.¹⁸⁸ Fr. Bertoni is demanding in asking of his confreres that they follow solid doctrine, that is, the Magisterium of the Church.¹⁸⁹
- The Superior General was to be elected for life,¹⁹⁰ as for St. Ignatius.

Regarding the influence of St. Ignatius in the spirit and the charism of Fr. Bertoni, much can be verified also in other writings of his. However, I believe that there can be inferred from the above that the Holy Spirit imprinted both of these holy men with the mark of availability and total self-giving to God, for the service of the Church, in similar and yet divergent ways, as we have already seen and will have occasion to see even better, under certain aspects.

4. THE ALPHONSIAN SPIRIT OF MISSION AND MORALITY

St. Alphonsis de Liguori, who lived from 1696 until 1787, in the region of Naples, exercised a determining influence on the moral teaching of Fr. Bertoni. Like Fr. Gaspar would later, St. Alphonsus pondered the anxieties of the people, in order to read, in the history of grace and sin, God's voice. And like St. Alphonsus, Fr. Bertoni became a genuine prophet, priest and pastor. Moral, then, can only be an option for the value of conscience which is founded on love, impelled by the Spirit and not uniquely by the law.

For Fr. Bertoni, as in St. Alphonsus, is the mediation of salvation along the path of perfection, and not of condemnation. It is an understanding of humanity in its context, seeking to provide for it a base to assist all to rise up, to continue the journey, to be saved. It is the morality of mercy and of grace, which rejects any contemporizing laxism and all rigorism without mercy. It is both salvific and seeks the truth. It goes beyond the role of conscience in the quest of truth and what is good. Fr. Haring states:

"Against all Jansenistic pessimism, the message of St. Alphonsus is: 'Abundant with the Lord is His redemption'" (cf.. Ps 130:7, Vulgate).¹⁹¹

In order to comprehend the moral theology of St. Alphonsus it is necessary to understand his family, personal and social context in which he lived. Principally, it must be kept in mind that his greatest expertise was in the pastoral field, and not theology.¹⁹² He was a man most concerned with the evangelizing activity among the most abandoned populations

¹⁸⁸ cf. Ignatius, *Constitutions* # 672.

¹⁸⁹ cf. *CF.*, ## 197-207.

¹⁹⁰ *Ib.*, # 8.

¹⁹¹ Bernard Haring, *Liberi e Fedeli in Cristo* (Roma: Paoline 1980) Vol. I, p. 68.

¹⁹² cf. Marciano Vidal, *Frente al rigorismo Moral, Benignidad Pastoral*. (Madrid: Covarrubias 1986), pp. 19-175). From this source, we can learn something of the up-bringing that he had: an authoritarian father, who sought a social prestige for his son; his mother was more loving and understanding. His confessors, from rigorists to probabilists, had a great influence on his decisions and in the conversion of his moral thought. The great crisis of the Christian conscience in his time (the 17th and 18th centuries) is manifested in the search for salvation with scrupulous and legalistic narrowness.

of the country-side. He addressed himself to these through the parish missions.

The preaching of the missions was modeled on that of the great missionary excursions of the XVII and XVIII centuries, as Vincent de Paul, John Eudes, Grignon de Montfort, Paul of the Cross and others.¹⁹³

The structure of the preaching of these “parish, or popular missions” in St. Alphonsus’ view, would have something in common with the first week of the Ignatian Spiritual exercises. Moreover, in the region of Naples, Alphonsus ran into traditions that were well rooted, planted by the Jesuits. However, the situation of the people in the rural areas required a particular kind of preaching, that would touch the heart of this people that did have faith, but somewhat superficial. As St. Alphonsus perceived, it is necessary to speak clearly about the judgment of God, the essential truths of the faith, conversion of life, confession, communion and religious living. He perceived the necessity, in a special manner, of taking care of this people with calmness.¹⁹⁴ The “popular mission”, or the “parish mission”, therefore, was adapted with this in view: without any long duration of the catechetical mission of Vincent de Paul and others, of a certain length, and with some fanfare, as with the Jesuits.

St. Leonard of Port Maurice expressed himself this way in 1746, writing to the Archbishop of Ferrara, Jerome Crispi, who had entrusted him with preaching the missions in the cathedral. The letter speaks of the way the missions were given at that time:

“I point out that there are two ways of preaching Missions in the Church of God: the first is that of the Fathers of the Company (of Jesus), and it is all fire, with many processions and much exteriority; the other way is that of the Missionary fathers of St. Vincent de Paul, that is all calmness and excludes every sort of exteriority; both have been fruitful and, as the world turns, I would pick the second method and it is much more fruitful than the first. It lasts no less than eight or ten days, and no longer, and there is not even enough time to take care of all in the confessional... In the second manner of preaching the missions, on the contrary, they work in the confessional, and each Mission lasts a month and even more and many consciences find peace”.

However, the saint was not entirely satisfied with this second method, since he added: “With all of this, my opinion is to take a middle course; I will use some of the exteriority of the Jesuits, but with moderation, I reprove the shortness of time... So it is that our Missions in places that are of little faith, we have them last fifteen days, and in the cities, even eighteen. Even afterwards, following the Blessing, we remain still another week, and even more. And believe me that in these days much more is garnered than in the other days, and like with a fine tooth comb, we are able to reach even the most complicated... This is why I said above that the second type of Mission is more fruitful; this is exactly how the priests of St. Vincent de Paul conduct themselves and we will try to imitate them”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ cf. P. Ritz, *L'annuncio Missionario del Vangelo* (Vicenza: Romane Mame 1959), p. 111.

¹⁹⁴ cf. Ritz, *L'annuncio*, p. 11, f.

¹⁹⁵ Giuseppe Orlandi, “La Missione Popolare redentorista in Italia”, in: *Spicilegium Historicum* 33/1 (1986), pp. 59-60.

For St. Alphonsus, the “popular mission” is the true mission, and authentically “popular”. This means it is an action of evangelization beginning with a group; and then, the announcement throughout the periphery, among the simple folk, lacking in faith, and not willing to come to the missions given in the centers. The religious missionary community sets itself up in the midst of the people, in a rural center, without directing them to go to the center. It is “popular” in contrast to anything that would be elitists. St. Alphonsus was a true missionary of the people.¹⁹⁶

It is interesting to note that in conformity to the Alphonsian spirit, it is the religious community that promoted the popular mission. This begins from the community, which is apostolic, and is for the people, which is its destination.¹⁹⁷

In St. Ignatius Loyola, the mission is also apostolic and part of an act of obedience for the service of the Church (the mandate of the Pope and of the Superior) in any place whatsoever.¹⁹⁸

For Fr. Gaspar, the apostolic mission (which involves *Verbi dei quodcumque ministerium*)¹⁹⁹ begins with the community, which is the witness and the announcer of the Word, with the meditation of the Superiors for the service of the Church, for the assistance of bishops.²⁰⁰ “Preaching” for him, is one of the means of the “apostolic mission”.²⁰¹

On the other hand, it is important for the comprehension of the apostolic missionary spirit of Fr. Gaspar to perceive his pastoral sense in the direction of consciences. For this reason, it is necessary to understand his courage in supporting and following Alphonsian moral theology. How can one, then, grasp this attitude of Fr. Gaspar, in this man in whom respect for the magisterium was so pronounced – in some quarters, the doctrine was “suspect”). Fr. Gaspar’s basic charism was precisely that of feeling with, believing with the Church, helping it through the assistance of Bishops.²⁰²

In order to comprehend the charism of Fr. Bertoni it is necessary that one feel with the Church, which is to ponder with her and to help her, as the local Church, in the perception of the voice of the Holy Spirit. He also speaks through the holiness of men and women of God (in Whom he always sought spiritual strength, as we have seen), and that have been recognized as such by the hierarchy. This is the case with St. Alphonsus. The power of authority for Fr. Bertoni is of necessity based in the Spirit of God. This is why in Constitution 185 he speaks of following the “Orthodox Bishop, placed by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church of God”.

¹⁹⁶ cf. F. Ferraro, “Le Missioni Popolari nelle Congregazione del Ss. Redentore”, in: *Spicilegium Historicum* 33/1 (1986), pp. 35-36.

¹⁹⁷ cf. ib., pp. 35 and 39.

¹⁹⁸ cf. Ignatius, *Constitutions*, ## 618-629.

¹⁹⁹ cf. *CF* ## 162-167, 182-3 and 185.

²⁰⁰ cf. *CF* 1-3, 5-7, 189-190; cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXIII, p. 262.

²⁰¹ cf. ib. ## 162-7, 182-3. The style of preaching the “popular mission” for Fr. Bertoni was one of the means possible to attain the objective of the “apostolic mission”, in accord with the Ignatian model.

²⁰² *Ib.*, # 1.

St. Alphonsus had deep admiration for the Company of Jesus, and Jesuit authors exercised a profound impact upon him. One of these, Fr. Claude Iacroy (1652-1714), published with commentaries, the moral works of Fr. Busenbaunn.²⁰³

In his work, then commented upon by the other Jesuit, Fr. Anthony Ballerini, St. Alphonsus – along with an appreciation for methodology – met a doctrinal orientation, situated between excessive rigor and exaggerated laxism.

However, as the Jesuits were attacked for their probabilist morality,²⁰⁴ and this includes Busenbaunn, and later on, it included St. Alphonsus himself. He developed a semi-probabilist morality,²⁰⁵ trying to avoid in this manner, certain attacks and to exercise his pastoral function for the good of consciences and his Congregation.²⁰⁶

Even though there was adopted for the Diocesan Seminary of Verona the morality of the rigorist position of Paul Gabriel Antoine, likewise a Jesuit, Fr. Bertoni did not hesitate to defend the equi-probabilism of St. Alphonsus,²⁰⁷ since, with Alphonsus, he was convinced that the law of love and grace is superior to any legal rigidity. It is good to remember that both of these holy men did receive a severe formation, in a rigid moral theology.

In the situation in which he lived, Fr. Gaspar tried to lead the sinner to conversion through a presentation of the evil of sin, toward the reality of eternal life. He appealed more to the superiority of love, of grace, of mercy, of pardon, of redemption, that God provides. The equi-probabilist position is an attitude that becomes conscience and stimulates it to struggle and generosity of self-giving in order to battle against egoism and laxism that are slaveries (one to the law, and the other to sin) which had no room in Fr. Gaspar's view, as they did not for St. Alphonsus.

Already in his *Compendium Rude*, Fr. Gaspar states that for a Congregation to achieve its purpose, it is to seek in the very first place, its own perfection, and then:

²⁰³ Hermann Busebaunn is a Jesuit of Westphalia, who lived from 1600 until 1668. He wrote his book *Medulla Theologiae Moralis* which, for St. Alphonsus, was most important for its clarity, precision, order and conciseness. In his casuistry it helped in the orientation of the existing opinions. (cf. Vidal, *Frente al Rigorismo*, p. 50).

²⁰⁴ According to St. Alphonsus, "the extrinsic authority of erudite masters is not as great a weight as their intrinsic reasons seem certain and convincing" (cf. Haring, *Liberi e Fedeli*, Vol. I, p. 350). The probabilists defend the following points: a) the individual conscience must respond creatively and responsibly too the new situations in search for the truth and good, before looking for some outside authority; b) the principal concern is not the objective truth understood as such by authority, but the sincerity of the individual conscience. Thus, there cannot be imposed on a person that which he, or she cannot interiorize, unless it is a question of impeding a grave injustice with regard to third parties. Thus, for the probabilist, each person has to live in harmony with a sincere conscience, not being bound to an external law, especially when its value is doubtful. The probabilists are opposed to the probabiliorists, who teach "presumption" is to be applied always in a literal function of the law, except there are had very serious reasons in favor of the freedom to be sought, or the good. (cf. Haring, *ib.*, pp. 65-6, 68, 343, f., 437).

²⁰⁵ In conformity with equi-probabilism, a right conscience, having equal reasons, or almost equal to opt creatively, is not obliged to follow a law that is doubtful in itself. This is a concept that is close to the probabilist position.

²⁰⁶ cf. Vidal, *Frente al Rigorismo*, pp. 46, f.; cf. Haring, *Liberi e fedeli*, p. 348.

²⁰⁷ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Ven. Gaspare*, I, pp. 312-3.

“To seek very seriously, in the second place, all the learning of the Church, principally moral theology.”²⁰⁸

So in his Constitution 53, he states:

“Let all study moral theology... especially that of St. Alphonsus”.²⁰⁹

The influence of Fr. Bertoni and his companions on the people made their reputation as great spiritual leaders, because of the large number of people who would come to the Church of the Stimmate in order to go to confession, and to receive counseling.²¹⁰

On the other hand, the discernment Fr. Bertoni had in following the moral theology of St. Alphonsus is corroborated by the beatification of this man of God in the year 1816, just a few days before Fr. Gaspar founded his Congregation.

²⁰⁸ “Attendere pur seriamente in secondo luogo all’acquisto di tutta la scienza ecclesiastica, principalmente morale”. – cf. “Points for the Writing of the Constitutions” – (*MssB* 9847).

²⁰⁹ “Si studino... la Teologia Morale, specialmente di S. Alfonso...”

²¹⁰ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*, vol. IV, p. 271.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOUNDING CHARISM

1. ABANDONMENT, AVAILABILITY AND IGNATIAN MISSION

At the beginning, throughout its development and the end result of a charism, it is the action of the Holy Spirit that always requires the attention and the cooperation of the person who has been endowed with it. It would be well to call to mind here the words of *Lumen gentium* 12, that comments on St. Paul's concept of charism:

"... the same Holy Spirit... allotting His gifts 'to everyone according as He will' (1 Co 12:11), distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1 Co 12:7)..."³⁵

However, as we have seen, the Holy Spirit acts through persons, events and circumstances that favor the appearance and the development of a charism. And this is always a gift of the Spirit that manifests the Church's holiness. Its finality is always for the benefit of the people of God and to respond to its needs. It is of a public and prophetic character, in so far as it is for the common good, pointing out ecclesial and social situations that have strayed, and announces values for the well being of the people.

The charismatic impulse of Founders tends to reproduce Christ's own life and mission, with a characteristic interpretation of the Gospel.

St. Ignatius based his spirituality on an intimate communion and relationship with God, Who is the Creator and Father. At Manresa, he experienced and lived interiorly such intimacy and was endowed with such confidence in God and His Providence, that he allowed it to draw him forward, to place in Him all his confidence and hope³⁶.

For the foundation and organization of his Congregation, Fr. Bertoni received directly the Ignatian influence, as we presented in an earlier chapter. In order, however, to penetrate into the very core of Fr. Gaspar's charism as Founder, there is of necessity required a comprehension of the Ignatian mission and abandonment.

Before God, Ignatius saw his own weakness and frailty. He had an insight into his own reality that required of him and attitude of profound humility, in recognizing his own

³⁵ cf. Jesus Alvarez Gomez, "La vita religiosa come risposta alle necessità della Chiesa e del mondo in ogni circostanza storica", in *BERTONIANO*, XXV/1 (January-June 1987) m oo. 31, ff; cf. Fabio Ciardi, *I Fondatori uomini dello Spirito* (Roma: Città Nuova 1962), pp. 27, f; cf. St. Ignatius, *Constitutions* # 624).

³⁶ cf. Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Espíritu de San Ignacio de Loyola* (Bilbao: El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús, 1958), p. 135, f.

insignificance and the grandeur of God. As the Lord is Provident, the saint placed in him his entire confidence, Ignatius intensified even more this confidence to root in Him, and not in himself, his own life's project.

The Saint of Loyola wrote once to Fr. John Nunes Barretto, much distressed at being named the Patriarch of Ethiopia:

"Do not be afraid of this great undertaking, being confronted with your limited strength. However, all of our insufficiency has to come to the One Who calls us to this task, He has to give you all that is necessary for His service, for He places you in this responsibility without your choosing it. He gives you this work to do, for which you feel you do not have strong enough shoulders to carry it through. This is so as far as the human side of it goes, unless the divine hands helps and lessens the weight and guides the one carrying the burden. So it is that when you come to distrust yourself, and you trust all the more in the One Who has sent you to assume this responsibility as His Vicar"³⁷.

Once he was convinced that the Lord is the ultimate reason of life, St. Ignatius in everything, and primarily, to carry out His will³⁸. Furthermore, he truly wanted to be God's instrument to achieve everything for His honor and glory. His entire life was channeled toward this function. He became more and more consciously and completely a man dependent on God.

To serve God with all his strength it is necessary to exercise promptness and to be completely available to the Lord.

Ignatius recorded in his Constitutions:

"... When based upon this foundation, the natural means which equip the human instrument of God our Lord to deal with his fellowmen will all be helps toward the preservation and development of this whole body, provided they are acquired and exercised for the divine service alone; employed in deed, not that we put our confidence in them, but that we may cooperate with the divine grace according to the arrangement of the sovereign providence of God our Lord. For He desires to be gloried both through the natural means, which He gives as Creator, and through the supernatural means, which He gives as the Author of grace..."³⁹

If one does depend on God and is closely united to Him, then all can be accomplished, despite human fragility, for the simple reason that He is all, He is omnipotent and the One Who knows what is best. In confidence, in humility, in abandonment, in dependence, in the search solely for the will and glory of God flowed availability⁴⁰ and the humble prayer of self-

³⁷ cf. Iparraguirre, *Espíritu*, p. 137.

³⁸ cf. J. Ayerra, *San Ignacio de Loyola y la voluntad de Dios*. (Manresa 1956), p. 82.

³⁹ St. Ignatius, *Constitutions* # 814.

⁴⁰ "The term "availability" is not used by Ignatius. However, it can be inferred, through this expression, the concept of being ready to follow the voice of God. It can also be rendered by "promptness" to give a response even to the least signal of God's will. Therefore, to be prepared, attentive, vigilant, and to seek to respond

offering in Ignatius. From this, all else is possible and indeed the saint did accomplish everything with this attitude and the reality of the presence of Providence⁴¹.

In obedience, which is the virtue of the search for the realization of the Lord's will, Ignatius encouraged an attitude of indifference, which demands purification of all which is self-absorption to be available to the Lord⁴².

In this respect, Polanco, Ignatius' "right-hand-man", wrote once to Fr. Urban Fernandez, in the name of St. Ignatius, through a letter dated June 1, 1551:

"He desired from us in the Company a resignation of one's own will and an indifference toward everything that was ordered. This customarily meant to be like a walking stick which allows itself to be moved at will – a kind of "cadaver obedience", which does not show repugnance at being moved this way or that. And although he was accustomed to informing himself regarding the inclinations of each one (whether one would be more suited for study, or other things), nonetheless he was more inclined to place in studies those who showed no other particular affection than to do the will of God our Lord, interpreted by obedience, rather than those who just showed a great inclination for study."⁴³

The attitude of indifference places us, according to Ignatius, in that state of readiness to follow that which God asks of us, without fear of sacrifices, without holding back for ourselves, and without refusing any task⁴⁴.

For Ignatius, whenever we place ourselves as available instruments, indifferent and ready, allowing God to act, He does not allow His plan to fail in us. We thus belong to God, and He needs us, in order to bring to term His plans, and He gives us the grace to carry out His intentions. Our hope is in the Lord, Who is provident. Confidence in Him, therefore, is meant to be total. In this manner, the "apostolic mission" is inserted in availability, in order to be "sent", as God's instrument, to bring the Good News of salvation to our brothers and sisters⁴⁵.

His immersion in the light of the Trinity, as Fr. Peter Arrupe, former Superior General of the Jesuits stated, did not have in Ignatius the development of a mystical nuptials, or that of transforming union⁴⁶.

immediately. Using Ignatius' terminology, it indicates the manifestation of "dependence", putting oneself at the "disposition" of the Lord, to "obey" with "diligence", "humility" and "fidelity". It further means "to offer oneself voluntarily", "freely, liberally and generously". It means to believe. (cf. Ignacio Iglesias, "La Contemplazione e la disponibilità", in *Recherches* 15, *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis* 15, 1978, pp. 47-73; cf. Juan Alfaro, "Es sencillamente creer", in *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis* IX/2 (1978), 12.

⁴¹ cf. Iparraguirre, *Espíritu*, p. 143, f.

⁴² *Unidad Vital, Ejercicios – Constituciones*. (Bilbao: Mensajero 1975), pp. 72, f.

⁴³ Ignacio de Loyola, *Obras Completas* (Madrid: BAC 1963), p. 769.

⁴⁴ Iparraguirre, *Espíritu*, p. 147.

⁴⁵ cf. ib., pp. 76-77.

⁴⁶ cf. Pedro Arrupe, "La inspirazione trinitaria del carisma ignaciano", in *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis*. XIII/1-2 (1982), pp. 41, f.

However, the spiritual transformation of Ignatius has him pass from the contemplation of the Trinity, to a contemplation of the works of the Trinity, in order to want to collaborate with its action. Thus, Fr. Arrupe continues:

“The comprehension within the bosom of the Trinity of the mystery announced by Paul, of all beings flowing out from God and returning to Him. Ignatius sees that the mysteries of creation, of man’s fall, of redemption and of the Church are caught up in that movement of descent and ascent. Above all, the mystery of Christ is revealed to him in that perspective. What he sees in Christ is not the model of this or that virtue, however perfect, such as humility, poverty, patience, zeal, etc. For Ignatius, Christ is above all the One who, being always conscious of issuing from the Father and of returning to him, continuously contemplates the Father’s designs in order to discern, so to speak, in a perfect indifference of heart and openness of spirit, without preconceived limits, what the Father wants from him for the realization of his work and his greater glory... The work of Christ has to be furthered, and furthered with the same modalities with which Christ did it: as unconditional, universal mission, and with a kenosis (which means poverty, humility and the cross) and in constant union with the Father”⁴⁷.

In this manner, Ignatius considered himself impelled to give himself totally for this cause. Thus, he wrote in his spiritual diary on February 27, 1544:

“... and not that this might confirm me further in some way, but that before the Most Holy Trinity there might be accomplished in me the greater service, etc., and in the most fitting manner”⁴⁸.

In the Trinity, therefore, Ignatius sought the point of departure and the arrival to be achieved through the “Mission”. Ignatius presented the whole theology of “mission” in these terms:

“... first, the Son sent His Apostles to preach in poverty, and then the Holy Spirit confirmed them, giving His Spirit in tongues of fire; and then, since the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, all three Persons confirmed that mission”⁴⁹.

From this, Ignatius planned the Company of Jesus, desiring that it participates in the “mission” in order to follow Jesus Who sent His Apostles for the salvation of humanity in every part of the world.

The “Mission” is not simply the exercise of a ministry, but it is to be “sent”. It is clear that this is an apostolic purpose. It is the “sending” that achieves the scope of the Company, which is that of exercising the ministries proper to it in behalf of humanity⁵⁰. However, it is not

⁴⁷ Ib., pp. 41-42.

⁴⁸ Ignatius, *Autobiografía*, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Ib., January 11, 1544.

⁵⁰ cf. Antonio M. de Aldama, *Reorientándose en la vinya de Cristo*. (Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis 1973) p.37.

purely the exercise of the apostolate without the sending.

The reality of the vow of obedience to the Pope is precisely to be available “to go to one or other parts of the world”⁵¹.

Ignatius always saw the mission and the dispersion of the Apostles as Jesus who “sends throughout the whole world, spreading His sacred doctrine to all levels and condition of person”⁵².

For the act of “going”, the saint also used the term “to peregrinate” (to go on a pilgrimage). Furthermore, initially in Rome, the Jesuits were known as the “pilgrim fathers”. Nonetheless, there is a distinction between these terms. “Pilgrimage” (as an apostolic excursion) is done for the sake of the “Mission”. The “Mission” is the “action of sending” on a “pilgrimage”⁵³.

The exercise of the Fourth Vow (of obedience to the Pope), that requires “indifference”, is an attitude of on-going preparation and availability. This refers directly to the “Mission”, subordinated to the sending by the Pope, to any place whatsoever (quocumque)⁵⁴. Hence, there does not exist any limit of geographical space for the “mission”, or the “sending”. The member of the Company (called a “companion”) is personally available (quicumque) to go. The one called, or chosen, or sent to go, does go in order to carry out that for which he has been sent (quodcumque)⁵⁵. As Fr. Aldama has said, it came to be known as the “Pontifical Mission”:

“any apostolic work whatsoever, or ministry, exercised in any place whatsoever, by order of the Pope”⁵⁶.

The finality, then, of the Company is to go throughout the world, seeking the greater glory of God and the assistance of souls⁵⁷.

The Missions (of going throughout the world) are of three modalities: one is carried out at the command of the Pope to a determined place⁵⁸; a second is accomplished by order of the Superior General; and the third is carried out by the option of the individual to work in

⁵¹ cf. Gregorio XIII, *Decret Romanum* May 5, 1575, cited by Ignatius in the First Chapter of his Constitutions.

⁵² Antonio M. de Aldama, *Iniciacion al estudio de la Constituciones*. (Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis 1979), p.237.

⁵³ St. Ignatius, in reading the “Golden Legend”, which contained the life-story of saints, was quite taken up with St. Francis (who interpreted the imitation of the Apostles in a literal way, as Aldama states, considering the apostolic activity as an exhortation to penance and to love God and not as “preaching”), and St. Dominic who, desirous of imitating the ideal of apostolic preaching, founded the Order of Preachers (cf. Aldama, *Repartiendose*, pp. 18-20).

⁵⁴ Abandonment in the following of the divine will occurs in obedience that interprets this will (cf. Ignatius, *Obras Completas*.) P. 781

⁵⁵ cf. Aldama, *Repartiendose*, pp. 53-60.

⁵⁶ cf. Aldama, *Iniciacion*, p. 237.

⁵⁷ cf. Ignacio, *Costituzioni*, p. 234 no. 603.

⁵⁸ *Ib.*

a determined place of the vineyard of the Lord, by commission. In all three modalities, there always has to be the “sending” or the “mission”, with an apostolic purpose, for the assistance of one’s neighbor⁵⁹.

“Mission” in the society of Jesus, as Fr. Ignacio Salvat states, is:

“... that juridical act by which the Supreme Pontiff – or Superior General, according to his concession – sends someone of the Company to accomplish a determined intention, in the service of the universal Church”⁶⁰.

“Mission”, then, is the “sending”, and “proclamation”⁶¹. This is understood in the most broad Latin sense, i.e., the sending of someone under obedience, to accomplish something, in a given locality, for the good of souls and for the propagation of the faith⁶².

It is to be noted that Ignatius of Loyola initiated his conversion with his experience of Christ. He tried then to respond, in the revision of his own life, out of love for Jesus, through the total commitment of himself (abandonment) and his life to the service of Christ’s salvific work in absolute poverty. As Christ sent the Apostles, so Ignatius, in total dependence on God, accepted “being sent” to “Assist souls”⁶³. Christ’s sending the Apostles was “to teach all peoples throughout the world”. Thus, Ignatius proposed to accept also for himself and for his companions this “mission”.

For the members of the Company to exercise this “Mission”, it is necessary that they have the mandate of the ecclesiastical authority, since the mission is eminently ecclesial. The conditions of each member and of all as a Company, for the carrying out of this mission, along with availability, responsibility and collaboration, there are likewise universality (since the “mission” is the participation in that universal mission committed to the Apostles by Jesus) and mobility (which is the possibility of changing one’s place and situation). This requires balance between the necessary stability to consolidate the fruit of the apostolic activity, and an important revision⁶⁴.

The “Mission”, in itself, is temporary. However, a continuous moving about would not be a mission, which has to have a point of departure, and one of arrival. Wandering about is not mission. Being definitively fixed in a determined place would be “residence”⁶⁵. Thus, as Fr. Aldama points out⁶⁶, the “mandate” to go to reside in another place is “Mission”, but the one being sent has to remain in a “state of mission”.

Originally, for Ignatius, the time allotted for a mission was short, connected with the

⁵⁹ This is the principal mission, and the others derive from it (cf. Ignacio Salvat, *Servir en Misión*. Roma: Gregoriana 1972), p. 95.

⁶⁰ Salvat, *Servir*, p. 96.

⁶¹ cf. Ignacio, *Costituzioni*, p. 253, nota 1.

⁶² cf. Ignacio, *Icostituzioni*, p. 222, note 6.

⁶³ cf. Salvat, *Servir*, p. 97.

⁶⁴ cf. ib., p. 110.

⁶⁵ cf. Aldama, *Repartiendose*, p. 62.

⁶⁶ cf. ib.

notion of “apostolic peregrination”⁶⁷. However, in practice, he accepted that its determination would depend on the finality of the mission. The spirit of “mobility” is what makes a member of the Company become “available” to change, in conformity with the “mandate”, under “obedience”, keeping in mind, in particular manner, the “greater universal good”. This is what determines the “being sent” to a specific place, rather than to some other⁶⁸.

Within the ministries of the Company, that of the “Word” (as sermons, lectures on sacred matters, the teaching of Christian doctrine), occupies the first place. Then, the Spiritual exercises and catechesis, the sacrament of confession, the administration of the sacraments, the particular exhortation, the works of mercy, colleges, writing books⁶⁹.

These ministries, therefore, are exercised as means. And they are used (choosing among them) in conformity to what is most suited to “helping souls, always communicating with the superior regarding their use”⁷⁰.

For Ignatius, what is most important is to participate, as those who have been “sent” on a “mission”, as were the Apostles, to follow through on what the Lord Himself mandated:

“And, as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You receive without charge, give without charge”⁷¹.

The community constituted the body of the Company, similar to the College of the 12 Apostles⁷². And beyond all else, the *res interna*, a spiritual reality is fundamentally the “communion”. Before being together for the work, there is necessary a union of souls.

Whatever the community is able to accomplish is to be understood as the *res externa*, manifested operationally (by working together), and essentially (by being together).

The most fundamental nucleus of the interior reality of the community is Christ’s love, which is the principal bond of unity and the principle of “Mission”.

As the book, entitled *Unidad Vital* comments, “the community comes to life for the apostolate, and is structured around apostolic interests”⁷³.

The primary subject of “Mission” is the “entire universal body” of the Company, and not simply each individual or community⁷⁴.

⁶⁷ cf. ib., pp. 64-65.

⁶⁸ cf. ib., p. 100.

⁶⁹ cf. Aldama, *Repartiendo*, pp. 187-244.

⁷⁰ cf. ib., pp. 160-163.

⁷¹ Mt 10:7-8.

⁷² cf. Vital, *Ejercicios*, p. 46.

⁷³ *Ejercicios*, p. 47.

⁷⁴ cf. ib.

2. FR. BERTONI'S ABANDONMENT IN THE EXERCISE OF THE APOSTOLIC SENSE OF MISSION, "IN OBSEQUIUM EPISCOPORUM – VERBI DEI QUODCUMQUE MINISTERIUM"

As in St. Ignatius, also in Fr. Gaspar the "apostolic mission" comes to light as the fruit of "the following of Christ" with total self-giving, without reservations, with distinct personal characteristics.

The strong Ignatian influence in Fr. Bertoni's life is what also kept him close to him in his spirituality and in his apostolicity. The historical contexts in which both lived were different. This holds true also for the social and ecclesial needs. However, the Spirit Who blows where and as He chooses, makes use of some. Rather than others, inspired to develop their particular charism for the good of God's people.

It must be emphasized that "abandonment" into God's hands is a gift of the Holy Spirit, Who renders a person capable of confiding and hoping completely in God, to the point of seeing and carrying out one's own life's project in the light of the Lord's will. Such a one allows himself to be led wherever the Lord chooses. It is to follow Jesus Christ in His "Thy Will be done". It means to place oneself into God's hands, doing one's own part and following through on what seems to be the best.

For St. Alphonsus, the greatest perfection is to conform our will with that of God⁷⁵.

The object of abandonment is extended to everything: to the past, to the present, to the future, to one's own being (with all one's sentiments, joys, sadness, ideas), to all that one holds, one's own projects, ideas, tasks, accomplishments, movement, situation, health...

Indifference is a preliminary disposition that supposes full confidence in God's love, as we saw with St. Ignatius.

In accord with what St. Francis de Sales states we ought "to become flexible and malleable before the divine will, as though we are wax, without desiring or choosing some things, but allowing God to do as he chooses, abandoning to Him our anxiety". In this state, He then thinks for us, as the Apostle expressed it" (IP 5:7)⁷⁶.

Thus, the characteristics of "abandonment" in each person are different. Caussade stated⁷⁷:

"The way of abandonment has to be adapted to the needs and capacities of individuals"⁷⁸.

Ignatius, "without fearing the future", placed himself in the path of the following of

⁷⁵ cf. M. Viller, "Abandon", in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, ed. 1937, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono* (Verona: Scuola Tipografica AMB 1951), p. 209.

⁷⁷ Jean Pierre de Caussade was a French Jesuit, born in 1675 in Quercy, and died in 1751. He was a famous preacher, writer and mystic. He proposed abandonment to Providence as the easiest means of sanctification.

⁷⁸ cf. Michel Olphe-Galliard, "Caussade", in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, ed. 1953, p. 359.

Christ in the apostolic mission of going all places, in communion and service⁷⁹ to the universal Church, for the salvation of souls⁸⁰.

Fr. Bertoni, impelled by the Spirit to “serve God, cost what it may”⁸¹, in a “total dependence on God in everything”⁸², and “following the same paths that Ignatius did, but not entirely by using the same means that he did”⁸³, made himself totally available to the service of the Church. He did this with his own special sensitivity through the assistance of Bishops, knowing that the Church herself is assisted by the Holy Spirit, as the Founder states:

“The hope that the Lord gives, the communication of His charity, in brief, his supreme consolation – regarding the points of our activity, if we are still somewhat in the dark, keeps us strong in waiting for that moment of light, in order to be committed too to the task; if all seems clear before us, this charity then animates its accomplishment”⁸⁴.

“This seems to be the practice of His Spouse, which is the Church. She has been assured by the divine promise of the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Yet, she does not cease in her quest for light in her activities, either in defence of the truth entrusted to her, or of her discipline. And when she does see her way clearly, she does not interrupt her work, her study, her taking counsel, in order to proceed further in the light and in the endeavor. And when she is impeded in her activity, she awaits the right moment, trusting in God.

“And in both these ways, she is always the model of our abandonment in the Lord., It is a most beautiful virtue to be abandoned, into the all-powerful arms of Divine Providence, when we are not able to act; but it is even a more perfect and consummate virtue when indeed we can and should act, in accord with the order placed by Providence, using our own efforts, but yet do not give up at the same time of being totally abandoned into His hands. This seems to have been the practice of the one who said: ‘I live now, not I (and, as consequence, neither do I act), but Christ lives in me (and consequently works in me) (Ga 2:20). ‘If you are a speaker, speak in words that seem to come from God’ (I P 4:11)⁸⁵.

⁷⁹ It should be noted that Ignatius, in his Constitutions, uses the word “service” about 220 times.

⁸⁰ cf. Ignacio, *Autobiografia*, February 24, 1554, p. 188.

⁸¹ “... to serve God under any condition...” (cf. MP July 30, 1808; February 29, 1809).

⁸² “total dependence on God in everything” – (ib. December 23, 1808; July 15, 1809).

⁸³ “... by the same paths, even though not in all those ways” (MP, September 9, 1808).

⁸⁴ Fr. Bertoni sought in the Church the model of his abandonment in God and his confidence in Providence. This appears in the citations that follows.

⁸⁵ “La speranza che dona il Signore, l’attestazione della sua carità in somma la divina consolazione, se circa i punti del nostro operare siamo ancora all’oscuro, ne tien saldo nell’aspettare il momento della luce per porsi all’opera; se siamo al chiaro ne anima alla esecuzione.

“Questa pare la pratica della sua sposa, ch’è la Chiesa. Assicurata ella dalla promessa divine dell’assistenza dello Spirito Santo, non lascia di cercare luce per operare, o a difesa della verità a lei affidata, o della disciplina. E quando vede chiaro non lascia di operare e di studiare, di consultare, per proceder altre nella luce e nell’operazione. E quando è impedita dal suo operare, aspetta tempo fidata in Dio.

“E in tutte due queste maniere è sempre modello dell’abbandono nostro nel Signore. Bella virtù è abbandonarsi, quando non possiamo operar noi, alle braccia onnipotente della Divina Provvidenza; ma più perfetta e consumata virtù, quando noi pure possiamo e dobbiamo, secondo l’ordine posto dalla Provvidenza, operare colle nostre mani, non cessare punto dall’essere ugualmente e del tutto abbandonati alle sue. Così pare che fosse chi diceva: “Vivo ego (e per conseguenza, opero), iam non ego, vivit (e per conseguenza, opera) in me Christus” (Ga II,20). E, si quis

Abandonment in God and the availability to carry out His will in everything, cost what it will, both in Ignatius as in Fr. Bertoni, develops in a context of "Mission". Considering themselves to have been called by God to be His instruments, following the Apostles' example, to be sent by Christ to proclaim Him, to collaborate with the Church in the cause of the salvation of souls.

Hence, in Ignatius, abandonment and availability occur in a context of immediate certainty of what the "Mission" is, the official "mandate" to the "service" of the Pope, participating thus officially in the "universal apostolic mission", as we saw earlier. Once certainty is obtained in the context of this "mission", with proper ministries, abandonment in God is to allow oneself to be led totally by God in the realization of the "mandate" and the exercise of the "announcement."

In Fr. Gaspar, there may be noted the diverse and distinctive characteristics of his abandonment and availability that stand out:

a.) First of all, he places himself totally at God's service, for wherever He might call, since He is everything and the full reason of his being and existence⁵². To serve means to commit oneself totally, without any reservations whatever (despite the recognition of one's own nothingness)⁵³, so that God might make use of this offertory gift to achieve His intentions.⁵⁴ Despite our nothingness, the Holy Spirit creates new life with God. Thus, it becomes so important:

"... to show to the Divine Father a portrait of His Divine son in us", and, "... we have to make a portrait of Jesus Christ in ourselves"⁵⁵

In the following of Christ, he had that availability to encounter everything out of love. He thus expressed himself in the following attitude: "...and offering to undertake even greater things, as His shame,"⁵⁶ His pain, if I may be judged worthy of them"

b.) The "service" of God is achieved in the service of one's neighbor. In the following of Christ this service occurs in obedience to the Father, giving over even one's life for other human beings. Obedience is the fundamental condition for abandonment. But rather than an act of renunciation, abandonment is an act of humble love, confident, and total, that leads a person to commit himself to the least sign of God's will. Abandonment, motivated in the obedience of one who loves, is guided by the Holy Spirit, as Bertoni stated:

"One sign that confirms all the others is the fullness of the Holy Spirit, with which one

loquitur, quasi sermones Dei (I Petri IV, II)" – (cf. Letter 38, October 26, 1813 – Epist. P. 99.

⁵² cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXXV, p. 740 and 753; cf. "The Divine Benefits", New year's Eve 1803, Sermon 21 – in: *PVC* p. 132)

⁵³ Justly, in this recognition one encounters God (cf. *NP*, August 24, 1808).

⁵⁴ cf. Dalle Vedove, *Un modello*, p. 20.

⁵⁵ "...far veder in noi stessi al Divin Padre un'immagine del suo Divin figliuolo" (cf. *NP*, 3 July 30, 1809)" ... far un retratto in noi stessi di Gesu Cristo" (cf. *ib.* February 26, 1809).

⁵⁶ "... offerta a cose maggiori di approbrio, e di pena, se me ne dignasse" (cf. *MP*, October 22, 1808; *ib.*, September 25, 1808).

receives the grace of the word, and the affection as well as the effect of charity, i.e., love for the word. A sign of this fullness is an excellent level of humility; a sign of an excelling humility is perfect obedience, which is the sign of signs, i.e., the seal of all other testimonies”⁵⁷

c) The “service” of God in one’s neighbor comes across in availability and in abandonment in the service of the Church. This is an arduous service, and Fr. Bertoni knew this well. He recognized this difficulty in the human limitations of all consecrated to such a service, in the members of the hierarchy, in the spiritual and specifically ‘moral condition of the poor, of the young. However, trusting in “the Lord, Who increases what one has whenever one abandons himself to Him, and follows Him faithfully”⁵⁸, Fr. Bertoni stated:

“Although the end of- our Congregation, which is to serve the Church by means of the various ministries of its vocation under the direction of its bishops, is at times an arduous and difficult thing, and if it is considered with a view to human frailty - also seemingly exposed to dangers, nonetheless the program of our particular dedication to the Church cannot be called imprudent or rash. This is true in the first place, because we believe that its achievement does not derive from the strength of man, but from the grace of the Holy Spirit: for he Who has inspired and begun the work, will Himself see it through, when our own forces are unable to carry on...”⁵⁹

Fr. Bertoni, like Ignatius, manifested an uncommon ecclesial sensibility, with specific characteristics. “To believe with the Church” is essential in his charism. And his abandonment, as already presented in the first part of this section, was modeled on the Church. And she eminently is led by the Holy Spirit. It is not without reason that Fr. Gaspar’s abandonment was rooted in the Holy Spirit, Who guides the Church. He was distinguished from Ignatius, who founded his Institute to serve the universal Church under the command of the Pope, while Fr. Bertoni

founded his Congregation that would be characterized by its service to the Bishops. For Fr. Gaspar, the bishop was chosen through the Holy Spirit:

“In the second place, with this program we do not propose to expose ourselves to dangers, or to go to this or that place, or to perform this or that action of our own will: but to follow the direction of the orthodox Bishop, placed by the Holy Spirit over the Church of God. This is a means sufficiently safe for avoiding error in the way of the Lord”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ “Segno che conferma gli altri e la pienezza dello SPirito santo, con cui si riceve e la grazia della parola, e l’affetto ed effetto insieme della carita, ossia l’amore della parola. Segno della pienezza e l’eccellente umilta; segno della eccellente umilta e la perfetta obbedienza, ch’è il segno dei segni, ossia il suggillo di tutti i testimoni.” - (cf. Meditation 39, 1 Kings 10:6 (1 s) -(MssB 6441).

⁵⁸ cf. Meditation 16 b, 1 Kings 3:19 (1 S), February 3, 1811 (MssBB 5538).

⁵⁹ “Essendo scopo della nostra Congregazione servire alla Chiesa con i vari ministeri della sua vocazione sotto la direzione dei Vescovi; ed essendo questa, alcune volte, cosa ardua e difficile; e – se la si consideri di fronte all’umana fragilita - sembrando forse anche esposta a pericoli; non per questo si puo dire imprudente o temerario il programma della nostra particolare dedizione alla Chiesa.

“In primo luogo, perche crediamo che la sua effettuazione non dipende dalle forze dell’uomo, ma dalla grazia dello Spirito Santo: poiche COLui che ha ispirata e incominciata l’opera, Egli stesso la condurra a compimento, quando a tenerla in piedi le forze nostre non bastino” (cf. CF 185).

⁶⁰ In secondo lugar con questo programma noi non ci proponiamo di esporci ai pericoli, ne di andare in questo o

Fr. Bertoni chose to let himself be led by the Holy Spirit in everything. In his great concern to serve God, in the service of the Church, in whose way of abandonment he placed himself (since the Church herself is guided by the Holy Spirit), he made himself God's instrument in His service. as his first biographer stated, as Eliseus, he stretched himself out in order to give new life to the deceased child - and so, Fr. Gaspar, dedicated all of his own strength in order to help his neighbor to become revitalized through Christ's grace⁶¹. Furthermore, his entire apostolate based on holy abandonment, which renders one supremely sensitive in striving to discover the manner and time of the divine will⁶², for the exercise of his apostolic action. He feared nothing, not even the storms of problems of his times, whether personal or social, being convinced that all he did was in the presence of the Lord, in Whom he unconditionally trusted⁶³.

His apostolic activity followed the signs of God's will.

d.) He founded his religious congregation, having for its finality that which characterizes it: "Apostolic Missionaries for the assistance of Bishops"⁶⁴ Prior to reaching the decision of founding an Institute, he hoped in the signs of the divine will: from his seminarian days, he nurtured the thought of joining together with some companions in order to establish a religious institute⁶⁵; he also received a special inspiration before St. Ignatius' altar, on September 5, 1808, as we saw earlier;⁶⁶ he had the experience of a Parish Mission, strengthening even more his mind toward the foundation of his Institute⁶⁷.

As he wrote to sister Naudet, August 17, 1816, the occasion came to found his Institute when FR. Galvani offered him "the Stimate, as an opportune place to establish a Congregation of priests who would live under the rules of St. Ignatius".⁶⁸

Fr. Gaspar saw in the signs from God, through events, the need to follow God's will in everything:

"To begin the undertaking... do not overlook even the most insignificant matter, and do not delay in accepting the inspirations".⁶⁹

quel luogo, o di compiere questa o quella azione di nostro arbitrio: ma di seguire la direzione del Vescovo ortodosso, posto dallo Spirito santo a reggere la Chiesa di Dio: che e un mezzo abbastanza sicuro per non errare nella via del Signore." - (cf. CF 185). The underlining in the translation above is that of the author.

⁶¹ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 338-9.

⁶² cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXIII, p. 265

⁶³ cf. CS IV, p. 104; cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 472-3

⁶⁴ cf. CF I

⁶⁵ This was confirmed by Fr. Giacobbe - cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 219, 223 and 342

⁶⁶ cf. NP, September 15, 1808

⁶⁷ From May 4th to the 26th, 1816, the Founder helped Canon Louis Pacifico Pacetti, an Apostolic Missionary, in the preaching of the Mission of St. Firmus Major. The title of "Apostolic Missionary" could be conferred only by the Holy See. Fr. Bertoni received this on December 20, 1817. (cf. Stofella, Ven. Gaspere, pp. 115-6.

⁶⁸ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXIII, p. 217

⁶⁹ "Per cominciare la impresa ... non bisogna trascurare la piu piccola cosa e non tardare ad accogliere le ispirazioni." (cf. HP, 3uly 23, 1809). "

In the social and ecclesial situation of that period he felt called to gather his companions together who, with an Ignatian spirit like his own, would dedicate themselves for “the assistance of Bishops”, “in community”⁷⁰, in the following of the same apostolic vocation.

Fr. Bertoni accentuated the community life much more than St. Ignatius did. The Stigmatines are called to follow the example of the apostolic community, being in the first place, witnesses of love. From this community of love, they were called to go out to announce the word, already written in the composition of their own lives. In his view, the world had a great need of seeing the- example of the Apostles⁷¹.

God must be respected and loved in the other, beginning with one’s own community. Hence, all are called to live, having but one heart and but one soul⁷². The other must be loved because he is God’s temple⁷³.

Fr. Bertoni’s abandonment in God goes even beyond the confidence and the certainty of the Lord’s action in the realization of the plan for his Congregation, and of any apostolic project taken on the light of God’s plan. Fr. Gaspar never preceded the action of God⁷⁴. And even having begun some work, he remained disposed to any possible change that the Lord might impose in his path. Abandonment is present before and after the mission that is assumed. With this type of abandonment, he feared nothing⁷⁵, not even if it meant that his work that he founded would be sacrificed.⁷⁶

e) In establishing his own religious Institute, Fr. Bertoni hoped that “working out from the base of a “religious community”⁷⁷, his followers would help the Church with their apostolic mission-mindedness⁷⁸.

In order to become an “apostolic missionary”, it is necessary to abandon oneself to God’s action, to be totally of God, to hope only in Him, and to act under its “mandate” for the evangelization and renewal of the local Church. This “mandate” is inherent in the vocational call in order to be a Stigmatine. As we have seen, this means that each one has as his finality, that of being an “apostolic missionary.”

In his social and clerical context, Fr. Bertoni saw the needs of the people and the Church in the living out of the Gospel Message, and in its announcement. Hence, he desired, with his companions, to assist the Church in her renewal and renovation. For this scope, he

⁷⁰ “In the manner of religious, but of perfect observance and most perfect common life.” – (cf. Summ. Add, Doc. XXIII, p. 219; cf. CF ff. 6, 96-104, 187, f.).

⁷¹ cf. Priests’ retreat, Nantua, October 4-13, 17-26, 1816, “On being a Worker in the Church” - MssB 3764; cf. CF 272

⁷² cf. CF 189

⁷³ cf. ib. # 228.

⁷⁴ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 542.

⁷⁵ cf. ib., pp. 471-3.

⁷⁶ He offered the property of the Stimmate to the Jesuits (cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXIV, pp. 642-3).

⁷⁷ Fr. Bertoni founded a genuine religious Institute and not a simple association of diocesan priests (cf. ib., Doc. XXIII, pp. 218-9). A proof of this is the fact that he wrote Constitutions for this religious Congregation which he founded, even without giving it a title.

⁷⁸ cf. CF 1.

proposed for himself to assist the people, the clergy and the youth - every class and walk of life to which anyone might belong⁷⁹.

The words "apostolic missionaries" Fr. Gaspar drew from the title that was conferred on him by the Propaganda Fide⁸⁰. Truly, the "apostolic mission" according to Fr. Gaspar, is different from the Ignatian understanding. For St. Ignatius, the Jesuit receives the official "mandate" from the Pope, or the Superior, that asks of each a determined task..

For Fr. Gaspar, the "Mission" is committed, keeping as its base the community, which has already within its very reason of being that of being dedicated to the "apostolic mission"⁸¹. Whoever enters the Institute assumes the "Apostolic Mission", or the "service" (obsequium) to the Missionaries⁸², under obedience to the Superiors⁸³ and the obedience to the Ordinaries under whom the exercise of the Apostolic Ministry is to develop.⁸⁴ The mandate, then, for Fr. Bertoni, is inherent in the Stigmatine religious vocation, which lives the call of Christ to "assist" the Bishops. Thus, the "quicumque", or personal abandonment, is proper to anyone who accepts the call from God to follow Fr. Bertoni, in being an "apostolic missionary."

To be an "apostolic missionary" for Fr. Gaspar means to follow Jesus Christ, Who announces the Kingdom, in intimate union with the successors of the Apostles, who were placed by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church. They were the first to be entrusted with proposing and with preaching the Word of God.⁸⁵

The words "apostolic missionary" can only be comprehended in Fr. Bertoni when joined to the "*obsequium Episcoporum*".

At the same time, the "go and teach" of the Founder's "apostolic missionary" characterizes all the being and the activity of the Stigmatine in evangelization. All is in function of the "prophetic role." Furthermore, every type of preparation, study, specialization⁸⁶, activity, work, finds its meaning, or not, for Fr. Bertoni, when it is employed and used as a means to become an "apostolic missionary". For this reason, he insists "on the "Christian, spiritual formation", "in virtue", in "the love of God".⁸⁷ It is clear that each one (even the sick) are placed in harmony, in union, for the assistance of others (within their possibilities, and with their availability), who make of it all the announcement of the Word, joined with the "apostolic mission." This is the reason why, for Fr. Gaspar, the "religious community" is the basis for the sphere of influence of the "mission."

⁷⁹ cf. Stofella, Il Ven. Gaspare, p. 79. Fr. Gaspar Bertoni preached to priests and proclaimed the life of perfection and holiness, proper to the ecclesiastical state (cf. ib., pp. 89-90 and 96, f.).

⁸⁰ cf. CS IV, p. 265.

⁸¹ CF 1. It is proper to remember CF p 6 that speaks of the common life, as well as the plural noted in CF 11- 1-2, 4-7, rather than the singular.

⁸² cf. ib. # 7.

⁸³ cf. ib. M 138, f.

⁸⁴ cf. ib. # 2.

⁸⁵ cf. Sermon 35, "The Rule of our Thinking and Acting", Feast of the Epiphany 1806, St. Paul's, Verona" on the left of the Adige - MssB 1235; cf. CF 185.

⁸⁶ cf. CF 56.

⁸⁷ cf. ib. # 166.

f.) The abandonment to God in the unfolding of the “apostolic mission” takes place in conformity with the needs and the demands of the Church (in the various dioceses), in its various situations and time periods.⁸⁸ Fr. Bertoni thus had a broad view of apostolic mission-mindedness. His ecclesial and community sense strengthen the abandonment that he had, modeling himself on the Church, which is guided by the Spirit. The “apostolic mission”, in the service of the Church, is exercised in conformity with her needs, with “various ministries”⁸⁹.

The Founder offered a list of ministries, all based on the Word of God, which is fundamental:

The ministry of the Word of God under any form whatsoever:

1. Preaching publicly, or instructing the people by public and private catechism lessons;
2. By pious talks and holy conversations, at times, fraternally correcting vices, at times exhorting to the practice of virtue and to the frequent reception of the Sacraments;
3. At times, guiding and urging the people to the acquisition of perfection;
4. Preaching the Spiritual exercises;
5. Promoting pious societies or associations;
6. Attending devoutly to the spiritual care of the sick, especially the dying”.⁹⁰

He further described his plan:

“By aiding with the disciplinary formation of clerics, either in the seminaries or in our own houses; furthering their progress in their studies and their piety by public lectures and private conferences”.⁹¹

In addition, he spoke of the Christian education of children, the youth and the unlettered, through oratories, teaching catechism, even private tutoring⁹², and even possibly helping the young with their studies,⁹³ and children in their school work, striving in it all for their formation in purity of habit⁹⁴.

Along with this, he mentioned the assuming of the clerical state with perfection, as a

⁸⁸ cf. ib., # 57.

⁸⁹ cf. CF 185.

⁹⁰ “Il ministero della Parola di Dio sotto qualunque forma: 1. predicando pubblicamente, o istruendo il popolo con catechismi pubblici o privati;

2. tenendo pii colloqui e sante conversazioni; così ora correggendo fraternamente i vizi, ora esortando all’esercizio della virtù e alla frequenza dei Sacramenti;

3. ora guidando ed eccitando all’acquisto della perfezione;

4. predicando gli Esercizi Spirituali;

5. promovendo le pie congregazioni o associazioni;

6. attendendo devotamente alla cura spirituale degli infermi e specialmente di moribondi” (cf. CF 163).

⁹¹ “Occupandosi della formazione e della disciplina dei CHierici, così nei Seminari, come nelle parrocchie e nelle nostre case: con pubbliche lezioni e conferenze private facendoli avanzare negli studi e nella pietà” (cf. ib. # 164).

⁹² cf. ib. # 165.

⁹³ cf. ib. # 166.

⁹⁴ cf. ib. #167.

means used by the Institute to bring assistance to other human beings, as in the administration of the sacraments⁹⁵. Therefore, all of these ministries listed above, the Founder presented all of them as means for the Institute to attain to its end of "Apostolic Missionaries in *obsequium episcoporum*"⁹⁶. His central concern in the use of these means, or in the exercise of the various ministries, was that of attending to the finality proposed, in a state of "active abandonment." Fr. Bertoni remained attentive to the voice of the Church. He was ready even to give up one type of work, even a good one, to take up some other type of ministry that presented itself for the good of the Church, here or somewhere else. This is why a real freedom from being conditioned regarding the type of people the community would serve, the places, the works, was very strong in him, under the influence of St. Ignatius.⁹⁷ In this dynamic, he showed himself disposed to close the schools at the Stimate in 1843⁹⁸.

In brief, the "apostolic mission" is proper to Fr. Gaspar's vocation and charism. The mandate, the "mission" is given by God in calling a suitable person to become a member of his Institute⁹⁹. Anyone called to the Stigmatine life participates directly in this "service" (obsequium') to live as an "apostolic missionary for the "assistance" (obsequium) of bishops.

The ministries that are means to be exercised in carrying out the "apostolic mission" are varied. The ministries that were emphasized already in the time of the Founder, as also later, were preaching in its various modalities: parish missions, catechesis, retreats, tridua, homilies...), assistance to priests and seminarians (vocational discernment, formation, spiritual direction, retreats) and the Christian education of youth (catechism instruction, Marian oratories, teaching school ...)¹⁰⁰

g.) The acceptance of other types of ministries is a constant challenge, principally keeping in mind the shift in the times and the needs, as well as in the emphases to be given to various works that have already been taken on that are more or less intensely apostolic. The temptation of attachment is a temptation against the spirit of "abandonment." This is why, as we have seen, Fr. Bertoni, like St. Ignatius, has left clearly in his program the need of mobility. Fr. Gaspar thought through his whole program in the crystal clear light of the Spirit, Who led him to trust in Providence and to recognize the signals from God in the new needs of the Church. This is why he is very strong in the demonstration of detachment, in mobility, in freedom from not accepting dignities¹⁰¹. His view of the Stigmatines was that a community in

⁹⁵ cf. ib. # 161-2.

⁹⁶ cf. CF I.

⁹⁷ cf. ib. # 4.

⁹⁸ Ten years before his death, due to the difficulties of limited and ailing personnel, and with the opening of the High School at St. Sebastian's by the Jesuits, the Founder closed the school at the Stimate. Thus, the Stigmatines were able to dedicate themselves with more time, and rightfully, to other ministries. (cf. Breve Cronaca della Congregazione di Preti delle Stimate di N.S.G.C. (Verona: Casa Buoni Fanciulli 1917) Vol. I, pp. 66-7.

⁹⁹ cf. CF W/ 7, 9-26.

¹⁰⁰ cf. CF #g 57, 161-166, 182; cf. Summ. Add. , Doc. XXVI, p-461; Doc. XXIII, pp. 158, 252, 261, and 267. cf. Sermon 35, "The Rule of our Thinking and Working", Epiphany 1806 – MssB 1227; cf. also Breve Cronaca I, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ The being "free of dignities, residences, benefices, and of the perpetual and particular care of souls and of nuns" in his Constitution // 4 is not simply an expression of his hiddenness and humility. It is much more an expression of that attitude of "being in a state of readiness" in order to serve, that keeping oneself disposed to be

the service of the diocesan mission program, even with the contingency of its "provisory commitment", but without any fixed choices of ministries¹⁰².

Furthermore, it is of great importance to "serve God and the Church absolutely gratuitously"¹⁰³. In order "to serve", it is vital to direct the attention to the one who needs the "service" the more, and not to be concerned in the first place with those already "well served"¹⁰⁴. The Founder's charism requires that the needs of the Church be scrutinized very carefully. This explains why Fr. Bertoni wanted his men "disposed to go anywhere whatsoever, in the diocese and in the world"¹⁰⁵. This "quocumque" from the Ignatian rule was specified by Fr. Bertoni with a sensitivity for the local Church.

For St. Ignatius, the "quocumque" was envisioned from the very beginning, with a "universal missionary" openness. For Fr. Gaspar, however, the "quocumque" contains already the universal breadth of view, but is characterized by service to the particular Church.

The Stigmatine, then, is meant to be "disposed to go anywhere". He thus shares in the life of the Institute which holds as its objective that of "going"; this is the finality of the "apostolic missionary" "for the assistance of Bishops", in order "to serve", with effective gratuity, and without any pre-conditions of a fixed place or work¹⁰⁶. Even in the situation of a temporary fixed place or task (due to the type of service rendered to the local Church), without allowing any mentality of permanence to pervade, the confrere of Fr. Gaspar is one who keeps alive his "disposition to go" and "to serve", the "orthodox bishop, placed by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God".¹⁰⁷

The ministries (quodcumque) are all conditioned by the "needs" "of the local Churches, "according to the diversity of times and circumstances".¹⁰⁸

h.) In a word, to come to understand the Founder's "abandonment", which he set as the basis of the "apostolic mission", it has to be united to his phrase: "*Missionarii a apostolici in obsequium E discorum*" and to the "*Verbi Dei quocumque ministerium*". At the same time, the dependence on the Bishop in Fr. Bertoni's charism is indirect reference to the "apostolic ministry"¹⁰⁹. In this point, recalling to mind that St. Ignatius asked for a special vow of obedience toward the Pope, Fr. Bertoni, on the contrary, did not demand of his followers a similar relationship to the Bishops. The reason is that his Institute depends on them closely for

uprooted from any place or work. The "apostolic mission" is the ultimate finality. The exercise of the ministries is the means.

¹⁰² cf. CF # 57; cf. *Summ. Add.*, ib. XXIII, p. 231; Doc. XXVII, p. 579.

¹⁰³ "Servire a Dio e alla Chiesa affatto gratuitamente" (cf. CF 3 and cf. also /// 102 & 104).

¹⁰⁴ In this perspective it is worth-while to consider the Founder's spirit of abandonment which could discern the proper moment to "leave" one work, in order to "assume" some other one, depending on the needs of the Church (cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXXIV, 1.2; and Doc. XXVII, p. 579).

¹⁰⁵ "Disposti ad andare in qualsiasi luogo, nella diocesi e nel mondo" (cf. CF 5).

¹⁰⁶ The gratuity in the exercise of the ministry leads the Stigmatine to offer his services without any financial compromise, in order to exercise freely his "apostolic mission". This elevates the more his prophetic witness, and thus leads him "to give without charge what he has received without charge" (cf. Mt 10:8).

¹⁰⁷ cf. CF 185.

¹⁰⁸ ib. # 57; cf. *Breve Cronaca* I, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ cf. CF 2.

the exercise of the "apostolic mission". Furthermore, the Congregation was established for "the assistance of Bishops", and not for any one single Bishop.¹¹⁰

Communion with the local Church brings it about that his Institute, in the common vocation of its members, is incarnate in the reality of the Church, offering to it a specific service, with assistance in the formation of its members, principally its priests and seminarians, the youth and its lay members, through its "apostolic mission", making use of a variety of ministries. Fr. Bertoni was able to accomplish this in his time in the historical reality that confronted him. Hence, the "mission" is characterized as a service of evangelization, already inherent in the apostolic nature of the Institute, through the witness of love and union lived in community and with the witness of the ministerial service. Such testimonies of life and of ministerial service for the assistance of the Bishop help in the formation of the local Church. The Stigmatine, by his vocation, is sent through the community (and under the obedience to his Superiors) to exercise its finality, as we have seen.

The model of abandonment for the Founder, is the Church, which is assisted by the Holy Spirit¹¹¹. The type of ministry to be exercised depends on the indications deriving from God, inspired by the Spirit into the local Church. Abandonment leads the Stigmatine, as Fr. Bertoni wished, to be sensitive to the needs of the Church, to take up its cause, in the local Churches. The situation, then, of the "Apostolic Mission" rendered him docile to the voice of the Holy Spirit, Who acts in the Church.

To serve this local Church, Fr. Bertoni's follower is in a state of "obsequio" (service), of this Church, with its Pastor, that is faithful to its mission. The clergy are to be united with the Shepherd, the laity will be the ferment, in communion with the Pastor, and all cooperate in the implanting of the Kingdom. The "obsequium", therefore, is at the service of unity, around the Bishop, for the establishment of the Kingdom.

Hence, in the exercise of the ministries, each one does not make the choice alone to be sent¹¹², but is to be available¹¹³. For Fr. Gaspar, in obedience there is fulfilled God's will¹¹⁴. The "level of promotion of the individuals is different, following the qualities of each one".¹¹⁵

i.) As the Church is led through the pontifical function for the promotion of the human community with God and with itself, and this is accomplished through the announcement of the Gospel, so Fr. Bertoni wanted his followers to assist the church in her evangelizing task. This is why he placed as the finality of his Institute that of being "Apostolic Missionaries"¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ cf. ib., # 1; cf. CS III, p. 409.

¹¹¹ cf. Letter 38, October 26, 1813. *Epist.* p. 99.

¹¹² cf. CF 186.

¹¹³ cf. CS III, p. 409.

¹¹⁴ cf. CF ## 139, 146, and 289.

¹¹⁵ "Il grado de promozione dei singoli e diversa secondo le qualita dei soggetti" (cf. CF ## 5, and 18S).

¹¹⁶ Fr. Louis Benaglia, commenting on the Decree of Approbation of the Congregation, dated September 15, 1890, bestowed by the Holy See, states that the term "missionaries" cannot be understood in the strict sense like that of the Combonians or the Xaverians. The word must be interpreted in the uniquely exceptional and temporary sense

The apostolic missionary scope of Fr. Bertoni is already inherent in his "dynamic abandonment" to God. This led him to place this vibrant gift within the mission of the Church, which is called to announce Christ. As to the timing and the manner of realizing this, it depends on the situation of the local Church, and it is to this that the Founder and his companions offered their "service" (*obsequium*).

The ministries, then, as we saw above¹¹⁷, are all means to achieve the objective of "service" to the Church¹¹⁸, with all service being characterized by the Word of God.

of the word, as it is that service that is performed in accord with the desires of the Bishop. The strength of the word "Missionary" would not be then, so much the exterior activity, but rather the spirit that animates it (as commitment, sacrifice, detachment, enthusiasm, availability, courage). The term "Apostolic" excluded every aspiration to any pontifical or juridical title whatsoever. It means rather, one assists the bishops, the successors of the Apostles. Each and every ministry is to be exercised according to the needs of the times. What is important is that it assists the Bishops. (cf. CS IV, pp. 355-6).

¹¹⁷ cf. CF 163. This speaks of "*Verbi Dei quodcumque ministerium*."

¹¹⁸ cf. CF 185.

CHAPTER V

STIGMATINE DEVOTIONS

1. THE ESPOUSALS

The spirituality of a person orientates his life in the direction of those activities that are characteristic to him. These, then, reinforce the essential outlines of this spirituality.

Since a charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and devotions are the means of sustaining the charism, it becomes important to understand some of the devotions of this man of God, Fr. Gaspar, in order to comprehend even better his charism.

Fr. Bertoni reflected in his activities a profound immersion in a dynamic abandonment to God, as we have seen earlier. He did all, in order to follow even the least sign of God's will, even when this meant he had to change his own plan of action. He would often have to set aside one or other type of the apostolate, which may no longer have seemed what God intended, even surrendering an enterprise that had been taken on in the unfolding of his charism as a Founder.

This draws attention to as the Patrons of his Institute, the fact that Fr. Bertoni chose not only but also as its Models⁸⁶, the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, precisely in their most meaningful Espousals². There could not be a better choice, given his abandonment modeled on the Church, assisted by the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Bertoni's Congregation was established for the service of the Church. And this is served as the Spouse of Christ, within the Ignatian concept. To serve the Church and to serve Christ is the same reality. Rightly, Paul speaks of Christ as the Head of the Church³.

Fr. Bertoni had an ecclesial sensitivity to the point of founding a Congregation of religious with the finality of "apostolic missionary" to serve the diocesan Church. For him, assurance was had in harmony with this Church, which is guided by God. His abandonment in the service of the Church was much nourished by the sponsal model of Christ with the Church, as this was lived visibly by Mary and Joseph in their espousals⁴.

There is certainly some wonder to note that precisely Mary and Joseph in the mystery of their espousals have been placed as patrons and models for a religious institute!⁵

⁸⁶ cf. CS I, p. 287

² cf. ib., p. 357, f.

³ cf. Ep 5:23.

⁴ A study regarding "Holy Abandonment: A Synthesis of the Stigmatine Devotions" was presented in an article written by my confrere, Fr. Joseph C. Henchey, under the title: "St. Catherine of Siena: An Historic and Prophetic Synthesis of the Consecrated Life", in: *Congresso internazionale di studi cateriniani. Siena/Roma 24/29 aprile 1980*. (Roma: Curia Generalizia O.P. 1981), pp- 632-652.

⁵ cf. CS I, p. 267.

Furthermore, in the Church dedicated to the Stigmata of St. Francis, he kept the main altar of the Espousals, and introduced its solemn celebration and cult as a challenge for each and everyone.⁶

Mary and Joseph are indeed models of abandonment in following God's will. They believed in, and adhered to this will even to the point reflected in Mary's question: "how can this be, since I know not man?"⁷ – and in the fact that Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honor and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally⁸!

Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli, in his first sermon on the feast, in 1825, stated regarding the espousals:

"In order to see the favor of God, our city has an altar dedicated to this Feast. This is so in order to respond to the wishes of the Church. And so that your hearts might be enflamed with devotion toward this most celebrated and sublime Mystery, I will show you this evening the excellence of Mary's Marriage, employed as an instrument of divine providence to bring to term the most important of its works, i.e., the Incarnation"⁹.

It is a fact that for Fr. Gaspar, the mystery of the espousals, along with giving prominence to the example of these personalities, it calls attention the carrying out of the plan of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Their sponsal love alone brings humanity to fulfillment, as it was assumed and lived as the fruit of Redemption. In this sense, Fr. Brugnoli added in his same sermon:

"It is true that Jesus is the sole Redeemer, but Mary and Joseph are His coadjutors in Redemption".¹⁰

Fr. John Mary Marani, the first successor of Fr. Gaspar, spoke of confidence in, and imitation of the Holy Spouses, as he would grasp it from Fr. Bertoni, as the best stimulus for the activity of the "Apostolic Missionaries", "prepared for all"¹¹. The Holy Spouses, in the same mystery of their espousals, offered an example of courage and confidence in playing their role in the plan of God in behalf of Redemption. In this manner, Fr. Bertoni found in their example, a powerful stimulus. Being totally given over to God, this moved him to commit himself totally into the Lord's hands to serve the Church, just as the Church herself trusts and acts in the strength of her Divine Spouse. The contemplation of the mystery of the Espousals of Joseph and Mary is a source of the apostolic dynamism for Fr. Gaspar ("to hand on to

⁶ cf. CS, I, pp. 251, f. and 265, f.; cf. Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*, Vol. IV, pp. 112, f., 199-200.

⁷ Lk 1:34.

⁸ Mt 1:18-19.

⁹ CS I, p. 254.

¹⁰ CS I, p. 255.

¹¹ The expression: "prepared for all" - *Parati ad omnia* – was one of Fr. Marani's characteristic sayings. cf. ib., p. 267.

others what one has contemplated")¹². In contemplating the depths of Mary and Joseph, he became more adroit in grasping the divine signs and in carrying out His plan.

Fr. Charles Fedelini, a man of great activity, and the "beloved son" of Fr. Gaspar, once preached:

"Mary is the most beautiful temple of God!... let us give her our hearts: and she will give us Paradise...Joseph loved Mary with the love of the Holy Spirit... a life was hidden in Jesus ...Three-fold Mirror, and Teacher: the Preceptor of three Lessons:

- a.) Docility to the divine inspirations¹³: Joseph awaking from sleep ... a readiness to carry out God's will and to depend on it: and stay there until I tell you...
- b.) Joseph as Preceptor, teaches me to imitate Christ in detachment from all things...
- c.) St. Joseph further teaches me that I must be a suitable New Testament minister as he was: he accomplished this by remaining close to Christ, and by observing Him..."¹⁴.

The devotion to Mary and Joseph is both distinctive and profound in Fr. Gaspar. Therefore, their espousals brought him to see them in a dimension that is fundamental in order to comprehend God's immeasurable love, . grasped only in this spousal aspect. This aspect was lived in the virginal matrimony of Mary and Joseph. In them, he saw the vital communion of a relationship of total commitment of oneself to the overcoming of the limits of human nature. Thus, he legislated:

"Everyone shall strive to the best of his ability to acquire that perfection of chastity which is befitting those who have embraced an angelic state of life. They are the groomsmen of Christ our Lord, and their soul, espoused to him alone, as the Apostle says, must be presented to Christ as a chaste virgin, that is, holy "in mind and body".¹⁵

There is thus comprehended the orientation of Fr. Gaspar's own life in the following of Christ, imitating the Holy Spouses in their following of the Lord, as genuine lovers, in the profoundly mystical meaning of the term. In this perspective, he preached October 4, 1808, in St. Firmus Major:

"Very many follow Christ for some temporal gain ... many follow Him like slaves, out of fear ... some follow Him as children, out of a love with some self-interest, however, in the inheritance; only a few follow Christ as friends, but base their love for Him on the mutual communication of gifts...wherever He goes, whether to Tabor, or to Calvary ... But, the Spouse, the adult in the school of Love, is not attracted by the perfume, but by the right hand of the Spouse. By being close to Him and supporting himself on His strength, the Spouse goes

¹² cf. ib.

¹³ In Chapter 6, we will treat specifically of this docility.

¹⁴ CS I, pp. 316-318.

¹⁵ "Ciascuno poi tenda con ogni sforzo a quella perfezione della Castita che si conviene a persone che hanno un ufficio angelico: che sono, cioe, i paraninfi di Cristo Nostro Signore; e la cui anima, a Lui unicamente sposata, deve essere a Cristo presentata come vergine casta, cioe santi di mente e di corpo" (CF 109).

at an equal pace with Him - and with Him does not run, but flies...¹⁶

Fr. Gaspar's deepest yearning is this: to live lovingly, as spouses who genuinely love one another. This is his love for Christ. For him, Mary and Joseph are models of such love. This is why he chose the Holy Spouses to be the patrons and the models for Stigmatines. He was convinced that if the community succeeded in loving with such total self-less abandonment, if it would act as Christ did, and to bring this to the service of the Church, this would be a service of one committed to the cause of the Church, the spouse of Christ. This is a vocation of authentic love, that leads its followers to love the Church in truth. By this, one becomes capable of anything. To give one's sweat, fatigue, to take up one's cross, to dedicate one's life... all of this is joyful dedication. This means to love like spouses do, and not for any motive of personal advantage or promotion. This is typical of "nuptial abandonment". It is a love, even though not noticed by others, in the fidelity of trying to serve in the best possible manner.

The Feast of the Espousals, that was so loved by Fr. Bertoni¹⁷ was deeply embedded in his mind, even from his boyhood years. It seemed that he saw in it the experience of such an intimate and mystical communion with Christ, as Aloysius Gonzaga. With youthful sentiments, young Bertoni manifested his profound love for Christ:

"From the cold winter, of quiet repose
Thus was drawn my heart in the green years,
By that gentle voice of a chaste Spouse.
I heard Him, yearned for Him, almost saw Him
But as at sunrise, His gentle face
Wipes dry and embellishes from nocturnal frost
The earth, and smiles on the painted turf.
Thus an urchin appeared to me, who in that
Light, from His most handsome face.
I recognized Him as a heavenly Star:
To you – He said – my Lord has sent me,
A gentle Attendant of the Spouse.
And, if you will follow me, to you
I will open the way to chaste embraces¹⁸.

¹⁶ "Moltissimi seguono Cristo per la mercede temporale...; molti seguono Cristo come servi, per timore ...; alcuni seguono Cristo come figliuoli, per amore un po' interessato dell'eredità...; pochi, seguono il Cristo come amici, i quali fondano il loro amore nella comunicazione mutua dei beni. Pochissimi seguono Cristo come amanti... dovunque Ei vada, o sul Tabore o sul Calvario...; Ma la Sposa adulta nella scuola d'Amore, non è attratta dall'odore, ma dalla destra dello Sposo, a cui forte stringendosi e appoggiandosi sulla Sua fortezza, procede di pari passo, e con Lui, non corre, ma vola..." (cf. CS I, p. 360).

¹⁷ cf. Letter S to Fr. Bragato, 3 January 29, 1848 – E ist. p. 318.

¹⁸ "Dal freddo verno di pigro riposo/ Tal fu tratto il mio cor negli anni verdi/ Da la voce gentil d'un casto Sposo./ L'udii, n'arsi, il vidi quasi "Ma come al nato sol sua faccia molle / DI notturna rugiada absterge e abbellà / la terra, e ride dalle pinte zolle./ "Così m'apparve un Garzoncel, che a quella / Luce, che dal suo bel viso n'uscia / Lo riconobbi una celeste Stella: "A te – diss'egli - il mio Signor m'invia/ Parainfo gentil, che a' casti amplessi, / Se tu mi segua, t'apriro la via." (cf. CS I, p. 359).

Fr. Gaspar really did follow this way of "nuptial abandonment"¹⁹, including the special gift of the Spirit. He realized this, recording in his spiritual diary:

"Whoever is drawn by the Spirit to a greater perfection, as is that way of abandoning oneself totally to God, should not find fault if others, of lesser virtue, make use of inferior "means, but which are also good".²⁰

In the Espousals, therefore, Fr. Gaspar discovered excellent patrons and models of living out his charism, balanced between communion with God and communion with one's brothers and sisters, mediated through the Church, Christ's mystical body and spouse. His choice could not have been better. The painting of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph, over the main altar of the Church of the Stigmata, marks the visible sign left by the Founder to the Stigmatines, as though he would say to each: the sponsal and dynamic abandonment of Mary and Joseph inspires us. Trusting in Providence, let us not be afraid of belonging totally to God so that - in the strength of His Spirit - we may serve our brothers and sisters through our assistance of the Church, as "Apostolic Missionaries." It is pertinent to remember the words of Fr. Marani, the first-born" spiritual son of Fr. Bertoni, addressed to all Stigmatines:

"I. Apostolic Missionaries under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph, Her Spouse.

II. Whoever gives his name to this Congregation should hold always before his eyes, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, in order to learn the following from Them:

- I. love for poverty;
2. application to prayer and meditation,
3. readiness in obedience even in those difficult matters and those contrary to nature,
4. charity toward God, to Whose glory each one is to look for, and nothing else,
5. charity towards our neighbor, for whose spiritual good each one is to work zealously, even at the cost of one's own life".²¹

On the other hand, Fr. Bertoni has left for his followers an abundant source of spiritual wealth and apostolic openness, indicated through Mary and Joseph in the mystery of their Espousals, as a means of preaching and stimulus for the laity.

In addition, Fr. Giacobbe praised this choice saying "that the good Veronese married couples (who are grateful to Fr. Bertoni because that much-desired great mystery in our Church, was given by him for public at the main altar of his Church) found in the example of these most chaste Spouses a norm and inspiration for every virtue, and in the efficacy of their protection, graces and blessings of which they themselves and their children stood so much in need".²²

¹⁹ Such "abandonment" is understood in relation to the union of Christ with the Church.

²⁰ "Chi è tirato dallo Spirito ad un modo di maggior perfezione, come è tutto abbandonarsi in Dio, non deve risentirsi se altri d'inferiore virtù s'appigliano a mezzi più bassi, ma pur buoni." (cf. MP October 12, 1808).

²¹ CS I, p. 364.

²² cf. *Summ- Add.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 513.

As a font, therefore, of solid teaching, one can turn to the Holy Spouses - for Stigmatines, for priests and the laity. In this connection:

“We Priests, called by God to the sublime office of saving souls, beg Joseph that he might grant us but a drachma of his Charity, and Zeal, and so forth...

And you, heads of families that he might obtain for you the grace to sustain the heavy burden of mutual love and fidelity, and so on...the care needed for the up-bringing of your children, in the Fear of God... And you, young women, not yet married, the grace to conserve intact the beautiful lily of Purity...

And you, of noble lineage, that you might be ennobled even further through the example of the most noble practice of the Christian virtues...

And you, poor people, that you might be helped to sustain joyfully your struggles and difficulties; and to love precious Poverty and holy Humility...

And you, who are suffering, that you might be able to carry patiently your Cross, which is the most sure path to heaven...

And you, sinner, my brother, what have you done..-!? the good St. Joseph will pay for you ...

Mary loves you more than all the Angels. And so, proportionately does Joseph”.²³

In this manner, the exemplarity of the Espousals in Mary and Joseph was proposed to the faithful by the Stigmatines as an inspiration to taking on fully the divine plan, as an authentic “dynamic nuptial abandonment.” This was the result, in Fr. Gaspar, of one who believed and accepted the following of the Holy Spirit- The greatest and most characteristic feast in Fr. Bertoni’s time is that of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph, that gives a distinctive mark to his profound spirituality and apostolicity. This man of God and man of the Church lived his own sponsal communion of abandonment and of service, following the Spirit Who leads the Church.

2. THE STIGMATA OF CHRIST

The Feast of the Espousals of Our Lady with St. Joseph began to be celebrated in the Church of the Stigmata on January 23, 1823, as soon as this had been reopened for the public²⁴.

Besides celebrating the titular feast of the Church, dedicated to the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi, Fr. Bertoni also introduced the special devotion to the Five Wounds of Jesus

²³ In these words, Fr. Charles Fedelini preached on the Feast of the Espousals. (cf. CS I, pp. 318-320).

²⁴ cf. ib., p. 248.

Christ, as the only evening function that was held always at the Stimate²⁵. From January 23, 1823, Fr. Bertoni had obtained, for a period of seven years, from Pope Pius VII, the plenary indulgence for this evening function on the First Friday of the month, and an indulgence of 300 days for all the other Fridays. Later, there was also granted the plenary indulgence for the Feast of the Five Wounds celebrated on the Friday after the Third Sunday of Lent²⁶.

In order to grasp the significance the devotion to the Stigmata of Christ had for Fr. Gaspar, it is first necessary, as we have seen earlier, to understand his whole life's project, of the following after Christ, within His abandonment of One Who strives to find the realization of God's will, as Jesus in obedience to His Father.

It is not possible to understand Christ without the total abandonment to the Father. The Passion, the cross, His death – are means taken on by the obedient Son, to carry out the work of Redemption. Fr. Bertoni understood perfectly that Christ goes on ahead, but with His Cross:

“Whoever wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take” up his cross and follow me²⁷.

The visible signs of self-giving, even to the last drop of blood, are in these Wounds of Christ:

“be in spirit ‘inside these clefts in the rock’²⁸, within the Wounds of our most lovable and humble savior, where I leave you now, embracing you with all my heart”.²⁹

Fr. Gaspar, with his truly painful physical ailments, shared in a singular manner in the sufferings experienced by Christ. He knew how to share in that suffering, as one in union with the Lord: “The Lord keeps me in bed and under the knife. Hay He be praised! ‘I will bless the Lord at all times’ (Ps 33:2). All long as He is served, that is all that matters. But, I do recommend myself to your prayers, so that God might keep me in the patience He has granted me: ‘Without me, you can do nothing.’” (Jn 15:5)³⁰.

Since the Cross was so valued by Christ, it is to be assumed by Fr. Gaspar's disciples, in the confidence that one will never have to carry it alone, as he stated:

²⁵ cf. CS IV, p. 217.

²⁶ cf. ib. pp. 217-8. The Feast of the Sacred Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ was introduced by Fr. Gaspar into the Church of the Stimate, following the counsel and the encouragement of Monsignor Denis dei Marchesi Dionisi, Vicar General of the Diocese. (cf. Stofella, *Il Ven. Gaspare*, p. 154).

²⁷ Lk 9:23, in Letter 144, May 1828 – Epist. p. 242).

²⁸ Ct. 2:14.

²⁹ “siate con lo spirito ‘in caverna maceriae’, nelle Piaghe del nostro Amabilissimo e Umilissimo Salvatore, dove io vi lascio abbracciandovi con tutto il cuore” - (cf. Letter 2 to Fr. Bragato, November 18, 1835 - Epist. p. 312).

³⁰ “Il Signore mi trattiene in letto e sotto i ferri e i coltelli (del chirurgo). Sia benedetto! ‘Benedicam DOMinum in omni tempore (Sal 33:2, Vulgate). Tanto che sia Egli servito, e cio mi basta. Mi raccomando pero alle sue orazioni, perche Dio mi continui la pazienza che mi dona: ‘Sine me nihil potestis facere’ (Cv 15,5)” - (cf. Letter 114, May 11, 1827 – Epist. p. 209).

“The Lord Just shows us the Cross so that we might have the merit of good will in accepting it, out of love for Him; but then, in the end, out of love for us, He carries it”.³¹

To follow after Christ demands continuing “self-emptying” from one’s own tendency toward comfort, in order to take on the plan of Jesus Christ in service with availability for the Will of God. The interiorization of Christ’s suffering leads Fr. Bertoni’s followers to find inspiration and strength in the One Who is discovered at “the depths of one’s own nothingness”.³²

To follow after Christ, one cannot be conformed to this world, or to be of the world³³. Renunciation is indispensable, as mortification and vigilance are unavoidable³⁴.

Preaching to the priests, Fr. Bertoni stated: “I have chosen you out of the world.’ They have to be separated, detached, crucified to the world; ‘the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.’ If the world, since I am a priest (or religious), does not agree with my maxims, but I agree easily with its principles, then I am a priest in name only. ‘If I am pleasing to men, then I am not Christ’s servant.’ To be this effectively and truly, it is necessary that I be in the world as in a state of suffering - that the world be my cross, as I will most assuredly be a cross for the world, because of the opposition of sentiments and principles that will be found between me and it, once I choose to conduct myself as a true priest (or religious)”.³⁵

The contemplation of the reality of the suffering and death in the Cross of Christ shows the resonance of the witness of the martyr. This ought to be especially in anyone who seeks to follow Christ in a way of particular consecration, such as Fr. Gaspar. This led him to “the desire and the humble petition of martyrdom”.³⁶ His life’s project led him to the witness of following after the Master. Hence, the religious life, as conceived by Fr. Bertoni, is eminently a testimony of offering, even martyrdom. It really does not matter if one loses everything, even life itself³⁷. Fr. Bertoni chose to be a man of the Word, imitating the Incarnate Word of God. However, this is the Word that does what it says, as Christ, by giving up His life³⁸. This is why the Founder recorded:

“We have to draw in ourselves Christ’s portrait”.³⁹

³¹ “Il Signore ne mostra a noi solamente la Croce perché abbiamo il merito della buona volontà di accettarla per amor suo, e poi in fine, egli per amor nostro la porta.” - (cf. MP, December 3, 1808).

³² “In fondo al proprio niente si trova Dio” (ib, August 24, 1808).

³³ ib.

³⁴ cf. Fiorio, Lo Spirito, pp. 49-58; Breve Cronaca I, pp. 56, 62 and 66.

³⁵ “Ego elegi vos de mundo.’ Devono essere separati, staccati, crocifissi al mondo: ‘mihi mundus crucifixus est et ego mundo.’ Se il mondo, ancorché io sia prete (o religioso), non lascia di accordarsi colle sue, non sono prete (o religioso) che di nome. ‘Si hominibus placerem, Christi servus non essem.’ Per esserlo in effetto e in verità bisogna che io sia nel mondo come in istato di patimento, che il mondo sia la mia croce, come io sarò infallibilmente la croce del mondo, per la contrarietà di sentimenti e di principii che si troverà tra esso e me, volendo io comportarmi da vero sacerdote (o religioso).” - cf. Fiorio, Lo Spirito, p. 54; cf. MP, July 24, 1808.

³⁶ MP, September 28, 1808.

³⁷ cf. MP, October 26, 1808.

³⁸ cf. ib., February 22, 1809.

³⁹ “Dobbiam fare un ritratto in noi stessi di Gesù Cristo.” - (ib. February 27, 1809).

He did not limit himself, as the finality of his struggle, with the cross of Christ, even though this is indispensable. The constant celebration at the Stigmatine of the devotion to the Wounds of Christ was the continuous reminder that the human being, the Christian, and even more the Stigmatine, has to follow all the stages of Jesus' life. Mortification, renunciation, the surpassing of egoism, suffering, physical death – are all necessary to attain with Christ to the scope of the "Apostolic Mission", inherent in the Stigmatine vocation. There is no victory without the cross; there is no salvation without the total giving of one's life.

Furthermore, Fr. Bertoni was most sure of the stage of transition and confident (and why not even joyful?)⁴⁰ in his "school of God"⁴¹ or the cross and penance:

"On earth, penance is brief, light and useful. In hell, it is endless, enormous, useless"⁴².

The cross is the reality for everyone- However, when shared with Christ, it has meaning: "Without the Cross one cannot get through this life- I present to you three Crosses, and you choose. The first is that of Christ: the second is that of St. Dismas, the good thief; the third is that of the unfortunate thief".⁴³

The cross, proper to the follower of Fr. Bertoni, ought to be a genuine banner, configured in the core of one's life. The following of Christ, Who is the "Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the end", is accomplished by accompanying Him, by making oneself crucified with Him. This is why Fr. Bertoni presented this ideal with Paul's words:

"Do not seek to know anything else among you, other than Jesus"
Christ, and Him crucified".⁴⁴

However, the practice of a devotion, seen solely in the materiality of the act, could diminish the comprehension of the entire spiritual edifice centered in the global Christological mystery. While calling attention to one or other aspect of the demonstration of Christ's love, the Spouse of the Church, Fr. Gaspar does not withdraw attention from the endless, enormous, useless"⁴².

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⁴⁰ cf. Dalle Vedove, Un modello, p. 243.

⁴¹ cf. ib., pp. 240-2.

⁴² Qui la penitenza e breve, leggera, utile. Nell'inferno lunghissima, enorme, inutile" (MP, March 15, 1809).

⁴³ "Senza Croce nessuno puo passare per questa vita. Io vi presenta tre Croci, e voi scegliete. La prima e di Cristo: la seconda e di S. Disma, il buon ladrone; la terza del tristo ladrone." (cf. ib, March 16, 1809).

⁴⁴ CF 51.

⁴² Qui la penitenza e breve, leggera, utile. Nell'inferno lunghissima, enorme, inutile" (MP, March 15, 1809).

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"You have grasped now, my listeners, the correct idea of a man risen with Christ. Can he any longer enjoy the coarse realities of this world? Can he look for anything else in this world, other than the supernatural and heavenly goods, among which he is to live for all eternity? "However, precisely this life of glory, in whose hope we now glory, is much less known or considered by the world, since one does not reflect also on the glorious life to which Christ is risen, and in which He now lives in God, with His Father. This is why St. Paul said (cf. Col. 3:3,f., Vulgate) that our life is hidden with that of Christ in God".⁴⁶

Regarding the resurrection, Fr. Bertoni's theology is typically based on St. Paul. It is not only rarely that he concentrated on this in his preaching⁴⁷.

What was most important for Fr. Bertoni was to remain with Christ, and for Christ to be within him. And when one is risen up with Christ, he then sets his objectives of life on high.⁴⁸ In this manner, one is crucified to the world⁴⁹, and like Christ His resurrection⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ CF 51.

⁴⁵ Although Fr. Bertoni focused often on the passion and death of Christ, which was the style in his era, he did not neglect to ponder the mystery of salvation in its totality. He developed the theology of Baptism in Paul, speaking in a simple and clear manner about sin and the resurrection through grace. (cf. Sermon 38, "The Spiritual Life", delivered on the Sunday "in Albis", April 5, 1807, St. Paul's, Campo Marzio, Verona – MssB 1301). The stage of the cross and death is the indispensable way to the mystery of Redemption, as he personally lived it, and pointed it out to his followers, in imitation of Christ.

⁴⁶ "Vedete voi ora, uditori, la giusta idea d'un uomo risorto con Cristo. Può egli mai gustar le basse cose di terra? Può cercar egli altro in questa vita, se non le sopprannaturali e celesti, fra cui de' vivere in eterno? "Ma appunto questa vita di gloria nella cui speranza ora noi si gloriamo, molto meno è conosciuta o vista dal mondo, siccome ei non vede pur la vita gloriosa a cui Cristo è risorto, e dalla quale vivi in Oio, cioè presso al suo Padre. Ecco perchè diceva San Paolo, Col. 3:3, sq., che la vostra vita è nascosta insieme con Cristo in Dio." - cf. Sermon 38, The Spiritual Life, Sunday "in Albis", April 5, 1807, St. Paul's, C.M. - MssB 1312-3).

⁴⁷ cf. Sermon 22, "Devotion", Tuesday after Easter, April 20, 1801 - MssB 632; Sermon 18, "Perseverance", April 11, 1803 MssB774; Sermon 38, "The Spiritual Life", cf. above, - MssB 1297, 1300, 1304-5, 1308, 1312, 1315, 1317; Retreat to New Priests, September 1810, 9th Day: "Resurrection and Ascension" - MssB 2632-7; 2642).

⁴⁸ Sermon 5, May 14, 1801, "The Ascension". - MssB 499; cf. above, "The Spiritual Life", Sermon 38 - MssB 1315).

⁴⁹ cf. "The Spiritual Life", Sermon 38 – MssB 1319; Retreat to New Confessors, September 1810, 9th day:

Fr. Gaspar called to mind the scars of the Wounds in his sermon on the resurrection and ascension:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ arose on the third day, to a glorious life, and after having remained on earth for forty days, appearing frequently to His own, He finally ascended into heaven. “Imagine that you see Him as He appeared to some of His disciples, so alive, illuminous and with the scars of the Wounds, inviting also you to heaven ... Christ has entered there with the scars of His wounds: this is the price, He says, with which I paid for this kingdom...”⁵¹

Fr. Gaspar recognized that the life of a priest is *a* genuine cross, but if it is lived out of love for God in view of the Paradise mentioned earlier, it acquires its full significance. The Cross has no meaning other than with Christ⁵².

The pair, “suffering-joy”, or “death-resurrection” for Fr. Bertoni is no dichotomy, as it was not for Christ Himself. It is the Founder’s Christocentrism that makes Him contemplate and live for long years the mystery of suffering characterized in his devotion to the Wounds of the Lord and profusely preached by him, but motivated in the victory of the Crucified. The global mystery of the redemption is *a* characteristic of his. If this were not so, suffering and the cross would have had no meaning for him.

Fr. Joseph Stofella, expert biographer of Fr. Bertoni, has left some comments regarding the Founder’s emphasis on the Stigmata, considering the aspects of death and resurrection:

“In these matters, this is the order set down by the (ven.) Founder in Meditation 6 on 1 Kings: where he speaks the “provident care of the Church... regarding prayer” with which she educates her students. ‘Like Anna with Samuel, the Church nourishes (her elect), leading them to meditate on the Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are the mysteries of the hidden life, and of the public life of the Lord. She weans them having them meditate on the passion’; she leads them to the temple having them meditate on the mysteries of the resurrection and the Divinity...’ The Founder continues: ‘We have to correspond... by making progress in prayer going from the life of the passion to the resurrection of Christ.’ And he adds: ‘All with method, and not by skipping any steps.’ We can only make the attempt to apply this in our own case”.⁵³

In fact, Fr. Gaspar reminded Fr. Louis Bragato, in a reference to the Stigmata of Christ, of the joy in seeing the Savior with the sins of the Risen One:

“Finally, be joyful; and when you need a bit of joy, fly in thought to Fr. Michele’s little

“Resurrection and Ascension” – MssB 2644.

⁵⁰ Sermon 38, “The Spiritual Life” – MssB 1308.

⁵¹ “Il Signore nostro Gesu risuscito il terzo di ad una vita gloriosa, e dopo essere domorato sulla terra quaranta giorni apparendo frequentemente a’ suoi, in fine salse al cielo. “Immaginare di vederlo quale apparve ad alcuno de’ discepoli, cosi vivo, luminoso e colle cicatrici delle Piaghe, invitando voi pure al cielo... Cristo vi entro colle cicatrici delle piaghe: ecco il prezzo, egli dice, a cui ho comprato io questo regno...” (cf. Retreat to the New Confessors, September 1810, 9th Day: “The Resurrection and Ascension” - (MssB 2632, 2647).

⁵² cf. *ib.*, 2647-8.

⁵³ cf. CS IV, p. 223.

room: and if you do not have the wings ready to take you over the clouds, find support in the bosom of our God, in the glorious Wounds of your Savior. 'Seek the things that are above, where Christ is.' – Recline there as one of His people in the beauty of that peace: because all is transitory, and ends soon, but that eternal peace does not ever come to an end"⁵⁴.

In the devotion to the Five Wounds of Christ. Fr.. Bertoni had a glimpse of the whole meaning of the consecration of his life and that of his companions, that is still valid today⁵⁵. It is not a matter of contemplating suffering upon suffering, nor glory after glory - but simply of following the total Christ. This contemplation passes through His whole human experience and redeems humanity in the dedication of His life and in that victory over all that led humanity to remain in death, For Fr. Bertoni, Christ is the Son of God. He is the hope and the One Who grants life, the resurrection. This is the very reason of the being of his life.

3. A SYNTHESIS OF CONSECRATION

The following of Jesus Christ brought Fr. Bertoni look for Him even to the very last moment, in order to see where it was that the Master was leading. To look above means to see the relativity of this present moment and to establish one's ultimate object in life with Christ united to the Father and to the Holy Spirit in the heavenly beatitude. He recognized this in the Second prelude of his conference on the resurrection and Ascension:

"just imagine that you see Him as He appeared to some of His disciples, so alive and luminous, and with the scars of His Wounds, inviting you to heaven, too, for which His plan is to return: 'I go to prepare a place for you'" (Jn 14:2)⁵⁶.

However, this glimpse into the future, made him look into the wounds of Christ, and yet to live in the present time within the structure of the Church, the Spouse of Christ, illumined by the Spirit, for the purpose of prolonging the salvation of Christ in history. This is never accomplished without suffering. Fr. Bertoni, like Peter, James and John, who saw the Lord's Transfiguration on Tabor, but at the same time saw Christ on His way to the Cross, taken on for the sake of His Spouse:

"The Church, as the Spouse of Christ, is a living image of the divinity, representing its principal characteristics: Unity: 'Holy Father, keep those You have given to Me, that they may be one as We are one ...so that all might be as You, Father, are in He, they might be one in us, so that the world might believe that you sent Me' (3n 17:11). Unity is for the union and the binding together the parts, establishes the immutable beauty and the invincible

⁵⁴ "Nel resto siatemi allegro; e quando vi occorra un po' d'allegria, volate col pensiero al camerino di D. Michael: se non avete sempre l'ale pronte da poggiar sopra le nuvole nel seno del vostro Dio, e nelle Piaghe gloriose del vostro Salvatore. – 'Quae sursum sunt quaerite, ubi Christus est.' - Sedete ivi come uno del popol suo nella bellezza di quella pace: che finisce tutto, e finisce presto, ma quella pace eterna non finisce mai." – (cf. Letter 5 to Fr. Bragato, January 29, 1840 – Epist. pp. 318-9).

⁵⁵ Fr. Bertoni, citing Cornelius a Lipid states that if anyone wants to see him, look for him in the Wound in Christ's side. – cf. "Holy Easter – The Spiritual Life", Sermon 38, April 5, 1807 in: PVC p. 295).

⁵⁶ "Immaginare di vederlo quale apparve ad alcuni discepoli così vivo e luminoso, e con le cicatrici delle Piaghe, invitando voi pure al Cielo, a cui disegno di far ritorno: 'vado parare vobis locum' (Gv. 14,2)." – CS I, p. 230.

power of the Church, 'beautiful as the moon, resplendent as the sun, terrible as an army with banners in battle array' (Ct 6:9)⁵⁷.

To remain with Christ's Spouse at the present moment is a challenge, considering her deficiencies. However, with the presence of the Spouse, even if one is called to suffer with the Church⁵⁸, one also sees her rise up and manifest her vocation and unity. Thus, Fr. Gaspar's concern, in the founding of his Congregation, in the light of the Spirit Who animates the Church, was all for the assistance of this Church in the realization of her vocation:

... (to assist) our Shepherds, that they might carry through on the renewal; for as you see, all was lost, and if there is no reform of the Church, there is no hope of a better state' (St. Thomas of Villanova)"⁵⁹

Fr. Bertoni intended, in living out the Word and in its transmission with his companions as "Apostolic Missionaries", to assist the Church and to be always attentive to the voice of the Spouse⁶⁰.

He fully was cognizant of the fact that the Church, governed by the Providence of the Spouse, is capable of overcoming her difficulties⁶¹, her sufferings and tribulations⁶². He offered himself, with good dispositions, to accept the cross in imitation of the Spouse of Christ:

Lord, we have known your Church's tribulations, in which there shines forth nonetheless Your admirable Providence, her Spouse, and her prudent, virtuous conduct, Your Spouse. We adore Your most wise government and we pray to be able to imitate your Spouse, in bringing our lives into harmony with hers and to conduct ourselves well in this: 'Whoever wishes to come after Me, let him take up his cross' (Mt 16:24). See that we do indeed carry our cross, and that we do not avoid it, and that we come to carry it so willingly that we even come to the point of glorying in nothing else but the cross: 'As for me, the only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Ga 6:14)'⁶³

⁵⁷ "La Chiesa, Sposa di Gesù Cristo, è una viva immagine della divinità rappresentandone i tratti principali: L'unità: 'Pater Sancte, serva eos quos dedisti mihi, ut sint unum sicut et nos ... ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu, Pater, in me, ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint, ut credat mundus quia tu me misisti (Gv 17:11,21).' L'unità è per l'unione e legame delle parti, f'a la bellezza immutabile e la forza invincibile della Chiesa, 'pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata.' (Ct. 6, 9)." (cf. Priests' Retreat in Mantua, October 0-13, 17-26, 1816, "Union" - MssB 3659).

⁵⁸ (58) - cf. Meditation 4, 1 Kings 1:5 (1 S) - (MssB 4909) December 8, 1810.

⁵⁹ "...et Pastoribus nostris, ut intendat Ecclesiae reformationi; nam ut videtis totum periit, et si non fuerit Ecclesiae aliqua reformatio, non est spes melioris status' (S. Thomas a Villanova, pag. 65, D)." - cf. MP, May 24, 1810).

⁶⁰ cf. Meditation 4, 1 Kings 1:5 (1 S), December 8, 1810 - MssB 4914 - cf. also Joseph C. Henchey, Saggi sullo Spirito. Vol. 3 (Roma: Curia Generalizia degli Stigmatini, 1984), p. 46.

⁶¹ cf. Meditation 4, ib., (MssB 4910; 4930) - cf. also Meditation 5, 1 Kings 1:12 (1 S), December 9, 1810 - (MssB 4934).

⁶² Ib.

⁶³ "Signore, abbiamo conosciute le tribolazioni della vostra Chiesa, in cui è ~i~ ugualmente l'ammirabile Provvidenza di voi, suo Sposo, e la prudente virtuosa condotta della vostra Sposa. Noi adoriamo il vostro sapientissimi governo e vi preghiamo a farne imitare la vostra Sposa, nel conformarci in tutto e bene condurci in questo: 'Qui vult venire post me, tollat crucem suam' (Mt 16,24). Fate che noi portiamo, non trasciniamo la croce,

And so, for Fr. Bertoni, to live in the present moment with the Church, means to struggle with her for the transformation of history, in the Church and with her. The fatigue, the Cross all make up a part of that intimacy with the Spouse of Christ, Who carries His Cross. Even more, this means to take on the Spouse's mission with enthusiasm and joy. The Cross, with Christ, has the strength of the Spouse Who has conquered. For the Founder, following the Church, did not allow himself to be absorbed by sadness⁶⁴.

On the Church's spousal abandonment Fr. Bertoni modeled his own, as we saw earlier, assisted by the Holy Spirit⁶⁵. With it, he lived in the hope of the future⁶⁶, that sees in the Cross and in the Stigmata of the Lord the eternal mystical nuptials, as the marriage of spouses who love each other without limit.⁶⁷

In imitation of the dynamic spousal abandonment of Christ's Spouse, the Church, in relation to Christ Himself, Fr. Gaspar situated himself in the profound intimacy of the master's love, bringing himself more in conformity with Him in the dynamic of His way. Union with Him was to be total and unique, not counting the fatigue, the cross, death. After living life to the full, follows communion in eternity. Here, too, the Cross is also necessary, as Christ Himself assumed it. Hence, the fecundity of the total giving over of one's life to the "Apostolic Mission", with the Church is opened up and only finds meaning in the resurrection. Christ is seen and followed in the mission considered globally. He is One alone and is the God of the living. This is the way that Fr. Bertoni understood Him: "By Isaac is meant the Only-begotten Son of God, Who is the spouse of the faithful. In the servant sent to lead back the spouse for her husband, we find the figure of the preachers, who are sent to propose to humanity the Word of God, and they become the procurators of these happy nuptials. From certain signs which follow the pre-established divine order, the preachers reach this, or that person, chosen by God, and pre-figured in Rebecca. Into this person, they communicate the blessed desires of being converted to Christ and to be united with Him by means of grace; and they give rich pledges of mercy and love in His name, so that such persons might consent fully, following what they have heard, to come to Christ. Then, the preachers bring the spouse with them joyfully to their Lord".⁶⁸

e la portiamo si volentieri che arriviamo a gloriarsi in quella, e la portiamo con tanto amore, che giungiamo a non gloriarsi se non in quella: 'mihi autem absit gloriari nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi' (Ga 6:14)." – cf. Meditation 5, 1 Kings 1:12 (1 S), December 9, 1810 – (Hss 4963).

⁶⁴ cf. Meditation 5, 1 Kings 1:5 (1 S), December 8, 1810 – (MssB 1910)

⁶⁵ cf. Letter 38, October 26, 1813.

⁶⁶ ib.

⁶⁷ cf. Sermon 8, Feast of the Translation of the House of Loreto, December 13, 1801 - PVC p. 306.

⁶⁸ "Per Isaaco è significato l'Unigenito Figlio di Dio che è lo sposo delle anime fedeli. Nel servo mandato a ricondurre la sposa figurano i predicatori, i quali mandati a proporre alle umane genti la Parola di Dio diventano procuratori di queste nozze felici. Da certi segni che seguono l'eterna preordinazione, i predicatori ravvisano or questa or quell'anima da Dio eletta e raffigurata in Rebecca. A quest'anima insinuano dolci desideri di convertirsi a Cristo e a congiungersi a lui per mezzo della grazia; e danno ricche caparre di misericordia e di amore in suo nome, finché ella consenta pienamente, seguendo la predicazione, di venire a Cristo. Allora conducono seco la sposa con gaudio al loro Signore". (cf. Sermon 25, Advent of Our Lord", December 9, 1804 – in *PVC*, p. 232).

SECOND PART

EVIDENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN Fr. BERTONI'S CHARISM

The First Part of this thesis treated of the foundation of Fr. Bertoni's charism, that appears historically as a gift of the Holy Spirit as manifested throughout the context of his lived situation. Its general shape and specific nuances reflect the influence of other persons and circumstances, favored by the Spirit Himself. This all came to be not by any mere chance, but from the Lord Who creates and renews all things.

It is not customary for grace to by-pass nature, and this too is the fruit of God's love. One's own nature is a manifestation of grace. In Fr. Bertoni, it is clear – with that evidence that comes from a faith-vision - that he worked and cooperated with the action of the Holy Spirit “For the tree can be told by its fruit”¹. At the same time in a clear way, his activities show Who it is that inspired him: it is the Spirit Who gives life².

The Second Vatican Council, basing itself on . the Scriptures, recognizes clearly the action of the Holy Spirit in the charism of Founders, as we have already noted³. The Council further states:

“The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a Temple (cf. 1 Co 3:16; 6:19). In them He prays and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons (cf. Ga 4:6; Rm 8:15-16 and 26). The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth (cf. 3n 16:13) and gives her a unity of fellowship and service. He furnishes and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorns her with the fruits of His grace (cf. Ep 4:11-12; 1 Co 12:4; Ga 5:22). By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse⁴. The Spirit and the Bride both say to the Lord Jesus: ‘Come!’ (cf. APoc. 22:17)⁵.

Hence, Gaspar Bertoni living intensely the presence and the action of the Holy Spirit in intimate communion with the Church⁶, manifested in his own being and actions that he was totally motivated by “the One Who inspired and began this work”⁷.

Forming a religious family with his companions, he sought to experience and to witness that evangelical love in a particular manner⁸. The words of Pope Paul VI might be applied here:

¹ cf. Mt 7:20 and 12:33

² cf. Rm 8:10

³ cf. P.C. 1

⁴ The Council text in its turn refers to St. Irenaeus in this regard, cf. LG 4, note 9.

⁵ cf. LG 4.

⁶ We saw earlier how he lived an ecclesial communion, specifically with the local church. His “thinking with the Church” characterizes his “abandonment” modeled on the Church herself, the Spouse of Christ.

⁷ CF 185

⁸ cf. P.C. 1

“In the ‘pursuit of perfect charity’ by which your life is ruled, how should you act otherwise than to be completely responsive to the Holy Spirit who, working in the Church, is calling you to the liberty of the children of God? (cf. Ga 5:13; 2 Co 3:17)”.⁹

We are going to follow how, in the exercise of the gifts he received, principally in the living of the consecrated life in the Community that he founded under the inspiration of the Spirit, the motivating dynamism of this same Spirit, Who continually animated and sustained him.

The Paraclete’s activity is beyond measure. However, the same may not be said for the results of His action in *a* person, as being clearly perceived as His activity. About Christ Himself He says:

“...no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit”.¹⁰

It can be stated that in Fr. Bertoni the Holy Spirit may be perceived inspiring his life, and in *a* special manner, his charism as the Founder of the Apostolic Missionaries for the assistance of Bishops”.¹¹

The Holy Spirit is prodigious in the bestowal of His gifts as from an inexhaustible source. In the life of Fr. Bertoni the Holy Spirit may be noted in his docility to grace, from the love which is the base of his gifts, from the prophetic power of his witness of fraternal communion, in his tireless search for perfection, humility, abandonment, wisdom, from his counsel and many other spiritual riches - many of which we will have the opportunity to present and follow.

⁹ E.T. 6

¹⁰ 1 Co 12:3

¹¹ The religious life as such is *a* gift of the Lord to the Church (cf. LG 43 and ET II). As Fr. Bertoni received and developed this gift in founding his Congregation, there can be clearly noted in this the presence of the Spirit.

CHAPTER VI

PERCEPTION OF THE SIGNS OF GOD

1. THE FORCE OF SECOND NATURE

In his following of the Lord, Gaspar Bertoni chose the will of God's the Mover of his entire being¹. For this reason it did not seem to matter that a supreme effort had to be exercised so that the power of his natural impulses would be channeled in this sublimating orientation. This dominion had to be exercised even over the unconscious level so that this would help him in the employment of his balanced personality, in the exercise of the unreserved love of God.

Rather than the path of self-sufficiency, he chose the way of humility². He recognized that without the power of grace, it would be impossible for him to live out his vocation, which included a most intense and broad program: his was a project of uncommon holiness, due to the abundance of the gifts he received, choosing to cooperate, on his part, to the greatest possible extent³.

Throughout his long journey, he remained conscious of the continual need for vigilance not to allow the strength of "passion" to take over; this was the strong impulse toward that temptation of acting out of his own self-sufficiency. Therefore he once wrote:

"The Devil tries in every way to hinder the Lord's work: to do this, he makes use of all our passions, principally the predominant one"⁴.

With Father Surin, Fr. Bertoni states the need of acting in conformity with the power of grace, and not even for an instant from the instinct of nature:

"To act solely out of a natural instinct, even for a moment, would hinder the place of God in human actions"⁵.

Fr. Bertoni tooted his entire existence and total moral attitude in God, Who is love. The impulses of his human nature were meaningful to him only when they were coordinated and finalized by reason of his truly human existence, which is orientated toward the divine. His "first nature" was channeled in this way only when it was inspired by "second nature", which is the presence of God, permeating everything by His love. In this, the law of grace, or

¹ cf. MP July 16, 1809

² *ibid.* July 24, 1809

³ *ibid.* February 14, 1809

⁴ "Il Demonio tenta a tutto potere a stornar l'opera del Signore: e si serve delle nostre passioni tutte, e massime della predominante" (MP 3 July 23, 1809).

⁵ "Operare puramente per istinto di natura anche per un istante: egli è un'impedire che Dio non operi per dar luogo di operare alla creatura" (MP 3 July 15, 1809). Fr. Jean Joseph Surin was a Jesuit who lived from 1600 to 1665.

of love, predominates. The moral attitude, “par excellence” is based on the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, Who renews all and bestows a new vision on the new man:

“...a person visited by the Holy Spirit and renewed in both knowledge and view regarding what of itself is indifferent and merely a means to an end, which is the glory of God and salvation - comes to appreciate only Christ, and what He esteems. In comparison to the glory and to what is useful, and the sweetness of present consolation, such a person not only abhors what the world loves, and rejects all this as gone bad, rancid and mouldy but even more, cannot even support hearing about these things. So many are deceived by their visions of grandeur, placing in them their happiness, and their glory”⁶.

Beyond any dichotomy between nature and grace, Fr. Bertoni saw them both under the prism of integration, but always in that dependence of the creature on God: all is gift, and just as a lamp, in order to shed its light, has to be connected to the energy. Similarly, our nature receives its vitality through union with God, Who brings about this connection with His grace. What should command is the power of grace (second nature) so that in a comparison, the organism moves ahead having life, which is what renders it human. In this connection, Fr. Bertoni once preached:

“Is there any wonder that even without your being conscious of it, He is at work within you with so much care: even when you choose to act with your internal or external faculties, it is always necessary that He, as the Author of nature, should assist you with His help? Without Him, neither your intellect would ever be able to think of the least reality, nor would your will be able to desire it, nor your eye, or ear, nor could any of your senses represent it. In similar manner, you would never have been able to move your foot, arm, direct your hand, unless He together with you, had not moved and sustained and guided you.

“Such is that most certain, necessary dependence, which is known also to the philosophers, that secondary causes have on the First Reason of their being, in bringing about even their own natural operations. Thus, St. Paul has said very well: ‘since it is in Him that we live, and move, and exist’ (Ac 17:28)”⁷.

⁶ “...un’anima visitata dallo Spirito Santo e rinnovata nelle cognizioni e nel modo di guardare le cose, cioè indifferentemente in se stesse, e non più che come mezzi al fine, ch’è la gloria di Dio e la salute dell’anima, e non apprezzando più che Cristo, e quello che Cristo apprezza, e al confronto anche della gloria ed utile, e dolcezza della presente consolazione, non solamente aborre le cose che il mondo ama, e da se via le gitta come rancide cose, e vecchie e muffate, ma non può più soffrirne nemmeno di sentirne a parlare, singolarmente da tanti ingannati, che in questo mettono la loro felicità, la loro eccellenza e la loro gloria.” (Meditations on the Book of Genesis. December 1810. Hss 5103).

⁷ “Qual meraviglia se, neppur voi pensandovi, Egli operasse intorno a voi con tanta sollecitudine: quando, volendo voi operare con le vostre potenze interne ed esterne, fu sempre necessario che Egli come Autore della natura, vi aiutasse con il suo concorso? senza del quale né il vostro intelletto avrebbe mai potuto condurvi all’atto di pensare alla menoma cosa, né la volontà a desiderarla, né l’occhio o l’udito e tutti gli altri sensi a rappresentarla: e così non avreste neppure potuto mai muovere il piede, alzare il braccio, condurre la mano, se Egli con voi non gli avesse mossi e sostenuti e guidati. “Tale è quella certissima, necessaria dipendenza, nota ancora ai filosofi, che hanno le cause seconde della Prima Cagione del loro essere nel produrre anche le proprie e naturali loro operazioni. Perciò ben disse s. Paolo: in ipso vivimus, movimur et sumus. (Atti 17:28)”. (“On the Divine Blessings”, in: PVC p. 132. Sermon on the Last Day of the Year 1803).

Fr. Bertoni would not rest until he had clearly before him God's plan. Hence, he became practiced in sharpening his spiritual sensibility so that he would always be animated by the strength of the Lord Himself, with His "second nature" offered as a gift. He wrote this to Sister Naudet:

"Therefore, for this purpose God has given us a participation in His divine nature so that we might neither live nor act any more just according to our own: thus, we should no longer just take the measure of our first nature - but, rather, that of the second, communicated to us by the grace of adoption as the children of God. Sister, you can see for yourself that timid thoughts and affections of your first nature, do not impede the powerful and stupendous effects of second nature"⁸.

He recognized gifts already possessed as natural in others and esteemed these in them as qualities. This recognition was such that he legislated that the promotion of his companions in the Congregation would be in conformity with their qualities⁹. The over-all orientation for everything was always visualized under the light of the Lord's call¹⁰ for the good of His Service and that of His Church¹¹. For the realization of this service there was dependence on the grace of the Holy Spirit¹².

To give full sway to the power of this grace meant to place oneself before the mercy of God, as Fr. Gaspar did in his own life. In this perspective, sin was kept at a distance, because in it, the power of first nature wins out, as it tends to be all wrapped up in itself: "'Flee from sin as from a snake' (Si 21:2). If you really had resisting him, then right now' temptations would be ended".¹³

The main objective to be achieved, however, moved by the power of grace, is clear: to trace in oneself the outline of Jesus¹⁴.

One rule for growth along the way of the power of grace Fr. Bertoni proposed to the Acolytes, encouraging them to trust in God: "You are to act with a genuine spirit, that is, with a certain reflex, but one that is ready, intimate, vibrant (in such a way) that all you have to do by reason of your state in life is indeed what God is asking of you. So, by accomplishing your duty, you are really obeying God and carrying out His will". Such a spirit is necessary because it is the very soul of all activity ... at each hour, repeat that saying of the Saints: Lord, give me your good spirit. You are school, put your heart . in God; whether you are serving in one of

⁸ "Perocche a questo fine ha Iddio partecipato la divina sua natura, affinche noi non vivessimo ne operassimo piu secondo la nostra: onde non dobbiamo pure misurare le forze della prima natura, ma della seconda, a noi comunicata per la grazia di adozione di figliuoli di Dio. Vostra Signoria vede come Dio esige da lei che coi timidi pensieri e affetti della prima sua natura non impedisca i forti e stupendi effetti della seconda" (cf. Lettera 21, fine di febbraio 1813, in: Epist. p. 66).

⁹ CF 7

¹⁰ ib. 27

¹¹ ib. 3

¹² ib. 185

¹³ "Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccatum.' Se tu avessi avuto cuore di resistere a quest'ora finite sarebbero le tentazioni" (NP July 29, 1809).

¹⁴ ib. February 26, 1809.

now in Church, let your heart be with God; when you are at chant, at table, on a walk, in prayer, in study, at rest, let your heart be with God”¹⁵.

To allow everything to be permeated by grace is fundamental and this was ever more so for Fr. Bertoni. The reason behind this is that in our human nature as such and as its objective, we do not find the full reason of our existence¹⁶. This seems to be why he expressed his conviction in these terms:

“It is necessary to become unaccustomed to doing one’s own will and to do everything as moved by God’s will for the sake of pleasing and honoring Him”.¹⁷

Since in him God is always the prime Hover, the action of the Holy Spirit finds an open path for His influence, and His inspirations develop in the living out of his charism, in the following of Christ and in the service of his neighbor through his priestly and religious vocation, in close collaboration with the Church. In him one may find a very expressive model of one who allows himself to be formed by the Spirit, and in this sense, these words from his spiritual diary might be understood:

“Very few are they who really understand what God would do with them were He not impeded by them in His plan”.¹⁸

Fr. Bertoni was not bent on that personal comfort toward which human nature tends. He is convinced - and on this he writes to Sister Naudet of how important it is to allow oneself to be possessed by God with all of one’s being:

“Let us freely allow God to enter and to take over this soul whom He loves so much and tries to unite to Himself We know the time of His visitation. Let us put aside all creatures and our senses so that we do not disturb this soul when it is at re- pose in the bridal chamber of its Lord. Nothing more is required”.¹⁹

Furthermore, Fr. Bertoni recognized the absolute dependence of his entire being on God. He never chose to be, nor to act unless .in union with Him, and for Him, seeing himself in

¹⁵ “Dovete operare con vero spirito, cioe con un certo riflesso, ma pronto, ma intimo, ma vivo, che le cose che dovete fare per ragion del vostro stato, son quelle che Iddio vuole da voi, e che pero facendole, venghiate ad obbedire certamente a Dio, e a fare la sua santa volonta. “Questo spirito e necessario perch’e l’anima di ciascuna azione ... dite ad ogni ora con quel santo: ‘Da, Domine, spiritum bonum.’ Siete in iscuola, e il cuore in Dio; in chiesa a servire, e il cuore in Dio; al canto, a mensa, al passeggio, all’orazione, allo studio, al sonno, e il cuore in Dio” (cf. Retreat to the Acolytes, November 22, 1810. MssB 4447,f.).

¹⁶ cf. PVC p.

¹⁷ “Disavvezzarsi a fare la propria volonta e ogni cosa fare come mosso dalla volonta di Dio a fine di piacergli, ed onorarlo” (MP, July 16, 1809).

¹⁸ “Pocchissimi sono coloro i quali intendano quello che Iddo farebbe di loro se Egli non fosse a’ suoi disegni da essi impedito” (MP May 18, 1810).

¹⁹ “Lasciamo liberamente entrare e possedere a Iddo quest’anima ch’ei tanto ama, e cerca di unire a se. Conosciamo il tempo della sua visita. Scongiuriamo tutte le creature e i nostri sensi a non destare quest’anima, quando ella si riposa nel talamo del suo Signore, Ne piu si richiede” (cf. Letter 21, near the end of February 1813- cf. EPist. p. 66).

His likeness and wanting this to be ever intensified and to be a renewed creature, allowing the development of the grace that came to him from the Holy Spirit²⁰. This sheds some light on why for Fr. Gaspar it was fundamental to live according to grace, and not merely in conformity with his human nature, in order to live the new life of Christ²¹.

According to his first biographer, Fr. Giacobbe, Fr. Bertoni really chose that God dominate in his life, and that he would be but an instrument in His hands:

“... he allowed God to accomplish everything in his life, and left nothing to his own human nature. This was so ordinary and natural to him that it can be said - not only in this connection, but in everything - that this principle is *a* characteristic and a norm for his thoughts and affections, and even of his daily living and intentions”.²²

2. THE KENOSIS AND THE FOLLOWING OF JESUS CHRIST

In order to realize a spiritual program in which one chooses God as the prime Mover in all of one's activity – or, put in better terms, *a* project in which one actively collaborates with the interventions of the “good Spirit” – there can be no progress or human effort without a continuous conversion, evaluation and a process of “self-emptying”, or the *kenosis* of one's own egocentrism.

The following of love's absolute model, Jesus Christ, demands continual conversion, even to the *metanoia*, or one's transformation into a new person.

Fr. Gaspar knew very well that one goes to the Father through the Son and with the action of the Holy Spirit.²³

In his following of Christ - Who being rich, made Himself poor, in obedience to His father, even unto death, for the liberation of humanity,²⁴ Fr. Bertoni made himself insignificant (humbling himself), being poor and totally abandoned into God's hands, as we saw in the First Part.

He is cognizant of the fact that to be formed in Christ's image is not the work of human effort alone. In fact, in this entire “*kenotic*” process, there is much more evidence pointing to the fact that the end result is God's action. However, this does not dispense from human cooperation. In a single word, availability can never be dispensed with, as we have mentioned earlier. It has already been shown that this is an attitude that is accentuated in his charism. To comprehend Fr. Bertoni's “*kenotic*” development, through his availability and his active abandonment to God, it is helpful to call to mind the Ignatian image of the “instrument” in

²⁰ cf. N. Dalle Vedove, *Un modello*, p. 20

²¹ cf. Rm 6:4

²² *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 425.

²³ cf. 3n 14:6, 16

²⁴ cf. 2 CO 8:9; Ph 2:6-11.

God's hands. In Fr. Gaspar's mind, to "live" meant to be totally of Christ, as the Church, His Spouse is, in order to serve Him in that service rendered to the Church with his "apostolic mission in *obsequium episcoporum*".

To be totally of Christ, to be formed in Him and with Him to follow the Father's will, requires the continuous effort to have dominate in one's own person, the power of "second nature", corresponding to the action of the good Spirit.

With St. John Chrysostom, Fr. Gaspar affirms the necessity of a truly diligent will in order to follow the Lord²⁵. He wrote:

"Whoever has good will, has everything. However, one's will is not good when one does not do what he can"²⁶.

The effort that Fr. Bertoni brought to all this was considerable. Conscientiously, he made use of all those means possible to him to live out his project of the continuous transformation of himself and to live fully his charism as Founder. In this point, too, he is most aware of what is required:

"To begin the undertaking, it is already necessary to have acquired great, heroic virtue.

"One matter is truly primary: and that is poverty. After this, there must be added all the other virtues.' One can never neglect even the smallest matter, and there can be no delay in receiving the inspirations".²⁷

Along with achieving all this with his objective of the greater glory of God and His love, Fr. Gaspar lived at a certain distance, with detachment from the world and its vices²⁸. He taught and lived flight from sin, resistance from temptation²⁸ and employed those fundamental means throughout his struggle following Christ, as he himself records:

"God does not reject anyone who seeks to battle under the banner of His Son, and that the means He prescribes will prevail, i.e., prayer and mortification".³⁰

The *kenosis* retains a very precise orientation: to follow Christ even to the cross, and death. Jesus was poor, made Himself as nothing, humble and obedient, as Paul tells us:

"... but (He) emptied himself, to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men

²⁵ cf. MP May 24, 1810.

²⁶ "Totum habet qui bonam voluntatem habet; sed voluntas non est bona, quae quod potest non operatur".

²⁷ "Per cominciar la impresa bisogna aver fatto acquisto di grande, eroica virtù" "Necessarii sumptus est paupertas: dein aliae virtutes omnes." Non bisogna trascurare la più piccola cosa e non tardare ad accogliere le ispirazioni." (MP, July 23, 1809).

²⁸ cf. ib. July 14, 1809.

²⁸ cf. ib. July 24, 1809.

³⁰ "Dio non rifiuta niuno di quelli che vogliono combattere sotto le insegne del suo Figliuolo, e che si prevalgono dei mezzi da lui prescritti, cioè orazione, e mortificazione" (ib., July 29, 1809; cf. ib. May 2, 1809).

are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross".³¹

Fr. Bertoni chose to follow this path, even to the point of finding in the depths of one's own self, emptied of even the shadow of pride, the ultimate Mover of one's whole being, which is precisely God.³²

He manifested his own personal coherence and conviction of the real need of conversion, praying to change the corruption within society, and moving the faithful to the practice of prayer and fasting, in harmony with the Holy Spirit:

"This kind of devil can only be expelled with prayer and fasting ...as the Holy Spirit states in another place – Tb 12:8 – prayer is good; not alone, however, but joined to fasting".³³

Fr. Bertoni was convinced that it is necessary to make a choice between the delights of this present world, with all of its insinuations, its attractions and promises and that narrow path proposed by Christ. He was persuaded that mortification, renunciation, a certain seriousness, penance and abstinence - on the physical, sentimental, psychological as well as spiritual levels - are important means in order to remain at the side of Christ, rather than seeking simply his own well-being. There is no evidence in him of any tendency of his seeking his own comfort, or exaggerated effort to obtain what was best for himself. Even regarding physical health, he recognized a role for the Holy Spirit:

"How true is that declaration of the Holy Spirit that the art of prolonging one's life is abstinence" (Si 37:34).³⁴

The *kenosis* which uses penance as a means of channeling one's personal strength for the living out of life and one's vocational choice moved Fr. Gaspar to characterize the charism of the Christian life as the mark of the Kingdom. He exhorted the faithful to penance, to the avoidance of sin, for their eternal salvation and the peace of a good conscience.³⁵

His on-going transformation, and his spiritual growth bound him indeed progressively to his fathoming, or to his "plunge" into the ocean of love which is God. However, such love is diffusive of itself into the mission of serving human beings through a certain "thinking with

³¹ Ph 2:7-8.

³² MP August 24, 1808; cf. March 13-27, 1809 and October 22, 1808. Fr. Bertoni's style of humility is remarkable, as we will have opportunity to bring put further on. Indeed his life-long process of intentional "self-emptying" clearly resulted in the development of his talents and charism with a strength that filled them with that vitality, which is the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, his spiritual leadership and specifically in the ecclesial context, would be restricted to activity based solely on his human nature.

³³ "Questa razza di demonj non si caccia se non coll'orazione e col digiuno... dicendo altrove lo Spirito Santo, Tob 12:8: che buona e l'orazione, non pero sola ma congiunta al digiuno". (Sermon 16, "On the Lenten Fast to be undertaken in joy", "Quinquagesima Sunday", February 22, 1803, St. Paul in Campo Marzio, Verona - MssB 746).

³⁴ "Tanto e vera quella sentenza dello Spirito Santo che l'arte di prolungare la vita e l'astinenza (Eccli 37:34)." (cf. Sermon 16, "The Lenten Fast to be undertaken with Joy". Quinquagesima Sunday, in St. Paul, Campo Marzio, Verona, February 22, 1803 – MssB 751).

³⁵ cf. ib. 752

the Church". This is why his charism as Founder moved him to undertake the religious and priestly vocation for the sake of the Church, as his particular way, as we saw in the First Part. His kind of *kenosis*, then, was not limited to any exaggerated vertical relationship with God, but followed in the footsteps of Christ, in the service of other human beings. The power of the Holy Spirit led him in this, as he states, considering the beauty of a person invaded by grace:

"... those heavenly thoughts which the Holy Spirit places within one's heart with love and these inspirations are ordered, directed and composed by this same Spirit toward God".³⁶

The finality of this "emptying" of self-centeredness is geared toward the *Parousia*. Penance, as we have seen, is the indispensable means. Asceticism is a part of this, but we will have occasion to address this specifically further ahead. Here the validity of penance is seen from the future:

"In that day, how blessed will penance seem! How pleasant will solitude be judged! How precious suffering! 'The world will rejoice', said Christ (3n 16:B-22), 'while you will be sorrowful, but your will take sorrow will be turned to joy... and that joy no one from you'".³⁷

The process of conversion occurs as the result of grace which animates a person in the spiritual life, conduct and manner of living out the Christian vocation. Fr. Anthony Bresciani, a Jesuit, wrote regarding Fr. Gaspar, bringing out these aspects in him:

... his was a truly sublime holiness, being always courteous and generous; he had a most appealing smile, endowed with gentle grace. He manifested a real tender charity for the sufferings and worries of all who turned to him in search of counsel and help. Each of his acts, words, his every expression were a comfort. In my opinion, such a simple humility, and at the same time one that was so sublime, only with great difficulty . found to such a degree...".³⁸

Fr. Gaspar himself speaks of the beauty of grace with all its effects in anyone who would turn toward God. This is the result of the "kenotic" process.³⁹

Further, penance and the *kenosis* are not the end in themselves. Beyond instilling an orientation toward the *Parousia* in any person who works at these, both find their full significance in the Paschal process in Christ. In April, 1807, Fr. Bertoni preached:

"As we have just completed in these days the lamentations of penance - and now having realized your justification, celebrated, as I believe, at this time, that for all of you is

³⁶ "...quei pensieri celesti che lo Spirito Santo pone in questa anima infiammano il suo cuore d'amore, e dallo Spirito stesso in Dio e in Cristo son ordinati, ristretti, composti" (cf. Sermon 15, "The Beauty of Grace". For New Year's Day of the year 1803. Preached in the venerable Church of St. Paul of Campo Marzio. MssB 726)

³⁷ "O quanto si stimera felice in quel giorno la penitenza! Quanto fortunata la solitudine! Quanto preziosi i patimenti! Il mondo godera, dicea Cristo 3o. 16, 20-22) e voi sarete invece contristati, ma la vostra tristezza si cangerà in gaudio e nessun ve lo potrà togliere" (Sermon 16, "The Lenten Fast to be undertaken with Joy". Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday, in St. Paul of Campo Marzio, Verona, February 22, 1803 – MssB 754).

³⁸ J. Fiorio, *Lo Spirito*, p. 134

³⁹ cf. Sermon 15, "The Beauty of Grace", New Year's Day 1803. – MssB 722 & 725

Easter: I see you, then, risen in Christ, walking joyfully in the newness of life, and hurrying along with the disciples to see Christ in Galilee.

"I am talking, therefore, to people who from fear and contrition have confidently ascended to trust in the divine mercy; from their earthly joys and from worldly consolations, have passed through that compunction and sorrow which is God-centered, and have come to a holy, devout exultation, in a vibrant spiritual joy in the Holy Spirit. For such, the calling to mind of past faults does not give as much pain, as this delights the memory and inflames the desire of eternal rewards".⁴⁰

With Paul, Fr. Bertoni also speaks of the necessity of living risen with Christ and of savoring the heavenly realities over those of earth⁴¹, much the same as living the hidden life with Christ in God.⁴² His manner of living the *kenosis* was concentrated in Christ's Paschal Mystery, savoring "the joy of the Spirit".

3. THE FOLLOWING OF GRACE AND DOCILITY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

The will of God as manifested in situations is inseparable from Fr. Gaspar's spiritual sensibility. His whole personality was bent on deciphering the meaning of God's voice heard in events. His wisdom and prudence were much used instruments, much as a key to open into the following of grace. One characteristic of this "key" is manifested in what he states:

"... you must have recourse to the source of light ... You must never precede, but always follow after the Lord, Who sheds His light and will suggest to you, once you have had recourse to Him, how you are to proceed and correspond".⁴³

However, one very important principle for him, as we have already noted in another place, is not to hinder God's activity⁴⁴ but rather through "vigilance" and "prayer", as well as being attentive and prepared to perceive the least aspect of the Lord's will, in harmony and dialogue with Him⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ "Compiuti nelli scorsi giorni i lamenti della penitenza, consumata in questi la vostra giustificazione, celebrata, come io credo, in oggi per voi tutta la Pasqua: io vi veggo dunque, risorti in Cristo, camminar lieti nella novita della vita, affrettarvi solleciti coi discepoli a veder, Cristo in Galilea.

"Parlo io adunque con uomini che dal timore e dalla contrizione ascendono con sicurezza alla fiducia della divina misericordia; che dalla letizia del secolo e dalla consolazione del mondo, per la compunzione e per la tristezza ch'e secondo Oio, son gia passati in una santa, divota esultazione, in un vivo spiritual gaudio nello Spirito santo; cui non tanto da pena il ricordar delle passate colpe, quanto diletta la memoria e infiamma il desiderio delli premj eterni" (Sermon 38, "The Spiritual Life", delivered on the Sunday "in Albis", April 5, 1807. Verona, in St. Paul's, Campo Marzio - MssB 1297-8).

⁴¹ cf. C01 3:1-3

⁴² cf. Sermon 38, "Holy Easter – the Spiritual Life", April 5, 1807 - in: PYC pp. 290-299.

⁴³ "...debba rivolgerti al fonte della luce ... Tu non devi precedere ma seguire il Signore il quale la illumina, e a te suggerira, posto il ricorso, con che la faccia progredire e corrispondere" (MP 3 January 12, 1811).

⁴⁴ cf. ib. May 18, 1811

⁴⁵ cf. ib. April 28, 1811

It is of capital importance to create a climate of listening in order to discern the Lord's will: "In order to be received and retained, divine inspirations seek solitude, quiet, internal either they are not heard, or and external silence: otherwise, they vanish or disperse".⁴⁶

And further:

"The Lord would speak to certain people, if only they ' would go aside for a little while, since the world is making too much noise around them"⁴⁷.

The attitude of openness and listening to God, removing every obstacle to the action of His grace, orientated Fr. Bertoni toward being docile to the Holy Spirit at each moment, and the Spirit within him found the terrain ready to bear fruit. So docility to the Holy Spirit is seen clearly as a gift that shapes one to be led consciously through grace.

In the view of Lecuyer⁴⁸, docility is brought into a correlation with grace, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, abandonment, conformity, discernment and the like. Docility bestows the impulse to act, and does not lead to passivism that would leave everything up to God to accomplish⁴⁹.

The same author states:

"The foundation for the entire teaching concerning Docility to the Holy Spirit is the existence of grace, the presence of God within a regenerated person, transforming the individual and taking over the direction of one's spiritual path, in a way that is totally new"⁵⁰.

Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange taught:

"Anyone docile to the Spirit, contrary to any pride and intellectual self-sufficiency, grows both in humility and the lack of confidence in one's own inspirations: docility to the Holy Spirit, far from being opposed to obedience, presupposes this and develops it and does nothing without genuine humility".⁵¹

St. Thomas does not offer a special treatise on docility, but he does make reference to it when he speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In his I - II, q. 68, he teaches that the Gifts are "habits" which render a person receptive, i.e., docile to the Spirit's activity. Garrigou-Lagrange also comments on St. Thomas regarding St. Paul's teaching. Thus, for Thomas, docility is a kind of a gift, infused with sanctifying grace:

"The habitual disposition to receive the inspirations from on high, much like the sails are needed in the boat so that it will respond to the blowing of the wind"⁵².

⁴⁶ "I lumi di Dio per riceverli, e per conservarli ricercano solitudine, quiete, silenzio interno, ed esterno: altrimenti o non si sentono, o svaniscono, e dileguano" (ib. 3 July 23, 1809).

⁴⁷ "Il Signore vorrebbe parlare a certe anime se si ritirassero un poco, perciocche fa troppo strepito intorno a loro il mondo" (MP March 22, 1809).

⁴⁸ cf. Naurice de Gandillac, "Docilité au S, Esprit", in: Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ed. 1957, 1468-1497.

⁴⁹ cf. ib., 1490, f.

⁵⁰ "Docilité...", in Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, 1490, f.

⁵¹ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Les trois âges de la vie intérieure*. (Paris: Editions du Cef 1951), Vol. 2, pp. 341, f.

⁵² R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation*. (Saint Sulpice: éditions de la Vie Spirituelle,

In the ultimate analysis, for St. Thomas docility to the Holy Spirit consists in allowing oneself not only to be instructed, but also to be guided by Him. In Fr. Bertoni may be seen the application of these words taken from St. Paul:

“Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God”⁵³.

In fact, the attitude of this man of God is that of trying always to be open to the voice of the Good Shepherd⁵⁴, of responding to His vital needs, striving always and being attentive in following Him wherever He may go⁵⁵. However, in order to do this, there is need for an unbounded confidence in Him. Within this prism, Fr. Bertoni is noted as being attentive to signals from the Spirit, corresponding to grace upon grace⁵⁶.

A special sign of the Spirit is seen in his founding charism. Only gradually is God’s will discerned.

Regarding discernment, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Sister Naudet:

“If the Lord has made clear the object of His glory, He will also gradually make clear the way and the time to realize it”⁵⁷.

Fr. Marani testifies with certainty that Fr. Bertoni’s vision of founding his Institute “in *obseuium E iscoporum*” was shared with him in confidence as early as the year 1812⁵⁸.

Fr. Bertoni himself gave testimony regarding the divine inspiration of his Congregation: ...’ we believe that its realization does not depend on human strength, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit: since the One Who has inspired and begun the work, He Himself will bring it to fulfillment (cf. Ph 1:6), when our strength of itself is not sufficient to support it”.⁵⁹

In fact, Fr. Bertoni, docile to the Spirit, in his memorable visit to St. Sebastian’s Church, to which we referred in Chapter 3, # 2, was inspired with a clear idea to found his Institute.

He recorded this inspiration in his Spiritual Diary, stating that the Lord had made this known to him that day:

“At St. Sebastian’s today, the Lord encouraged me by renewing my memory regarding the graces of the past...”⁶⁰

1923) p. 349.

⁵³ Rm 8:14

⁵⁴ cf. 3n 10:2-5

⁵⁵ cf. Letter 11, at the end of 1812, or beginning of 183. Epist. - p. 46.

⁵⁶ cf. MP September 15, 1808 and February 14, 1809.

⁵⁷ “Se il Signore ha fatto chiaro l’oggetto della sua gloria, fara chiari a mano a mano e il modo e il quando” (cf. Letter 32, June 28, 1813 - EPist. p. 86).

⁵⁸ cf. Summ. Add, Doc OIII, p. 219

⁵⁹ “Crediamo che la sua effettuazione non dipende dalle forze dell’uomo, ma dalla grazia dello SPIRITO SANTO: poiche Colui che ha ispirata e incominciata l’opera, Egli stesso la condurra a compimento, quando a tenerla in piedi le forze nostre non bastino” (cf. CF 185).

⁶⁰ “A S. Sebastiano il Signore m’incoraggio rinnovandomi la memoria delle (grazie) passate...” (MP, June 21, 1813).

The fact is that in his past life, as a priest, he already had the thought of gathering a few companions to live as a community, or as a religious Institute. Through signs coming from God, his charism was ripening⁶¹.

A significant event furthered him along this path: on July 15, 1808, he participated with a few of these companions in the ceremony of the procession bearing the body of St. Gualfardo:

“There was experienced a powerful divine impulse to gather together and to be dedicated perpetually to the good of others”⁶².

Even earlier, it can be deduced from other testimonies⁶³, and particularly that of Fr. Cesare Bresciani, that God endowed young Gaspar Bertoni, even as a child, with special graces and charisms⁶⁴.

There is the opinion that the initial inspiration, which would then remained impressed on him throughout his entire life, for the founding of a religious Institute, was already bestowed perhaps on the day of his First Communion that took place perhaps before November of 1788⁶⁵. Fr. Bertoni. recalled in his Spiritual Diary, on October 9, 1808, the day of his First Communion - and on this later date, he was experiencing great “devotion and affections” as on that day⁶⁶.

The manner and the time of the Lord’s will of really uniting with a few companions, to establish a Congregation, finally arrived on November 4, 1816:

“The Arch-priest Galvani, is totally imbued with St. Ignatius. He has offered me the Stimmate as an opportune place to establish a Congregation of priests who would live according to the rules of St. Ignatius”⁶⁷.

Thereafter following, rather than preceding the traces of the Spirit, Gaspar Bertoni in fact did establish his Institute, without neglecting the least indication in hesitating to welcome His inspirations⁶⁸. With this same spirit, he wrote the Constitutions and carried forward the work that was just begun. The Congregation is described as a family of “new ministers that he saw called by the Spirit to innovate and to restore the priestly ministry and the Church”.⁶⁹

⁶¹ cf. CS Vol. II, p. 140.

⁶² Doc. XX, p. 132, # 22 Mss Lenotti; *Life of D. Gramego*, Archives of the Stimmate, Verona.

⁶³ cf. Fr. Giacobbe’s Testimony, in: Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 308, f.

⁶⁴ cf. N. Dalle Vedove, *Il Ven. Gaspare*. Vol. I, p. 132

⁶⁵ cf. ib. p. 200

⁶⁶ cf. MP, September 9, 1808.

⁶⁷ “L’arciprete Galvani si ch’è tutto S. Ignazio. H’ha offerto le Stimmate come luogo opportuno a porre una Congregazione di Preti che vivano le regole di S. Ignazio” (cf. Letter 54, August 17, 1816 -Epist. p. 130).

⁶⁸ cf. Summ. Add. Doc. XXIII, p. 217.

⁶⁹ Dalle Vedove, *Beato Gaspare*. Vol. II, p. 639.

His personal attitude is characterized in this petition:

“O Lord, we do not even dare to enter into Your House unless Your Spirit leads us”⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ “O Signore, noi non siamo arditi di entrare nella vostra casa senza che il vostro Spirito ne intrometta” – 2nd Meditation on 1 Kings - (Samuel) – November 25, 1810 – commentary of St. Gregory the Great - (MssB 4864).

CHAPTER VII

CONSECRATED LIFE

1. THE POWER OF UNION

Fr. Gaspar was indeed blessed with the charism of a Founder.¹ The force of this charism, through which he experienced the Spirit, was concentrated in love, and in particular, with that of one who follows Christ, in order to serve him in the characteristic manner of the “*obsequium episcoporum*”, as we have seen earlier.

Pope Paul VI spoke explicitly of charism as coming from the Holy Spirit:

“Certainly the charism of the religious life is not some sort of impulse born ‘out of human stock or will of the flesh’ (cf. Jn 1:13)², or of a cast of mind that ‘is modeled on the behavior of the world around you’ (cf. Rm 12:2)³. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who is always at work in the Church”.⁴

However, the charism also results from a given historical influence,⁵ which provides a kind of infra-structure, through which, or upon which, the Spirit’s power models the Church, in her abandonment and union with the Trinity and humanity.

Therefore, Fr. Bertoni’s charism cannot really be known and comprehended without keeping in mind his ideal of its very reason of being in and for the Church.⁶ Its specific nature of necessity includes the prophetic power of mutual love within the religious community,⁷ manifested in union with God and with the confreres;⁸ this occurs in the union of life, heart, prayer and apostolate. In addition to this, it includes a special union with the Church, living with her and at her service and by each one qualifying himself in the best possible manner.

All this, therefore, is what Fr. Gaspar’s charism includes: a community religious life, with the connotation of unity; and further, an apostolic life in communion and the service of the Church and its spirituality, with specific nuances. The apostolic activities of Fr. Bertoni’s followers arise naturally from the love experienced in communion of life, modeled on the Apostles and the first Christians.⁹ In order to be charismatic and of an authentically prophetic

¹ The religious life as such, appears in *Lumen Gentium* as a “pneumato-logical” reality of the Church, although the Council does not refer to it specifically as a charism. However, as LG 44 states, it pertains to the life and holiness of the Church. Further it is a “special gift” that assists in the “salvific mission of the Church” (LG 43). *Perfectae Caritatis* # 1 states that it is “under the impulse of the Holy Spirit that men and women found religious families.

² cf. Jn 1:13

³ cf. Rm 12:2

⁴ ET 11

⁵ ib.

⁶ cf. LG 12

⁷ cf. CF 188

⁸ cf. ib. # 266

⁹ cf. ib. 189.

stamp, the consecrated life of Fr. Bertoni's ideal, is concentrated in the power of union,¹⁰ despite the differences in individual characteristics,¹¹ and various ministries.¹²

Through this union and communion, on the level of the Stigmatine community, and of this with both the local and universal Church, there was built the great "Edifice" for the glory of God. Fr. Gaspar wrote in these terms:

"... the Lord is clarifying the points of the plan of this Edifice, 13 and the temple of His glory.¹³ Thus God binds us by charity with our neighbors and with Him, all that is helpful for us and for our neighbors, is also useful for the glory of His Divine Majesty. 'I pray, Father, that they may be one.' What charity does is that it unites, rather makes us one with the multitude of our brothers and sisters, and we all become one with God, 'as You, Father, are in He, and I in You, so may they be one in us'".¹⁴

Union is the expression of charity, as Fr. Bertoni writes to Fr. Bragato, on December 1, 1837: "... which was poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit".¹⁵

This same union is a gift that is reinforced by prayer and meditation: "...In my meditation a fire shall burn', therefore, this is undoubtedly the surer and sounder way of acquiring this unity".¹⁶

This is essential for Fr. Bertoni in his laying the foundations of a life of special consecration to God, from which would radiate the entire force of union with his confreres.¹⁷ It is not possible to sustain his charism that is visibly manifested in the realization of the Institute's finality, without its vital and radiating expression in the living of a love expressed in unity.¹⁸

It is this union that orchestrates these riches and differentiated gifts of the Spirit, to be used primarily with a view to the other person. Union flows from self-giving and contributing to the common cause, in the plan of seeking out the Lord's will for the good of others and the Church, and in accord with the circumstances of time and place. Thus, all one's own personal material, intellectual, psychological, theological, pastoral, spiritual resources are placed at the

¹⁰ "The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose" (1 Co 12:7).

¹¹ cf. CF 7.

¹² cf. Chapter IV of this present work.

¹³ Or, in other words, the work of forming the Institute.

¹⁴ "...il Signore va schiarando i punti del disegno di questo Edifizio, e tempio della sua Gloria. Così. Dio lega per carità noi con i prossimi e con Lui, (in guisa) che il miglio utile nostro e l'utile del prossimo e l'utile della Gloria di Sua Divina Maestà. 'Rogo, Pater, uti unum sint.' La Carità opera che uniti, anzi fatti uno, colla solitudine de' nostri fratelli, arriviamo a divenire tutti uno con Dio, 'sicut tu, Pater in me et ego in te, ita et ipsi in nobis unum sint'" (cf. Letter 25, March 6, 1823 - EPist. p. 74).

¹⁵ "... 'diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum'... (Rm 5:3-5)..." (cf. Lettera 4 to Fr. Bragato, December 1, 1837 - Epist p. 317).

¹⁶ "...nella mia meditazione il fuoco divampera, perciò senza dubbio questa è via più certa e sicura ad ottenere questa edesima unione..." (cf. CF 222).

¹⁷ cf. ib. 221

¹⁸ The theme "charity" as such, will be developed further on.

service of this cause. Obedience also cooperates in this:

“In great part, this union is achieved by the bond of obedience, says St. Ignatius”.¹⁹

Union is the expression of what is essential for the living of the charism, which is the community. Without it, a project of life which would attain in full the finality of the Institute, is impossible. Therefore, the follower of Fr. Bertoni is called to communion in his religious community: all things are common - hearts, minds, bodies, and everything necessary for the subsistence and way of life: God is common to all, the exercises of piety are in common, and the labors are common.’ The same thing is said by Cassian, who cites the words of Chapter IV of Acts: ‘They had but one heart and one soul’; and he observes that right afterwards is said: And they held everything in common’.”²⁰

As far as the “Mission” is concerned, it is the key of the Ignatian community life,²¹ while the love in the community life is the source of Fr. Bertoni’s idea of “mission”.²² The Stigmatine charism is deeply rooted in a solid community life, richly endowed with unity. This union is a bond with the finality of the Stigmatine life itself, which is the service to the Church, manifested in the very first place, by union with it. This is “to think with the Church”. The three words: God-confrere-Church synthesizes the entire charismatic project of Fr. Bertoni, permeated with the Spirit’s own vitality that impels the charism and is what makes it fructify.

The dynamic unity in this above-mentioned trilogy would be broken only if one or the other relationships (between its component partners) would impede the bond.²³ Thus, for example the lack of union and the love in relationship to God, or toward a confrere, or toward the Church, would not allow the vocation to achieve its purpose in the authentic living out of the charism.

Unity is a gift of his confrere the image of God the Spirit, present in anyone who sees in and respects him as such.²⁴ God Himself is respected and loved in the Bishop chosen by the Spirit Himself. Anyone who would follow Fr. Bertoni is called to be united and to assist the Bishop in the power of the charism.²⁵

The union in the inter-relationship of the members of the Stigmatine community is meant to lead them to the point of serving as an example for the faithful,²⁶ not for any ostentation or presumption. Rather it must be done with humility and the effort to recognize

¹⁹ “Tale unione in gran parte si compie per il vincolo dell’obbedienza, dice S. Ignazio” (cf. CF 224).

²⁰ “...tutte le cose sono comuni, i cuori, le menti, i corpi, e tutto ciò che è necessario al sostentamento e al tenore della vita: comune Iddio, comune l’esercizio della pietà, comune le fatiche’, ecc. La stessa cosa dice Cassiano riportando quelle parole del Capo IV degli Atti: ‘avevano un sol cuore ed un’anima sola’: e ossetta che subito dopo si dice: ‘e tutte le cose erano loro comuni’” (ib. 226).

²¹ cf. Unidad Vital, Ejercicios. p. 345.

²² cf. CF ## 6; 187-190.

²³ cf. MP May 18, 1811.

²⁴ cf. CF 223.

²⁵ ib. # 185.

²⁶ cf. CF 119

the call as a gift for the living of love and unity, following the example of the Apostles,²⁷ and the first Christians.²⁸ This was indeed so pronounced in the first community at the Stimate that today, one can turn toward it as a special font and authentic model in the carrying out of the evangelical project.

Fr. Louis Bragato confirms this, with this witness he has left: this Congregation very slowly was growing even to numbering 19 (this should be corrected to 18) individuals, between Priests and lay brothers. Its bond was charity that seasoned every task and all fatigue with a kind of spiritual sweetness. Its foundation was a life lived perfectly in common, which was regulated by a perfect obedience in everything”.²⁹

Sharing is a virtue that particularly promoted unity within the community of Fr. Bertoni and also in relationship with both the local and universal Church.³⁰ It was precisely due to his sensitivity and sense of sharing with the cause of the local Church that Fr. Gaspar founded his Institute (*“in obsequium Episcoporum”*).

In considering Fr. Bertoni’s community as such, it is not possible to be an authentic member of it without placing oneself in availability of sharing with it one’s own being. For this reason, under obedience, one develops his own gifts and prepares himself culturally, theologically, pastorally and spiritually, to offer service, in sharing with the community and serving its cause. One’s own personal realization is in proportion to the love in serving the community, promoting its unity and sense of belonging. In this, may be noted the power of the Spirit, which is the force of communion, love and humble service.³¹

To be united to another is precisely the same as loving the other. In Fr. Gaspar, love for the Church was not incidental – in this he was like Ignatius.³² Obedience and service are simply logical consequences in this dimension. For Fr. Bertoni, one is to give witness of communion and unity in the religious community and begins, with this good example, to serve the Church, in close union and collaboration with the local Pastor, chosen by the Spirit.³³

Union with the Pope the sign and guarantee of union between the local church and universal Church,³⁴ is of fundamental importance for Fr. Gaspar. Docility toward him is an indication that our vocation is of divine origin.³⁵ In this case, one may understand its charism

²⁷ cf. ib. 272.

²⁸ cf. ib. 189.

²⁹ Summ. Add., Doc. XXV, p. 284.

³⁰ L. Schlör speaks of the “one spirit that animates all, and one and the same life, so to speak, is diffused among all” (Joseph Fiorio, *Lo Spirito*, p. 75).

³¹ cf. CF 223.

³² cf. Candido Dalmasses, “La Iglesia en la experiencia personal de San Ignacio”, in: *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis*, XVI/44 (3, 1983). 58-60.

³³ cf. CF 185; cf. also Sermon 35, “The Rule of our thinking and working”. For the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1806. In St. Paul’s Verona, on the left side of the Adige – MSS 1234; cf. also Original Constitutions, MssB 9947.

³⁴ cf. Epiphany Sermon 1806 – MssB 1237.

³⁵ cf. Meditation 35, on the 1 Book of Kings (1 Samuel), in the spring of 1811 - MssB 6309.

of “thinking with the Church”, promoting its unity.³⁶ Furthermore, it is known how much Fr. Bertoni and his companions worked to promote the clergy and the unity of all around the Bishop.³⁷ In all of this, the action of the Spirit is evident, renewing all and promoting communion.³⁸

He preached unity to the clergy,³⁹ especially with the words of Paul to the Ephesians: “Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together” (cf. Ep 4:3).⁴⁰

The model of unity is the Church, assisted by the Spirit: “The Church, spouse of Christ, is a living image of the divinity, representing His principal characteristics: unity. (Jn 17:11)”.⁴¹

His religious community was meant to be, therefore, a united body, like the Church, without divisions, in which there should be the convergence of collaboration, as the members form only one body.⁴² The wisdom of union is mutual love.⁴³

Obedience seals unity in the difficulties that arise from living out the vocation, which unfolds in a plurality of ministries.⁴⁴ Such obedience, for Fr. Bertoni, goes above the mere acceptance of the precept given by another; it involves also the acceptance of his person. The living of the charism opens out into unity, which receives its power in loving obedience, in imitation of Christ’s obedience.

2. THE VALUES OF BROTHERHOOD

Beyond living united in one and the same spirit,⁴⁵ the members of Fr. Bertoni’s community are called to strengthen their own living together with the “exercise of all the virtues”.⁴⁶

For genuine living together, external conduct is of great help to respect the other’s being. Thus, Fr. Bertoni spoke of modesty, good manners and moderation.⁴⁷

³⁶ Fr. Gaspar even offered to Pope Gregory XVI all the goods that he had acquired for the Congregation, in a gesture of detachment and harmony for the cause of the universal Church, along with his outlook of faith, seeing in the Pope, the Vicar of Christ. (cf. Joseph Fiorio, *Lo Spirit*, p. 61).

³⁷ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XX, p. 157; and Document XXVI, pp. 376, f.; 399-400.

³⁸ “Union”, from one of two courses of Retreat the Founder preached to the Clergy of Mantua, October 4-13, 11-26 1816 – MssB 3687.

³⁹ “Good Example”, from the same Retreat to the Priests of Mantua, October 1816 – MssB 3573.

⁴⁰ “Solliciti servare unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis” – Ep 4:3 - “Union”, from Mantua Retreat, 1816, noted above. MssB 3656

⁴¹ “La Chiesa sposa di Gesù Cristo e una viva immagine della divinità, rappresentandone i tratti principali: l’unità (Jo 17:11). - MssB 3659 – Sermon on “Union”, Mantua Retreat 1816)

⁴² cf. Sermon 35, “The Rule of our thinking and acting”, Epiphany 1806 – MssB 1238

⁴³ cf. “Unione”, Mantua retreat - MssB 3691.

⁴⁴ cf. CF 185

⁴⁵ cf. Original Constitutions – MssB 8853: “mezzi per conservare l’unione e l’esercizio di tutte le virtù”

⁴⁶ cf. “Charity in a Busy Life”, perhaps from the Mission at Sts. Firmus and Rusticus, May -’4-26, 1816- MssB 4212.

⁴⁷ cf. Mission Sermon, “Charity in a Busy Life”, from the Mission Sts. Firmus and Rusticus, May 4-26, 1816,

In his view, whoever chooses to follow Christ, as the Apostles did, strives to have Christ's own attitudes: he comes to appreciate others and to be understanding regarding their weaknesses, prior to making judgments:

"If you could live only with the Angels, or faultless people, there would be no need of gentle and patient charity".⁴⁸

Meekness is recalled with Christ's own words in Mathew (5:4),⁴⁹ just as the humility of Jesus Himself is proposed, according to Fr. Fedelini's memory.⁵⁰ It is not that this virtue was considered the ultimate in Fr. Bertoni and his companions. By means of it, one is inspired to exalt and to encourage the gifts of the Spirit existing in other confreres.⁵¹

In the community at the Stimmate, the figure of the superior is considered in a spirit of faith. He is one who knows how to seek counsel from the more experienced and light from God. Both in counsel that is given, as well as in that received, the effort was made to accomplish everything following what before God seemed to be best.⁵²

Solidarity meets with strength considering the community as such, which is so opposed to the formation of antagonistic groups within. Such divisions wound the sense of union and fraternity.⁵³ Friendship that is lived in brotherhood, is a good to be stimulated and is to be developed without any separation from the other members of the same community and without special acceptance of certain ones.⁵⁴

Similarity in clothing, food, and in the manner of living, indicates solidarity in the common cause, embraced in the power of the virtues of fraternity and poverty.⁵⁵ Moreover, in Fr. Bertoni's community, much attention was given not to allow the comfortable life to arise. As soon as any tendency in this regard was noted, it would be corrected. Here is an admonition left by Fr. Gaspar:

"In fervent Religious communities, as well as in those that are more relaxed, there are defects; but in the former, they are corrected and considered to be abuses; in the latter, they are passed over, and eventually become usage and customs".⁵⁶

Regarding the daily living and the use of material goods, attending to the needs of

Verona – MssB 4212.

⁴⁸ "Se non avessi a vivere che con Angioli e uomini impeccabili, la carità dolce e paziente non si sarebbe necessaria" – ib. MssB 4215.

⁴⁹ cf. ib. MssB 4216.

⁵⁰ cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 495.

⁵¹ cf. CF 223

⁵² cf. *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 495.

⁵³ cf. CF 208. cf. ib.

⁵⁴ cf. ib. ## 209 and 217.

⁵⁵ cf. ib. ## 227.

⁵⁶ "Nelle religioni ferventi, e nelle rilassate vi sono dei difetti; ma, nelle prime sono corretti, e si consierano come abusi; nelle seconde si dissimulano e passano in uso, e costume" (cf. MP July 22, 1808).

each one was not impeded.⁵⁷

Concord helps the union of minds. This is only had keeping God as its source.⁵⁸

In addition to this, each one is called to look out for the other this leads to the attention, conversation, dialogue, fraternal correction, the encouragement of one's confrere,⁵⁹ and in a particular way, to working for the spiritual well-being of the other:

"Since the end of the Congregation is the salvation of souls, consequently it assumes ministries appropriate to this end: therefore, religious should primarily and zealously work for the spiritual benefit of their own Confrere before that of non-members..."⁶⁰

Correspondence by letter also helps union and fraternity; this is recommended by Fr. Gaspar principally for the members of the Congregation.⁶¹ We know how much good he accomplished by the use of this means, a good that is limited not only to those to whom the letters were written, but also is extended to anyone who is able to read his letters and to meditate on them today. In them, one can see throughout a sublime spirituality with which the "good Spirit" offers His riches. Fr. Bertoni states, quoting St. Basil:

"He who through the grace of God has done something good, should also let it be known to others, for the greater diffusion of God's glory.' (St. Basil) relates apostolic examples of this".⁶²

Regarding the care to be extended to the sick in Fr. Bertoni's community, the basic rule was "to serve them as one would Christ".⁶³ Fr. Gaspar also offered some practical guide-lines regarding health and love to be shown who are physically more fragile. All the while, the Founder personally was living his own asceticism of suffering and is indeed a model for the following of Christ, particularly in His suffering.⁶⁴ So, he had first-hand experience of the needs of those who do suffer.

Hospitality between confreres is a most sublime value, and indicative of the challenge: "see how they love one another". To know how to welcome others, to spend one's own time with the confreres, is to leave the sublime value of Stigmatine fraternity.⁶⁵ In this whole matter, Fr. Bertoni directed that no effort should be spared:

⁵⁷ cf. CF 232.

⁵⁸ cf. ib. f 228

⁵⁹ cf. ib. ff 196 and 265.

⁶⁰ "Siccome il fine della Congregazione e di procurare la salute delle anime, e per conseguenza son da esso richiesti ministri proporzionati: ne risulta in primissimo luogo che qualsivoglia membro della Congregazione debba prima e con piu ardore procurare e desiderare la salute dei propri fratelli..." (ib. 262).

⁶¹ cf. CF 257-261.

⁶² "Chi per grazia di Dio ha fatto qualche cosa di buono, deve farlo conoscere anche a tutti gli altri, per piu largo aumento della stessa gloria di Dio.' E di cio egli reca esempi apostolici." (cf. ib. # 259).

⁶³ ib. # 236.

⁶⁴ cf. Summ. Add. Doc. XX, pp. 138-145; cf. MP March 16, 1809; and December 12, 1808.

⁶⁵ cf. CF ff 243-249.

“Furthermore, let us not be content to show only these external manifestations, but also practice all works of mercy and humility on their behalf, sparing neither toil nor expenses, in so far as religious poverty permits and the brother’s need demands”.⁶⁶

Another means of building brotherhood in Fr. Bertoni’s community is common recreation. This facilitates friendly conversation, animates charity, promotes unity.⁶⁷

To assist the life of fraternal community, where genuine love proceeding from the Spirit reigns, Constitutions and other Rules exist.⁶⁸ These are instruments to live together seeking, in community, the Lord’s will. So, for Fr. Bertoni, the spirit of the law is that of the Spirit, as he wrote once to Sister Naudet:

“As far as the composition of the Rules are concerned: you have to keep uppermost in mind to bring supreme, rather exquisite diligence to the task of writing these, so that you might further the promptings of Our Lord’s Providence, which asks this of you. However, it is most evident that even closer to His heart is to place in your soul the Living Rule, which is His Spirit, and to write in your heart the entire law or constitution of His Charity and of His love”.⁶⁹

3. COMMUNITY: A PROPHETIC FORCE

Fr. Bertoni’s community, inspired by God, and brought to birth only after much discernment, as was seen earlier,⁷⁰ lives the strength of the charism in the service of the Church.

After Fr. Galvani offered Fr. Gaspar the Stimmate, the men began to live there “in the manner of Religious, but of perfect observance and most perfect common life ...and there was also introduced the private pronouncement of the three simple vows, all subordinated to Fr. Bertoni.”⁷¹

The “missionary” end, proposed by Fr. Gaspar to his incipient work, stems from and begins with the religious community. He stated:

“The world has to see something of the evangelical life that the apostles led”.⁷²

⁶⁶ “Quindi non bisogna contentarsi di sole dimostrazioni, ma molto piu conviene praticare verso di loro tutti gli atti di carita e di umilita, senza risparmio di fatiche o di spese, quanto la poverta religiosa lo permette e il bisogno del fratello lo richiede” (ib.# 247).

⁶⁷ cf. ib. ## 250-256.

⁶⁸ cf. ib. ## 138 and 141.

⁶⁹ “Quanto alle Regole: a lei deve stare a cuore con somma diligenza, anzi squisita, di prepararle affine di secondare la Provvidenza soave di Nostro Signore, che cosi richiede. Ma si vede chiaro che a Lui sta piu a cuore di porre nell’anima di Lei la regola viva, ch’e il suo Spirito, e di scrivere nel cuore suo l’intera legge e costituzione della sua Carita e del suo amore.” (cf. Letter 21, near the end of February 1813 - Epist. p. 67).

⁷⁰ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXIII, p. 219.

⁷¹ Summ. Add., Doc. XXIII, p. 218; cf. ib. p. 252.

⁷² “Ha bisogno il mondo di vedere alcun tratto di quella vita evangelica. ‘Christum ducem, Apostolos principes sequamur’” (cf. the Priests’ Retreats in Mantua, October 4-13, 17-26, 1816. The conference: “To be a Worker in the Church” -MssB 3764

Even though with its own specific characteristics, the community of the "Apostolic Missionaries" is modeled, just as is the Company of Jesus, on following the way of the Apostles. Fr. Gaspar preached:

"The Society of the Son (cf. 1 Co 1:9) is a communion of faith, of grace and Christ's glory, as maintained in Christ's Church... there are those who share more closely in Christ's life and grace, as those who follow not only Christ's precepts but also His counsels. In this sense, the apostles were more of the society of Christ than the other Christians".⁷³

The fundamental starting point for every Christian, and yet with a special prophetic power for the "apostolic missionary", is that of exercising the mission of loving:

"By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are My disciples"(Jn 3:35)⁷⁴

Fr. Bertoni insists on fraternal love between the members of his religious community, to the point of dedicating the entire Fourth Part of his Original Constitutions to this theme.⁷⁵ He states in Constitution 266:

"Nothing can be compared to the harmony and mutual union of wills: for by it the individual multiplies himself. If indeed two or ten persons agree among themselves, there is no longer one individual, but each individual has multiplied himself ten times, and in the ten you shall find unity, and the ten in each individual".⁷⁶

He calls attention in his Constitution 189 to the early Christian Community:

"...they were all of one heart and soul, and held all things in common and distributed them among all according as anyone had need..."⁷⁷

And further, he quotes the words of Psalm 132 in his Constitution 190:

"...how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity".⁷⁸ In his view, God is the font of love. God must be honored in the other, who is His temple ; in this manner, God is recognized in everyone. He is the foundation of community.⁷⁹

⁷³ "Societatem Filii. 1 Cor. 1,9: (idest) communionem fidei, gratiae et gloriae Christi quae habetur in ecclesia Christi ... scilicet qui magis Christi vitam et gratiam participant, ut qui non tantum praecepta sed et consilia Christi sequuntur. Sic de societate Christi magis erant Apostoli quam alii Christiani". (cf. Conference "Union with God", Priests' Retreat Mantua, October 1816 – MssB 3390).

⁷⁴ "In hoc cognoscunt omnes quod discipuli mei estis, si dilectionem habueritis ad invicem. (Io 13, 35)" – (Original Constitutions, Pars X - MssB 9948).

⁷⁵ cf. CF 187-281; cf. MssB 9948-9968). Fr. Bertoni was convinced that the prophetic power of the Stigmatine charism begins with charity, and this begins at home. The fruit of the apostolate depends very much on the genuine living of it. This is why there is so much insistence on the theme in the Original Constitutions.

⁷⁶ "Niente si puo paragonare alla concordia e alla reciproca unione delle volonta: poiche per essa l'individuo si moltiplica. Se infatti due o dieci persone sono concordi, non v'e piu un solo individuo, ma ciascuno sara decuplo, e nei dieci troverai l'unita, e i dieci in ciascuno."(These words are a citation from St. John Chrysostom.

⁷⁷ "...avevano un sol cuore ed un'anima sola e tenevano tutto in comune e lo dividevano ai singoli secondo il bisogno di cias- cuno..."

⁷⁸ "Come e bello e giocondo il convivere di tanti fratelli insieme!"

⁷⁹ cf. CF 228.

The living out of community is not something theoretical. It is a reality that was lived and noticed by witnesses who were edified with the apostolate of Christian love that was lived at the Stimateate:

“If you converse with thee, you will notice that each one of thee is a kind of portrait of the deepest sentiments, and in their others, in thought, in their external comportment”.⁸⁰

It is good to speak with one who always knows how to discern and to suggest the positive aspects of a colleague. Such a one would know how to offer suggestions, but fraternally! All would be done so that the other might not be hurt, but promoted with the presence of the other! The ideal is to be joyful, without murmuring, and respects the other’s person! All this seems to have been pondered and lived by Fr. Gaspar and his first companions.⁸¹

The care for the sick, and hospitality, as has been seen earlier, form a constitutive part in Fr. Bertoni’s community, and are not merely the initiative of his Constitutions.⁸²

However, a project for a life-time in a fraternal community requires the firmness of the Word of God, spoken in the experience of mutual love, which is as “the light of the world.” Prophetism has its strength precisely in speaking in the name of God and announcing His Word which is life and is read in the writing of the life of the one who announces it. This is what Fr. Bertoni and his companions sought and lived.⁸³

The manner of living in community, regarding food, clothing and dwelling is meant to be in conformity with other religious and priests of exemplary life. This is what the Founder points out in his Constitution 6. And further:

“(The life-style) shall be of edification to the faithful for its Christian parsimony and religious poverty”.⁸⁴

It is known that this is the way it really was. Out from the community at the Stimateate, the whole power of the Apostolic Mission radiated. This was not taken on individualistically, but with a sense of necessary sharing and co-responsibility, according to Fr. Bertoni’s project. Self-seeking and jealousy in the matter of the Apostolic Mission would only lead to its losing its power. Union reinforces charity, as has been seen, and this strengthens the Apostolic Mission.⁸⁵ The manner and the time for the exercise of the apostolic ministries are regulated by obedience.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Summ. Add, Doc. XIII, p. 66.

⁸¹ cf. CF 191-207; cf. Meditation 44, on 1 Kings (1 S), November 10, 1811 – MssB 6588).

⁸² cf. Summ. Add. p. XCII; cf. CF 234-249.

⁸³ cf. CF 222; cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XIII, pp. 66, f.; cf. Meditation 44, *ibid.* – MssB 6590.

⁸⁴ “...sara di edificazione ai fedeli per la cristiana parsimonia e per la religiosa poverta” (CF 6).

⁸⁵ cf. Joseph Fiorio, *Lo Spirito*, pp. 69, f., and 129-30.

⁸⁶ For Fr. Gaspar, obedience is an important point in the following of the Spirit. Through it, the Will of God is done manifested through the guide-lines of superiors. He stated: the intention in obeying must be pure and formal: i.e., solely to fulfill the order and to comply with the Superior’s will, or better, with God’s will, which is executed in and through the will of the Superior.” (cf. CF 146; cf. also ## 139 and 289).

It is of supreme importance to note that Fr. Bertoni's idea of his religious community exists as in Mission. To the contrary of being an inhospitable place for prophets, the community becomes their strength, as Fr. Giacobbe testifies:

He united to his spirit a family of apostolic laborers, but never touched the titles or the goods of their families: he did not want patrimonies, stipends, special clothes, nor food for his confreres; no retribution for preaching, no financial return, and no alms were taken for the divine ministry. And yet his sons always went about preaching: and still they obey the indications of the Bishops, of the pastors, of the rectors, of other priests, of the colleges, of the oratories, monasteries, pious places, the prisons, those under capital punishment. A single thread rules them, one voice summons them..."⁸⁷

With the special intervention of the Holy Spirit, Fr. Bertoni founded his Institute not to be a spiritual power that would be concerned with itself and with its own conservation. On the contrary, he instituted it to serve in the "Apostolic Mission",⁸⁸ without any fear of thus being totally consumed by it. Thus, his confidence for the future of its subsistence is based on the One Who inspired it.⁸⁹ In the geographical context of Verona, as was seen in Chapter I, his work unfolded prophetically, in an outstanding manner, with the assistance it brought to the renewal of the clergy and the assistance of youth, serving the local Church in an eminent manner. He once preached:

"There is the impartiality of the divine judgment in the repulsion of the human spirit, manifested in the indefectible rectitude of the first Rock, that reproves the abuse and the disdain of gifts, aggravated by the minor scandals of so many priests, and by the negligence and weakness of so many Shepherds... 'Great is the dignity of priests, but great is their ruin if they sin'".⁹⁰

For a renewal, he goes on:

"And thus by the indefectible firmness of the first Rock, the Creating Spirit makes clear the plan of vocation of new ministers, according to God's Spirit".⁹¹

The primitive community at the Stimmate, therefore, keeping Christ as its goal, prophesied with its life and preaching. The repercussion that it made was indeed felt. There was indeed a transformation in its social and ecclesial context, but not without the support of the One Who begun the work, Who was also the One to see it through.⁹²

⁸⁷ Summ. Add, Doc. XXI, p. 209.

⁸⁸ cf. CF 49.

⁸⁹ In this respect, it would be helpful to remember Fr. Bertoni's own words: "...we believe that its achievement does not derive from the strength of man, but from the grace of the Holy Spirit: for He Who has inspired and begun the work, will Himself see it through when our own forces are unable to carry on ..." (cf. CF 185).

⁹⁰ "Equita del divino giudizio nella .repulsione dello spirito umano, manifestata per l'indefettibile rettitudine della prima Pietra, che rimprovera l'abuso e il disprezzo dei doni, aggravato dagli scandali minori di tanti sacerdoti, e dalla negligenza di tanti Pastori ...'Hagna dignitas sacerdotum, sed grandis eorum ruina, si peccant.'" (cf. 13th Meditation on 1 Kings (1 S), January 1811 - MssB 5323-4).

⁹¹ "Ed ecco per la indefettibile fermezza etc. manifesta lo Spirito creatore il piano di vocazione di nuovi ministri secondo lo Spirito di Dio." (cf. 14th Meditation, 1 Kings (1 S) Jan.-Feb. 1811-MssB 5369).

⁹² cf. Nantua Priests' Retreats, October 1816, conference on "Union with God" – MssB 3428). cf. also Summ. Add, Doc. XXI, pp. 206, f.

CHAPTER VIII

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

1. "TO CONTEMPLATE AND TO HAND ON TO OTHERS WHAT HAS BEEN CONTEMPLATED".

Fr. Bertoni's charism, lived in and springing from community, which is the prophetic sign of love taught by Christ, moves the community to evangelize, for the assistance of the Church, in those modalities which the signs of the time indicate, in the light of the Spirit.

For the Founder, such an announcement of the Word is not possible without its content having been experienced within the community that manifests it in the witness of life and in the "apostolic mission" exercised through different ministries. Thus, in his Constitution 49, he states that the Congregation has for its finality that of "contemplating and of handing on to others what has been contemplated".¹

The fecundity of the Apostolic Mission is in the power of the Spirit. Whoever, takes it on, finds the power to announce the Word with fruitfulness. For this reason, Fr. Bertoni asks that his companions should live personally and in community an intimate contact with the Lord: prayer, meditation, the sacraments, devotion to the Holy Spouses, to the Stigmata of Jesus, the divine office, the examination of conscience, retreats, and spiritual reading...²

The religious life, for Fr. Gaspar, is perfectly in harmony with the direct apostolate, calling attention to the conducting dynamism of both, which is Christ's action, mediating humanity with the Father.³

He refers to the example of the Apostles:

"Let everyone also be mindful of the example of the Apostles, who in their intimate dealings with man, 'becoming all things to all men, so that they might save all for Christ', nevertheless kept a state of perfection."⁴

In this plan, a dissipating activism would only be satisfying for one who had not followed the admonition noted in his spiritual diary:

"When one first does not pray well, then neither can he speak well about God".⁵

In his view, above all else, contemplation is the moving power behind the Apostolic

¹ contemplari, sed etiam contemplata aliis tradere". cf. S.T. II-II, q. 186, a. 6.

² cf. CF 47; cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XII, pp. 61, f.

³ He states in Constitution 271: "Let each one keep before his eyes, the example of Christ our Lord, who though habitually living with others, even eating and drinking with them, nevertheless not only preserved perfection, but also adhered to a state of life which was the most perfect."

⁴ "Ognuno parimenti si proponga l'esempio degli Apostoli, dei quali sappiamo che vissero in uno stato religioso e di perfezione; e tuttavia praticarono familiarmente con gli uomini, e si fecero tutto a tutti per guadagnar tutti a Cristo" (cf. CF 272; cf. ib. # 189).

⁵ "Quando uno non si fa prima ben orazione, non si parla nemmeno bene di Dio" (cf. MP February 4, 1809).

Mission⁶ and the fundamental condition for preaching.

In his project, a pastor, who is a man of prayer, goes forward to encounter reality according to the disposition of Providence. He does not go on ahead of God; he is not hurriedly and precipitously seeking to act without first thinking it over in the light of God. He was convinced that only in contemplation would one perceive the time and the manner to carry out a project, or to make a decision.⁷

“The active life of itself is not enough to serve Christ; the help of contemplation is necessary”.⁸

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit enkindles the heart, and activates the tongue of anyone who would announce the Word of God and moves of the hearers, as Fr. Bertoni taught the newly approved Confessors. Hence, the need of prayer, of meditation, and the contemplative life.⁹

For many, there is necessary the return, a conversion, as real prodigal sons, to the life of intimate contact with God, in order to overcome selfishness, spiritual decline, and emptiness. This is Fr. Bertoni’s thought and he emphasizes it speaking to the new Confessors:

“...among the Christian laity there are those who raise their minds to God, have a taste for the things of God, rejoice in the most intimate communications with God - while I feel nothing in my relationship with God, I experience no spiritual affections, and make no profit...”.¹⁰

Fr. Bertoni insisted on Jesus’ own words in Luke 18:1, that speak of the need to pray always; it will not be enough to dedicate oneself to it only once in a while.¹¹ For him, it is indispensable to cooperate with divine inspiration:

“God’s inspirations, in order to be received and retained, seek solitude, quiet, internal and external silence: otherwise, either they are not perceived, or they vanish and dissipate”

⁶ cf. Founder’s Conference on the “Means of salvation: Prayer and Cooperation”, Mission of Sts. Firmus & Rusticus, May 4-26, 1816, MssB 4091; cf. Meditation 24, 1 Kings (1 S), March 1811 – MssB 5934; cf. “Introduction to the Active, Contemplative and Mixed Life” – MssB 8787).

⁷ cf. Meditation 32, 1 Kings (1 S) Spring-time 1811 - MssB 6192. In Fr. Bertoni’s view, there should always prevail God’s will, the following of grace, being docile to Him - all before bringing one’s own will to the pastoral undertaking.

⁸ cf. the Founder’s copy of “Meditation of Ponte, Introduction to the Active, Contemplative, Mixed Life” – MssB 8787.

⁹ Speaking to the newly approved Confessors, Fr. Bertoni manifests the conviction that it is in meditation that one draws upon the power of the Spirit, in order to communicate with others: “Unless the Holy Spirit inflames their hearts, and empowers their tongue, and brings it about that they speak in such a way that will be on the level of their hearers in order to open up their hearts, they will accomplish nothing...” (cf. Instruction to the Confessors, “The Exercise of Meditation” – MssB 3074, and 3076-3085).

¹⁰ “...cristiani secolari laici, si alzano a Dio, gustano Dio, godono delle piu dolci comunicazioni con Dio, ed io di quanto ha rapporto a Dio nulla sento, non ho affetto a nulla, non si approfitto di nulla.” - cf. 1st Day of retreat to the new Confessors, “The end of Man” -(cf. MssB 2440).

¹¹ Parish Mission of St. Firmus & Rusticus, May 4-26, 1816 – “Means of Salvation: Prayer and Cooperation” -(Hss 4091).

(cf. MP July 23, 1809).¹²

As is known, Fr. Gaspar's own life' was conducted allowing God to permeate profoundly his whole person.¹³ This was realized in him through intimacy with God, in prayer, in meditation, in the sacraments. There were times that he even passed the hours of the night in adoration before the blessed sacrament.¹⁴ Thus, God became the Love, the absolute in life. Thus, apostolic authenticity and credibility offer their own strength in one who prophetically communicates God, only when truly His Word has become incarnate in him.¹⁵

The religious community that the Founder desired, in the first place, was to be a community of contemplation.¹⁶ In it, each would live the *kenosis*, where God would be found, and the love that conditions brotherhood. One would come to see and to love God Who dwells in the other.¹⁷ In this way, one would be a support to the other in the living of his own consecration:

"... by communication and mutual sharing, charity increases and multiplies..."¹⁸

We know of the intensity and the multiplicity of the forms of the apostolic activities of Fr. Bertoni and his companions. But, we also know how intense their contemplative life was!¹⁹ Contemplation and the announcement of the Word were inseparable. It is important to maintain a balance between the two:

"Those who are overly inclined to activity, should withdraw in prayer: those who are overly attached to prayer, should be encouraged to activity" (cf. MP, July 12, 1808).²⁰

The contemplative life is to contribute to the "apostolic mission", like love contributes to serving; or, in other terms, to experience its finality. The ideal for Fr. Bertoni is the mixed life: contemplation and action ("*contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*"), similar to Christ's own life.²¹

¹² "I lumi di Dio per riceverli e per conservarli, ricercano solitudine, quiete, silenzio interno ed esterno: altrimenti o non si sentono, o svaniscono e dileguano" (cf. MP July 23, 1809).

¹³ cf. Summ. Add. Doc. XXVI, p. 461.

¹⁴ cf. ib., p. 462.

¹⁵ cf. ib. pp. 475-7.

¹⁶ Fr. Gaspar underlines the value of charity intensified in prayer and meditation: "because this bond of unity is especially strengthened by prayer and meditation, according to that saying: 'In my meditation, a fire shall burn'; therefore, this is undoubtedly the surer and the sounder way of acquiring this unity." (cf. CF 222; and cf. also ## 221 and 223).

¹⁷ cf. ib. f 223.

¹⁸ "...comunicandosi e partecipando l'uno dell'altro, la carita cresce e (si) moltiplica." (cf. Letter 32, June 28, 1813 Ep ist. p. 86).

¹⁹ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXIII, pp. 259-262.

²⁰ "Quelli che inclinati sono troppo all'azione bisogna ridurre all'orazione: quelli che all'orazione molto si attaccano conviene spingere all'azione" (MP, July 12, 1808).

²¹ He stated: "The active life alone is not enough to serve Christ; as it needs the help of the contemplative life ... The Excellence of the Mixed Life: more perfect than the active and the contemplative The Excellence of Christ's Mixed Life..." - cf. "The Introduction to the active, contemplative and mixed life", Meditation from DaPonte - (MssB 878).

2. ASCETICISM AND THE QUEST FOR PERFECTION

Fr. Bertoni fully realized that the following of Christ is demanding and becomes ever more the measurement of one's drawing close to Christ, to perfection. But, at the same time this way of life opens beyond measure one's generosity and absorption, by a kind of osmosis, of one's personal love for Christ. In this way, Christ's Cross was understood and loved by him in his continual Paschal transformation.

He knew that the "apostolic mission" is accomplished with the continual effort to collaborate with the Spirit, Who is active in anyone who does not place any obstacle.²²

And he was also fully cognizant that "to begin an undertaking, it is necessary to have already acquired, great heroic virtue and not to delay in accepting inspirations".²³

To these, was added also the conviction that "when in a religious Company, each member does not attend specifically to his own personal perfection, this Company cannot make any progress - and if it is committed to work, it does so listlessly and languidly".²⁴ Therefore, the Founder placed his Constitution 6, "one's own spiritual perfection", as among the means of attaining its missionary purpose.

Perfection is a continuing action of seeking and total conversion, even in the smallest matters:

"Do not be in conformity with this world, but be transformed in the spirit of your mind",

Fr. Bertoni noted.²⁵

And again: "Those who are careless in trifles, will sink down little by little".²⁶

One has "to struggle with the little defects as well as with the more serious ones: and with all diligence, develop virtue", he added.²⁷

The end of all of this for Fr. Gaspar, is God: "Everything is included in serving God, cost what it may".²⁸

The Parousia gives support to asceticism:

"It is necessary to think of Heaven at the end of a path strewn and overgrown with thorns, brambles and briars: it is necessary to keep on going... removing the thickets one at a

²² cf. MP, May 18, 1811. (23)

²³ "Per cominciare la impresa bisogna aver fatto acquisto di grande, eroica virtu ... e non tardare ad accogliere le ispirazioni" (cf. ib., July 23, 1809).

²⁴ "Quando in una Compagnia religiosa ciascun membro non attende di proposito alla sua particolar perfezione, non puo la Compagnia procedere, e se opera pure lo fa senz'anima e solo languidamente" (cf. ib., October 11, 1808). The quest for perfection requires the continual "kenotic" process, treated above in Chapter VI, # 2. St. Thomas' influence may be seen in this point - cf. S.T. II-II, q. 188, 1.6,3.

²⁵ "Nolite conformari huic saecu lo, sed reformamini spiritu mentis vestrae" (cf. MP, July 24, 1808, from Rm 12:2).

²⁶ "Qui spernit modica paulatim decidet" (ib., from Si 19:1).

²⁷ "...combattere li piccoli difetti come altra volta li grandi: e di ascendere alla virtu con ogni diligenza..." (cf. ib., October 8, 1808).

²⁸ "Tutto sta nel formare la risoluzione di voler servire Dio a qualunque patto" (ib., July 30, 1808).

time, without ever stopping...”²⁹

To cooperate with the operations of God, continual vigilance is necessary: “I fear Jesus passing by”³⁰

In his spiritual diary, the Founder portrays his asceticism, his convictions and real quest for perfection in the on-going effort to “draw in ourselves Christ’s portrait”.³¹

For this task of continuing struggle, a real effort is needed: “we will not go to heaven without it costing us great travail and fatigue. ‘The Kingdom of heaven suffers violence’”.³¹

However, this bears results in the following of Christ: “God does not refuse any of those who chose to fight under the flag of His Son, and who avail themselves of the means prescribed by Him: i.e., prayer and mortification; such a one will gloriously triumph”.³³

Vigilance and attention are required to avoid falling into small faults. These become important, and therefore: “Flee the small sins”.³⁴

Moreover, he wrote that the evil of sin must be avoided at any cost:

“If one were to consider the great wrong that sin is, not even one would be committed”.³⁵

Christ’s gate is a narrow one. His Cross is necessary, Fr. Bertoni wrote in his spiritual diary, using Christ’s own words:

“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow Me”.³⁶

The sacrifices inherent in life, health problems, the tediousness and even persecutions, are all included within the perspective of an offering out of love. However, what is remarkable is that Fr. Bertoni accepted it all with an even disposition, courageously, serenely and without

²⁹ “Bisogna supporre il Cielo come in fondo a un viale sparso, e intralciato di spine, bronchi e cespugli: conviene ... proseguendo la via con levar di mezzo or questo or quel cespò ... né restar mai” (cf. ib., July 30, 1808). ”

³⁰ “Timeo Iesum transeuntem” (ib. September 15, 1808).

³¹ “Dobbiam fare un ritratto in noi stessi di Gesu Cristo” (cf. ib., February 26, 1809). His whole thought is orientated toward Christ. Thus, his whole quest to put on Christ’s own features.

³¹ “...non andremo in Cielo senza che ci costi travaglio grande e fatica. ‘Regnum caelorum vim patitur’” (cf. ib., February 22, 1809, from Mt 11:12).

³³ “Dio non rifiuta niuno di quelli che vogliono combattere sotto le insigne del suo Figliuolo, e che si prevalgono dei mezzi da Lui prescritti, cioè orazione e mortificazione: costui anzi trionfera gloriosamente” (cf. ib., July 29, 1809).

³⁴ “Fuggire i peccati piccoli” (cf. ib., February 22, 1809). Fr. Gaspar much emphasizes vigilance, and at the same time, prayer, to combat temptation along the path of virtue.

³⁵ “Se si considerasse che gran male è il peccato, non se ne commetterebbe pur’uno” (ib., February 19, 1809).

³⁶ “Qui vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me” (ib., February 22, 1809, from Mt 16:24). This point of Bertoni’s asceticism was particularly presented in Chapter V.

complaint.³⁷

The suffering in his personal life was not negligible, particularly that agony caused by his leg, which prostrated him to bed for lengthy periods of his life. The incisions, rather extended and deep, repeated more than 200 times, without benefit of anesthesia, were a real martyrdom for him. From his perspective, this was all part of the dynamics of love in oblation suffering as cooperation with grace:

“The Lord comes to my help at the right moment, beyond all of my merits, with the prayers of his faithful servants ... it seems that He wants me wounded, not dead. Thus I am able to serve Him and not abuse His graces, and to do that penance that I need”.³⁸

In addition, his austere life regarding clothing, food and mortification strengthened him in being united to Christ's suffering, in giving himself entirely to Him, allowing the Holy Spirit to be the life of his being.³⁹

Further, he applied Jesus' own interpretation of penance, suffering: “How happy will that day of penance be considered! How fortunate that solitude! And how precious those sufferings! ‘While the world will rejoice,’ said Jesus, ‘you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy...and that joy no one will take from you..’ (Jn 16:20-22)”.⁴⁰

Fr. Gaspar, furthermore, looked on suffering as real school. Without doubt, the “diploma” that he received in it could only have been *Summa cum laude*!⁴¹

His life with his companions was an experience of need to give testimony of poverty, required of religious, and demanded principally of those of life in misery. Their witness of austerity in dwelling, in clothing, and in food, drew the attention of those whose eyes were open, to the fact that this was an effort to share in Christ's own life. Fr. Schlör stated:

“They live very poorly and mortified. Each one's room is very simple, as is each piece of furniture; yet, throughout the house there is a real perfection of cleanliness, that is a delight to see. The little church, that once was conducted by the Franciscans, has been wonderfully restored and is remarkably spotless”.⁴²

³⁷ cf. Summ. Add, Doc. XXVI, pp. 520,f. and 618.

³⁸ “Il Signore mi aiuta a tempo, contro i miei meriti con le orazioni de' suoi servi fedeli... egli mi vuol ferito, non morto. Così io possa servirlo e non abusarmi delle sue grazie, e fare quella penitenza che mi è necessaria” (cf. Letter 104, May 1826 – Epist, p 197).

³⁹ cf. Summ. Add, Doc. XX, pp. 236-45; Doc XXVI, pp. 416-32, and 516-526. He experienced in the affliction of his lengthy ailments the worth of suffering. What was most important to him was to be united with Christ, in Whom he placed the most absolute confidence. In this manner, the process of redemption unfolded. (cf. Letter 12, January 9, 1813 – Epist. p- 50).

⁴⁰ “O quanto si stimera felice in quel giorno la penitenza! Quanto fortunata la solitudine! Quanto preziosi i patimenti! ‘Il mondo godera,’ dicea Cristo, Io. 16, 20-22, ‘e voi sarete contristati, ma la vostra tristezza si cangerà in gaudio e nessun ve lo potrà togliere.’” (cf. Sermon 16, “The Lenten Fast to be undertaken with Joy”, preached on Quinquagesima Sunday, in St- paul's, campo Marzo, Verona - February 22, 1803 – MssB 754).

⁴¹ cf. Summ. Add. Doc. XVIII, p. 98; Doc. XXVI, p. 420.

⁴² Summ. Add, Ooc. XIII, p. 67.

Fr. Bertoni's plan calls for a continuing attention to develop without ceasing. One can never be content with the journey already accomplished. Christ must be lovingly followed, and he does not stop.⁴³ The intervention of the Spirit is constant, but He must encounter an attentive heart. In this sense, Fr. Bertoni preached:

"Even when souls arrive at that level of perfection, they are not yet sure; rather, they run a great risk, if they are not very humbler and mortified. There is the example of St. Ignatius regarding the Stigmat; that of St. Francis Borgia regarding mortification; and that of St. Thomas concerning humility.

'Let him who stands take heed not to fall'.⁴⁴

And further:

"We ought to correspond, and in our actions, to progress from virtue to virtue (cf. Ps 83:8), from the moral, to the religious, to the divine".⁴⁵

For Fr. Bertoni, the aspiration to perfection, which has its font in God is of absolute necessity to anyone who is consecrated in the religious life.⁴⁶ This is not something involuntary. It has to be sought for, strength of will must be applied, in order to cooperate with the grace that will not fail.⁴⁷

Whoever does not make the effort, Fr. Bertoni stated, is like one who gives up rowing while being in the current of a river: he be submerged.⁴⁸

Fr. Bertoni looked on the priesthood as a state of perfection:

"...whoever does not strive to be perfect, is a fraudulent priest."⁴⁹

His view was that our perfection consists in two aspects: to what God wills, and in the manner He wills.⁵⁰

In the quest to carry out God's will, the end of asceticism comes only with death. The

⁴³ cf. Panegyric in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, preached in St. Firmus Major, Verona, October 4, 1808 -(MssB 1868).

⁴⁴ "Arrivate a quel segno di perfezione, non sono già sicure le anime; anzi corrono grandi pericoli, se non siano molto umili e mortificate. Esempio di S. Ignazio circa le Stimate; di S. Francesco Borgia (circa la mortificazione; di S. Tommaso (circa l') umiltà. Qui stat videat ne cadat". - cf. Meditation 23, on 1 Kings 6:18 (1 S) - Spring of 1811 - (MssB 5880).

⁴⁵ "Noi dobbiamo corrispondere e nell'azione, progredendo di virtù, Ps 83:8, dalle morali alle religiose, alle divine." - cf. Meditation 6 on 1 Kings 1:19 (1 S), December 16, 1810 - (MssB 4991).

⁴⁶ And he affirmed: "We ought to aspire to true wisdom (or) perfection, (or) loving union with God. 'Have charity, which is the bond of perfection' Col. 2:14. The means to acquire this are: Great esteem - great desire - great diligence" - cf. Summaries from Rodriguez, "The excellent things contained in this book" - (MssB 8809).

⁴⁷ "...if you do not will it, then all the diligence and means that Superiors might employ for your perfection, will not be sufficient." - cf. Summaries from Rodriguez, ib. - (MssB 8813. : cf. also ib. 8816).

⁴⁸ cf r. ib. 8819).

⁴⁹ "...chi non procura di esser perfetto, e un sacerdote finto" (ib. 8819).

⁵⁰ cf. ib. 8831.

terms “death to self” and “life in God” have profound meaning. In this, for Fr. Gaspar, one lives the beatitude of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹

3. HUMILITY

In order to leave completely free God’s influence in his own being and activity, Fr. Bertoni fully recognized that God is everything, and the Bestower of his existence and all his gifts. His intense asceticism was based on humility, which is, in the final analysis, the truthful perspective regarding oneself and God.

He felt called to a special vocation which required sublime faith. This finds its support in humility. Therefore, he maintained with St. Augustine:

“In proportion to the height that one chooses to construct the building, so much the more deeply should its foundations be dug... Therefore, in his view, humility was what received and retained the gift and the treasure of faith”.⁵²

In Fr. Bertoni’s life, faith and humility walked hand in hand. As has already been seen, the Absolute is precisely God Who is to be sought after, cost what it may. This is possible when the barrier of selfishness is overcome. In this regard, it is worthwhile to remember here the Founder’s words:

“In the depths of one’s own nothingness, one finds God”.⁵³

This same God is also to be sought and found in the being of one’s brother - and with every neighbor, in like manner, one is to enter into a relationship of humility. God always is to be in the forefront. This is the basis for the oft-repeated slogan in the Veronese dialect: “Lowly, lowly, as the little creatures in their burrows”.⁵⁴ These words, written to Fr. Bragato in 1848, were proverbial in the early Stigmatine community, in order to indicate that special style of humility and simplicity. It was a kind of motto received from Fr. Galvani, but here addressed to Fr. Bragato who had renounced the episcopacy which had been offered to him in deference to the position he held.

In Fr- Gaspar’s ideal, the entire beginning of generous undertakings had to depart and

⁵¹ cf. Letter 12, January 9, 1813 -(Epist. p. 50.)

⁵² cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 463. Fr. Bertoni’s authenticity is sufficiently established in what refers to the solidity of his spiritual edifice, with the immense impact that he had on Verona – and also, with regard to his humility, recognized in him to such a sublime degree.

⁵³ cf. MP, August 24, 1808 - see p. 28, note 6. In his spirituality, only when all personal pride is overcome is there obtained the right condition to grasp and perceive clearly God’s presence. From this, developed his entire asceticism to overcome all egocentrism and for the acquisition of humility. This supplied the context in which to see God in Himself and in others. God became his “all.” Each person should be respected in his dignity, because in the very depths of one’s own self- emptying, is God transparent. Before God, one’s own gifts are developed (as everything has been bestowed by God) so that they might redound to God Who has given them so freely.

⁵⁴ “Bassi, bassi; buseta e taneta.” (cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 548; and Doc. XXXV, p. 754). This phrase described the cricket, hidden in a lowly place.

be accomplished through humility, in the conviction that God really is the One Who gives the strength and the increase.⁵⁵

Humility, far from having one's talents disappear, is a power that moves a person to develop with the greatest zeal to serve one's neighbor, but always with attention for God's glory. He must be in the forefront. Thus, it is humility that elevates one to appreciate God's gifts in others. In addition, it leads one to uphold, to spur on and to assist others to do this, without jealousy, envy or rivalry. All talents are gifts of the Spirit for the service of one another, so that God's glory will reign. This is what Fr. Bertoni thought, lived and taught.⁵⁶

The truth is that he avoided everything that might have been reason for him to be honored by others: praise, honors, even the title of "canon", or other distinctions.⁵⁷ His personal conviction, as a simple man (while being learned, a leader and an authority in different fields of knowledge, as in theology and spirituality), made of him a genuine humble servant. He worked, acted and tried in everything to have God and others stand in the lime-light.⁵⁸ Hence, he was even embarrassed in receiving the bishop, a prince, the emperor... who would visit him, to seek his counsel.⁵⁹

He found humility so important that not only did he live it to perfection, but left it described in his Constitutions. numbers 120 and 121, offering guide-lines for its respect. He placed there even the twelve grades of humility, compiled by St. Benedict in his Rules. Among these, are the following: modest regarding the eyes, words and gestures, obedience to the Rules, patience in obeying the Superiors, the conviction of one's own unworthiness, admission of one's own faults, not seeking one's own will, and the fear and obedience of God.

The importance of humility is exalted by Fr. Bertoni because it also restrains pride, and thus facilitates the human being to follow the path leading to God, rather than to sin.⁶⁰ It enables one to become like *a* child, in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven.⁶¹

He taught the real need of knowing oneself. From such knowledge comes humility. When a person lacks self-knowledge, one may inflate with pride, having a false esteem of oneself, thinking that one is superior to others. He describes the opposite of this:

"But is it not so that when a person comes to know himself, that he is but dust and ashes, that he has nothing of himself, but that all is due to God, will it not then be easy for such a person to render that tribute of obsequious reverence and all the praise that is due to

⁵⁵ cf. Joseph Fiorio, *Lo Spirito*, p. 40. cf. also Meditation 10, 1 Kings 2:9 (1 S), near the New Year 1811 – MssB 5164.

⁵⁶ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 368, 469-9, and 546-7.

⁵⁷ cf. ib. pp. 547-9.

⁵⁸ cf. ib. pp. 551-2. Humility had so imbued his personality that it made a deep impression on anyone who had contact with him.

⁵⁹ cf. ib.

⁶⁰ cf. Sermon 1, "Humility", delivered as a Deacon, in the Church of St. Paul, Campo Marzio, June 8th - the third of the Sundays of St. Aloysius – it lasted about a half hour, in the year 1800. - cf. MssB 371.

⁶¹ cf. ib. MssB 375. He stated that humility is not only *a* counsel that is useful for perfection, but it is a precept in order to live spiritual childhood and be saved.

God".⁶²

For us to know ourselves, it is necessary to take a close look at ourselves, the Founder taught - "to touch our own nothingness with our own hands is something that is very sensible and obvious"⁶³ From this may be comprehended why he was convinced that in self-emptying, recognizing one's own "nothingness", that God is met. This sheds light on his asceticism, his intense desire to allow God's action to be what commanded his whole being.

When a person arrives at the depths of humility, and penetrates into the profound abyss of oneself, where God is encountered, then one may be increased by Him. Then it is that all one's actions come to be motivated in Him, in His Spirit. And Fr. Gaspar added: "the sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the accomplished preacher is the virtue of humility".⁶⁴ We can truly confirm the Spirit's presence in him through his humility in announcing God's Word.⁶⁵

In his view, one hopes in evangelization in God's intervention communicated through the one who acts in the name of God Himself! The Pastor must be imbued with such humility. Fr. Gaspar stated:

"The first work and fruit of a good shepherd is humility".⁶⁶

According to his teachings, in order to sway people "the example of true humility is worth more than is the certain sample of secular and worldly authority".⁶⁷

His own humility was always motivated by the following of Christ, Who, being obedient, humbled Himself, even unto death, to the most shameful of deaths. However, his humility was also inspired by the Lord's resurrection.⁶⁸ Thus he had no misgivings at all about being considered and being sublimely limited, and of taking on any sacrifice whatever, accepting misrepresentation and opposition regarding himself. He believed that he was called to be hidden in Christ. He thus appreciated the gifts that God gave him; the only one to be exalted was the One Who had given the gifts. He utilized these gifts for the benefit of the community, without seeking to draw praise on himself.⁶⁹

⁶² "Ma fate che un uomo conosca se stesso, d'esser polvere e cenere, d'aver nulla da se ma tutto da Dio, come non sara facile a lui rendere il tributo d'ossequiosa riverenza e d'ogni laude, dovuta a Dio." - cf. Sermon 1, "Humility" - ib, MssB 384.

⁶³ "...toccar poi con mano il nostro niente, qual cosa piu sensibile e piu ovvia." - ib., MssB 386.

⁶⁴ "...signum perfecti praedicatoris est repletio Sancti Spiritus, et virtus humilitatis signum illius plenitudinis." - cf. Meditation 39, 1 Kings 10:6 (1 S) - MssB 6427).

⁶⁵ cf. Summ. Add., Ooc. XXVI, pp. 335-7. His theological and spiritual preparation and his great eloquence were committed to the Word of God, being confident that this is where the power of conversion lies. Hence, he taught the priests that they should never preach themselves but God's Word (cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 335-7).

⁶⁶ "La prima opera e frutto (del buon pastore) e umilta" - cf.- Meditation 41, 1 Kings 10:4 (1 S), Autumn of 1811 - (MssB 6485).

⁶⁷ "...piu assai vale l'esempio d'una verace umilta, che certa mostra d'autorita secolare e mondana." - cf. "Notes regarding St. Ignatius -(MssB 8723).

⁶⁸ In this respect, he recalls the words from Philippians 2:8: "...He humbled Himself, making Himself obedient unto death but God raised Him high..." And the words to the Romans 8:29: with those He justified, He shared His glory." - (cf. "Regarding Patience", Consideration 1 - MssB 4384).

⁶⁹ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XX, p. 167.

Verona was indeed sublimely enriched by the humility of this man who did not hide for himself the treasury of the gifts he had received from the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Founder's humility was not the art of making others like ourselves, while maintaining the appearance of humility. Rather it seems to be the art of leading others to live as images and temples of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ It demands from each the continuing effort of lowering oneself, as Christ did, in order to serve others.⁷¹ This requires the spirit of poverty and humility of heart, and excludes as worthless all self-consideration. It makes us leave aside all that is not God, and reduces us to the condition of spiritual childhood, having us follow Jesus' teachings:

"If you do not become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of God".⁷²

4. ABANDONMENT INTO GOD'S HANDS

The matter of Fr. Bertoni's abandonment has already been specifically treated in the reflection on the "apostolic mission", on page 64 and following. Here we will treat directly the virtue of abandonment as the gift he developed, and which permeates his entire spirituality, becoming an integrating and substantial part of his being and attitude before God.

Fr. Bertoni was a person outstanding for his absolute confidence in God, committing himself through a conscious and active surrender into His hands.

Fr. Nello treats of this matter in masterly fashion, stating, with Gardeil, that abandonment enables a person (as is the case in a special way for Fr. Bertoni) disposed to receive God's help:

"This total abandonment to God, which is hope, is only realized little by little, and never perfectly. Filial fear brings this about to the most sublime degree, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit".⁷³

Through his ascetical life, Fr. Bertoni contributed his part, seeking to cooperate with the intervention of the Spirit, as has been seen earlier. God is the source of human realization and liberation. When a human being does all that is possible not to hinder the influence of grace, and acts in conformity to God's will, by being committed entirely into His hands, finally is able to realize life's plan, and then God acts in and with him. Thus, Fr. Bertoni wrote:

⁷⁰ And further: humility is not hiding oneself to avoid helping others with those gifts received from the Spirit. In this connection, the Founder stated: "...each one is born to do great things: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness' Gen. 1,26. 'Let us glory in the hope of the glory of the children of God' Rom. 5,2. ' (cf. "Humility", Nss 4365.). God is the One to be praised. (cf. ib. 4366-70).

⁷¹ cf. ib. 4372

⁷² Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 546.

⁷³ cf. Dalle Vedove, Un modello, p. 76.

"It is a beautiful virtue to be abandoned into the omnipotent arms of divine Providence, when we are not able to act ourselves: but it is an even more perfect and consummate virtue, when indeed we can and we should – according to the order placed by Providence work with our own efforts, and yet not ceasing to be equally and totally abandoned to His power. Thus, it seems that the one who said the following, did in his own life: 'I live (and, consequently, I work) now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ, Who lives (and consequently, acts) in me' (Ga 2:20)".⁷⁴

The struggle to bring about the dominion over the "first nature" is very pronounced in Fr. Bertoni.⁷⁵ Thus does "second nature" reign, and the person allows full sway to grace,⁷⁶ and in fact, within, dwells Christ. Happy is anyone who allows God "to guard the city" (cf. Ps 127:1) – and then, "if God does not, in vain the sentries watch".⁷⁷

Fr. Gaspar was convinced that "Providence, necessary for all creatures... brings it about that a person touches with his own hand the insufficiency of own strength and reason, and hence, experiences the need of God's hand to sustain him..."⁷⁸

The placing of oneself entirely in God's hands, for Fr. Gaspar, meant to give oneself to Him, without holding back anything - confiding in Him as the absolute reason of being. On the other hand, all this requires the spending of much effort to love God, Who has first loved us:

"We have to correspond with growth in virtue and with self-giving to God without reserve".⁷⁹

We are the "apple of God's eyes". He would accomplish wonders in us if we would allow Him to act, "placing ourselves freely and totally into His hands".⁸⁰ Being convinced of this, Fr. Bertoni had much experience in his own life of this abandonment to God. He truly accomplished wonders in Verona. His "abandonment to God" is like a wire through which an

⁷⁴ "Bella virtù e abbandonarsi, quando non possiamo operar noi, alle braccia Onnipotenti della Divina Provvidenza; ma più perfetta e consumata virtù, quando noi pure possiamo e dobbiamo - secondo l'ordine posto dalla Provvidenza - operare colle nostre mani, non cessare punto dall'essere ugualmente e del tutto abbandonati alle sue. Così pare che fosse chi diceva: 'Vivo ego (e per conseguenza opero), iam non ego, vivit vero (e per conseguenza opera) in me Christus' (Ga 2:20)." (cf. Letter 38, October 26, 1813 - Epist. p. 99). What is called "abandonment into God's hands" is a reality that was fully lived by Fr. Gaspar. So, to comprehend it, it is necessary to keep in mind his theological ideals and life-style, i.e., unconditional faith, hope and total confidence, and absolute love for God - and for His sake, love for high neighbor.

⁷⁵ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXV, p. 667.

⁷⁶ cf. Summ. Ad d., Doc. XXXV, p. 691. The "first nature" is the equivalent of a "carnal person"; the "second nature" is the response of a person under the effect of God's grace, as has been seen in Chapter VI.

⁷⁷ "Nisi Dominus custodierit civitatem, frustra vigilat qui custodit eam. Ps 126:1 (Vulgate) - (cf. Sermon 1 in the Triduum of Penance to St. Rocco, preached in the cathedral, for immunity from cholera, Verona, 1831 - MssB 4240).

⁷⁸ "...la sua Provvidenza necessaria alle sue creature, fa che l'uomo tocchi con mano l'insufficienza delle sue forze e della sua ragione, onde conosca la necessità della mano di Dio che il sostenga..." - (ibid., 4241).

⁷⁹ "Dobbiamo corrispondere col crescere in virtù e col darsi senza riserve a Dio." - cf. Meditation 7, 1 Kings 1:24 (1 S), December 1810 - (MssB 5032; ib., 5021. cf. also "Caussade", in: Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ed. 1953, col. 361-5.)

⁸⁰ "...si rimettessimo liberamente e totalmente in sua mano." cf. Meditation 15, 3 January 1811 - (MssB 5480).

electric current flows: it transmitted energy into the prophetic power of his consecrated life and into his apostolic mission.

The manner of "abandoning oneself" to God ought to be beyond suspicion, and without taking precautionary measures. God's action, then, is very evident. In this regard, Fr. Bertoni wrote:

"The Lord adds something of His own whenever one abandons himself to Him, and follows Him faithfully, strongly and humbly does not precede Him; and therefore, He offers unmistakable signs to all of having received a vocation from God. These signs are:

1. holiness and doctrine that are more heavenly, than of this earth;
2. correspondence between the message preached and the life lived..."⁸¹

Abandonment to God brings one to modeling himself on God, glorifying Him, in order to supply then the condition of carrying out an apostolate:

"... above all, and before all else, we are to work for the Divine Glory in ourselves: that is, to have obtained full victory over ourselves, before entering the struggle to win over the hearts of others..."⁸²

If by chance, in our human weakness (although doing all that we can to improve ourselves, to transform the structures, or to convert people), we prove incapable, Providence will take over. We will always be diligent and fight the good fight with God's strength, if we are diligent in our relationship with Him.

Fr. Gaspar said as much, in writing to Sister Naudet:

"And if', therefore, we should forget other things: He, either Will remind us of them; or, "y His Providence, He will conduct the matter much better than we would, with all our own resources of remembering and thinking. In short, we are always diligent, 'when we love ("diligimus") God.' "Happy is the one who can lose himself in this abyss! who casts himself, courageously and ship-wrecked, into this Ocean!. A baby is never more secure than when sleeping in his Mother's embrace, the child abandons every thought and care of himself. He does not see, hear, or speak. But the Mother sees, hears, speaks, and is busy for him. And, being so close to him, she may awaken him whenever she sees fit"⁸³

⁸¹ "Il Signore vi aggiunge del suo quando uno si abbandona a lui e lo segue fedelmente, fortemente, e umilmente non lo previene; e quindi ei da segni non equivoci a tutto il mondo della sua vocazione divina. Questi segni sono: 1° la santità e la dottrina piu di cielo che di terra; 2° corrispondenza della predicazione colla vita in cui traovano..." – cf. Meditation 16, 1 Kings 3:15 (1 S), February 3, 1811 – (MssB 5538).

⁸² "...si deve sopra tutto, e prima d'ogni altra cosa, procurar questa Cloria Divina infroi stessi: cioe avere ottenuta piena vittoria di se, prima di entrare in campo per vincere i cuori altrui..." - cf. Letter 34, St. Ignatius' Feast 1813 - (Epist. p. 91).

⁸³ "E se per questo dimenticheremo altre cose: Egli, o le sapra ricordare a noi; o colla sua Provvidenza condurra la cosa assai meglio che noi, con tutto il nostro ricordare e pensare, avremmo fatto. In somma, noi siamo sempre diligenti, 'quando diligimus Deum.'

"Beato colui che si perde in questo abisso! che si gitta, animoso e naufrago, in quest'Oceano! Non e mai piu sicuro un figliuolo, che quando, addormentato in collo alla Hadre, abbandona ogni pensiero e sollecitudine di se. Ei non vede, ei non ode, ei non parla. Na vede per lui e ode e parla e opera la Madre. E quando ella vuole, sa e puo

The abandonment lived and preached by Fr. Gaspar, as has been seen, is the indispensable basis for his apostolate. In his view, the contemplative life, as permeated with love, expands into the active life. When, as he maintained, the perspective maintained is God, one's neighbor is loved, in His image, with all of one's strength, replete with the very power of God. Fr. Giacobbe spoke of this once:

"...like a second Eliseus, who drew all up within himself to communicate the breath of life to the child who had already died, applying mouth to mouth, matching both hands and feet; in like manner, he would come to the level of anyone's weakness, he would keep their pace, level of effort and inclinations, so that he might communicate to them the spirit of that life that people strong in the life of Christ's grace live, so that in good time they might bear fruit of Christian virtue".⁸⁴

The following of the Spirit's action, that brings out the signs of His will⁸⁵ is founded on total confidence in God, Who is all love, and on Providence. Thus Fr. Gaspar's total confidence in Providence is explained. Therefore, He feared nothing, even what might seem to be against the Institute that he founded.⁸⁶ His attitude of surrender, of availability, of indifference, finds its power here. His self-surrender and availability are mature - even, as Fr. Charles Zara testified, to the point of allowing the whole work he had undertaken to be absorbed by the Jesuits, if necessary.⁸⁷ All fear vanishes. Hope dominates. Thus, the One Who can do all, continues His influence and it comes about. Fr. Bertoni wrote:

"The time will come when even those restraints that prudence teaches to maintain, will be loosened. Divine Providence does make use of them to protect His plan, until the cloud passes over. Meanwhile, blessed are those who hope in this divine Providence. They have nothing to fear that anything might hinder or thwart His designs. At one and the same time, Providence proceeds gently and strongly, arranging all for the purpose intended: all circumstances, both prosperous as well as adverse, as well as the good and ill will of human beings, all serve Providence... 'We know that by turning everything to their good, God cooperates with all those who love Him' (Rm 8:28).⁸⁸

Confidence and hope in God concur in Fr. Gaspar's total abandonment in God.⁸⁹ Hope

svegliarlo, standole si vicino" (cf. Letter 36, Feast of St. Ignatius 1813 - Epist. p. 96).

⁸⁴ Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, Giacobbe's Biography of the Founder, pp. 338-9.

⁸⁵ cf. ib., Doc. XXIII, p. 265.

⁸⁶ cf. CS IV, p. 104. In this citation, there is included what he wrote in his Spiritual Diary on February 14, 1809: "Nothing was to be feared, other than not corresponding as one should, with the Lord's Graces."

⁸⁷ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXIV, pp. 642-3.

⁸⁸ "Verra il tempo che saranno sciolti anche i lacci di quei ritardi, che la prudenza insegna ad osservare, e la Divine Provvidenza se ne serve per proteggere cio che vuole, finche passi il nuvolo. Intanto, beati quelli che sperano in questa Divina Provvidenza. Essi non hanno a temere di nulla che si osti o si frapponga a' suoi disegni. Ella va soavemente e fortemente insieme disponendo ogni cosa al fine inteso: e tutte le cose, e prospere e avverse, e la volonta buone e perverse degli uomini, egualmente servono a lei ... 'diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum' (Rom. VIII, 28)". - cf. Letter 14, January 15, 1813 - (Epist. p. 53).

⁸⁹ cf. Letter 25, March 6, 1813 Epist. p. 73. It is to be noted that the act of trusting and hoping in God, without preceding Him, but always to follow him: "Therefore, I had directed you not to go ahead of God, even if you have to prepare His ways, according to the most useful sayings of St. Ignatius." (cf. also here S.T. II-II, q. 129, a. 6).

is strengthened by the Holy Spirit, to Whom he often refers as the “good Spirit”.⁹⁰

This same “Good Spirit” inspires him to a readiness in praising and glorifying God in everything, while his confidence in Providence makes him reflect on God as the reason behind everything and as being worthy of every praise.⁹¹

However, those who find this kind of abandonment difficult, as Fr. Bertoni taught, should be understood and respected.⁹² But, at the same time, his personal example could be valuable for anyone who is experiencing the reality of bitterness, misunderstanding, infirmity, deception, crisis, loneliness...In this regard, Fr. Giacobbe wrote:

“His hope in God stood over very long and harsh trials”.⁹³

Lastly, his care in preparing himself to cooperate with the action of God, the point of casting himself onto the care of Providence with absolute confidence, is manifest. He himself stated:

“It is of the utmost importance to seek out the diligence to do on our part what is required, and not to impede what God can and wishes to do, on His part”.⁹⁴

In this connection, he once preached to priests:

“The Spirit Who breathes over the foundation of faith, would build in us a perfect edifice of charity, with our cooperation with the divine grace in which we hope”.⁹⁵

Fr. Gaspar, in recognizing the truth regarding himself and God, placed all his hope and confidence,⁹⁶ in the One Who can do all things, and in Whom everything is accomplished. Therefore, his whole life “unfolded uniquely under the sway of the dominion of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and, for this reason, in a complete surrender and in a total abandonment to the divine initiatives”.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXV, p. 676.

⁹¹ cf. ib., p. 667; cf. Sermon 35, “The Rule of our thinking and acting”. For the Feast of the Epiphany 1803. St. Paul’s, Verona – on the left -(MssB1240).

⁹² cf. HP, October 12, 1808.

⁹³ cf. Summ. Add., Ooc. XXVI, p. 471; cf. also pp. 472-3. His life and activity, despite so many tribulations, was governed by that which he often called to mind: ‘he hoped against hope’ (cf. ib., p. 472).

⁹⁴ “Squisita ricercarsi la diligenza per fare dal canto nostro, quanto e d’uopo a non impedire quanto Dio puo e vuole fare dal canto suo.” - cf. Letter 19, 2nd week of February 1813 – Epist. p. 62. Cooperation with grace has already been recognized as an action proper to the Spirit for the good of the person, and in behalf of what one is accomplishing with the grace that has been received.

⁹⁵ “Spirito che sopra il fondamento della fede edificchi in noi un edificio perfetto di carita, cooperando noi alla divina grazia in cui speriamo.” - cf. MssB 4864.

⁹⁶ cf. Dalle Vedove, Un modello, p. 200.

⁹⁷ ib., p. 260.

CHAPTER IX

RICHESS OF THE SPIRIT

1. THE CHARITY OF SERVICE

The Founder was fully dedicated to be faithful to the gifts he had received. His continual search for perfection brought him to correspond to the Lord's appeals. His total self-dedication led him to place himself as would a child, in a state of absolute confidence, in the hands of Providence. His, however, was a choice of abandonment that was profoundly conscious and dynamic, accomplishing fully his own part, in order to be a useful instrument in the hands of God. He willed to serve other human beings with great humility, through the gifts he received and developed.

Nevertheless, the consciousness of his human limitations lead him to anchor his hope in the Lord, Who for him was the foundation of the realization of his whole being. Only God realized his concerns; and in his correspondence to the intervention of the "Good Spirit" is the sphere in which he moved. He placed himself entirely under His inspiration and action. He tried to correspond, as has already been seen, to the interventions of this same Spirit.

The truth of the matter is that it would be impossible to live according to the Spirit without His own moving inspiration. He is the Bestower of His gifts that assist a human being in discerning whatever would be better according to God.⁹²

In Fr. Bertoni one can see this activity clearly; he is totally given over to God and to his own brothers. For him as the Founder of the Institute of "Apostolic Missionaries", meant to live and serve according to God's plan, the whole foundation is the very love of God as this was being lived in the Stigmatine community, in order to share this far and wide.

In discussing love, Fr. Bertoni made of it the strongest rampart of his spiritual edifice, of its religious life and apostolate. He spoke of it in these terms:

"...the divine liberality, adding superabundantly with the gratuitous, downpour of His supernatural inspirations and infused gifts, they have been raised up almost by these three degrees of love to desire the communication of the truth, of goodness, and of their joy in the divine presence ('they will go from virtue to virtue' (Ps 83:8 Vulgate), they have finally arrived at that purity and peace of heart, to which there is promised anew the very vibrant and familiar communication with the source of all light, of all good, and of all joy..."⁹³

⁹² cf. L CO 2:12-16.

⁹³ "...sopraggiungendo la divina liberalità colla pioggia gratuita de' supernaturali suoi lumi e doni infusi, elevati quasi per que' tre gradi di amore a desiderare la comunicazione della verità, della bontà e del gaudio della divina presenza ('ibunt de virtute in virtutem' Ps. 83,8) sono finalmente giunti a quella purezza e pace di cuore a cui è ripromessa la comunicazione molto viva e familiare colla fonte d'ogni luce, e d'ogni bene, e d'ogni gaudio..." - cf. Heditation 1S, 1 Kings 3:1 (1 S), February 1811 -(MssB 5465).

With the help of grace, he really attained these degrees of love in his total oblation to God, within this basic principle:

“Love is the form and the unique principle of action”.³ According to his teaching, there are two principles of perfection to nourish true charity: “To have one’s heart permeated by God and emptied of self... This means to hold as nothing everything that is not God, or which does not lead to Him... and to recognize the supreme good which God is, and as such, love Him. This will not leave any space within the person for affections, desire, love for any other good”.⁴

From this love for -God and the Founder’s total surrender to Him, may be seen the effect of that love which he extended to his neighbor. In the first place, it is necessary to be permeated with the love of God in order to communicate it without interruption. In regard to Fr. Gaspar, his first biographer states:

“On fire with love for God, he knew how to communicate it with admirable effectiveness to the hearts of others”.⁵

Whenever he noticed the humility within anyone who had come to visit him, he was “all full of gentleness and charity”.⁶

Love for one’s neighbor begins at home, as he often insisted.⁷ And how much did he recommend this to his own companions! His Constitutions, as has already been seen, are full of this orientation of the respect of fraternal love.⁸ Loving in so far as it is service of the other, is the effect of love for God. It is in respecting God, Who resides in the other, that there is delineated the following of Christ.⁹ Therefore, the apostolate encounters strength in the realization of: “see how they love one another.” The Founder’s focussing on the overcoming of the acceptance of persons, is worthy of note. He was very attentive to the importance of taking into consideration the differing requirements of each one.¹⁰

For him, charity was a gift, *a* charism coming from on high. It is impressed in the heart by the Holy Spirit. He backed up his views with these words from St. Paul to the Romans 5:5:

“Charity is diffused into our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us. The

³ “L’amore forma e principio unico dell’operare” – cf. “The loving life of Christ, His Perfect Charity”. Hission at Sts. Firmus & Rusticus, October 4-26, 1816, Yerona -(MssB 4228).

⁴ Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI - Giacobbe’s Biography - p. 475.

⁵ Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 407.

⁶ ib., p. 404.

⁷ cf. CF 188.

⁸ cf. ib. ## 187-297.

⁹ cf. “Charity in a Busy Life” – Mission of sts. Firmus & Rusticus, Hay 1816 – (Hss 4225); cf. Sermon 6, “Charity toward one’s Neighbor”. Sermon delivered in St. Paul’s. Campo Marzio, June 21, 1801, in the Fifth Sunday of St. Aloysius – (Nss 525).

¹⁰ cf. CF 214-217.

Holy Spirit is given not only in regard to gifts, but it is the Person of the Holy Spirit Himself, and consequently, the Divinity and the Trinity”.¹¹

However, this gift of charity, as the action of the Spirit Himself, cannot be hindered. Rather, it must be developed and activated with the effort of cooperating with it, so that it might be exercised both in relation to God and to one's neighbor. In docility to the Spirit, love encounters fruitfulness.¹² Thus, whoever acts with the gift of charity is recognized in the action, that corresponds to the gift. In the fecundity of the gift, or as a consequence in the person's life, there may be clearly noted the influence of the Giver. The intervention of the Holy Spirit in the life of Fr. Bertoni was most evident. His activated charism transformed his environment. He enriched the Church as well as anyone who benefited from his loving activity.

One can distinguish mentality of this world, and between a person who acts solely with the another acting out of charity.¹³ This is why he insisted on acting in accord with God, and of loving one's neighbor for the sake of the same God.

There can always be noted in politics, in science, in technology, and in every field of human activity, when the individuals engaged in these, do act with some Christian charity, or when they do not. The transforming power of this love makes itself felt. In the context of Verona, where Fr. Bertoni lived, his presence was noted as one of continuous service out of a love, rooted in God.¹⁴ These words that he preached could well be applied to himself:

“... charity that is prudent plans well the time; longanimous charity awaits the right moment; discreet charity discerns the time, and does not hurry the works through any immaturity or immoderation. Powerful charity takes hold of the right time, and does not leave undone anything, out of human respect or fear. It makes broad use, in its time, of the righteous and just who admire it, and holds in check the timorous, who may fear it and have a certain regard for it. Therefore, the human spirit and vice are timid and vile before this authentic virtue and the Spirit of God: hence, this charity is recognized as a great gift from God and a witness”.¹⁵

Despite being a genuine ascetic, Fr. Bertoni's life remained dynamic. Every day, he

¹¹ “‘Caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris, per Spiritum Sanctum, qui datus est nobis.’ Datur Spiritus sanctus, non quoad dona sua dumtaxat, se ipsa persona Spiritus Sancti, ac consequenter Deitas et Trinitas” - cf. “Union with God”, Mantua Priests' Retreats, October 4-13, 17-26, 1814 - (cf. MssB 3395).

¹² cf. Schema for Panegyric in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1808 - (cf. Nss 1798); cf. meditation 17 on 1 Kings 4:1 (1 S), February 10, 1811 - (Hss 5526); cf. Some Points from Rodriguez - (MssB 8865).

¹³ The text from the outline of the Panegyric honoring St. Francis of Assisi states: “This charity which comes from heaven, is distinguished from false and imprudent zeal, the source of which is this earth.”

¹⁴ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 482.

¹⁵ “...la carità prudente che dispone il modo, e longanime che aspetta il tempo, e discreta che lo distingue, non precipita le opere per immaturità o immoderazione, così la carità forte, che afferra il tempo e non lascia infette l'opere per riguardi e timori umani; fa largo a suo tempo presso i retti e giusti che l'ammirano, e tiene in freno i ribaldi, che la temono e l'hanno in certa riverenza e riguardo; perciocché lo spirito umano e il vizio e timido e vile a fronte della vera virtù e dello Spirito di Dio: onde si riconosce questa carità per un dono grande di Dio e testimonio.” (cf. Meditation 16, 1 Kings 3:16 (1 S), February 3, 1811 - MssB5537).

dedicated himself without reserve to serve.¹⁶ His whole endeavor “as based on charity”.¹⁷ In his words, charity is the end toward all the means are ordered, orientated and weighed”.¹⁸

Fr. Louis Schlör has left a testimony regarding the Founder and his community, in admiration of their life in harmony and the single spirit that seemed to animate them:

“What stands out in them the most is humility, charity and a very affable atmosphere”.¹⁹

Fr. Bragato stated in a similar vein:

“Their bond was charity which seasoned all the work and the fatigue with a most appealing spirituality”.²⁰

Furthermore, regarding charity, Fr. Bertoni called attention to a matter of real importance: the famine that struck the area at different times. He recognized how difficult total self-giving was that would go to the point of martyrdom. He sought for the poor at least the non-essentials:

“Who is there among us who – I would not say is already disposed to give his life in this way out of love for his neighbor, as this is the path of the already perfect, according to St. Thomas In Io. XV, 24 - but who would willingly give what is left over of those riches that he is really wasting, in order to sustain his brother, already struggling with hunger, that would only carry out no more than the simple precept?”²¹

Fr. Lenotti has left this testimony in speaking of Fr. Bertoni’s treatment of the poor:

“On certain occasions and under some circumstances, he was so generous that he seemed even to sin by prodigality. Along with the daily distribution, which for so many years was done at the door for about 50 and even 70 of the poor, to whom every day he ordered that there be given a serving of polenta (as is continued to our own day), he continuously extended his hand to other people in need. At times, those who came to ask his help, would receive substantial alms...”.²²

The external comportment, gestures, and attitudes of a person might indicate his love, or charity. Gentleness, joy, hospitality and peaceful reception that Fr. Gaspar extended to all, appear to be the results of the sincerity of his love for God, to Whom he had dedicated

¹⁶ cf. Summ. Add., Doc- XXVI, p. 483.

¹⁷ ib., p. 489.

¹⁸ “...il fine e che da ordine, modo, misura a tutti i mezzi” (cf. Letter 85, Lent 1825 – Epist, p. 174).

¹⁹ Summ. Add., Doc. XIII, p. 66.

²⁰ ib., Doc XXV, p. 284.

²¹ “Chi e infatti fra noi che, non diro sia gia disposto a dare anch’egli in questo modo la vita per amor del suo prossimo, che questo e proprio de’ perfetti, S. Thom. In Io. XV, 24, ma che doni volenteroso il superfluo di quelle ricchezze che dissipa a sostenere il suo fratello, languido talor per la fame, per adempire non piu che al semplice precetto?” – cf. Sermon 6, “Charity towards one’s Neighbor”, preached in the Parish Church of St. Paul’s Parish Church, Campio Marzio, Verona, on June 21, 1801, on the 5th Sunday of St. Aloysius – (MssB533).

²² cf. Summ. Add., Dox. XX, p. 177.

himself. He teaches all this both with his words and with the way he lived.²³ It would suffice to recall to mind these words of his:

“Let this charity first of all be shown by receiving the confreres with those external manifestations of special friendship which are usually employed...” “Furthermore, let us not be content to show only these external manifestations, but also practice all works of mercy and humility on their behalf, sparing neither toil nor expenses...”²⁴

Lastly, the Founder always had in mind the ultimate purpose of charity, which is one with its first beginning: the last end of the universe and of humanity in particular, and of all societies...consists in that charity, friendship and mutual love ...”²⁵

We see, then, how the Spirit’s greatest gift ruled Fr. Gaspar’s whole life.

2. POVERTY, THE POOR, and “GRATIS OMNINO”

The Founder’s sense of gratuity was intimately tied in with his *kenosis*, and also to the fact that he considered everything, and every human being, as God’s gift. His own self-giving was done as a gesture of love, which is essentially gratuitous. For this reason, poverty which is that necessary “capital” to be laid aside before the beginning of Fr. Gaspar’s endeavor, enters into the fundamental dynamic of personal self-emptying, in order to encounter the One Who is Providence.

He did whatever he could to obliterate in himself whatever was limited, in order to surrender himself, body and soul, to the One Who is everything. He sought to follow after Christ, Who, “being rich, made Himself poor for us, so that we could be enriched with His poverty”.²⁶ He took seriously what he wrote in his own spiritual diary: “...to begin the undertaking, it is necessary to have acquired great and even heroic virtue...”²⁷

He emphasized this in a particular manner:

“Poverty is the fundamental need: then all the other virtues’.”²⁸

Fr. Bertoni realized a veritable “missionary crusade” among the Veronese clergy,

²³ In this manner, he wrote:

“...if people come to you, and see you dominated by unruly conduct, without doubt they will withdraw from you...” – cf. “Life of St. Francis Borgia” – MssB 8753.

²⁴ “Questa carità prima di tutto si deve dimostrare nell’accoglienza, che deve essere accompagnata dagli esterni segni della più grande amicizia...”

“Quindi non bisogna contentarsi di sole dimostrazioni, ma molto più conviene praticare verso di loro tutti gli atti di carità e di umiltà, senza risparmio di fatiche o di spese...” (cf. CF 246-7).

²⁵ “...il fine ultimo dell’universo e dell’uomo in particolare e di tutte le società... consiste nella carità o amicizia e amore mutuo...” – (cf. observations that Fr. Bertoni made concerning a book. These are found in a letter of his to Bishop Aurelio Mutti, dated June 11, 1852 – with the Founder himself signing the letter – Epist. p. 357).

²⁶ 2 Co 8:9.

²⁷ “Per cominciare la impresa bisogna aver fatto acquisto di grande eroica virtù” (cf. NP, July 23, 1809).

²⁸ “Necessarii sumptus est paupertas: dein aliae virtutes omnes.” (ib.)

together with his community at the Stimmate - and this, too, through a poverty and detachment from material goods, and overcoming any spirit of this world. His life and preaching touched on the essential points for the conversion of the clergy that he addressed. This is *an* example of his words to the College of Acolytes:

“How wrong it is if you begin to enjoy the delights of this world: wealth, honors, pleasures. This would be an indication that the delights of heaven would have become distasteful to you. When did the manna disappear from the Hebrews, and no longer come to them? when they began to taste the fruits of this earth. *Josue 5, 12.*²⁹

He added further on:

“... poverty of spirit, disinterestedness, cuts all the vices at the very root, and this leads to humility that introduces all the virtues, in which perfection consists”.³⁰

Prophetism, principally with the witness of a poor life offered by Fr. Bertoni and his companions, in fact was much noticed in Verona as Fr. Giacobbe stated:

“... he truly loved frugality at the table, and poverty in the choice of clothes and also in the furnishings of their house he commanded esteem and veneration even from those who would only be moved at the authenticity of moral actions; this refers to that solemn renunciation that he and three of his companions made regarding the considerable estate that had been left to them in a will by their companion and fellow religious, Fr. Francis Cartolari, of Noble birth... Fr. Bertoni led his companions to the near-by Oratory and said: Let us sing, let us sing the praises of the Lord, and thank Him from the bottom of our hearts for the great victory that you have obtained over yourselves, by rejecting the riches of this world, in order to acquire that joy that the world knows not, poverty: that joy that was so loved by Jesus - and that more that you come close to this, by loving it, the more it envelops you, and makes you like He”.³¹

From his life, one knows of still other renunciations made by Fr. Bertoni of material goods, or inheritances, that were offered to him.³² He followed St. Philip Neri in this, and his maxim: “never touch the pocket-book of your penitents, either for yourself, or for others”.³³ Hence, the question may be asked: what was the Founder’s motive in all this? He kept in his heart, and often on his lips, the reason for his actions:

“It is necessary not to go on ahead of the Lord, but rather follow behind Him. This principle - in the mind of his first biographer - canonized, so to speak, those generous

²⁹ “Guai se incominciaste a gustare i dilette del mondo: le ricchezze, gli onori, i piaceri. Sarebbe segno che vi sono a nausea le delizie del cielo. Agli Ebrei spari, ne mai piu comparve, la manna, quando? quando gustarono i frutti della terra. *Josue 5:12.*” (cf. Retreat to the Acolytes, 1st Instruction, On Sloth - November 22, 1810 - Thursday - (MssB 4446).

³⁰ “...la poverta di spirito, il disinteresse, taglia la radice a tutti i vizi, e inducendo l’umilta introduce tutte le virtu, in che consiste la perfezione.” – cf. Meditation 4, 1 Kings 1:5 (1 S), December 8, 1810 -(MssB 4929).

³¹ Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, pp. 512, 515-6.

³² *ib.*, pp. 542-3; and Doc. XX, p. 178.

³³ *ib.*

decisions of renunciation on the part of Fr. Gaspar.³⁴

Poverty was contemplated in his Constitutions with the nuance of total detachment.³⁵ Material things are solely for what is strictly necessary. Nothing should be considered one's own: "Let us keep in mind, he used to say, that we are really poor; that, if there is something, it really does not belong to us; all belongs to the Lord, and let us remember that we do not live here to live as nobles, but as the poor of Jesus Christ."³⁶

For him, the use for the common good of what was necessary, consolidates charity, and sharing. He and his companions administered the school of the Stimate, they preached and instructed - and always gratuitously. In his Church, all was gratuitous – there was neither a collection, nor were offerings accepted, with the exception of Mass stipends.³⁷ To maintain pious works, or those of beneficence, Fr. Bertoni did make use of the help of good people who gave money for these purposes. For one of his own works of charity, he called on what was derived from his lands (indeed, the fruition was not very high). Further, he would use whatever came from his other possessions, which had as their objective to maintain the works that he administered.

In his view, "one should never waste, or destroy the licit or natural sources of means" to maintain the works.³⁸

It is true that he was a good administrator; he was capable in looking after and making use of what was necessary to the health and the well-being of his men (always within poverty), of himself and for the maintenance of his works. However, he never used more than was necessary. With the poor, however, he was always prodigal, and ready to collaborate.³⁹

Besides renovating the Church, of building the residence and the school of the Stimate, he was also able to do over the buildings on his properties for his tenants, and for others in the city:

"So he provided at the same time, a very great advantage for craftsmen and very many of the poor of the surrounding area, who always received from Fr. Gaspar a request for work during some part of the year, with the resultant profit and great help for them".⁴⁰

Fr. Bertoni did experience a very special sensibility for the poor. In addition to his helping and promoting them, as has been seen, he ordered that a special dedication be given to the most fragile (the poor, children, the uneducated) in instruction, in catechesis, through the sacraments. He left this as legislation in his Constitutions 72, 182-3. It is interesting to note

³⁴ *ib.*, p. 542.

³⁵ *cf.* CF 90-104.

³⁶ *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XX, p. 176.

³⁷ *cf. ib.*, Doc. XII, p. 60. He accepted the Mass stipends to follow the diocesan directives.

³⁸ "...non bisogna serrare ne distruggere le sorgenti lecite e naturali dei mezzi..." – (*cf.* Letter 133, perhaps late March 1828 - *Epist.* 228).

³⁹ *cf. Summ. Add.*, Doc. XX, pp. 176-7.

⁴⁰ *ib.*, p. 176.

that he did not look for any conditions, or compromise demanding financial retribution, for the exercise of his mission, always marked by the witness of gratuity. Furthermore, it is in this that he establishes his own pledge, since he based this in his confidence in Providence. Having already what was necessary for maintenance, he did not try to accumulate other material resources. Poverty is lived as a witness of love, that is gratuitous, just as sharing and service are, for the sake of the Kingdom, which is the sake of one's neighbor.

He has left written, therefore, in Constitution 3 that his followers are called to "serve God and the the Church in an entirely gratuitous manner".⁴¹ In his autograph manuscript regarding his General Outline, n. 1, he well describes his plan:

"The purpose of this Union, or Congregation of Priests is to serve God, our Lord, and His Church gratuitously, as far as any hope or expectancy of earthly reward is concerned".⁴²

3. HIS WISDOM AND COUNSEL

The Spirit blows where He will, as we have already commented. He bestows a variety of gifts.. Some utilize these gifts very well and make them bear fruit in behalf of others. The Gifts principally of Wisdom and Counsel are so evident in Fr. Bertoni that they were experienced by so many people, of various walks of life that they sought him out looking for orientation and direction. Fr. Luois Schlör, c chaplain at the Imperial Court of Vienna, who visited Verona, wrote to Fr. Anthony Rosmini and described this:

"Their Superior, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, a lovable and revered old man, and quite versed in the theological sciences, especially in spiritual direction, is - so to speak - an oracle of he city and also for visitors. Some of these come from afar, to have recourse to him – some by letter, or they bring him persons looking for advice in theology and cases of conscience".⁴³

Fr. Bertoni was much consulted by bishops, various founders and foundresses of religious communities, such as: Anthony Rosmini, Camilo Cesar Bresciani, Anthony Provolo, John Anthony Farina, Leopoldina Naudet, Nicholas Mazza, Marcantonio Cavanis, Theodora Campostrini, Madelena di Canossa, Louis Biraghi, Benaglio, Rigler, Villamaruffi, Pazzi ... and other personalities.⁴⁴ To some of these, to whom he offered advice, he would be like a co-founder of their Institutes, in that he actually did help them in the elaboration of their Constitutions and in the orientation and formation of their spirit. He, however, left for others the titles of honor.

The carrying out of the task of Scrutinizer of the priestly vocations which the Bishop

⁴¹ "Gratis omnino servire Deo et ecclesiae" (CF 3).

⁴² "Il fine di questa Unione o Congregazione di sacerdoti e di servire Dio Nostro Signore e la sua Chiesa gratuitamente quanto alla speranza e aspettazione di terrena mercede" – "Notes for the Constitutions", his handwritten manuscript of six points (MssB 9847).

⁴³ Summ. Add. , Doc. XIII, p. 66.

⁴⁴ cf. ib., Doc.. XVI, p. 84; Ooc. XX, pp. 184-S and 265-6; Doc. XXIII, pp. 214-5; Doc. XXVI, pp. 364-8 and 402-4; Doc. XXVIII, pp. 590-3; Ooc. XXX, pp. 610-1; cf. Dalle Vedove, Beato Gaspare, Vol. IV, pp. 8-9; cf. Stofella, Il ven. Gaspare, pp. 207-22.

entrusted to him, is a good indication of his gifted ability of wisdom, discernment and counsel.⁴⁵

In fact, as his first biographer records, Fr. Bertoni had “a special gift in the difficult direction of souls ... divine prudence was for him a virtue which illuminated all the others ... He was not only a “father” by his charity, but he was also a prudent and capable “doctor”. In his profound understanding of the human heart, he was able to penetrate to the roots his penitent’s trouble...He seemed to be a man of God and animated solely by the divine spirit”.⁴⁶

Anthony Bresciani knew the Founder well, and had also been directed by him. He once states that “all his actions, words, attitudes are the fruit of that wisdom infused in him by the Holy Spirit”.⁴⁷

The Superior General of the Jesuits, Fr. Fortis, who knew him perfectly, likewise praised his renowned prudence.⁴⁸

Wisdom, prudence, discernment, counsel and holiness in Fr. Gaspar all come together, which he then placed at the disposition of grace. He did his utmost on his part to develop the received gifts, that he might indeed be totally of God, and fully at the service of so many other human beings.⁴⁹

He once wrote:

“Let us, therefore, love God and render to Him that service that we can, in that manner that he has made each of us, and according to that spirit and grace that He has bestowed”.⁵⁰

For him, it was necessary to pass every process of human reasoning through the sieve of divine Wisdom, as he really did,⁵¹ principally through prayer.⁵² He wrote: “... as St. Gregory indicates, take one step when the way is clearly seen, holding back on the second until bit by bit the clarity increases”.⁵³

Fr. Bertoni chose to follow, and actually did, step by step, the action of grace, made present to him in all events. He was helped by his gift of prudence, that rendered him perceptive for the analysis of the signs of the times and the needs of hearts.⁵⁴ Therefore, he

⁴⁵ Summ. Add., DOc. XXVI, pp. 405-10.

⁴⁶ ib., pp. 366-7.

⁴⁷ ib., Doc. XXII, p. 215. The underlining is of the author himself.

⁴⁸ cf. ib.

⁴⁹ cf. Summ. Add, Ooc. XXII, p. 214; Doc. XXVI, pp. 306-7; Doc. XXX, p. 611; XXXIV, p. 641; and Doc. XXXV, p. 669.

⁵⁰ “Amiamo adunque Dio e rendiamogli quel servizio che possiamo, così come ciascuno Egli ne ha fatti, e secondo lo spirito e la grazia che Egli ne ha donato.” (cf. Letter 4 to Fr. Bragato, December 1, 1837 - Epist. p. 315).

⁵¹ cf. Letter 51, perhaps November 183 - Epist. p. 100).

⁵² cf. Letter 91, without date - Epist. p. 181.

⁵³ “...acena S. Gregorio, facendo un passo dove si vede chiaro, aspettando a fare il secondo a mano a mano che la chiarezza si avvanza.” - (cf. Letter 3S, October 26, 1813 - Epist. pp. 98-9).

⁵⁴ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XX, p. 184; and Doc. XXVI, p. 547.

was never in a hurry in trying to give some direction, with any plan to propose and immediate solution to a problem with a slip-shod effect.⁵⁵ He preferred to reach the root of the problem before hazarding any mistaken solution. His prudence was founded on his confidence in Providence, which is the motivating force of his suggestions – even along with the human effort that was never lacking on Fr. Gaspar's part.⁵⁶ It is prudence that moved him in the power of the action of grace. Because of this very fact, prayer, the analysis of the reality of the individual and the situation, in the light of the gospel ideal, were all required of him. Fr. Gaspar was fully cognizant of the act that this is supremely human. He himself stated:

"Many hurry through their undertakings, in order to hasten and anticipate their success."⁵⁷

And further:

When through prayer and prudence one comes to ascertain a manner of procedure, one still should not see it through until in the time determined by God and in accord with reason. One cannot, therefore, fail to dispose people with gentleness, imitating the Lord's own government and that of Providence..⁵⁸

In this manner, Fr. Gaspar cultivated his gift of prudence which then offered security to anyone who would follow his example and counsel. His source for this gift is the "impulse of the Holy Spirit. Let us do all - he said - 'let us do all we have to do with a pious, kind, sincere and ardent spirit, so that .it might be most evident that we do not act out of vanity or pride, but that we are moved by the Holy Spirit'" ⁵⁹

However, the intervention of the Holy Spirit requires from the person who follows His counsel that of- bringing it to fulfillment. Fr. Bertoni used a biblical passage in this for his principle:

"My sons, do not do anything without counsel"⁶⁰

And further: "After hearing the counsel ' with a sane and right reason, nothing is wrong with following the weak call of human reason in the very bright light of divine Wisdom. And just as though nothing had been done by us, let us recognize each inspiration from that

⁵⁵ He stated: "...A Pastor, a man of prayer should only take up his tasks in the accord with how the Lord disposes them with His grace. One does not anticipate ... but awaits the proper moment, and the favorable circumstances: and all is accomplished following the Lord." – (cf. Meditation 32, 1 Kings 9:14 (1 S) - (MssB 6192) .

⁵⁶ cf. ib. – Meditation 27, 1 Kings 8:10 (1 S) Easter time 1811 - (MssB 6037) .

⁵⁷ "Molti precipitano le imprese per affrettarsi e anticiparne il successo" - (cf. Meditation 16, 1 Kings 3:15 (1 S), February 3, 1811 -(MssB S521).

⁵⁸ "Quando ancora abbia coll'orazione e prudenza accertato il modo, non la manifesta se non al tempo da Dio e dalla ragione determinato. Non lascia però di meno intanto di disporre quasi gli animi con soavità, imitando il governo del Signore e della Provvidenza (cf. Meditation 16, 1 Kings 3:1 (1 S), February 3, 1811 - MssB 5521).

⁵⁹ "...in donis et operibus ope et instinctu Spiritus Sancti factis. Omnia tam pio, benigno, sincero, incenso spiritu agamus, ut pateat nos non vanitate aut superbia agi, sed a Spiritu Sancto" (cf. Mantuan Retreats to Priests, "Correspondence to Vocation" - October 4-13, 17-26, 1816 – MssB 3311).

⁶⁰ "Filii, sine consilio nihil facias" (cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 501).

font from which really, either immediately or mediately, it is derived".⁶¹

Fr. Bertoni's prudence stands out in his activity, which indeed manifested courage. Prudence for him meant to see first what God wanted, in order to respond without fear, following His designs, and not simply in conformity with the impulse of 'first nature'. He stated:

"...the Church never gives up looking for light for her activity ...And when all is clear, it never ceases working, and studying and consulting, in order to proceed further in the light, and in the undertaking..."⁶²

He emphasized the need, especially for the confessor, to have much direction from God in order to orientate the problems of conscience. In addition to this, it is divine wisdom that illuminates the understanding in order to discern all that refers to God. Therefore, in his view, there is an on-going attitude of humility and prayer.⁶³

Discernment, for Fr. Gaspar, is worked out through the mind of Christ. Whoever lives in Him always analyses, judges and acts motivated by the will of God and not unilaterally following only one's own.⁶⁴ Hence, for the discernment process, the following are necessary:

- a.) great intimacy with God, beginning with faith (prayer, meditation...);
- b.) b.) humility, the quest for counsel and obedience to God's Word, to the authority and tradition of the Church, for the orientation of spiritual direction;
- c.) c.) conformity with the will of God as well as total and confident abandonment into His hands. In all this, as we have seen in the development above, Fr. Gaspar was a master.

In all happenings, with his prudence, wisdom and discernment, he became for many a kind of "compass" to point out the path to follow, without exerting any pressure to seek to impose his own will. In his plan, the "good Spirit", sent by Christ, is something like the indicator on the scales that holds the weight. This Spirit served as a kind of sieve, through which passed every decision, or course of action to be taken.⁶⁵

In pondering deeply on the situations of great spiritual misery or fragility of so many people, the power of mercy, of compassion, and of wisdom of his spiritual direction might be

⁶¹ "Ascoltati così i consigli della retta e sana ragione, niente impedisce che ... sottomettasi la tenue fiaccola dell'umano raziocinio al Sole chiarissimo della Divina Sapienza, che, come se da noi niente pure avessimo fatto, ogni lume riconosciamo da quella fonte donde in verità, o immediatamente o mediatamente, deriva." – (cf. Letter 39, Autumn 1813 - Epist. p. 100).

⁶² "...non lascia di cercar luce per operare ... E quando vede chiaro, non lascia di operare e di studiare e di consultare, per procedere oltre nella luce e nell'operare." – (cf. Letter 38, October 26, 1813).

⁶³ cf. Letter 16, January 26, 1813 - Epist., p. 56,f.; cf. the seventh day of retreat, First Meditation – "The beginning of Jesus' Public Life", Retreat to the New Confessors, September 1810 -(MssB2556-7).

⁶⁴ ib.

⁶⁵ He once wrote: "...a light is enkindled in the intellect, one of admirable wisdom and divine prudence, in order to judge what has relationship to God, either as an effect, or as a means, to reach Him in the future, and to glorify Him in the present." – (cf. Letter 16, January 26, 1813 – Epist. p.57; cf. also Meditation 2, 1 Kings 1:1 (1 S) – MssB 4864; cf. Meditation 32, 9:14 (1 S) – (MssB 6202).

compared to salt that seasoned and conserved his advice. He pardoned, healed and helped to instill new life, as his wisdom was effective in the power of the Spirit.⁶⁶ For this reason, many sought him out to help in resolving the most intricate problems.⁶⁷

This explains why Fr. Louis Berti described his reputation throughout Verona: “Bertoni was truly a saint – he really was endowed with the discernment of souls”.⁶⁸

It is clear, then, that Fr. Gaspar’s wisdom and counsel were a synthesis of the gifts received from the Holy Spirit and cultivated by him for the sake of the mission he had embraced.

4. PREPARATION, THE CULTIVATION OF PROFICIENCY, AND AVAILABILITY

Readiness is a quality that was much esteemed by Fr. Bertoni.⁶⁹ He desired it in each and every member of his religious family, which is called to heed continuously the “*obsequium episcoporum*”, as a “good soldier of Jesus Christ”.⁷⁰ In an inspiration received before the altar of St. Ignatius, Fr. Bertoni had a clear insight regarding his future Institute: “Courage, soldiers of Christ... Bring my spirit alive again in you, and also in others through your meditation”.⁷¹

As we saw above, in treating of his charism, the Founder of the Stigmatines desired that his Apostolic Missionaries should be prepared for the announcement of the Word of God, in the diverse ministries of her vocation, as we saw in Chapter IV.⁷²

Readiness is not a military discipline for war-like activity, but analogically, it is an attitude of openness to the Spirit, of a profound spiritual life in search of perfection; furthermore, it is being open to the signs of God’s will, through obedience, availability and, in singular manner, to be prepared intellectually, and practically in the various areas of knowledge, chiefly in theology.⁷³

Fr. Bertoni was not a person of mediocrity. However, knowing that it is God’s action that moves hearts, he never forgot that a person has to cooperate with this, so that one might become His instrument, the least unworthy possible. In all that refers to spiritual direction toward that Christian social harmony, an adequate preparation is presupposed. To be in an Apostolic Mission “*in obsequium episcoporum*”, there is necessary a perfect grasp of all that pertains to faith and morals.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Fr. Gaspar taught: “... the authentic preachers, renewed in the Spirit of God... have compassion for those who are in the mud...” (cf. Meditation 17, 1 Kings 4:1 (1 S) - MssB 5602; cf. also Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 501.)

⁶⁷ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XX, p. 184.

⁶⁸ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXIV, p. 641.

⁶⁹ The follower of Fr. Bertoni is called to be always “disposed to depart”, as we saw above in pp. 66, f.

⁷⁰ 2 Tm 2:3.

⁷¹ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXV, pp. 659-60. cf. also p. 43 of this present work.

⁷² cf. CF, 1-7 and 185.

⁷³ cf. ib., 47-82.

⁷⁴ cf. ib. 49.

He also fully realized that it was not possible for each member of the community to be prominent in every area of knowledge. However, he desired that in the Congregation, taken as a whole, there would be such capability,⁷⁵ so that in each branch of knowledge, some one would be prepared. Thus, his religious family would have those conditions to serve the Church in the best possible manner, in conformity with the diversity of times and circumstances.⁷⁶

Furthermore he wanted his men to specialize, particularly in the *area* of theology.⁷⁷ Within this sphere, he emphasized Sacred Scripture, and moral, especially that of St. Alphonsus.⁷⁸ He specified also Patristics, Liturgy, Ecclesiastical jurisprudence, Scholastic Theology, Dogma, Church History, Catechetics and Sacred Eloquence.⁷⁹

Hence, he left behind the stimulus for study and for specialization in the different branches of the humanities, as well as in technology and science. All was to be in conformity with the abilities, the specific minis- tries, needs - and always at the service of the Church, of evangelization and under the dependence of the superiors and in harmony with the demands of the community religious life.⁸⁰

Thus, for example, those who choose the Brother's vocation are called to perfect their own preparation in their own talent to assist the Congregation achieve its objective, in the living out of its own special Charism.⁸¹

The cultivation of excellence, specialization and extensive knowledge are means to assist the religious community of Apostolic Missionaries to attain its scope of helping the Church to accomplish its mission,⁸² in dependence on the One "Who is the Lord of all knowledge".⁸³

Fr. Bertoni made it quite clear in his Constitutions that a balance has to exist between the life of prayer and dedication to study.⁸⁴ He also emphasized the need continuously to study Christian doctrine so that one might always be indeed up-dated in it:

"Do not strive to know anything other among you than Jesus Christ, and Him, crucified".⁸⁵

He recalled to mind from Scripture those words of Jesus Himself:

"I 'am the Alpha and the Omega".⁸⁶

⁷⁵ cf. ib. 56.

⁷⁶ "...according to the diversity of the times and circumstances" (cf. CF 57).

⁷⁷ cf. ib., # 58.

⁷⁸ He specified in his manuscripts: "... the acquisition of the entire ecclesiastical science, principally moral..." – fcf. his handwritten manuscript, "Autografo", # 6 - MssB 9847; cf. also CF 50, 52, 53, and 58).

⁷⁹ cf. CF 53 and 55.

⁸⁰ cf. ib., M 48, 54, 56-7, 62, 66-8, 72, 72-82.

⁸¹ cf. CF 77-8.

⁸² cf. ib. #/ 62.

⁸³ "...che e il Signore delle scienze" (ib. # 65).

⁸⁴ cf. ib. ## 66 and 127.

⁸⁵ "Non credetti di sapere altra cosa fra di voi, se non Gesu Cristo, e, questo crocifisso" (cf. ib. # 51).

⁸⁶ "Io sono Alfa ed Omega" (id.,ib.).

Lassitude, indolence and negligence have to be overcome with strength in order to study, as he insisted.⁸⁷

His rule called for a dedication to study even with the commitment to apostolic activity.⁸⁸

Availability and readiness are indispensable in Fr. Gaspar's plan for the Stigmatine to place himself in the attitude of the Mission. Preparation is geared to this. Therefore, his rule "to allow oneself to be moved by obedience" is fundamental.⁸⁹

Availability is manifested admirably in Fr. Bertoni as an authentic gift of the Spirit. This can be noted even in the offering of his own personal goods for the service of the Church. For him, the plan of God is supreme. For this reason, he placed all the goods he had acquired at the feet of Pope Gregory XVI. He wrote to the Pope in these words: "If it seems to the Holy Spirit, and to You, Most Blessed Father, that our goods might serve Christ our Lord and be for the utility of His Church, in accord with the purpose I was going to use them, I would receive this disposition from Your Hands as a gift from heaven. If, however, the Spirit and Your Prudence should dispose otherwise, allow me the honor of receiving from my hands a gift as insignificant as a bit of gold, which with all confidence, I have placed at your Holy feet: and the only condition being that it not cease from the service undertaken, which would be for me a reason to trust, and to accomplish this service better and with greater perfection".⁹⁰

Availability is a gift of the Spirit that Fr. Gaspar developed for the benefit of people, in and for the Church. With this gift there is made tangible in this man of God that which the Spirit Himself infused in him, as Fr. Gaspar himself stated:

"As for me, it seems in the Lord that I am disposed to go wherever He may tell me to go: To go, as well as to come, whatever it is that He may say: Come." It seems that the Lord wanted the lesson repeated many times in my ears. While I was seriously ill during these past days, through the lips of my old teacher, Fr. Fortis, every evening would recite that very excellent prayer which I followed in my heart: *'Susci e, Domine, er manus S. Ignatii, universam meam libertatem...'*⁹¹

Knowledge, therefore, as proposed by Fr. Gaspar, is in the function of service, within

⁸⁷ cf. CF 125

⁸⁸ cf. r. ib. 72.

⁸⁹ "...si lasci muovere dall'obbedienza" (cf. ib. ## 186; 127).

⁹⁰ "Or se parra allo Spirito santo e a Voi, Beatissimo Padre, che torni all'ossequio di Cristo Nostro Signore e alla utilità della sua Chiesa, disegnare questo Fondo Vostro a quel fine che io intendevo applicarvi un fondo profano, il ricevero dalle Vostre Mani come dono del Cielo. Se altramente disponesse lo Spirito e Voi rendanmi degno di accettare dalle mie mani un dono come che tenue di un po' d'oro, che con tutta fiducia ho posto ai Vostri Santissimi Piedi: e, non che cessare dal servizio intrapreso, sarebbemi argomento di confidare anzi di poterlo meglio e con maggior perfezione eseguire." - (cf. Letter 1 to Pope Gregory XVI, August 9, 1838 - EPist. p. 340).

⁹¹ "Quanto a me, parmi nel Signore essere così disposto ad andare ov'Egli mi dica: Va, come a venire, ov'Egli mi dica: Vieni." Questa lezione pare che il Signore mi volesse ben ripetuta agli orecchi, quando, stando io gravemente ammalato ne' giorni scorsi, mi faceva ogni sera, per bocca dell'antico mio Maestro P. Fortis, dire quella sì eccellente orazione che io seguiva col cuore: *'Suscipe, Domine, per manus S. Ignatii, universam meam libertatem...'* (cf. Letter 3, November 26, 1812 - Epist. p. 29).

the response of availability. It has to be eminently humble, i.e., it has to be experienced as a guage in which the glory of God is exalted and be bound to charity, to the service of the Church, and not something by itself.⁹² In this manner, Fr- Gaspar asked of his men that they be "teachers who would excel in learning and experience, who would attribute nothing to themselves".⁹³

That knowledge that would satisfy "the vice of curiosity", or that is harmful, does not enter into the Founder's plan,⁹⁴ as this would withdraw from the basic project that involves one's own sanctification and the Apostolic Mission.

On the contrary, that knowledge which is constructive, receives light from divine Wisdom, as the opening of the intelligence for the study of Sacred Scripture, as Fr. Gaspar maintained.⁹⁵

All that he would say for others, he would first experience in his own life: he was much dedicated to study as a seminarian, and even after he was ordained a priest.⁹⁶ Continuing formation is proper to one who really tries to renew himself in order to serve better. This is his characteristic sign. As Fr. Giacobbe stated, in addition to the time given over to prayer, to his few hours for sleep, and after his other activities he dedicated the rest of the time to study.⁹⁷ He was fully persuaded, therefore, that one who was continuously renewed, was in a better condition to offer a more qualified service to those who came to him, and to the Church as such.

His first biographer described him in this way:

"He dedicated himself to the profound and constant study of the sacred Scriptures and to the Fathers, to the ascetical and moral writers, to the various branches of knowledge and to sacred and profane erudition ... that it seemed to us unbelievable that a man could have mastered such broad knowledge..."⁹⁸

Activism not rarely leads to a repetition, to remain below the requirements of spiritual direction, of pastoral and even on the teaching apostolate, if one does not provide himself continuously with a new base of the spiritual, cultural, theological and pastoral development or regeneration. Fr. Bertoni was convinced of this. This is why he gave such insistence for his own men to progressive preparation, and to sacrifice time for study, so that the Stigmatine Apostolic Mission might always make a valid and up-dated contribution to the Church, "*in obsequium episcoporum*". This position of his stands clearly within the spirit of his charism. Continuing preparation, the cultivation of excellence and availability, based on the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the service of the Church, assist each and every one, and all together, as a body,

⁹² cf. CF 185; cf. also Meditation 23, 1 Kings 6:15 -(MssB 5867).

⁹³ "Maestri per la scienza ed esperienza ottimi, i quali niente a se attribuiscono" - (cf. Meditation 23, ib. MssB 5867).

⁹⁴ cf. CF 122-24.

⁹⁵ cf. Meditation 7, 1 Kings 1:24 (1 S), December 1810 – MssB 5031.

⁹⁶ cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XX, p. 182.

⁹⁷ cf. ib., Doc. XXVI, p. 335.

⁹⁸ Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 335.

to dispose themselves to be valid instruments of evangelization.⁹⁹ This, then, is the meaning within the Institute taken as a whole, of what was traditionally said in the slogan: “*parati ad omnia*” - in order thus to be able to achieve the good of souls and for the greater glory of God”.¹⁰⁰

It is clear, therefore, that God’s gifts in Fr. Gaspar bore fruit in behalf of His people. With his cooperation, as good soil, he facilitated the development of these gifts. In this manner the social and ecclesial context in which he lived and worked received a powerful renewal. This does not spring simply from human strength, but from the Spirit, present in him and brought to produce.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ cf. ib., Doc XX, p. 184.

¹⁰⁰ ib., DOc. XXIII, p. 252.

¹⁰¹ cf. Rm 8:4.

CONCLUSION

The radius of activity of a human being, such as Gaspar Bertoni, has breadth and intensity in proportion to his own depth, or bio-psychic- spiritual inheritance. At the same time, there must be taken into consideration the commitment of these strengths, conscientiously orientated toward an objective.

We have seen the historical and political context in which he lived, the formation that he received and developed, the influences received in his life from the outstanding personalities that shaped him, such Ignatius Loyola, Thomas Aquinas, Alphonsus Liguori, and so many Fathers of the Church and spiritual Masters.

In an outstanding manner, furthermore, there can be seen in him all along the way, the relationship of on-going dialogue: God Who continuously called him, through his lived history and the relationships that he formed to all of which he corresponded, always in the light of faith. The call is always progressive and challenging. He was tenacious in corresponding¹ cost what it did. The strength of the Holy Spirit sustained him. Moreover, this "good Spirit" found in him the vibrancy of a ready, conscientious, generous and confident response. From his childhood on, he perceived that the Absolute, God Himself, is all that truly matters. The following after Him means to devote oneself, with all confidence, in order to realize the undertaking that he desires.² He carried through with this to the very end of his mission, with all of its tribulations, and stated that it is in him he confided, the One Who began this good work.³

In this manner, we understood how, with all the charismatic endowment that Fr-Gaspar had, and all the influence exercised by him throughout Verona, around and through his religious institute, he was able to find inspiration and so much spiritual energy in the Holy Spirit, Who inspired him and sustained him with His gifts. In order to grasp all this, it is necessary to look at the results of his life and activity, as we had the opportunity here to zero in on a few fundamental points.

The light of the Spirit was called upon always by Fr. Gaspar, and his whole response depended on it.⁴ As Fr. Bresciani has left recorded, regarding him in 1855, "in addition to the good natural sense with which God so richly endowed him, it is my opinion that his entire activity was weighed and directed in the light of the Holy Spirit".⁵

¹ He recognized: "This stability and security of spirit, the effect of the internal Spirit .. is the most beautiful disposition." (cf. Meditation 14, 1 Kings 2:30 (1 S), January 1811 - MssB 5364).

² We can apply to him his own words: "The young man who experiences that the Spirit has cast within him the foundations of this design, and has already drawn the first lines of this plan, what a beautiful disposition he already has!" - (cf. Meditation 14, 1 Kings 2:30 (1 S), Winter 1811 - MssB 5369).

³ cf. CF 185.

⁴ "God's light is needed for the discernment process" - (cf. Meditation 32, 1 Kings 9:14 (1 S) - MssB 6202).

⁵ Summ. Add., Doc. XXII, p. 215.

Fr. Gaspar himself followed his own conviction recorded in his spiritual diary:

“Very few are they who realize what God would do with them if He were not impeded in His plans”.⁶

However, it was not sufficient for him not to impede the divine interventions. In this same diary he affirmed the need of cooperating directly and conscientiously with the Lord. He was most convinced of God’s action in his life, and further’ that He wished to see also our efforts along with His intervention.⁷ And this effort on our part, remains ineffective, without the help of the good Spirit.

There was noted to a singular degree in him the real concern always to follow, and never to precede the Spirit’s action.⁸ Therefore, he continually followed after Him through events: from the very first idea of his mission, to his being invited to teach catechism to children, to the preaching of the Mission at St. Firmus, the invitation to move into the Stimmate and to establish there the Congregation of the Apostolic Missionaries to assist bishops, to his being sought after by so many people who sought his counsel, his work with the youth, his care of the poor, the condemned, his assistance of priests, the retreats he preached... in everything, he saw before him the sign of God in events to then follow after Him. All of this he achieved throughout his life through the suggestions and the inspirations that he drew from his reading of the Fathers of the Church and other spiritual Masters, from the invitation to sharing with others and events, bringing these to maturity through prayer, with his ascetical and mystical life.

It is clear that his special gift of following God after perceiving His will, is situated as the effect for the action of the discernment of Spirits.⁹ This explains why he was able to advise so many people and to be the instrument of this Spirit for the spiritual good of man.

In Fr. Gaspar, all his activity was permeated by the motivation of God. He became more and more humble in recognizing God’s supremacy as the point of’ actively and completely abandoning himself into His hands, so much like the Church herself, the Spouse of Christ, who abandons herself to Him, as we have seen. His activity was motivated in the hope of the One he loved more than anything else, God Himself. His entire apostolic effort emanated from his vibrant love toward this Love, and sprang from the religious community that he founded, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to serve the Church. In this manner, the Holy Spirit shows Himself visibly in His actions. Fr. Bertoni maintained that *the gifts and activities are developed with the help and through the intervention of the Holy Spirit*, when he preached regarding one’s correspondence to his vocation: “It is in the Holy Spirit, i.e., in the gifts and works, through the intervention and instinct of the Holy Spirit, i.e., in the gifts and

⁶ “Pochissimi sono coloro i quali intendano quello che Iddio farebbe di loro se Egli non fosse a’ suoi disegni da essi impedito” (cf. MP, May 18, 1811).

⁷ cf. ib., March 6, 1809.

⁸ He said that we must always follow, and never precede God’s action (cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXIII, p. 220).

⁹ An archpriest from Verona, Fr. Louis Berti, recognized this gift in Bertoni, and wrote of it in 1907 to Fr. John Mary Lona (cf. Summ. Add., Doc. XXXIII, p. 641).

works, through the intervention and instinct of the Holy Spirit, all is accomplished. Let us do everything in such a pious, gentle, sincere, ardent spirit, so that it might be evident that we work not out of vanity or pride, but moved by the Holy Spirit.'

"'In a charity that is not fictitious', but a charity like that of those who have this, and only this, on their lips".¹⁰

Through what he accomplished through these gifts which he then developed through love in the good of his religious community and the Church,¹¹ it can be concluded without doubt that he was moved only through the Good Spirit. This was communicated to him in the birth and growth of his Founder's charism, as in all the richness of gifts that this same Spirit favored him for the real edification of so many.

One could very correctly apply these words of his to him: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into anyone's heart what it is that God has kept hidden from the wise and prudent of this world, and revealed it by means of the faith to the humble and poor of heart (cf. Mt 11:25), who in their faith, fear Him, and glorify Him and love Him".¹²

With Fr. Giacobbe, we can state that Gaspar Bertoni really was a man "full of the Lord's spirit".¹³

I believe, in this manner, that it can be established that Fr. Bertoni was richly endowed by God. That faithful and prudent servant, administered the charism entrusted to him as Founder and the many gifts he received. In their results, the Holy Spirit's action is also evident, which in him found only correspondence. He was convinced that "correspondence attracted greater graces and help".¹⁴ Thus, in his correspondence to the gifts, and to carrying through on his charism as Founder, there is even stronger proof that he only acted moved by the Holy Spirit Himself, the Bestower of Gifts and the One Who brings them to fruition.¹⁵

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¹⁰ "In Spiritu Sancto, (seu) in donis et operibus ope et instinctu Spiritus Sancti factis. Omnia tam pio, benigno, sincero, incenso spiritu agamus, ut pateat nos non vanitate aut superbia agi, sed a Spiritu Sancto.' "'In caritate non ficta,' come e di coloro i quali non hanno piu in bocca che carita e perfetta carita." – (cf. Priests' Retreats, Mantua, October 4-13, 17-26, 1814 - "Correspondence to one's Vocation" - MssB 3311).

¹¹ In this same conference regarding correspondence to vocation, he called to mind the passage from Mt 7:16 – noting that from its fruits, the tree is known. (cf. id, 3305).

¹² "Occhio non vide mai, ne orecchi udi, ne in cuore umano ascese pur mai, quello che Dio tiene nascosto a' sapienti e prudenti del secolo, e rivela per mezzo della fede agli umili e poveri di cuore, Matth. 11,25. che lo temono e lo glorificano e lo amano credendo." - from a "Fragment of a Discourse on Faith" - MssB 1553.

¹³ Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, p. 376; cf. 3n 1:16.

¹⁴ "Correspondence attracts ever greater graces." ' cf. Meditation 56, 1 Kings 14:19 (1 S), 3 January 19, 1812 - MssB 6972; – cf. Parish 1, exposition of the Gospel for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, the 24th after Pentecost. Nov. 8, 1801 - MssB 1475 and 1480; cf. meditation 7, 1 Kings 1:24 (1 S), December 1810 - MssB 5032; Med. 8. id. MssB 5041; Med. 15 MssB 5480.

¹⁵ cf. 1 Co 12:3-11; cf. LG 12; cf. a rough draft of Sermon 39, On the Rosary. October 4, 1807 - MssB 1354.

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