

September 1808

5. 'Humble yourself in all things.'

Fr. Scupoli's doctrine. Fr. Gaspar and the motto of Bro. Giles. The complete biblical text.

11. 'At the end of Mass much recollection and ...'

Supernatural graces. Leave God for God.

13. 'God calls us to emulate angelic purity.'

St. Ignatius' Constitution [Rodriguez]. The Archangel Gabriel in Fr. DaPonte. St. Gaspar's Constitution.

'It is necessary to be prepared for greater temptations...'

Fr. DaPonte's teaching. Fr. Gaspar to the Seminarians.

'...do not be over-burdened with penances and occupations...'

Fr. Scupoli's doctrine. St. Ignatius' text.

15. 'Introduction to the Annual Retreat... A Visit to St. Ignatius' altar.'

Providential importance of this visit. The Saint's words and spirit.

'I fear Jesus passing by...'

Fr. Lenotti's explanation. St. Augustine's interpretation.

'Cooperating with one grace, merits a second.'

Much connected with the preceding.

'God deigns to talk first as 'Father' before being 'Judge.'

St. Augustine's saying: *I fear Jesus passing by and remaining.*

'Let us have our accounts ready ... before the Master asks for them.'

Give an account of your stewardship!

'Give yourself back to yourself!'

St. Bernard's *On Consideration. Most pious Meditations.*

'We often have God on our lips to give him to others...'

This goes back again to: *Give yourself back to yourself.*

'The dignity of the priest makes me tremble.'

Fr. Gaspar to the people in 1802. The same idea to the Seminarians in 1811. Pius VIth and the Prelates of his time.

17. 'Death. The past is no longer...Only the present is here...'

Rodriguez: Give attention to this very day... St. Ignatius at Manresa. Jacob and Rachel. From half day to half day. From *Biblical Preaching* of Fr. V. Houbhy, SJ. Good use of time.

21. '... No longer time for reading, but for acting...'

St. Bernard again: *On Consideration*.

25. '... Reign of Christ ... Follow Our Lord at the cost of life...'

Fr. Bertoni's Manuscript n. 92: points of meditation from Fr. DaPonte. From a text of this Father.

'... Mass offered with much recollection... and Catechism with much zeal...'

The whole day of grace. Proposals of imitation.

27. '...The Incarnation ... Gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity ...'

Graces of prayer. From Fr. DaPonte.

'...Pardon. Great love for the Trinity...'

Gifts of prayer and heroic proposals. From Fr. DaPonte. *To suffer and to be rejected for You*.

28. 'The desire and humble petition for Martyrdom.'

Follow Jesus more closely.

'For those who lack internal mortification ...'

Ignatian norm: see Rodriguez and St. Francis Xavier.

29. 'it is a very great good to suffer something out of love for God...'

Gospel texts.

[Fr. Stofella's Note]

From his notes on St. Francis of Assisi. Penance. Cross. Love. *Be imitators of me*. From Segneri's *Manna of the Soul*.

September 1809

23. 'Humility, compunction and Confidence in God.'

'It is not enough to be simple in order to make others saints.'

St. Teresa and humble letters.

28. 'Knowledge of the immense debt that binds us to God...'

From the *Contemplation toward Love*. A sentence of Fr. Gaspar.

5th SEPTEMBER 1808

[36.] **Humble yourself in all things.**

This is so because the ideal flows from another principle: ***at the bottom of one's own nothingness God is found.*** This is what he had repeatedly learned from Scupoli's thoughts:

... a true, deep knowledge that you are nothing, you know nothing, you can nothing and you have nothing else except defects and poverty, and that you are only worthy of eternal damnation... Oh! would it be that we come to understand this nothingness which makes us masters of everything! Humble yourself in front of everybody and beneath everybody, if you want to exalt God in you and you in Him. If you long to find Him, do not exalt yourself, because He will run away. Lower yourself, and lower yourself as much as you can, because He will come to find you out and he will embrace you! He will all the more dearly welcome you and hug you in love, the more you lower yourself in your own eyes... ¹

There is no characteristic trait in the life of Fr Bertoni, than what is surely a fidelity to the motto of the Franciscan Brother Giles, as St. Gaspar preached it from the pulpit of St Paul's: **I have seen many people who because they wanted to climb too high, have fallen. For my part I cling well close to the ground, not to fall! ²**

The following is the full text from Scripture: ***The greater you are, the more you humble yourself in all things, and you shall find grace before God. For great is the power of God alone and He is honored by the humble.*** (Sir 3, 20-21).

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11th SEPTEMBER 1808

[37.] **At the end of the Mass: much recollection and modesty. It lasted a short while, though, because I got distracted in exercising external charity.**

This was a precious grace of Prayer. Recollection and modesty which Fr. Gaspar did not attribute to himself but to God's graciousness. It seems that he blamed himself for having so quickly got distracted. We would have told him, today, that it was nothing other than *leaving God for God.*

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¹ Scupoli, *Spiritual Combat*, c. 32.

² Cf. St. Gaspar's Sermon 7, On Pride, July 26, 1801, in: PVC, pp. 144, ff. [MssB ## 572, ff.].

13th SEPTEMBER 1808

[38.] God calls us to imitate the purity of angels.

Rodriguez³ states that "Our Holy Father, Ignatius, in his Constitutions⁴ puts in front of us as a mark to be targeted *to struggle to imitate the purity of angels*. We must note that Latin verb *enitendo*, which does not simply mean *to make an effort* but rather *to do violence to oneself* while making an effort.

Fr Bertoni took the following notes from Da Ponte's **Meditation on the Annunciation**⁵:

... The Angel Gabriel entered the place where the Virgin Mary was, with rare modesty, reverence, seriousness and a look of holiness which was proper for the message he was going to bring. This was to teach us how apostolic people should behave externally when they are sent as ambassadors of Christ. This is how Religious people should be who profess angelical life. Their external appearances have to breathe out holiness and lead everybody to holiness...

We are not surprised that when Fr Bertoni compiled the Constitutions for his Religious, demanded:

... that perfection of Chastity - to be acquired with all effort - which befits persons whose office is similar to angels'. They are to be the *paranymphs* of Our Lord Jesus Christ... by which they have to present to Him their souls as a chaste virgin, holy in mind and body...⁶

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[39.] We have to prepare ourselves for greater temptations. We have to prepare ourselves to make reparation for defects we committed: so as to reach there, where God wants us to be.

This reflection is connected with the note of 31 August, *Great temptations...* It seems that here too Fr Bertoni thought of the teaching of Da Ponte⁷:

... Without the permission of God, the Devil cannot tempt us. Through temptation God intends to do good to us. He does not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength. [Da Ponte offers two suggestions]: The first is not to look to the Devil who vexes me, but to God who allows him to. The second is not to concentrate on the evils which the Devil threatens me with, but on the goods which God promises. I shall therefore fix my eyes on God all-powerful and in the power of His grace with

³ Rodriguez, Part III, Trace 4, c. 1

⁴ CSJ, n. 547

⁵ DaPonte, *Meditations*, Part II, Meditation 6, Point 2, n. 92.

⁶ CF # 109. Translator's Note: (*The "paranymph" was the "procurator of the wedding [the Best Man??]"*). *This biblical image was very dear to Fr Bertoni. He saw his Apostolic Missionaries as "mediators" between God and men in the mystical Wedding of the Kingdom of God.)*

⁷ DaPonte, o.c., Part VI, Meditation 32, Point 2.

trust and hope. I shall entreat Him to grant me, in His omnipotence, to use the proper means to meet his right goals.

In the Instructions he will give the Students of the Seminary from Nov 1810 onwards he will develop his thought on I Cor 10, 13:

... Temptation does not take hold of you except as much as human nature can bear. God is faithful: he cannot tempt you beyond your strength...⁸

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[40.] We must not let ourselves be overburdened by penances and activities.

Dom Scupoli wrote:

... Exercise prudence and discretion in those good activities which can cause harm to the body - like using self-scourging, hair-shirts, fasting and similar things. What is questioned is not the use but the abuse. He warned the soul against the Devil who urges to chastise severely the body with scourging, abstinence, hair-shirt and similar cruelties with the aim that we should become proud of the good we do... or so that the consequent infirmities make us unable to do good works... or even so that, under excessive labor and pain, we begin to loathe the spiritual exercises.⁹

In Bartoli's *Life of Ignatius*, Fr Bertoni could find the complete text:

... Chastisement of the body should not be exaggerated, nor inconvenient, with wakes, abstinences and other external penances which normally cause harm and hamper greater good¹⁰ He must have been happy to hear this from "his" Ignatius!

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15th SEPTEMBER 1808

[41.] Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises. While visiting the altar of St Ignatius with my companions I felt much devotion and recollection with great inner cheerfulness and some tears - even though the visit was short. I had the feeling that the Saint was welcoming us and inviting us to work for the greater glory of God as he did. To work in the same ways: though not using all those means that he was able to use. He seemed to tell us: "Onward, soldiers of Christ! Gird yourselves with fortitude! Pick up the shield of faith, the helmet of Salvation, the sword of the divine Word and fight against the "ancient serpent". Make my spirit alive again in you and in others through you".

It was at the time of the annual Spiritual Exercises of the Clergy and the Candidates for Ordination, on the autumn Ember Saturday, which that year fell on 24

⁸ Cf. St. Gaspar's Meditation 12, transcribed from St. Gregory the Great, on *Primum Regum* [cf. MssB ## 5240-5295, Epiphany 1811 (??)]

⁹ Scupoli, *Spiritual Combat*, 33 & 42.

¹⁰ St. Ignatius did not prescribe any particular penances [cf. CSJ nn. 8; 296; 580. [Fr. Bertoni followed suit: cf. CF ## 43; 44; 112].

September. The *Exercises* began on Thursday evening, the 15th. The collegial visit to the altar of St Ignatius in the church of the Jesuits (whose Order was still suppressed), showed that for those ecclesiastics Saint Ignatius remained always the "Master".

We do not know what the others had experienced during that "short visit". Surely, in the life of Fr Bertoni that was a land mark! If it is true that *the creature is called to pursue the glory of God* and that *the zeal for the glory of God must follow the plans which Divine Providence established for the destinies of the Elect*¹¹, that day must have appeared to Fr Bertoni as the day of his effective insertion into those divine plans. As a matter of fact the Lord eased the experience by such a gift of Prayer, accompanied by **some tears** and with **much cheerfulness**, that to the humble priest it should have felt as really extraordinary. The fact also that he wrote this accurate note shows that he intended to remain grateful for it. He wanted to stimulate himself to correspond to it adequately. We should read again this note, therefore, with the same respectful devotion with which it was written.

The words attributed to St Ignatius reflect the text of **Eph 6, 13-17** with a reference to **Rev 12, 9** with that **ancient Serpent** which was cast down from heaven and **leads the whole world astray**. **My spirit** is the Ignatian "zeal for the greater glory of God".

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[42.] I fear Jesus passing by.

It sounds like the motto of the Introduction to the Annual Retreat. Its meaning is obvious. In a sermon at the beginning of his apostolic ministry, Fr J.B. Lenotti, forty years later but still under the direct guidance of Fr Bertoni, will express the same thought. He started off by saying that *God gives us his help today, and we do not know whether tomorrow it will be the same... Those effective inspirations which He bestows unto the souls are like sudden lightning or fleeting lights, which made St. Augustine say **timeo Jesum transeuntem** (I fear Jesus passing by). Woe to us if we do not correspond quickly to the grace which he offers us while walking by. Perhaps we shall never have it again!*¹²

More than the meaning which St Augustine¹³ offers, this is the obvious meaning from the Gospel incident which the Saint commented upon, i.e. **Mt 20,30-34: And behold two blind men sitting by the way-side heard that Jesus passed by, and they cried out saying: O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us! And the multitude rebuked that they should keep their peace. But they cried the more,**

¹¹ Fr. Dalle Vedove, CSS, *Modello ... o.c.*, pp.22 & 27.

¹² Fr. J.B. Lenotti, Sermon 'On the Mercy of God', for the Holy Year of 1852 – extended from 1850.

¹³ Sermon 88, on the Words of the Gospel of Mt 20 [Maurina edition]

saying: O Lord, son of David, have pity on us! And Jesus stood having compassion on them, touched their eyes. And immediately they saw, and followed Him...

For St. Augustine this "passing by" of Jesus is his very state of "wayfarer" among men. The two blind men are the two people - Jews and Gentiles - which Jesus, who remains "for everlasting", lowered Himself to heal by "passing by" them.

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[43.] When we cooperate with God's grace, we become worthy to receive a second grace.

This is a maxim from the same homily quoted above or the continuation of the reflection on the *timeo Jesum transeuntem* of St Augustine. We should be convinced that it will never be Jesus who will interrupt the competition of love between Himself and the soul which has begun to follow Him.

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[44.] God is kind enough to talk as a *Father* before talking as a *Judge*.

This sentence is a deeper reflection on the text of St Augustine¹⁴, already quoted:

*... What does it mean **Jesus is passing by**? Jesus acts in time. Jesus makes passing actions. Look carefully and see how many actions of Jesus are "passed". He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was buried. He rose. He ascended into heaven. And now he no longer dies, nor has death any power over Him. His divinity remains forever and the immortality of His Body will no longer pass away." **God is kind enough to talk as a Father, for as long as Jesus is passing by.** He will talk one day as judge: on that day Jesus will be remaining, no longer passing...*

St Augustine, in his commentary, seems to support the longing of the two blind men who shouted louder and louder to Jesus. And he gives the reason:

*... I say this, and I say it openly: **I fear Jesus passing** (here on earth) and **remaining** (there in heaven). I fear Him both as Man and as God. That is why I cannot keep silent...!*

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[45.] Let us draw up the accounts of our service before the Master calls for them.

This is a reflection strictly connected with the preceding note and perhaps written on 16 Sept during the Retreat. It is inspired by **Lk 16,2: Give an account of your stewardship!**

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¹⁴ St. Augustine, 'Discourse on the Two Blind Men'. Translation of G. Sandri. Brescia: Morcelliana, p. 27.

[46.] Give yourself back to yourself. St. Bernard to Pope Eugene.

This, too, is a Retreat text. It might have been quoted by the Retreat Master. Or it could come from Fr. Bertoni's personal reading of St Bernard's *Considerations for Pope Eugene*. It was an exhortation to St Bernard's former disciple who became Pope¹⁵. Here is the text:

*... Eugene, should I praise you if you give all your life and knowledge to external action and no time to reflecting? No, I do not praise you, certainly! Action must be prepared by reflection. Therefore, remember: **give yourself back to yourself!** ...I don't mean always, nor often but at least some time. Is this too much of a favor? I ask for this as a favor not as pretending to judge...*

Fr. Gaspar will use this text in his *Instructions* to the Clergy.

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[47.] We often have God on our lips - to give Him to others - and we care little about having Him in our hearts.

This sentence refers perhaps to the saying of St. Bernard *give back yourself to yourself* ...and see to it that you do not get scattered. Let it not happen that you, priest, have the Lord on your lips, to give Him to others, which is a duty of your office, while you do not have Him in your heart for yourself. If that is the situation: what will happen of yourself and your very Ministry?

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[48.] The dignity of a priest makes one tremble.

This is the feeling which accompanied Fr. Bertoni since the beginning of his vocation. It lasted until his death. On 26 September 1802 when he entered the third year of his priesthood, he confided from the pulpit that:

... If we priests are superior to you, on account of our dignity, we remain in the condition of human beings like you. We are pressed by the same tribulations from every side. We are assaulted by the same enemies. We are threatened by the same dangers if not even greater... As far as I am concerned, at least, I do not hesitate to declare that I fear much, under such overwhelming burden, that my negligence and luke-warmness could ruin me in front of God as judge. He declared that he will be very harsh in judging those same people whom He had chosen to be above others in dignity. I hope that the prayers of many people will make Him more favorable and appeased with me...¹⁶

¹⁵ Letter to Pope Eugene, c. 5, 14.

¹⁶ PVC, p. 189. Sermon 13 *On respect for Priests*, September 26, 1802 [The week of his 2nd Anniversary of his own Ordination as a Priest. [MssB ## 67694].

He will preach to the young Seminarists of Verona:

... God presents to his chosen one the Ministry to which He called him as very formidable (*fearfully heavy even for the angels' shoulders*). He has to give an account to such a strict Judge also of the souls of others. Not only of his own faults but of his omissions too. This is so, even if the priest is a man of great prayer and knowledgeable and virtuous: *elevated above others in contemplation and outstanding in action...*¹⁷

Fr. Bertoni told this same audience that:

... the just idea of how lofty and all-embracing the priestly power is, together with great respect for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is a very good sign of priestly vocation. But he added that He, who understands on one hand the loftiness of the priestly status and on the other the abuse that many make of it, will develop a great trepidation. He will understand the gravity of the fall when he sees a priest sin. *Great is the dignity of priests, but great also is their ruin!*¹⁸

He personally witnessed this among all classes of Clergy, since the day when Napoleon laid his hands on Pope Pius VII:

... Such are the times we live in exclaimed Fr Gaspar, **such are the times! Pray, please pray for many Prelates!** In their deformity from the **unfailing righteousness of the First Rock** (Pius VII), he saw the impending **judgment of condemnation**. This was **justified by the repeated admonitions** (by the same Pope), and **by the continuous rebellion** of those Prelates. **It is so terrible the manner in which they will be punished by the dispossession of the ill-used gifts.** He who is aware of both the justice and awfulness of this sentence, develops an intense fear for himself. *Howl, cypress, for the cedar has fallen!* (Zech 11,2) This is a fear which prevents us from approaching such difficult Ministry with presumption...

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17th SEPTEMBER 1808

[49.] **Meditation. Death. The past is no more. The future has not yet arrived. Only the present is here. And it is in my hands. Let me live day after day, or rather from morning to midday and from midday to evening. Let me do every single thing with all possible perfection. Perhaps I will have no more time in which to glorify God.**

This is a reflection on the Meditation of the day during this course of Retreat which lasted 8 days. The previous day he had meditated on the *Foundation* (the Purpose of Human Life) and on Sin. On the 17th he meditated on the *Last Things*

¹⁷ Meditation 16-b, on St. Gregory the Great's *Primum Regum*.

¹⁸ *Ib.*, Meditation 13 – MssB ## 5296, ff.

and first: on Death. After the text which he heard from the Retreat Master and ended with: *only the present is here - it is in my hands!* He then added his personal resolution. This resolution has its source in a reading of Rodriguez':

*... Do not take into account anything except TODAY. It is the usual temptation of the Devil to frighten us with the prospect of having to persevere for the whole stretch of a long life. This happened to St. Ignatius at Manresa. But who is not able to make an effort only for one day? To this he adds a charming text from Genesis, about Jacob trying to win Rachel to himself. This could become a norm of life and it is chosen as a conclusion of the whole chapter. This is the text [**These seven years were**] **seemed to him but a few days, because of the greatness of his love!** (Gen 29, 20)...¹⁹*

To come to practical conclusions, Fr Gaspar restricted his terms to half a day ...which is also a suggestion of St. Ignatius for the practice of the **Particular Examen**. As far as the original text to which Fr Gaspar referred, it is from St Augustine's **Confessions**:

... This is what is called time. The past is not ours, nor can it be recalled. The future is not yet and will perhaps never be. Only the present belongs to us. But, alas! We scarcely have it, because it runs away even though we can keep it for ourselves. In fact in the same time that it starts to be it passes or rather it has passed away...²⁰

The good use of time! Fr Gaspar makes a practical resolution for holiness in the spirit of the most pure love. What matters for him is only the **greater glory of God**.

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21st SEPTEMBER 1808

[50.] **Now it is no longer time for reading but for acting.**

This seems to have been another inspiration from his Retreat. Fr. Bertoni feels himself pushed to action. Certainly it is the Pauline: **The love of Christ urges us!** But it could be also St Bernard's *Reflections* with that *Give yourself back to yourself* we saw above. Following that text he must have read also these exhortations:

... Your reflecting should begin from yourself as not to waste time in other things while neglecting yourself. You have to uproot, to destroy, to build and to plant. Your reflecting must be something already established before anything else. The time to act is now in your hands...

¹⁹ Rodriguez, Part I, Tract 2, c. 6.

²⁰ Fr. Stofella found this text of Augustine's *Confessions* 1, in: Fr. Vincent Houdry, SJ, *Preacher's Library*. Remondini: Venice - a book much used by our early Confreres.

Meditatio is the Latin word used in these texts, which - as in the classic Rhetoric - means **study** and **preliminary exercise**. Fr Bertoni was never at all idle. On that day, however, he found his **time to act** in his hands. To the task, then!

With regard to that expression about *giving up reading* one has to take it with much discretion in a man who did always read or made others read for himself, until the end of his life.

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25th SEPTEMBER 1808

[51.] Meditation. The Kingdom of Christ. Strong [inner] motion to follow Our Lord closely, at the cost of [my] life, through Poverty and Humiliation.

The Retreat is finished. It seems that Fr. Bertoni wanted to fill in the gaps of an incomplete course of *Spiritual Exercises*, picking up and considering more deeply some Ignatian themes which had been neglected. Fr. Da Ponte is his teacher. In the Manuscripts of Fr Bertoni, at [MssB] [Fascile n. 92] we have the organized points of more than 50 Meditations of Da Ponte. Titles and sub-titles in such a way that each point could make for a complete Meditation. The first carries this title: *The Kingdom of Christ*, which in Da Ponte's is just a page heading but Fr. Bertoni put it as the title to the whole collection. The Journal too carries here ***The Kingdom of Christ***. Fr. Gaspar says that he felt a **strong inner motion**, which indicates a supernatural experience, towards what is the utmost *fruit*, as Ignatius calls it, of this Meditation. Fr. Gaspar feels like one of those generous souls which give away all for all:

... Those Religious who imitate the Apostles have as their aim to get concerned not only about their own salvation and perfection, but also about the salvation and perfection of their neighbor... and... profess to be companions of Jesus in this enterprise. They offer themselves with enthusiasm for any labor whatsoever... until the shedding of blood... for the glory of God and the salvation of souls...²¹

This sentiment was already in Fr Gaspar on **11 and 24 July** when he offered himself **for sacrifice**. It will come strongly again on **27,28, 29 September**, coupled with a **humble petition of martyrdom**... too.

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[52.] The Mass was very recollected with sentiment of reverence. During the Catechism lesson, much zeal and persuasion and some eloquence. Before entering the Lord made me recollect that His Divine Son was preaching in Jerusalem while fasting all day. He used to go back to Bethany in the evening. This moved me very intensely to love and to work. Then when I explained this

²¹ DaPonte, Part II, 'Fundamental Meditation', Point 3, n. 4. [This ideal of the imitation of the Apostles in the service of Jesus Christ under-lies St. Gaspar's central dream: Apostolic Missionaries for the Service of Bishops. [CF ## 1; 259; 272; 273].

very insight as introduction [to my Catechesis], my talk became easy and most convincing.

That Sunday 25th September was a full day of grace. Intense inner motions during Meditation. recollection and reverence in the Mass. Great zeal and even eloquence in the ministry of the Christian Doctrine. Fr Gaspar understood that all these things came from *above*, **where every good endowment and every good gift come (Jas 1,17)**. Even that sudden reference to the habitual fasting of Jesus, helped him to make the introduction and present it as a good model for a loving imitation. He will note the *profit* he will draw from this, on 16 November.

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27th SEPTEMBER 1808

[53.] Meditation: The Incarnation. Sentiment of gratitude to the Most Blessed Trinity and of cooperation with Jesus Christ. I was bound to love God even before His becoming man. All the more now!

After the Meditation on the Kingdom of Christ, in both Da Ponte's and Fr Bertoni's, we have the *Decree of Incarnation*. We report here the concluding prayer in Da Ponte's as it seems to reflect very much the sentiments of Fr Bertoni:

*...O most blessed Trinity, how could I ever thank You for having disclosed Your hidden infinite greatness, with the Incarnation? Whatever I'll give You for such a gift will always be too small. Should I not love You and serve You because of that? Here I am, Lord, completely dedicated to Your service. I desire to love You as You loved me and to imitate Your same virtues which You have disclosed to me. Having given me what is more, please give me what is less. Grant me to love You because of this infinite gift You have given me. Amen...*²²

The last lines of Fr Bertoni's note reflect what Da Ponte said in introducing that prayer:

... If God, before becoming man, wanted to be loved with all our heart and mind and spirit and strength... how much more reason do I have now to love and serve him with greater zeal...!

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[54.] Evening. Pardon. Sentiment of the great love to the Blessed Trinity for having given us His Son. Great tenderness towards the same Son. Much lively faith and great desire of union and association with His pains and humiliations. Petition of grace of suffering and of being despised for His sake.

It seems that Fr Gaspar spent this whole day in reflecting upon the Incarnation, as if he was still on Retreat. The content of his second note refers

²² DaPonte, Part II, Meditation I, Point 2,, n. 8.

clearly to a second meditation on this subject as in Da Ponte's and his own manuscript: *The charity of God in the Incarnation: **God so love the world (Jo 3,16)***. That meditation had a most proper conclusion during the evening visit in the Church Blessed Sacrament. This service was known in Verona as *perdonanza* (a spiritual exercise of reconciliation), which we have transliterated as the word appears.

Certainly, with DaPonte, Fr Bertoni applied the whole message of Jesus to himself in the words: ***God loved the world so much ... So much did God love me, that He gave me His only-begotten Son, so that by believing in Him with true faith, I may not perish but I could gain eternal life.***

And he prayed:

... Oh only-begotten Son of the Father, how much could I thank You for having come to the world to free us from so many evils and to fill us with so many gifts? ²³

As far as he was concerned he gave this answer: total dedication of self and full association and union with Christ: *to suffer and being despised for Your sake*, according to St. John of the Cross, imploring Heaven's grace and strength.

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28th SEPTEMBER 1808

[55.] During Meditation and afterwards: desire and humble petition of martyrdom with great inner exhortation.

The experience of these days was a crescendo of spiritual experiences of an extraordinary nature. Fr Bertoni did not have the intention of writing for readers. He wrote briefly and concisely for his own use: ***Desire and humble petition of martyrdom***. This sounds like a deepening of his ***follow Christ more closely at the cost of life*** of the previous Sunday, the 25th. The content of the interior **exhortation** is *"the secret of the King"*.

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[56.] Those who lack internal mortification and yet like to do external mortification, should be told to refrain from the latter. In this way they will become eager to develop the former, also as a compensation for not being allowed to exercise the external one.

This is a norm of spiritual Direction very much in conformity with the Ignatian teaching and with the practice of the Company of Jesus. We read in Rodriguez:

... What is of utmost importance is the mortification of passions and the exercise of true and strong virtues"... What we have to exercise ourselves in, mostly, is this

²³ **ib., Meditation 2, Point 3, nn. 2, 3.**

interior mortification: while the exterior mortification, which is also necessary, should be used as a means to reach the interior one. ²⁴

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29th SEPTEMBER 1808

[57.] **The recognition of what great good it is to suffer something for the sake of God. *Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice. Blessed are you when they will curse you and insult you and reject your name as bad and they will say any evil against you, falsely, for my name. Be glad on that day because your reward is great in heaven.***

This text does not allow us to interpret the nature of that **understanding**. We think that after the intense experiences of the previous days, it should have been of the same nature as those graces. It was also a tasty penetration of the spirit of the Beatitudes. In this case too we leave it as “*the secret of the King*” [Mt 5:10; Lk 6:23].

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During the last days of September and the very first ones of October Fr Gaspar had to keep himself busy in preparing the *panegyric* (a special homily for the annual solemn liturgical feast of a saint) of St Francis of Assisi in the church of St Firmus Major, which was served by the Friars Minor Conventuals. Fr Gaspar must have worked very hard for that *panegyric* day and night. We have two different drafts of that labour for the homily. Both carry the title by the hand of Fr Gaspar: *Panegyric of St Francis of Assisi, preached in St Firmus Major on 4th Oct 1808, Verona*. While one of them looks almost complete and ready to be written for the finished copy, the second one has a different format but still incomplete. We think that during the actual sermon Fr Gaspar must have included in the first structure some elements of the second draft.

What strikes us here is the connection between these drafts and the *spirit and letter* of this Journal. It is the spontaneous exaltation, with open heart, of that spirit of detachment and self-abnegation which, in his Journal, is the constant leading motive and pattern. Is that not the pattern which St Francis of Assisi lived in a more perfect way?

Here are some extracts from that *panegyric*.

... To talk about this most holy Hero is to talk about the most perfect spirit of Penance, and the most sublime spirit of the Cross and the most fervent spirit of love towards Christ crucified. Hence we can easily apply to him those words of Christ: "If one wants to come after me, let him deny himself!" This is the spirit of penitence. "Let him take his cross". This is the spirit of the cross. "Let him follow

²⁴ Rodriguez, Part 2, Tract I, c. 7, 4. [The author presents this as a peculiar teaching of St Francis Xavier].

after me" (Mt 16,24). This is the spirit of love. These are the principles, these are the steps and this is the perfection of his holiness.

Here is the way traced for those who want to follow it. "***If one wants***". For those who want to run this course, not relying on one's own strength but on the divine mercy: "***let him come after me***". All this fits Francis very well. I am sure that while hearing these things, though said in my poor way, you will be inflamed by the desire to imitate him who imitated Christ. If one wants...!

Not to digress further, we want to give the last statement of the other draft of this panegyric which makes a commentary of the Pauline sentence: ***Be my imitators of me as I am of Christ (I Cor 4,16 and 11,1)***. We read something which Fr Bertoni will apply more clearly to himself in the next entry, for the 8th October:

... This is, therefore, the way along which Francis walked and reached heaven. Let us follow him courageously by living the evangelical perfection through the commandments, or through the evangelical counsels, if God has called us to that. We too shall manage to imitate Christ on earth and to possess Him for all eternity. Let us set out immediately on this path, because the journey is long. The time allotted to us is perhaps very short. Eternity that awaits us is without end...!²⁵

²⁵ St. Gaspar Bertoni emphasized the integral aspects of the Paschal Mystery in his 'Franciscan Panegyrics' – this one of 1808 – as well as the other one honoring St. Veronica Giuliani, the Capuchin mystic remembered in 1839. Here are some excerpts:

The formula is simply this: to imitate Christ on earth in order to possess Him for all eternity: 'For I bear the Stigmata of the Lord Jesus in my body...' [cf. Ga 6:17, Vulgate]. St. Francis was inserted, planted in the Tree of Life to draw from it its sap, life from the tree. The four effects of this con-crucifixion are: union, mutual inherence, assiduous and loving contemplation, ecstasy. Having become almost a single person with Christ" 'I live, no longer my own life...' [cf. Ga 2:20], St. Francis is assimilated to his crucified love. In com-passion, in the Stigmata, there he found his every joy...

[Fr. Bertoni may have developed his 'Espousals Principle', a gradated approach to the following of Christ – based on St. Gregory the Great and his Reflections on *Primum Regum* used by Fr. Bertoni:

5004: **Prelude 3.** *Draw me after You [Ct 1:3] You draw, O Lord, Your Spouse by Your right hand, and we will run after You to the odor of Your ointments: ibi, and the teachings of the Church in words and deeds and disciplines: in the odor of Your ointments" this is the fruit of Your grace. To the odor of Your ointments Ct 1:3. And if we cannot follow you with a strong love of a Spouse already adult in the school of holy love: draw me ibi. We will follow you with the first-fruits of the most tender, nascent and youthful fervor.]*

There follows here Fr. Bertoni's *Espousals Principle* from his panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi [MssB ## 1868, ff.]:

... There are very many who follow Christ for the temporal reward: but the mercenary, when he reaches the door, is paid, and remains excluded from the house: 'You have received your reward:' [cf. Mt 6:2].

Let it be clear that among those called to *follow Christ*, beside the sons of St. Francis and his hearers, St. Gaspar certainly included himself and his closest companions of study and the apostolic mission. The joint study of Rodriguez on the part of the early Stigmatines was not without purpose.

Before concluding here, it is interesting to note that in the first draft mentioned above Fr Bertoni referred to *The Manna of the Soul* by Fr. P. Segneri. St. Gaspar expressly quotes it when that author comments the Pauline texts. Fr. Bertoni seems to rely much on the interpretation of Fr. Segneri, his own noble and peculiar way... Expressions of St Paul are put directly on the lips of St. Francis. Especially verses like: *The things which were gain for me, I have counted a loss (Phil 3,7)*. Together with the following verse, which will become a text for the Meditation of 4 October, feast of St. Francis. There, Paul will have the first three points and Francis will be the application of the fourth.

Of course the Franciscan sources abound in both drafts of the panegyric: especially the *Life* of the St, Francis written by St. Bonaventure.

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Many follow Christ as slaves, out of fear: they do follow, but at a distance, and remaining distant, they do not share in their master's secrets. 'The servant does not know his master's business.' [cf. Jn 15:15].

Some follow Christ as children, from a somewhat selfish love for their inheritance: but such children are more loved than loving: they even come to the point of disdain for their father, should he command something that goes against their grain, even though he makes reasonable requests, and imposes demands on them for their own good, but they may be difficult. 'I reared sons, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.' [cf. Is 1:2].

Few follow Christ as friends, in that they base their love on the sharing of His goods; but should these cease for reasons hidden to them, but always under the direction of a just Providence, and their sweet influence is lost, and there is substituted a rather harsh sharing in the difficulties of the friend: 'Then all the disciples deserted Him and ran away' [cf. Mt 26:56]: these were the very ones who had been declared 'friends' by Christ. 'All the rest seem more interested in themselves than in Jesus Christ.' [cf. Ph 2:21].

But, only very few follow Christ as lovers, who in the youthful ardor of their love follow Christ wherever He may go, whether to Tabor, or even to Calvary. Drawn by the sweet odor of His perfume, by the internal consolations and inspirations, they even run after Him. However, they are not able to keep up to His pace, nor can they maintain His speed. He proceeds not by steps, but by giant-steps, in running along His way. 'walking deliberately in your footsteps...' [cf. Ps 18:6, Vulg.]

However, only the spouse, the adult in the school of love, is not attracted by the sweet-smelling perfume, but the strong right hand of the Spouse: 'Draw me!' [cf. Ct 1:3]: firmly holding on and finding support in His strength, she proceeds apace, and with Him she not only runs, but flies. 'His left arm is under my head and his right embraces me.' [cf. Ct 8:5, Vulg.].

The whole purpose of this *sequela* as lived by St. Francis, is to become one with Christ, almost a single spirit with Him - so that one might indeed come to the point of being able to say: 'I live, now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me' [cf. Ga 2:20] - not 'with' Christ, but rather "in' Christ: disdained, poor, wounded as Christ: DRAW ME! [cf. Ct 1:3].

Compunction and trust in God.

We can just say again that this was a precious *gift of Prayer*. We can only praise the Lord for it and take it as an example and instruction. This is how we have to present ourselves to God.

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[150.] Simplicity is not enough in helping others to become saints. Prudence is also necessary.

Yes! We are asked to ***Be therefore wise as serpents, and simple as doves...*** (**Mt 10:16**). Probably an analogy may be drawn here between what Fr Bertoni said and what St Teresa wrote:

*... It is most important that the Guide be a wise person, of good intelligence and of experience. If on top of this he is a man of learning, this is most helpful ... Though at the beginning [of the way to perfection] it seems that there is no need of much learning, I have always been and always will be of the opinion that any Christian should choose a person with a good learning [to be directed by], if he can. And if he finds a more learned person, all the better. Those who journey on the way of Prayer have more need of this. The more spiritual a person is, the more he needs this... A person dedicated to Prayer who can deal with learned people...will not be deceived by the illusions of the Devil. I believe that the Demons are in real fear of humble and virtuous learned people because they know that learning will detect them and make them perish...*²⁶

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28th SEPTEMBER 1809

[151.] During prayer and also after it: very clear understanding of the immeasurable debt which binds us to God by reason of Creation and of Redemption.

We must underline that **very clear understanding** which lasted **also after prayer**. It is a *gift of Prayer* which goes beyond the time of Prayer. This precious gift seems to be the effect of the ***Contemplation to attain Divine Love*** which we have to *stir up within ourselves*, which concludes the ***Spiritual Exercises*** of St Ignatius. In 1810 Fr. Gaspar presented and explained it to the clergy in the Retreat²⁷, following the outline of Fr. Nepveu. We give here only a paragraph, in which we see the personal reflection of Fr. Bertoni:

²⁶ St. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, c. 13. This teaching much influenced the life and spirit of St. Gaspar, as may be seen from his Letter 34, in *Epistolario*, p. 91. Feast of St. Ignatius 1813.

²⁷ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. I, pp. 236-241.

... As Augustine said "God became for you, at the same time, Creator and Redeemer so that you should not divide love". The Father wants the whole of our heart by right of Creation. The Son wants the whole of our heart on account of Redemption. The Holy Spirit wants the whole of our heart in the name of Sanctification...

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