

## VENERABLE GASPAR BERTONI



The founder of the Congregation of the  
Sacred Stigmata  
of Our Lord, Jesus Christ

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Fr. Joseph Stofella, Stigmatine  
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Fr. Joseph Henchey, CSS  
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The author declares that he has fully complied with the Decrees of Pope Urban VIII, and the dispositions of the Holy Roman Church, of which he professes to be a most devoted son.

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## PREFACE

In writing this new LIFE of his Venerable Founder, the author had two ideas in mind:

a) he wished to comply with the requirements of the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, where the Cause of this Servant of God is now under consideration;

b) he also wished to give an adequate response, not so much to any formal requests, but rather to a more fundamental void which he noticed in the Venerable Founder's own family.

It seemed to the author that the need for a critical study would at the same time fill in this void. In this new biography, a consistent effort has been made that the text may be understood even at a first reading. The Servant of God would then be depicted in a fuller manner, and he would be better able to speak for himself.

In this work, it is the Servant of God himself who speaks, as do the witnesses of his life, his reputation and his deeds. This is not only the primary intention of the author, but it is his sole hope.

The documentation that is employed draws heavily from the text and the Appendices of the Diocesan and Apostolic phases of the Cause of his Beatification. Usually, the "Positiones" relative to the Processes are cited, rather than their respective "Summaria." The greater part of the documentation, however, is taken from the voluminous "Summarium Additionale, ex Officio Compilatum," which has been the recent project of the Historical Section of the above mentioned Sacred Congregation. It is a ponderous tome, in which previous documentation has been sifted, voids have been filled in and details have been added. The whole spectrum has been corroborated with new data, drawn from over twenty libraries and archives in Verona, Stresa and Rome.

The author, however, did not restrict himself just to those sources. He took advantage of additional information, derived from the most varied sources. This will appear in the notes that accompany the text.

Unless the author is mistaken, he can reasonable hope that he has presented the person of the Venerable Gaspar Bertoni, after much research, in a historically convincing light. He can also reasonable hope that he presents him in a fuller and more substantial manner.

It is a pity that it is not always possible, in a project of this type, to fill in every void, or to answer every question that was uncovered as the work progressed. This, though, is the usual lot of endeavors of this nature.

Would it be better to improvise, merely to achieve a literary totality - or should one fill in every void, for the sake of balance, through sheer imagination?

Despite the evident difficulties inherent in this study, and despite all its deficiencies, of which the undersigned is fully aware, he, nonetheless, has confidence in the truth presented, in its reality and in the fascination of its integrity.

Fr. Joseph Stofella, C.P.S.

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**Abbreviations:**

Mss.	=	Manuscripts
Med.	=	Meditation
Serm.	=	Sermon
parag.	=	paragraph
Sp. Notes	=	Spiritual Notes
Comm. Lib.	=	Municipal Library
Lib., Stimm.	=	Library of the Stimate
Mss. fot.	=	Microfilm (Photographic Manuscript)

## INTRODUCTION

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FR. BERTONI'S LIFE

#### Political Developments in the City of His Birth

At the time of the birth of the Servant of God, whose life we are here to narrate, Verona had enjoyed particularly high prestige among the cities of "Veneto," for two and one half centuries. In Venice, her standard, with its motto: "VERONA FIDELIS," stood out in the beautiful San Marco's of the Doges. This was a truly merited encomium.<sup>1</sup> Although many Veronese citizens had been infected by the "Spirit of the Revolution," the city itself never ceded in those two decades, in which the thousand year Republic came to its inglorious end.

When the hospitality of Venice was nobly extended to the fugitive Count of Provence (or of Lille), Louis XVIII, the brother of Louis XVI, Verona also received him both cordially and respectfully. This was an unpardonable crime in the eyes of the Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Unprotected Venice proclaimed its neutrality in the face of the French invasion of 1796. Verona was left exposed to the hostile troops. Her people humbly admitted their long-time devotion to the See of San Marco. This gave access to the barbarities of the French, and to that infamous episode, known thereafter as the "Pasque Veronese." Verona then awaited the suppression of the Republic, and endured those reprisals which ruined the city.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

A treaty was signed at Campoformio on October 29, 1797. On the 21st of January, the following year, Verona and the other Venetian States passed under the control of the Austrian eagle.

During the next year, the French forces were driven out of the territory of Italy, by the combined efforts of Austria and Russia. During this campaign, Verona and her environs were the center of the allied operation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Napoleon Bonaparte became First Consul with his stunning victory at Marengo, on June 14, 1800. The French territory was then extended to the Mincio. Napoleon led his armies again, and concluded a peace treaty signed at Luneville, on February 9, 1801. This time they imposed their frontier on the Adige River, in Verona. This divided the city in two - there was the "Italic, or Cisalpine Republic," on its right bank; this was the puppet Kingdom of Italy. On the left bank, the Imperial Austrian domain was established, until the Peace of Presburg, of December 26, 1805.

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<sup>1</sup> Moroni "Dictionary," Vol. 94, p. 299; Scipione Maffei, "Verona Illustrata," Vol. 4, p. 26 Milan, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> Moroni, Vol. 94, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> I.c.; cfr. Treccani "Encyclopedia," Vol. 35, pp. 185 & 187.



At this time, the frontiers were moved to Isonzo, and along the Adriatic. This meant that Verona was totally ruled by the "Kingdom of Italy" for eight years. Verona also was the capital of the "Department of the Adige."<sup>4</sup>

During all this time, the city was the theatre, or the zone of war, on several occasions. The last conflict that Verona witnessed followed in the wake of Napoleon's debacle at Leipzig from October 16-19, 1813. The last battle took place at the end of this same year, and the early months of the subsequent year. In April of that 1814, the French troops were driven back to their homeland, thus marking the fall of the puppet Kingdom of Italy.

Verona was already in Austrian hands by the 4th of that February 1814. It then became a principal city of the new Kingdom of Lombard-Veneto.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Verona then enjoyed many years of peace under Austrian control, until 1848. However, during this era, there were also years of severe privation and terrible famine, frightfully seared by the cholera plague of 1836.<sup>6</sup> In 1848, the tide again turned, and the city found itself as the battle-ground of a terrible struggle. For the time being, Austria was saved. Verona was the headquarters for the campaign of 1849. Thereafter, these headquarters were maintained at a high degree of efficiency for the events that were soon to unfold.<sup>7</sup>

Over the years, the city was honored by several visits of chiefs of state. In 1822, it was the site of the European Congress of Kings, Emperors, Princes and Diplomats, which history has recorded as the "Congress of Verona."<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

As far as the policies directed toward the Church in Verona applied by the various and successive governments are concerned, it would seem that the Republic of Venice did not manifest that chronic ·Cesaro-Papism, at least during its last years, that so frequently lashed with the wishes of Rome.<sup>9</sup> Verona more than proved her devotion and filial attachment to Pope Pius VI. As an "Apostolic Pilgrim," he stopped in the city for two days on his return from Vienna. On that occasion, he benignly bestowed his blessing on the multitude which assembled to render him homage in the Arena.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Moroni, Vol. 94, p. 305 f.

<sup>5</sup> I.c., p. 308.

<sup>6</sup> Oswald Perini: "History of Verona from 1790-1822;" 1793-1796, Vol. III, p. 350; C. C. Bresciani, "Collection of Funeral Orations," Vol. I, p. 96 f.

<sup>7</sup> Treccani's Encyclopedia, Vol. 35, p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> Moroni, Vol. 94, p. 308 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Von Pastor: "History of the Popes," Rome, 1934, Vol. XVI, 3. pp. 97, 98.

<sup>10</sup> I.c., p. 359, note; Moroni, Vol. 94, p. 300 f.

During the French Domination, however, its true nature was displayed from the very beginning. Everywhere there was rampant manifestations of godlessness, the profanation of holy places and the confiscation of sacred objects of worship and art. Some ultraliberal Veronese citizens, and among them a number of priests and religious, preached the ideals of "Liberty, Fraternity and Equality" to the populace. Bishop John Andrew Avogadro was imprisoned with forty-six leading citizens. He narrowly escaped execution, which was the lot of four of them.<sup>11</sup>

During the Napoleonic era, the methods employed were somewhat less crude. There were still, nonetheless, insults heaped on the Church hierarchy and its ministry suffered many annoying interruptions. Restrictions were imposed on the clergy and there was a significant reduction of parishes, from forty-six to fourteen, as many churches were closed entirely. Lay Congregations and Confraternities were hindered and then combined to make them fewer in number. Then, Religious Orders and Congregations were suppressed.<sup>12</sup> There was an attempt to wean the Clergy away from Rome and the Vicar of Christ subsequently imprisoned at Savona and Fontainebleau.

Then, followed the Austrian domination, with its policy of Josephinism, and other similar theories. Suspicion took the place of veneration - the ministry of the Church was restricted and hindered. This lasted until 1848, when, by the grace of God, the old regime was swept aside and relations with Rome were restored to normal. Church worship was again granted freedom, and the authority of the Bishops was returned to them. The celebrated Concordat of 1855, signed by Pope Pius IX and Franz Joseph I, assured liberty to the Church.<sup>13</sup> The tragedy that subsequently destroyed this agreement does not enter our narrative.<sup>14</sup>

### **A Brief Summary of the Church of Verona**

During the twenty years preceding the fall of the Republic of Venice, Verona appeared to visitors - such as Wolfgang Goethe<sup>15</sup> - as a very religious city. Her Clergy were thought of by her contemporaries - and even Pope Pius VI - as worthy of the city.<sup>16</sup> This was true, but much of the credit was due to the generation of priests that immediately preceded. There were a number of distinguished men, and some of them were still living at this time. There were many canonists, theologians and learned men, endowed with a genuine Church spirit, who were the glory of their day. Two distinguished men stand out above the rest - two priests, who were also brothers, and who worked together for many years. They collaborated in publishing the Church Fathers and other authorities. They were Fathers Peter and Jerome

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<sup>11</sup> O. Perini, "History, etc.", Vol. 2, p. 418; Anthony Pigghi, "Biography of Bishop John A. Avogadro", Verona, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Julius Sommacampagna, Comm. Library Verona BB. 113, 114.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Todesk, "Course of Church History", Turin-Rome, 1928; Vol. V., p. 280 f.

<sup>14</sup> I.c., p. 281.

<sup>15</sup> "Trip to Italy," September 17, 1786.

<sup>16</sup> Pius VI to Bishop Avogadro: cfr. Louis Trevisani, "Opere," Verona, 1926, Tome I, p. 70.

Ballerini. The former, especially was outstanding. He was a Consultor to the Senate of Veneto, as well as to Benedict XIV. He championed the cause of the Roman Papacy, against the prevailing errors of his time. He was also an ardent defender of papal infallibility.<sup>17</sup>

The errors of the XVIIIth century - Jansenism, with its allies, Febronianism, Josephenism, and then later Gallicanism found some support among the Clergy.<sup>18</sup> This was not a general movement, but somewhat subdued and mingled with the rigorism of the "Probabiliorists." The works of St. Alphonsus Liguori refuted this latter group during the next century.

Next should be mentioned an eminent Bishop of Verona, Bishop John Morosini. He was a patrician from Venice, and a former Benedictine Monk of Monte Cassino. He ruled Verona from 1772-1789. His pastoral achievements reached their culmination in the Synod he convoked in 1782. He was long remembered in Verona as a man of extraordinary merit. He did not retreat in the least before the anti-Roman policies of Emperor Joseph II, that were in vogue in the three imperial deaneries that comprised the Diocese of Verona. The Third Order was banned, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was forbidden. The observance of the month of May in the Churches was prohibited and all external devotions were suppressed arbitrarily.<sup>19</sup> This was the background as Pope Pius VI undertook his Journey to Vienna in a last attempt to persuade the "Sacristan King" to settle his differences with Rome.

In 1790, Bishop Morosini was succeeded by Bishop John Andrew Avogadro, who was also of the Venetian nobility. He seems to have been destined to give new impetus to the work that his predecessor had only begun, and he was most effective for a while in combating the prevailing errors of the time. He was an ex Jesuit, and was highly regarded by Pope Pius VI. He regretfully saw the spirit of the Revolution creeping into the Church. A number of his priests, being infected by the so-called "Great Principles," such as "Philanthropy" and "Progress." Some priests became members of Massonic Lodges. The situation was much aggravated after the so-called "Pasque Veronesi" of 1797. At this time, the much harassed Bishop was imprisoned, and far greater threats were leveled at him. There were many among the Religious who left their Orders and Congregations to take an active role in politics. Many lived irresolute lives, and become apostates. Some did recant, but quite a few of them did not return to their Institutes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> H. Hurter, "Nomenclator Litterarius", Tome III, Oeniponte, 1895, cc. 93-98. "Catholic Encyclopedia," Vol. II, col. 751. Cfr. Fr. Tarcisio Facchini, C.S.S.: "The Papacy - Principle of Unity and Peter Ballerini of Verona," Padua, 1950.

<sup>18</sup> (Derived from various manuscripts of Fr. Bertoni).

<sup>19</sup> A. Bernareggi: "The polemics concerning the Devotion to the Sacred Heart in Italy at the end of the 1700's", Scuola Cattolica, Milan, Series V, 1920, Vol. 19, July, p. 36. Cfr. also Moroni, Vol. 95, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "The Life of Fr. Peter Leonardi," Verona, 1855, p. 24 ff. Cfr. A. Pighi, "Biographical Sketch of Bishop J. A. Avogadro," p. 8.

In 1801, with the city politically out in two, the Diocese was also torn asunder. The Bishop and the seminary were on one side of the Adige, under the Austrians - while the Vicar General, the Bishop's Residence, the Curia, the Cathedral and its Chapter were on the opposite bank, under the French. Practically no communication at all was allowed between the two sectors. When the city was reunited, at the end of 1805, the Diocese was left without a Shepherd, as Bishop Avogadro had resigned.<sup>21</sup>

With the See being vacant, the Diocesan Seminary suffered practically a total financial, disciplinary and moral collapse. For a while, it looked as though it would be impossible -to save it from complete ruin. Fortunately, however, Monsignor Gualfardo Ridolfi, who was Vicar Capitular at the time, and who very shortly would be appointed Bishop of Rimini, was able to recruit that part of the clergy that had remained faithful to their duties. He was thus able to salvage the situation.

It seemed that God had a hand very definitely in the appointment of the next bishop of Verona. In 1808, Bishop Innocent Liruti took over the Diocese.<sup>22</sup> He had been a Benedictine Abbot, and was already 67 years of age; but, he would remain as Father and Shepherd of the Diocese for nineteen years.

His tenure, however, did not lack its crises in adjustments due to policies he introduced. It was not long, though, before it was evident that throughout the Diocese "once again good discipline flourished, and the Diocesan Seminary would better be described as a monastery of monks, rather than a haven for worldly ecclesiastics."<sup>23</sup>

From the very beginning of his administration, the good Bishop reasserted all the obligations of priests, and strongly reminded his colleagues of the dignity of the ecclesiastical calling. So many, in that tragic era, had completely forgotten it.

It would suffice to consult his Pastoral Letter, issued on Septuagesima Sunday in 1809, as it is recorded in his "Recollections." He wrote: "Those priests, either Secular or Regular, who attend the theatre, the ball room and other like amusements, or who in any way support them, either within the city, or anywhere in the diocese, are suspended ipso facto a divinis; as are they who attend them, even without their clerical garb."<sup>24</sup>

In 1812, Bishop Liruti, at the request of the government, "compelled many priests, who were living as lay-men, to retire into the, seclusion of the Seminary. At

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<sup>21</sup> Moroni, Vol. 95, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "Collection of Funeral Orations," Vol. II, p. 96 f.

<sup>23</sup> Sommacampagna, Manuscripts already cited, "B" 113.

<sup>24</sup> Liruti: "Recollections," Diocesan Curia, "B", "Sede Vacante."

the same time, those given over to drunkenness were suspended until further notice from saying Mass.”<sup>25</sup>

All of this had to be mentioned, to appreciate more fully the marvelous renewal of the life of the Veronese Church. Within two, or at the most three decades, its rebirth witnessed the rise of the Diocese, so that it became a symbol of the very embodiment of the faith, that confronted the “Philanthropy” that was in vogue at the time. The Church of Verona became a stimulus and a model for other dioceses even beyond the Alps. This fact is made most evident in a book, published in German, which was the result of a careful study, conducted over many months in Verona. It came out in 1840, and bore the title: “The Philanthropy of the Faith; or, The Life of the Church in Verona,” by Ludwig Schlor, “Doctor of Theology, and Secular Priest.”<sup>26</sup>

The renewal was so far-reaching, that a native Veronese scholar of great renown, Fr. Bartholomew Sorio, of the Oratory of St. Phillip, compared the new times with the glorious past of Verona. He wrote that they “were witnessing the glorious return of those times of St. Cajetan Thiene, when it seemed as if all of Verona was a monastery.” He went on to say that Verona had become a veritable ‘seed bed, or a nursery of priests, religious and monks.”<sup>27</sup>

At the age of 86, Bishop Liruti closed his eyes in peace, after having witnessed in his flock the work of God’s salvation evident everywhere. When he was 80 years of age, he had written: “... with the help of God, I have finished the Visitation of the entire Diocese.” He went on to say that he “was resolved to convoke a Synod ... and that he asked the permission for it from the government, but he was refused.”<sup>28</sup>

The old Bishop had been somewhat biased in that he did not trust the doctrine of the then “Blessed Alphonsus Liguori.”<sup>29</sup> His mistrust, perhaps, was due to the teachings of Fr. Gabriel Antoine, whose text was used in the Seminary. Later, throughout Verona, the doctrine of St. Alphonsus was accepted.<sup>30</sup>

Bishop Joseph Grasser, a Tyrolean, immediately succeeded Bishop Liruti, and ruled the Diocese for ten years, from 1829-1839. He was succeeded by a former Benedictine Abbot, Bishop Peter Aurelius Mutti, who governed the Diocese from 1841-1852. He died in 1857 as Patriarch of Venice. Both Bishops delighted in the fact that the Diocese was referred to as a “fertile garden.”<sup>31</sup> To Bishop Grasser goes

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<sup>25</sup> Summ. Add., Doc. XXIV, Intro., p. 269. Cfr. Mss. of J. Sommacampagna, Professor of Church History in the Diocesan Seminary from 1812-1821. Doc. XXVIII, Intr., p. 586 f.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Summ. Add., Doc. XIII, 2 Intr. p. 65. Cfr. Moroni, Vol. 94, pp. 179 f.; 181 f.; 184 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Summ. Add., Doc. XXVI, Intr. p. 268; Doc. XVII, 1 Intr. p. 95 f.

<sup>28</sup> Liruti: “Recoll.” l.c.

<sup>29</sup> Liruti: Letter to Fr. Mazza, February 24, 1824: Mss. Liruti, Seminary Library of Verona.

<sup>30</sup> The text of Fr. G. Antoine, S.J., adapted for Seminary use, was considered by St. Alphonsus as “too rigid.” Cfr. His Letters, Vol. III, 1890, p. 394; “Homo Apostolicus,” XVI - 108.

<sup>31</sup> Moroni, Vol. 94, p. 186.

the credit for re-establishing the "Schools of Christian Doctrine."<sup>32</sup> Bishop Mutti made a Pastoral Visitation of the Diocese twice in ten years. He also reorganized the Seminary and assigned a permanent Spiritual Director to live there.<sup>33</sup> Both Bishops were men of great ability, and they were endowed with a spirit and vitality that was without parallel.

They enjoyed the esteem and the affection of their flock.<sup>34</sup>

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The rapid renewal that took place in the Church of Verona must also be attributed to the cooperation of those members of the Clergy who, even during the darkest hours, remained faithful to their commitment. It should also be pointed out, that the basic goodness of the majority of the faithful came through that turbulent age intact. Above all, however, it was due to a choice band of priestly souls, and others like them, who were totally dedicated to the service of God. In the midst of the terrible turmoil, they redoubled their efforts in the apostolate, and were adroit in the new projects they undertook.

Our Venerable Founder's part in all this is the subject of this book. His personal holiness, and his intense efforts for the sanctification of the Clergy - his founding and developing the parish Marian Oratories - the Congregation that he founded at the Stimate, and the example of its members, and its school - his willing cooperation in the foundation of other Congregations that sprang up at this time - the light of his counsel, which permeated every level of society - all this will be unfolded as the narrative develops.

We cannot, however, omit certain names and various endeavors of theirs, that were either founded, reorganized or renewed to meet the difficulties of that era in Verona. These will give a fairly complete idea of the great good that was being accomplished in the city, and throughout the Diocese.<sup>35</sup>

Fr. Peter. Leonardi (1769-1844) and his "Company of Night Hospital Workers", founded in 1796; his "Raminghelli Institute," to care for abandoned children, which was founded in 1799; his Congregation of the "Daughters of Jesus," founded in 1809; and lastly, his "Schools of Charity." He was a tireless missionary who, because of his zeal for souls, and his fidelity to the Vicar of Christ, he endured persecution and imprisonment.<sup>36</sup>

Blessed Madeline di Canossa (1774-1835), who founded the 'Daughters of Charity.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "Collection ..." cited above, Vol. I, p. 131.

<sup>33</sup> This position was covered by Fr. Lino Fasoli, Pastor of the Most Holy Trinity Church, Verona, until 1842.

<sup>34</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "Coll ...", p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Moroni, Vol. 94, pp. 172-195; 206 f.

<sup>36</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "The Life of Fr. Peter Leonardi," Verona, 1855.

<sup>37</sup> Bresciani, "Coll ...", Vol. I, p. 391-425; I. Giordani, "Madeline di Canossa," 3rd. ed., Brescia, 1946.

Mother Leopoldina Naudet (1773-1834), who founded the “Sisters of the Holy Family.”<sup>38</sup>

Theodora Campostrini (1788-1860), of noble birth, who founded the “Little Sisters of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary.”<sup>39</sup>

Fr. Charles Steeb (1773-1856) and Louise Poloni (1802-1855) who together founded the “Sisters of Mercy.”<sup>40</sup>

Fr. Anthony Provolo (1800-1842) who founded his “Society of Mary” for the education of deaf mutes.<sup>41</sup>

Fr. Nicholas Mazza (1790-1865) who founded his “Pious Congregations” to care for abandoned girls and those orphan children with gifted intelligence. He also attempted a foundation of an Institute of African Missionaries. Fr. Mazza’s Cause is now before the Sacred Congregation of Rites.<sup>42</sup>

We will also note here a number of other groups that underwent a rebirth, or second foundation, at this time. First of all, there was the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. This Institute was suppressed in 1810, with all the others, and was then reestablished a decade later. Its renewal was due mostly to Fr. Anthony Cesari. The Capuchins returned to Verona in 1835, as did the Jesuits in 1837. For a number of years thereafter, the Jesuits conducted the public school at St. Sebastian’s. The “Regular Clerics, Ministers to the Sick” were renewed in “1842 by Fr. Cesar Camillus Bresciani (1783-1871). He became a renowned preacher and was known as the “Apostle to the Hospitals.”<sup>43</sup> Because of the significant contribution made by his Order throughout the entire Lombard-Veneto Province, he was called a “second St. Camillus.” There are also other names that we might mention and the endeavors that were attributed to them.<sup>44</sup>

In this background, Venerable Gaspar Bertoni, Founder of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ, lived - and died, at the age of 76.

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<sup>38</sup> Summ. Add., Doc. V, Intr., pp. 12-20.

<sup>39</sup> I.c., Doc. XXVIII, Intr., p. 587.

<sup>40</sup> Icilio Felici, “From a Lutheran to an Apostle,” Pisa, 1943. Mario Vanti, “Sister Vincentia Maria Poloni, (Louise, to the World),” Verona, 1932.

<sup>41</sup> C. C. Bresciani, “Coll ...”, Vol. II, pp. 32-59.

<sup>42</sup> Emil Crestiani, “The Life of the Servant of God, Fr. Nicholas Mazza,” Verona ed. 1933. Peter Albrigi, “A Brief Life of the Servant of God, Fr. Nicholas Mazza,” Verona, 1946.

<sup>43</sup> Moroni, Vol. 94, pp. 173; 191; 236 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

**VARIOUS PERIODS IN THE LIFE OF THE VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD,****FR. GASPAR BERTONI**

Fr. Gaspar Bertoni's life can be divided into three periods of unequal length:

- I. From his birth, until his ordination to the Priesthood; the Period of his Formation: 1777-1800.
- II. From his Ordination, until the foundation of a Community at the Stimate - sixteen years of intense study, and extremely varied apostolate among the clergy, the laity and the youth: 1800-1816.
- III. From his entrance into the Stimate, until, his death, "in the arms of God." A thirty- seven year period during which he founded and formed a Congregation of Priests and Brothers at the Stimate - a period of an even more varied apostolate, during which his years of teaching school, were coupled with extensive counselling, while enduring excruciating suffering, until his death: 1816-1853.





## FIRST PERIOD: 1777 - 1800

FROM THE BIRTH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, UNTIL HIS ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

From his birth, until his ordination to the Priesthood; the Period of his Formation.

Gaspar Bertoni's birth-house, in Verona, in Via di Sotto (which is now called Via Nicola Mazza)

[L-R]

[1] The front of the house;

[2] The room where he was born, downstairs, when a chapel was built. At the left hand side, we can see details of the original wall.



Detail of the sign at the front wall, that reads:

"IN THIS HOUSE  
WAS BORN ON THE 9 OCTOBER 1777  
AND DWELLED HERE UNTIL 1810  
THE BLESSED GASPAR BERTONI  
FATHER OF THE VERONESE YOUTH  
FOUNDER OF THE STIGMATINES"

Sign at the baptismal font in the Parish of St. Paul, in Campo Marzo, that reads:

"IN THIS BAPTISMAL FONT  
ON THE 10 OCTOBER 1777  
WAS BORN TO THE LIFE OF THE SONS OF GOD  
THE BLESSED GASPAR BERTONI  
PEARL OF THE VERONESE CLERGY  
APOSTLE OF THE YOUTH  
FOUNDER OF STIGMATINI FATHERS  
  
THE PARISH OF ST. PAUL EXULTANT  
VENERATES HIM AND RELIES ON HIS PROTECTION  
IN THE SECOND CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH  
  
VERONA 9 OCTOBER 1977"



## CHAPTER I

**THE BIRTH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD AND HIS EARLY EDUCATION****The Bertoni Household**

At the beginning of October 1777, the Bertoni home was located in Via di Sotto (which is now called Via Nicola Mazza), in St. Paul's Parish, in the Campo Marzio sector of Verona. The following members made up the household:

Matilda Bertoni, nee Liorsi. She was the 70 year old widow of Gaspar Bertoni, a notary, who had died in 1768. In addition to his widow, Gaspar also left three children:

There was Anthony Mary, a 42 year old bachelor, who was a high ranking notary, and had one time served as Chancellor of the City Council, and Prior of the Association of Notaries.

Francis Louis, aged 30, and his wife, Brunora (Ravelli), who was 31. She was the daughter of the Notary, Francis Ravelli, and was a native of Sirmione, a village on Lake Garda. In December of this same year, Francis was to become the "Notary of Greater Affairs," but his title was to be merely honorary, as he was never to practice his profession. For all practical purposes, his profession only brought him the personal advantage of being able to write "Illustrissimo" before his name.

Then there was Paula Bertoni, their 39 year old sister, who was not married.

Living in the same home, there were also the 68 year old priest, Fr. James Bertoni, and the Notary, Ignatius Bertoni, aged 64, brothers of the late Gaspar Bertoni.

They were also brothers of the late Catherine (Bertoni) Pistoia, whose unmarried daughter, Teresa Pistoia, lived with them. She was 47 years of age.

With the exception of Ignatius Bertoni and Teresa Pistoia, all the members of the household held jointly the undivided and rather extensive Bertoni estate. It had been handed down this way over the years. Ignatius, however, already had his share, as had Catherine Pistoia, which at her death, had then passed to her daughter, Teresa.<sup>45</sup>

These, then were the closest Bertoni relatives that awaited the first born of the marriage of Francis Louis and Brunora Ravelli. There were, then in addition to the child's mother and father, the paternal grandmother, two grand-uncles, an uncle and an aunt, plus a cousin, already 47 years old. There was general agreement that the family tradition begun by old Gaspar Bertoni if the child should be a girl, she would be named Matilda, and if a boy, he would be called Gaspar.

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<sup>45</sup> Information derived from the "Bertoni File", Archives of the Stimate, Verona.

**It's a boy!**

On the 9th of October of that 1777, at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, Gaspar Bertoni was born. On the very next day, the 10th, his Grand-Uncle, Fr. James Bertoni, had the privilege of regenerating the new-born into the life of the sons of God. At Baptism, the child was given three names:

Gaspar, after his Grandfather, and for an even earlier member of the clan, one Gaspar Bertoni, who had served the ancient Republic of Venice in some official capacity;

Louis, that the child might be under the protection of St. Aloysius Gonzaga;

Denis, whose feast was commemorated the day the child was born.

The Sponsor for the Sacrament of Baptism, was the "most illustrious" Doctor of Canon Law, Silvio Da Prato, who had been a friend of the family for a long time.<sup>46</sup>

**Matilda**

Almost six years after Gaspar's birth, a little girl was born, on March 18, 1783. On the day of her birth, she was baptized at home and given the names Matilda Josepha Catherine. As she was born and baptized on the vigil of St. Joseph, the Patron of a Good Death would watch over her in a special way. She died 3 years, 7 months and 29 days later, on November 11, 1786. Hers was but a fleeting existence that was not even known to the first biographer of Ven. Gaspar Bertoni.<sup>47</sup>

During her lifetime, the Bertoni's lived at their country estate in Caldiero. When they came here, or how long they stayed, is not known to us.

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Gaspar, from his earliest years, received the most attention from his mother. The other grown-ups in the family also were most effusive toward him, but there is little mention of his father's relationship with him. There were no more children born of the marriage.

**Mr. Francis Louis Bertoni**

The child's father, Francis L. Bertoni, perhaps over-impressed with his new status, was anxious to establish economic autonomy for himself and his little family. He approached his uncle, Fr. James, and his brother, Anthony Mary, to see if they would agree to a division of the estate. Their discussions were lengthy and were marred by friction and discord. Finally, however, an agreement was reached in May of 1783.

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<sup>46</sup> Summ. Add., Doc. I, p. 3; "Bertoni File," I.c.

<sup>47</sup> Records of Baptism & Death, Ap. Proc., fol. 193.

Unfortunately, Francis was most impractical in the administration of his financial affairs. By 1789, due to "his unsound business dealings," he was forced to entrust them to his brother-in-law, Charles Ravelli, the brother of his wife, Brunora. After the death of Ravelli, Francis' own brother, the Notary, Anthony Mary, took over. He, however by 1800, found he could no longer balance the accounts, and so he handed them back to his prodigal brother. It was now evident, that for the sake of peace and harmony, the only plausible solution, was a legal separation in his marriage. Documents were signed that determined precisely the annual distribution of the income.<sup>48</sup>

### **Further Developments in the Bertoni Household**

The turbulence, to which we have only alluded, was in direct contrast to the peace and quiet that young Gaspar's mother provided for his up-bringing. Both the honor, as well as the onerous responsibility of rearing the child, fell on her. This proved to be advantageous for both of them, and the results she achieved, brought her great consolation in an otherwise unhappy marriage.

This close relationship between mother and son was most fortunate since, along with all the other troubles, there were five deaths in less than seven years in the house. Young Gaspar, before his eighth birthday, saw the death of the priest that had baptized him, his Grand-uncle, Fr. James Bertoni. The next year, just after his ninth birthday, he saw a white casket with the body of his little sister, Matilda, who had died a victim of small-pox. His other Grand-uncle, Ignatius, died the following year, and bequeathed a silver sword to his little nephew, stating that he was counting on the prayers of his "nephew's son." Teresa Pistoia, Gaspar's 60 year old cousin, died when he was not quite thirteen; she, too, remembered him in her will. The very next year, his Grandmother, Matilda, of the noble Liorsi family, who was over 80, also - and the entire older generation had passed away.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Mother and her Son**

Let us retrace our steps, however, and proceed in a more orderly fashion.

Fr. Bertoni's filial admiration for his mother remained so much a part of him right up until his death. He described Brunora to the priest who would one day write his biography, as a woman of great piety, much wisdom and good judgment. For her part, she had the great joy of noticing her son's innate joyfulness, coupled with a sense of piety far beyond his years, and the fact that he very early gave evidence of being blessed with a keen mind.<sup>50</sup>

From the hidden background of his early years, some of his characteristics have come down to us. From various sources, we discover that in the Servant of God, his bright eyes were among his outstanding features, as well as his intelligent

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<sup>48</sup> Doc. VI, p. 24, f.

<sup>49</sup> Register of Deaths, St. Paul's in Campo Marzio; "Bertoni File," l.c.

<sup>50</sup> Summar., p. 7, Parag. 31; Doc. XX, p. 170; XXVI, pp. 360, 492.

manner and his quick and retentive memory. He early manifested a taste for prayer, either before his own little altar that he had made, and especially when he prayed with his mother. He manifested an inclination for anything that pertained to God, as even the sound of the organ in church, his spontaneity and his exemplary conduct.

In general, there was in him a marked absence of those whims, so usual in a boy of such a lively temperament. It was said of him that he was even made happy as a young boy, when he was given an image of some Saint for his very own.<sup>51</sup>

It should also be pointed out, however, that this lad of 12 who had made a little altar for himself, just shortly before this, had a gun repaired for himself!<sup>52</sup> This documented incident seems to indicate a typical liveliness of a boy that was a wholesome balance to his unusual holiness for his age.

There are other recorded incidents of his early childhood that have come down to us. At the usual age, young Gaspar was enrolled with other lads his same age, in a nearby kindergarten. One episode in his life at this time stands out. When the voices and the hands of his young companions rose, when the time for lunch had arrived, it was stated that "he would not touch his, until the teacher had said it was all right -- he always remained quiet, and sat up straight in his little chair." This same teacher, who related this, also stated that even then, she referred to him as "the little Saint," or as her "angelic little Gaspar."<sup>53</sup>

There is also a record of a statement that his mother made about him at this age: "If all children had even a fraction of the obedience of little Gaspar, it would be more than enough to make their parents and teachers happy."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 308, ff.

<sup>52</sup> *Ib.*, p. 309, footnote.

<sup>53</sup> Doc. XX, p. 128, n. 1; XXVI, p. 310.

<sup>54</sup> Doc. XX, p. 128, n. 2; XXVI, p. 314.

## CHAPTER II

**THE SERVANT OF GOD IN PUBLIC SCHOOL**

Young Gaspar early manifested a desire to go to school, and he asked his parents to “accede to this wish of his.” He was, therefore, at the age of eight, enrolled at the public school at St. Sebastian’s.<sup>55</sup>

**The School at St. Sebastian’s**

This school had been established by the Company of Jesus, and had been under their management until their suppression. At that time, it was taken over by the city, which maintained the same religious atmosphere, and even some of the same teachers. Religion had its influence in all of the subjects that were taught there. The science course, for example, was placed under the protection of Mary Immaculate, and St. Aloysius was presented as the model for the students.<sup>56</sup>

Among the teachers at this school at this time were the former Jesuits, Fr. Louis Fortis and Fr. Joachim Avesani.

Up until this time, Fr. Fortis had been teaching the course called the Humanities, but beginning with this year, he was assigned to teach Philosophy as well. He also had organized and taught the courses of Christian Doctrine to the upper grades in the Church of St. Sebastian, right next to the school. He also helped out with the Oratory that was conducted on Sundays and Holy Days for the students of Philosophy.

Young Gaspar was fortunate to find a Spiritual Father for his early years in this Fr. Louis Fortis - who would one day be chosen the Superior General of the Jesuits, after their reinstatement. The impact that this man made on the young boy, remained with him for the remainder of his life.<sup>57</sup>

In Fr. Avesani - who taught Rhetoric for many years, and who was later to be the principal of this school - young Gaspar found the Director of the old Marian Congregation. Soon after his arrival at the school, the young student gave his name to Fr. Avesani to be enrolled as a member.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 311.

<sup>56</sup> Doc. II, p. 4; cfr. The Preface of “The Course of Sciences,” (Mss. of Louis Medici), of Fr. Fortis, S.J. Viet. Emm. Lib., Rome, Jesuit Section.

<sup>57</sup> Doc. II, p. 4, f. Intro. - Louis Fortis was born in Verona in 1748. At the age of 14, he entered the Society of Jesus. When the Society was suppressed on July 21, 1773, he returned to Verona. In the unsuccessful attempts to reorganize made by the Society - first at Parma, in 1793, and then in Naples in 1803 - Fr. Fortis was among the leaders. He came back to Verona in 1811. When the Society was reestablished by Pius VII in 1814, Fr. Fortis again hastened to return to it. He was named Provincial of the Roman Province, and in 1820, he was elected “Prepositus General”. He was a man of deep study and an able leader - he was always considered to be a very holy man. He died in 1829.

<sup>58</sup> Ib. and p. 6 text.

### **As a Student**

Gaspar Bertoni was a student at St. Sebastian's from Grammar School right up through Philosophy, according to the system of that time. The records of his scholastic achievements of all those years have, unfortunately, disappeared. There have come down to us, however, some recollections, given later in life, by men who had attended school with him long years before. They tell us that he was livery studious and disciplined," although he was very happy, and had a good sense of humor."

We are also told that he was singled out as a model for his classmates, because "he was very far ahead in his studies, even though he was likewise far behind in age."<sup>59</sup>

The sources that his first biographer was able to consult, indicate that any greater progress, or success in his scholastic achievements, could not have been possible. He did repeat, however, two grades of the three year grammar course by "his own choice," so that his age would not be a handicap in the higher courses in the Humanities, Rhetoric and Philosophy.<sup>60</sup>

### **His Devotion for St. Aloysius**

As to his progress and spiritual advancement of this period of his life, he had become most attracted by the life of St. Aloysius. Some of the accounts of the Saint's early life, would also make a good description of Gaspar Bertoni's student days, with certain adaptations being made. The boy as a young student, was most edifying to his companions; in his early steps in virtue, he made great strides. Hardly had he set out on this climb, and it seemed that he had reached the summit."

Others, who knew him in this phase of his life, state that so great was his modesty, and such was his demeanor, even as a little boy, that he was much admired and esteemed."

When his friends saw him on his way down the street, there is a record of the fact that more than once the remark was passed:

"The Saint is going by."<sup>61</sup>

It was during this same period that the following incident occurred. The family had a maid in its employ, and one day her curiosity was aroused when he politely told her that she did not have to make his bed. After waiting for the

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<sup>59</sup> Doc. X, p. 118, n. 2; p. 120, n. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 311, f. & 314. There is some doubt concerning this alleged repetition of classes. We are sure that Gaspar frequented that school for ten years - the Grammar Course and the "Philosophy Course" would only add up to 8 years. There were, however, "Preparatory Classes." It is possible that as a young boy, he might have attended these Preparatory Classes for one or two years. This would leave the possibility open that he could have repeated at least one year.

<sup>61</sup> Summar., p. 47, Par. 33; Doc. XX, p. 117, n. 1; p. 128, f., n. 6; XXVI. p. 314, 317.

favorable moment, she then went to his room to make it. When she pulled down the sheets, she found that the mattress was stuffed with hay, and was also generously sprinkled with chips of wood and small pieces of iron.<sup>62</sup>

Another time, "his parents wanted a new suit made for him, and they had already put in the order for it. He then went down to the tailor himself and insisted on a style and cut different from what had been specified. His thought was that he wanted to be the object of ridicule. He did win the nickname of "little Capuchin." He had already "resolved to give himself entirely to God."<sup>63</sup>

### **His First Communion**

All of these early indications, unusual for his young age, seem to point to the need he was experiencing for the spiritual nourishment of the Eucharistic Bread.

On April 26, 1789, Gaspar had the happiness of seeing his name placed on the scroll of the Marian Congregation as a new member. This consecration of the pious young boy to the Mother of God was intended to be as a sequel of that wonderful day in his life. Either this day, or the one previous, had found him for the first time at the altar rail being fed with the Bread of Life. The impression of this day was forever inscribed on his soul. He was to recall its still vivid memory, almost 20 years later on his 31st birthday, October 9, 1808. By that time he had been a priest for eight years, and had already experienced the graces of prayer and union. He wrote in his Spiritual Diary that during the celebration of Mass that day, he had experienced "certain fervent impulses, wrought in His soul by God," plus lithe consideration of serious sin." Then he went on to note: "There were tears of compunction, and an increase of faith, trust, humility and loving reverence. Finally, - at Communion, I experienced devotion and sentiments like those of my First Holy Communion Day long ago ... and that I had not experienced since."<sup>64</sup>

It was perhaps in such a state of mind that Gaspar wrote the following as a composition for his Rhetoric class:

"During my youth, my heart came to yearn, Called by its Spouse, in a voice not stern.

I heard Him, glimpsed Him - now for Him I burn."

Then he added this warning:

"Just wishing to see Him, you search in vain,

If first you've not loved Him. So this, then recall He speaks to your heart, but sweetly and plain.

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<sup>62</sup> Doc. XX, p. 128, n. 4; p. 318; Cfr. CEPARI. "Life of Blessed Aloysius Gonzaga," Part I, Chap. VI.

<sup>63</sup> Doc. XX, p. 128, n. 3; XXVI, p. 319 and the Lenotti-Giacobbe "Pro-Memoria," (Cfr. Doc. XX, p. 125, n.9); Ap. Proc., fol. 613, v.

<sup>64</sup> Doc. II, p. 5, f.; XXXV, p. 661.



This kind invitation, on deaf ears, doesn't let it fall. From the noise of the crowd, He keeps distant and aloof.

Leave home, race and land, in response to His call

Your King will then take you, under His very own roof."<sup>65</sup>

### **In the Marian Congregation**

The young boy, then, was enrolled on April 26, 1789, among the active "elite" of the Marian Congregation of the "Annunciation. This had been established at St. Sebastian's and was an affiliate of the "Prima Primaria" of the Roman College.<sup>66</sup>

His first biographer made no mention of this dedication of the boy to the Blessed Virgin. However, that which he has recorded concerning the boy's progress in piety and study, depicts the traditional portrait of the typical member of this Marian Congregation. The qualities that were required include: a diligent application to intense study, as a means of pleasing God and fulfilling His Will; a continuous and total dedication for a deeper piety, and a more solid virtue, through faithfulness to prayer and to the duties of one's present state of life; a love for mortification, and charity for his neighbor. All of these must then be permeated by a filial devotion toward the Mother of God.

This would be apparent by compliance with the following religious practices: Confession and Communion, at least on Sundays and Holy Days; daily Mass, meditation, spiritual reading, examen of conscience, visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as a visit to honor the Mother of God. Furthermore, there were required various retreats, participation in Triduums and Novenas, prior to all the Feasts of the Blessed Mother, and a special emphasis was placed on the traditional May devotions. The members also had to participate in various apostolic projects on their recreation days out in the country, where various games would also be interspersed with reading. After the completion of their games, the boys would sit around on the grass, to listen to reading, short sermons and the like. On their way home, they would also visit the hospitals or a church. All this was complied with under the maternal protection of the Queen of heaven.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Sacrament of Confirmation**

It would not seem an exaggeration to state that in so ardent a soul, the Sacrament of Confirmation must have been very fruitful. It was conferred on him,

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<sup>65</sup> This appears in his early handwriting, and is presently with the Documents at the S. Cong. of Rites.

<sup>66</sup> Doc. II, p. 4, Intr., and n. 6, text.

<sup>67</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 312, f; 317, 318, f; 482; Cfr. Emile Villaret, S.J., "Congrégations de la Sainte Vierge - Manuel des Directeurs," Rheims-Toulouse, 1930, pp. 15, 16, 18, 19.

the 6th of September, 1791, by the new Bishop of Verona, Bishop John Andrew Avogadro.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Sciences and Philosophy**

At the close of the scholastic year of 1792-1793, Gaspar Bertoni successfully completed what we would call high school. He then went on to study those classes that were then called the Sciences and Philosophy.<sup>69</sup> He continued the study of Italian Literature (or, as it was then called, "Tuscan"). Perhaps it was at this time, or a little later that he was introduced to the system of Fr. Anthony Cesari, whose school of thought is the standard in Italy. Fr. Cesari came to know young Gaspar Bertoni when he studied under him. He considered the young man as none of the most gifted minds of any student that had studied under him." He stated that young Bertoni came to possess "a thorough knowledge of the ancient authorities."<sup>70</sup>

For the term of 1793-1794, in his new class, he studied under Fr. Louis Fortis. Fr. Fortis' assistant that year was Fr. Anthony Zamboni, and he would succeed him the following year. It seemed that young Gaspar, in this more demanding atmosphere of order and discipline, increased his efforts to learn. He was also, at this time pondering, in his heart and soul, his vocation to the priesthood. As the months passed, in addition to the scholastic requirements, he did further research, took part in discussions and studied more on his own. He applied himself seriously to these studies that one day he might be a master of them in his own right.

He soon became quite proficient in the required scholastic disputes, and caught the eye of his teacher, Fr. Anthony Zamboni. Fr. Zamboni once gave him, as a remembrance, his own personal manuscript of the course in Logic. Gaspar studied and pondered over it during the summer vacation. From this manuscript, the young student learned much, Fr. Giacobbe tells us, that helped him later in life to combat "the most pernicious of all the errors which then afflicted the Catholic world - Jansenism."<sup>71</sup>

As we have mentioned previously, at the end of his first year of Philosophy, Gaspar, then 17, much to his dismay, lost his teacher, Fr. Fortis. At that time, Fr. Fortis was to be among the first of former Jesuits, who attempted the reunification of the Society, under the protection of the Duke of Parma, in 1794.<sup>72</sup> This took place just about one year before Gaspar reached a most important decision in his life. It seems, though, the groundwork for this decision had been laid during his studies and consultations with Fr. Fortis. Now it was time to make the transition from reflection to resolution, and to fulfill all that his decision involved.

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<sup>68</sup> Doc. III, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Doc. II, p. 5 Intr.

<sup>70</sup> Doc. XXII, p. 214; XXVI, p. 315.

<sup>71</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 315, f.

<sup>72</sup> Doc. II, p. 4, Intr.

## CHAPTER III

**HIS VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND HIS THEOLOGICAL STUDIES**

One day, young Bertoni was taken aside by his Pastor, Fr. Francis Girardi. He was an excellent priest and had a doctorate in both Canon and Civil Law. He had been a Professor, up until a few years previously in the Diocesan Seminary, and had been appointed Pastor of St. Paul's in 1790.<sup>73</sup>

Rather sharply, he asked: "Why is it that you are taking so long to make up your mind about the priesthood?"

Gaspar took this as a sign from God. He did not enter into any further discussion, as he sincerely felt that he was unworthy. It would still be a little while longer before he would respond.

Thereafter, he increased his prayer; he intensified his mortification; made a fervent retreat and conferred with his Spiritual Father. He found that his call was genuine, and that the great dream which he had barely dared to ponder in secret, was in perfect harmony with the will of God.<sup>74</sup> There was now only the matter of making the decision, reflecting on the fact that he was not only the first-born, but that he was the only surviving child who could continue the family name.

We do not know whether or not he encountered any opposition from his family. It does not appear that he did - at least, we do not think that he did. It would seem most probable that this decision of his had already been the most fervent hope of his mother. His unpredictable father may have been opposed, but this is not certain. At any rate, when he registered for the school year in November 1795, he enrolled in the first year of theology at the Diocesan Seminary.<sup>75</sup> It would seem, then, if there had been any opposition, it had been overcome by this time. He did not, however, board at the seminary, and attended his first classes in his lay clothing.

In addition to attending classes at the seminary, he also went there for the retreats that were regularly conducted just before Ordinations. He remained at home, and helped out in his parish, under the surveillance of his Pastor, in accord with the instructions of Pope Benedict XIV. This was a fairly common arrangement at the time in seminaries.<sup>76</sup>

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His Professor of Dogmatic Theology was Fr. Lazarus Righi, a theologian who cared little to increase his personal prestige in learned circles. He, therefore, avoided

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<sup>73</sup> Cfr. Dedication on his grave, St. Bernadine's, Verona; Born: December 10, 1737 - Died: December 11, 1812.

<sup>74</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 321, Chap. V.

<sup>75</sup> Doc. IV, p. 7, Intr.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. "Enchiridion Clericorum", Poliglottis Vaticanis, 1938, pp. 109-113, Chap. IV, nn. 3-8.

the polemics of various schools of thought. He preferred, rather, to present the substance of the questions that were being treated with as much clarity as possible. Fr. Righi used to remind his students of this warning of St. Bernard:

“There are those who wish to learn for the sake of learning: this is dishonorable curiosity. There are those who wish to learn that they might thereby become known: this is dishonorable vanity. There are those who would learn in order to sell their knowledge: this is shameful commercialism. There are, however, those who wish to learn in order to edify: this is charity.

Then, there are those who wish to know to be edified themselves: this is prudence. Only the latter two groups, of those mentioned, can be said to avoid the accusation of misusing their knowledge only they who attend to it with a good purpose.”

Gaspar took this to heart. He copied the entire course of his Professor, from beginning to end in his own handwriting. When studied a century later, it gives the impression of having been copied with the patience of a monk. To elevate his mind in this arduous undertaking, at the top of every single page, he inscribed: “L.D.S.”, a common Latin abbreviation for either “Praise to God alone,” or “Praise to God always.” Whatever he understood by it, it was a constant reminder of doing every task with the right intention, of not seeking anything or wishing for anything, other than the glory of God.<sup>77</sup>

He studied Moral Theology under Fr. Nicholas Galvani, who, in addition to teaching theology at the seminary, was also the recently appointed Pastor of St. John’s Church “in Foro.” His text was the “Compendium” of Fr. Gabriel Antoine. The meeting of this teacher and disciple produced a mutual respect, and was, as we will see, a most providential encounter. This deep respect was retained down through the years, even after Fr. Galvani’s death.<sup>78</sup>

Gaspar studied Canon Law under Fr. Michael Angelo Bellini, J.e.D., whose “*Institutiones Canonicae*” he copied out by hand with that precision that was characteristic of him.<sup>79</sup>

As the years went on, the young seminarian gave more and more time to his own personal and private study of the “*Summa*” of St. Thomas. By the time he was ordained a priest, he would have already gone through it entirely twice, and was well along in his third study of it. On one of these occasions, he accompanied his study of the text of the “*Summa*” with the “*Commentarium*” of Francis Sylvius. In addition to the scholastics, he undertook other studies, as Sacred Scripture, the

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<sup>77</sup> Mss. Bertoni, n. 1; Doc. IV, p. 7, Intr.

<sup>78</sup> Doc. IV, p. 7, Intr.; VIII, p. 44, f. Intr.

<sup>79</sup> Mss. Beroni, n. 2.

Church Fathers, the ancient canons, Church History, Liturgy and other allied subjects.<sup>80</sup>

We do not possess his records from the Seminary, as all the files from his era have disappeared. We do have some indication of his scholastic achievements, though, from a eulogy preached in his honor after his death. Fr. Bertoni was said to have been “meritoriously approved in every subject.”<sup>81</sup> One of his school companions, who was also familiar with the Bertoni home, has reported: “From his days in the Seminary, he studied ten hours every single day, in addition to attending classes ..... In class, he was a special joy to the Arch-Priest, Fr. Galvani.”<sup>82</sup> We do have some of his manuscripts from those times, and we also know for a fact that for many years after his ordination, his name and a few others were cited-as examples and proofs of the excellence of the Program of Studies at the Seminary at this period.<sup>83</sup>

### **Vestition, Tonsure and Minor Orders**

On December 31, 1796, he was vested in the Seminary Chapel.

He received First Tonsure a week later, on the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1797. He received the first two Minor Orders on “Sitientes Saturday,” April 1, 1797; and the last two Minor Orders on the First Sunday after Pentecost, June 11th of that same year. Bishop Avogadro officiated at all of these ceremonies that were held in the Chapel of his Episcopal Palace.<sup>84</sup>

### **His Seminary Life and his participation in the Apostolate of his Parish**

As for his personal conduct, we have additional testimony from his above mentioned classmate. “He prayed a great deal, did much penance and frequently kept an all night vigil. But with all this, in conversation, he always seemed happy and had a good sense of humor. He was an expert in the innocent fun he made of his companions. He could do this in such a way, as never to be in the least offensive to anyone ... but was never pointed in these jokes, and his kindness was remarkable.”<sup>85</sup>

As for his work in the Parish during this time, his biographer tells us that “those who actually saw him or who had heard about him from others who had known him personally, attest that they had never seen a more diligent, more zealous, a more fervent or a more dedicated seminarian than he was ... nor did they know of anyone who had shown more love for God, or who had more compassion

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<sup>80</sup> Doc. XX, p. 182; XXVI, p. 328, f.

<sup>81</sup> Doc. XXI, p. 204.

<sup>82</sup> Doc. XX, p. 117, n. 1.

<sup>83</sup> C. C. Bresciani, “Collezione Orazioni Funebri,” Verona, 1866, Vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>84</sup> Doc. IV, p. 8, f. nn. 1-4.

<sup>85</sup> Doc. XX, p. 117, n. 1; p. 129, n. 10.

for the poor. In their opinion, he displayed an even greater concern for the youth of his time, immersed in so many dangers.”

He would be the first to arrive in Church in the morning, and would then set about preparing the altars for Mass. He showed a great desire to serve Mass, and to assist at the other services and devotions. He was most observant of the liturgy, and never gave the slightest indication of boredom. While awaiting for a given service to begin, he would occupy the time in prayer or meditation, or in spiritual reading from some appropriate book.<sup>86</sup> We can guess, but with a documented foundation, what these books were: sometimes it would be “The Imitation of Christ”, or, “The Spiritual Combat,” with its sequel, or “The Path to Paradise,” by Fr. Lawrence Scupoli.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to his prescribed studies, he manifested an interest in music - both in singing and in learning how to play an instrument or two. What ability he acquired, he put to good use in the sacred chants of the liturgy, as well as having picked up a further means of contact for his apostolate to the youth.<sup>88</sup>

### **A Catechist to the Young**

As a dedicated Seminarian, his efforts with the youth gave a good indication that he was to be the priest of the Marian Oratories. There has come down to us his “Instructions on Penance,” that he prepared for the children of his parish. It is actually a treatise in miniature that he compiled on this Sacrament. In obedience to his Pastor, he inscribed above its introduction, “For the Greater Glory of God, and for the Edification at my Brothers.” He then specified who these -brothers- were - his fellow teachers of Christian Doctrine. He indicated that he had employed the simplest and most practical and natural method that he knew of to get his ideas across, and to impart a definite clarity. For him, the analytical method was best, and his choice has been confirmed by experience. He wrote: “I believe that, by the grace of God, I have reaped a greater harvest than I had hoped when I planted the seeds.”

However, he was not always content with his achievements:

“This was because of my own lack of ability, the brevity of class time, and also because sometimes I had to make allowances for the thinking process of the young students. Therefore, I was not always able to adhere to my chosen method.”

He went on to say: “Except for the method, in so far as I was able, I did my best not to insert anything that was just mine personally.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 323, ff.

<sup>87</sup> Summar., p. 48, Par. 38; Doc. XXXV, p. 664, note, Dec. 17th.

<sup>88</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 320, f.

<sup>89</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 653.

This statement is so characteristic of Fr. Bertoni - it was the practice of his entire life. His reason was, as he would remark another time: "Because of ourselves, what possible good can be derived?"<sup>90</sup>

He also carefully listed his sources - first of all, his texts of the Scholastics, the Roman Catechism, the doctrine of St. Robert Bellarmine, the Council of Trent, St. Francis de Sales, "the customs of his Diocese," the Boman Ritual and St. Thomas. All of these speak in this 'Instruction,' by the frequent use of their very expressions."

He also gave a summary of what he felt that the work lacked:

"With the help of God, I hope to remedy this with more personal study, and by consulting others, to whom I owe so much."<sup>91</sup>

The adaptation and explanation of these texts, and the style and the manner in which he employed them, were all his own work:

"The gardeners, or farmers of this city, along whose fields the Adige flows - as you have no doubt noticed, too - go to great pains to see that water from the Adige, by means of little channels, reaches their shrubbery, flowers, their fruit trees and their plants. Without grace, your soul is dried up by the heat of the passions, and by the winds of temptations. Such land either gives no fruit at all, or it is scarcely able to do so. It is necessary, then, to water it, and this water is grace. Just as this is necessary for the gardens, so, a channel of grace must reach your souls. And you know that this torrent of Grace has been flowing continuously, since the death of Christ."<sup>92</sup>

For his lofty purpose of assisting the youth of his time, Gaspar Bertoni, as the occasions would present themselves, would elevate their conversations, and even their recreations - although he denied himself these diversions by rule.<sup>93</sup>

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These were the years of the French occupation, following their invasion, of 1796 and those following. The infamous so called "pasque Veronese," and the fall of the Venetian Republic, were then followed by the Austrian domination. Pope Pius VI suffered imprisonment and a very table martyrdom in 1799. Half way through the year 1800, Napoleon, as First Consul, initiated the resumption of the French Exploitation of Italy.

During all these vicissitudes, Gaspar Bertoni advanced toward the priesthood, and gave unmistakable signs that in his daily life, he was fulfilling all the required norms of a priestly vocation. His Pastor "admired him as though he were

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<sup>90</sup> Doc. XXIV, p. 271.

<sup>91</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 653.

<sup>92</sup> Mss. Bertoni, n. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 323.

another St. Aloysius Gonzaga,” we are told, and “all those who knew him considered him to be a saint.”

We have this testimony from Fr. Camillus Cesar Bresciani.

He also tells us that those responsible for the spiritual well being of the Seminary, pointed him out as the model of the clerical life.”<sup>94</sup>

It is too bad that we do now know the name of the Spiritual Father who guided Gaspar Bertoni through his reception of the Minor and Major Orders, up to the priesthood. After Fr. Fortis had left Verona, there are only allusions here and there as to who filled this post. After young Bertoni had made the acquaintance of Fr. Nicholas Galvani, his Professor of Moral Theology, and it was evident that a common bond had been established between the two, there does not seem to be any reason for imagining that Fr. Galvani did not number this student of his among his regular penitents. We do have documented proof that, a number of years later, in 1813, Fr. Bertoni did regularly go to confession to Fr. Galvani.<sup>95</sup>

### **The Subdiaconate and the Diaconate**

On “Sitientes Saturday,” March 9, 1799, Bishop Avogadro ordained Gaspar Bertoni to the Subdiaconate, in the Cathedral, with the canonical title that his patrimony was assured by his parents’ estate. On Holy Saturday, April 12, 1800, the same Bishop ordained him a Deacon, ‘in the Chapel of the Episcopal residence. At this time, young Bertoni was only twenty two and a half. To meet the canonical age of 24, required for ordination to the priesthood, he lacked a year and six months.<sup>96</sup> The question arose as to whether a dispensation from the canonical age should be sought.

We are told by his first biographer, that as a Deacon, he considered himself unworthy to be ordained a priest, even if he did have the required age, and so he did nothing to hasten this tremendous day in his life, but left the matter entirely up to his Superiors.<sup>97</sup> Evidently they did act, because that May of 1800, Pope Pius VII, who had been elected to follow in the awesome footsteps of Pius VI, granted a dispensation, in a Decree that he signed at Venice. According to the practice of those times, this dispensation was granted in three separate parts - there was one dispensation of thirteen months that was granted, followed by two others of 48 days each. This rather complicated Decree left the way clear for the Ordination of Gaspar Bertoni for the subsequent Pentecost Saturday, June 7, 1800.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Doc. XXI, p. 204, f.

<sup>95</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Feb. 28, 1813, Mss., n. 69-8.

<sup>96</sup> Doc. IV, p. 9, f.

<sup>97</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 330.

<sup>98</sup> Doc. IV, p. 10, n. 7, Intr.



We have only made brief references, here and there, to the family background during these events in his life, but now we will add a few more details, derived from available documents. It had seemed the only way to restore peace and harmony to the Bertoni home was to draw up an agreement that the members of the family signed on that April 18, 1800. This agreement was based on the fact that Francis and Brunora Bertoni were to separate. The financial arrangements were also signed by their son, who qualified his signature by affirming that "it was only to manifest his filial submission to the respective wishes of his parents."<sup>99</sup>

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Napoleon's hordes overlapped the Alps, poured over the Valley of Aosta, forded the Ticino, marched into Milan, and there re-established the "Cisalpine Government." Bishop Avogadro, shortly after Easter, was imprisoned and barely escaped with his life. The perilous times made him a fugitive from his See.<sup>100</sup>

### **The First Sermon**

On that June 8, 1800, a Sunday, Gaspar Bertoni, therefore, was not a newly ordained priest celebrating his First Solemn Mass.

As a Deacon, though, he ascended the pulpit for his first public sermon, and his theme was "Humility."

Fr. Giacobbe makes this observation: "It is noteworthy that this was the subject matter for his first sermon, especially since he personally chose it." He stated that "he was so happy that he was thus able to 'open his mouth' (which meant to begin his preaching apostolate) with the Beatitude: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' as Christ Himself began the Sermon on the Mount, with these words. He also was happy in the thought of being able to contrast his own nothingness to his listeners, with the most heroic humility of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. He stated that this Saint was most innocent, because he was most humble."<sup>101</sup>

The one maxim that best typified his own spiritual life is found in another sermon that he gave which was on "Pride." This sermon was delivered just one year after the sermon that was mentioned above. He pointed out that it was expressed by the Saint "I have seen many fall, because they had risen too high; for my part, I stay close to the ground so that I will not fall."<sup>102</sup>

This thought was well synthesized in a brief slogan that he first heard from Fr. Galvani, but which was to become so very much his own: "Bassi, bassi - buseta e taneta!" It was expressed in the succinct dialect of the area. It was customarily used in a children's game, perhaps similar to "hide and seek;" it was then applied by Fr.

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<sup>99</sup> Doc. VI, p. 26.

<sup>100</sup> Doc. IV, p. 10, n. 7, Intr.

<sup>101</sup> Mss. n. 9, 1st Sermon.

<sup>102</sup> Mss. n. 9, 7th Sermon.

Bertoni to mean that one should make a hidden and humble place, as one in obscurity.<sup>103</sup>

As to his Ordination to the priesthood, it turned out that those clauses of the dispensation, granting two reprieves of 48 days each, proved to be unnecessary - all that he needed, was the one dispensation of thirteen months.

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<sup>103</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 755.

**SECOND PERIOD: 1800 - 1816**

FROM HIS ORDINATION, TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNITY AT THE STIMMATE.

From his Ordination, until the foundation of a Community at the Stimate - sixteen years of intense study, and extremely varied apostolate among the clergy, the laity and the youth: 1800-1816.



## CHAPTER I

**"THOU ART A PRIEST"**

The tremendous victory of Napoleon at Marengo, on that June 14th, over the Austrian forces, re-established the French domination of Italy. The truce that followed, established the Mincio as their boundary, and left Verona under the standard of Austria. This made it possible for Bishop Avogadro to return to his Cathedral. So doing, he then set the Ordinations for the Ember Saturday of that coming September.<sup>104</sup>

**Proximate Preparation for the Priesthood**

When his ordination had been put off indefinitely, Gaspar Bertoni considered this as an opportunity to adore the Divine Will of Good Pleasure. Moreover, he gratefully accepted this unexpected respite that was granted to him, and used it for a more intense and an even more complete preparation for his great day. In this way he felt that at Ordination, to put it more correctly, he would be less unworthy. To him, the priesthood was formidable, even for the Angels, paraphrasing St. John Chrysostom: "An awesome dignity, even for Angelic shoulders." He felt that this was so with all the more reason in his own regard.<sup>105</sup> This indefinite delay afforded him the opportunity of forging ahead on the path that had been traced out for him by God.

The reader might be wondering why we have not had recourse to the personal feelings of this Servant of God at this momentous juncture of his life. This would seem to be the opportune place to quote, for example, from that little diary which he, as the years went on, would counsel others to keep for themselves. He used to say that these notebooks should not be kept "in the interests of learning, but for the sake of wisdom, and this, not for others, but for oneself."<sup>106</sup> We do know that he himself did keep a spiritual diary, in which he would regularly jot briefly an idea, an aspiration, or a resolution that had come to him. However, all that has come down to us of his personal spiritual diary, and to which we will make repeated reference, is a very brief booklet. The first entry in it, moreover, was not made until practically eight years later than the period we are now discussing.<sup>107</sup>

After the date had been set for Saturday, September 20th, Gaspar Bertoni withdrew at the assigned time, into the grand silence for an appropriate course of

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<sup>104</sup> Doc. IV, p. 10, n. 7, Intr.

<sup>105</sup> St. John Chrysostom. This was often in the mind of Fr. Bertoni as a Priest: "Superiors by dignity, almost Angels by office, but we remain in the condition of men ... As for myself, I do not hesitate to state that under so excessive a burden, I do fear much the thought that I may be found wanting before that Judge ..." Mss. n. 9, Sermon XIII, Sept. 20, 1802. This text of Chrysostom was often on his lips too in the Instructions and Sermons to Clerics and Priests.

<sup>106</sup> Mss. n. 23, "Meditations on the 1st Book of Kings," 1st Medit.

<sup>107</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. 11, Intr. & Text, p. 654-672.

the Spiritual Exercises. The silence of those days has continued even to these, as no record of them has come down to us.

### His Ordination

On that September 20th, His Excellency, Bishop Avogadro, officiated at the Ordination ceremony in the Cathedral. This was to prove to be his last such function in the Diocese for him in the Cathedral. A number of untoward surprises were by now imminent for him. This, though, is the way life is.

For young Bertoni, the most stupendous day of his whole life had dawned - a day for which he had long yearned and hoped. He was a priest forever!<sup>108</sup> He delayed his First Mass for three days, which he devoted entirely to prayer, under the special protection of Our Lady of Ransom.

### His First Mass

The First Mass was celebrated on the 24th of September, at Caldiero. On this Feast of Our Lady of Ransom, the newly ordained priest, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, with his mother, Brunora, and all the family and relatives, offered the holy sacrifice for the first time. It has been established that his father, Francis Louis Bertoni, was also present.<sup>109</sup>

Despite all that had happened, Francis and Brunora knelt side by side on that day before the altar. In a message of congratulations that was delivered, it was stated that "the generous sacrifice that these parents made," of their only son, who was "the sole hope of the family," and who was to have been "the comfort of their old age," indicated their sense of self denial. At this moment, their only thought was the "spiritual good" of their first, and now their only child, as well as "the glory of God."<sup>110</sup>

It is too bad, perhaps, that this solemn occasion could not have been celebrated in the little Church, dedicated to St. Mark, and which had long been place of worship of the family forebears. There, a Fr. John Baptist Bertoni had been buried now for some 48 years, and where Fr. James Bertoni, who had baptized Fr. Gaspar, had celebrated so many of his Masses.<sup>111</sup>

The First Mass, however, took place in the little family Oratory, or Chapel, not far from there, at a place called "Conti Cipolla."<sup>112</sup>

The message delivered there on this day, then, reminded the newly ordained priest of "the sacrifices his parents had made." The orator also touched on the

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<sup>108</sup> Doc. IV, n. 7, Intr. & Text, p. 10, f.

<sup>109</sup> Id. [Further investigations revealed that he celebrated his first mass at "Giara", within the parish of Illasi. Nello Dalle Vedove, vol. I, pp. 445-447 ]

<sup>110</sup> Congratulatory Message of Joseph Scudellini; Mss. in the Archives of the Stimate, Verona.

<sup>111</sup> Ib; cfr. Inscriptions in the Church.

<sup>112</sup> "Summarium super Introductione Causae Servi Dei; Cat. Docc., p. 107.

dignity that had been received with his ordination, almost at the outset of his talk. This thought, certainly, only echoed young Fr. Bertoni's own thoughts on the priesthood. It would later in life be presented by him many times to other priests: "From the nothingness that is man, the priest at his ordination is elevated to a Divine dignity."

Perhaps at this very hour, Fr. Bertoni was formulating in his Own mind so many of the thoughts that he would later preach, as:

"The choice of a man for the priesthood is a creation from nothing. We are nothing by merit and nothing by dispositions - the priesthood - is totally a gift from God. On our part, there are only the absence of merit, sin and imperfection ..." <sup>113</sup>

Then there was a very flowery interlude in the message, in full accord with the style of the oratory prevalent in that era, where the newly ordained was described as "a favorite son of heaven, endowed with extraordinary talents. He was tireless in his studies, and well versed in the theological sciences - and one who had most perfectly and justly understood his Divine dignity."

The speaker then addressed the new priest directly: "You know well how to bring into harmony with this dignity, that holiness of life and that irreproachable conduct that is demanded by so sublime and lofty a calling, not that you will ever totally equate the power of the Eternal and Immortal Priest. Him you represent, and you must approximate Him by your purity and your innocence, by modeling your life after so great a Prototype, in so far as this is possible to mortal man, that your own image of Him might be most perfect ..."

At the conclusion of this sermon, Fr. Bertoni returned to the altar, and there he prayed for himself, his parents and, as the speaker had suggested, for the entire family of mankind - "for the suffering and afflicted Church, for their country, in its time of travail."

We are sure that he prayed for these intentions, as they are contained in the sermon that was preached for the occasion, which is the only record of that day that has come down to us. From that sermon, as we study it now, we find some ideas that Fr. Bertoni would preach himself in the years of his priesthood. Hearing himself praised to the skies, as it were, his heart no doubt protested, as he later would state:

"Of ourselves we are only nothing: if we are anything at all, then we are sinners before all else. We should be all the more humbled in direct proportion as our elevated dignity places us in the supreme danger of not corresponding to that dignity, with the holiness that it demands." <sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Text from Mss., n. 16; "Sp. Ex. to Priests," 1st Day, 2nd Medit.

<sup>114</sup> Id.



The oratory at this First Mass barely reached this soul, totally absorbed in an intimate colloquy with God.

### **The New Priest**

After his First Mass, Fr. Bertoni, ever the dutiful son, remained with his mother in the family home back in the city. He was assigned as an Assistant in his home Parish of St. Paul's in "Campo Marzio," with thirteen other priests who were also working there.

From these early days of his priesthood, he fulfilled diligently all the spiritual duties that are proper to the priest. In the celebration of holy Mass, he found "the greatest of his heart," his first biographer tells us. He celebrated Mass in a most dignified manner, and observed exactly all its rites and ceremonies. He never showed any inclination to procure stipends for his Masses.<sup>115</sup>

Some of his expressions in his early sermons attest to the sublime faith that was his: "O! God! You will see Him descend from heaven onto this altar; I will show him to you in my hands ...!"<sup>116</sup>

Next, to his Mass, he showed particular devotion in the recitation of his Breviary, described as "the principal duty of the priest," as well as "an intimate conversation with God." He proposed for himself these eight rules for its recitation:

"1.) consult the 'Ordo'; 2.) place the markers, for the psalms in proper order; 3.) recite, it with composure, the proper sentiments and with the proper posture; 4.) recite it either standing or kneeling - or, when necessary, even sitting down, but without slouching or restlessness; 5.) recite it, observing all the pauses; 6.) pronounce the words carefully, noting always the correct accents; 7.) read with such attention that it will not be necessary to repeat any words; 8.) do not stop to grasp the meanings of the various passages, as these can be looked up when the recitation has been completed."<sup>117</sup>

He was gradually initiated into the priestly ministry, as it was assigned to him, being the youngest Assistant. For his own part, he was not over anxious to be entrusted with responsibilities that required an experience greater than he had had. Zeal for the glory of God steadily increased on him, as well as for the good of his fellow man." He also continued "his studies with even greater ardor and care", as he so well understood the preparations needed in the demanding apostolate required by those times, with all the new ideas prevalent everywhere.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 332, f.

<sup>116</sup> Mss. 9, Parish Sermon delivered at Illasi, Nov. 8, 1801.

<sup>117</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 331, f.; cfr. XX, p. 189.

<sup>118</sup> Doc. XX, p. 182; XXVI, p. 335.

## CHAPTER II

**HIS UNREMITTING STUDIES AND EARLY MINISTRY**

The worsening crisis soon erupted, and the city and its suburbs were caught right in the middle of it all. The city underwent bombardment toward the end of that December, and was left at the mercy of the French invaders the following January. With the signing of the armistice at Luneville, Verona was under a dual control - one section was under the French, through the puppet "Italic government," and the other section was under Austria. The city, then was partly a republic and partly under a monarchy, and the Adige remained the boundary line, until the end of 1805. In the minds of the populace, this division was verbalized by calling the Austrian sector, on the left bank of the river, "Verona," and by calling the French sector, in the right bank, "Veronetta." St. Paul's Parish and the Bertoni home were situated in "Veronetta." From the end of 1805, to the ultimate departure of the French from Italy, all of Verona was the Royal City of the France-Italian Kingdom.

Bishop Avogadro's residence and Cathedral were on the right Bank of the Adige, but he was forced to remain on the Austrian side, as he was not acceptable to the local French officials. After a while, he resigned the See altogether, and since he had once been a Jesuit, he returned to the Company of Jesus, that was struggling for its rebirth within Napoleon's territory.<sup>119</sup>

**His Priestly Studies**

During these tumultuous times, Fr. Bertoni spent a great deal of time studying, either at home, or in the various libraries of the city. He poured over the works of St. Thomas, and with pen in hand, he continued his studies of Sacred Scripture, developing the thoughts he had already reaped previously. Furthermore, he accompanied this study with a number of the better known commentaries, such as Cornelius a Lapide. Reflecting on the papers that he compiled at this time, they very definitely give the impression that he knew Sacred Scripture practically by memory.

He also consecrated long hours to the study of the Church Fathers, especially St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great. From these studies, his sermons soon developed marked scriptural and patristic overtones, speaking as he did with such conviction and penetration that was to be so characteristic of him.

He studied the various disputes that he might better combat the pestilence wrought by Jansenism, and the other pernicious errors that had infiltrated the clerical ranks. He was an omnivorous reader, and in 1805, he received the faculties for reading prohibited books. He read attentively, constantly, with a purpose and goal in mind, that of attaining precision in his knowledge.

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<sup>119</sup> C. Beccari, "Il B. Giuseppe Pignatelli, S.J.," *Isola del Liri*, 1933, p. 170.



Along with his profound erudition of the sacred sciences, he deepened his grasp of other phases of learning. He fully understood, and noted in the margin of one of his papers, a text that had been attributed to St. Gregory the Great: "That we be ignorant of the knowledge of, this world, only the devil can be the inspiration."<sup>120</sup>

During these years, he undertook a project of gathering an immense documentation of texts that seemed to be a defense of the Primacy of the See of Rome. From Pope St. Damasus, up through the entire Pontificate of Pope Pius VI, he compiled 1400 pages of large notebook paper, in a very neat and legible penmanship - by far, the majority of these pages are in his own handwriting. To these were added 430 pages pertaining to the Pontificate of Pope Pius VII, and later a few additional pages of subsequent Popes.

For such a prodigious endeavor, he spared neither effort nor time, even when his priestly duties for the salvation of souls consumed the majority of the hours of his day ... He continued this enterprise, even when he was physically indisposed, that he might support his ministry on a most solid foundation.<sup>121</sup> There is no doubt that he had a love for study, or to put it more correctly, an ardor for it. This was to be his lifelong companion, even right up to his death.

### **His Study and Virtue**

The virtue of studiosity was for Fr. Bertoni, both in the variety of subjects to which he applied himself, and in the method he employed, a lifelong formative process for both his mind and heart, to better him for his pastoral ministry. Study for him could never hinder the practice of virtue, but rather it was always meant and understood by him to be an exercise of it.

There was a maxim that he frequently proposed to priests and seminarians alike, when just after his thirtieth birthday, he was appointed to the important post of Spiritual Director of the Seminary. He used to say: "All knowledge, possessed in humility, is a great aid to prayer and meditation."<sup>122</sup> He derived this thought from the "Commentary on the First Book of Kings," by the so-called "Pseudo Gregory, n but he paraphrased it somewhat by adding the qualifying "humble knowledge." This seems only to have been the fruit of his own reasoning, in the early years of the priesthood.

From this can be seen the fiber and the mettle produced in his soul by his personal application to study. His was a disciplined application, and he was unbending in his resolution to seek only the true glory of God. Doubtlessly, in such arduous application to the rigors of study, his body suffered a genuine

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<sup>120</sup> Doc. XX, p. 182, ff.; XXVI, p. 335, 564; XXXI, p. 618; Mss. n. 24.

<sup>121</sup> Mss. n. 44-66; Doc. XXVI, p. 466.

<sup>122</sup> Mss. n. 24, Med. 52.

mortification. It was his mind, too, that he especially-mortified, by the restraint that he imposed on it from yielding to intellectual curiosity.

The mortification that he imposed on his mind and body was not the only penance that he practiced, for Fr. Bertoni was always quick to repress any manifestation of curiosity. The following anecdote has come down to us, and it was most characteristic of him throughout his entire life. As the incident occurred about this time that we are now considering, we will insert it here.

### **The Balloonist at “Campo Fiore”**

The rear window of the Bertoni horn, opened out on a public park called “Campo Fiore.” On January 22, 1804, an extraordinary air show that was being presented there, that was the first demonstration of its kind, it seems in Verona. A large crowd had gathered which, in itself, was something of a spectacle. All the windows of the neighborhood, as well as the balconies were crowded but, the Bertoni home was quiet. Fr. Bertoni was praying in his room for the man who was taking such a risk with his life, in this performance that was so dangerous for those times.<sup>123</sup>

Through the air echoed shouts of praise for the courage of the dare-devil. There were a number of authoritative conversations on this newly developed art, that would one day master the skies themselves.<sup>124</sup> In this dangerous venture, Fr. Bertoni had no other thought than for his brother in jeopardy - his thoughts were that here was a fellow man, in the proximate danger of being suddenly called before the Tribunal of God. It is hard to tell whether Fr. Bertoni's decision not to witness this event stemmed from his spirit of self denial, or his intense love for his neighbor.

### **The Preacher**

The hours that he gave to study were certainly on a parallel with those that he dedicated to the apostolate. So, often as a seminarian teaching catechism, in a way, he had begun his preaching ministry. Furthermore, we have already mentioned his first sermon as a Deacon. That first sermon that he delivered, plus about forty others, has come down to us. They were all delivered in St. Paul's Church, except one that he preached at Illasi, between 1800-1807. All of these sermons are so ordered that they seem to be a series that had been arranged for publication. As for their substance, content and form, they truly merit the favorable review that they received from his biographer, who stated that they were “a precious treasure of oratory, and of divine knowledge.”<sup>125</sup> We should keep in mind, however, the style and tastes of that era.

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<sup>123</sup> Doc. XX, p. 34, n. 29; XXVI, p. 318.

<sup>124</sup> L. Trevisani, “Opere,” Verona, 1826, Vol. IV, p. 228.

<sup>125</sup> Mss. n. 9; Doc. XXVI, p. 565, f.

They contain powerful appeals, based on divine truths, which, at times, are indeed disturbing. They also are full of practical suggestions, as well as apologetical themes, but, most of all, Fr. Bertoni laid the greatest emphasis in these sermons on the Christian virtues. He accentuated, with his own special powers of persuasion, the real necessity of living in the state of grace, in that interior peace with Christ, in accord with the Law of the Gospel - that peace that results from the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the just.

He was soon to become a master in the pulpit, so that in March of 1801, as a very young priest, he was assigned to give the solemn sermon on the Passion. Customarily, this sermon was expected to last one hour and fifteen minutes!<sup>126</sup>

One "sermon", among those that are still extant, stood out for a long time on the memories of those who heard it, for its ardor and power, and its animated delivery. On April 27, 1805" he spoke for over an hour against the ever increasing immodesty, especially in dress - which was quite a feat, perhaps, for a priest of only twenty-eight.<sup>127</sup>

(We might point out here that at this very time, on the other side of the Adige, Mother Madeline di Canossa, with her associates from Milan, had organized a movement for the return of modesty.)<sup>128</sup>

This particular sermon delivered by the young priest, caused quite a stir and was followed by others like it, whose theme he would take from the everyday lives of the faithful of that time. Especially was this true, when the idea of "Liberty," so common in that Napoleonic era, also had infiltrated the Austrian side of the Adige. Fr. Bertoni analyzed and refuted a number of the slogans and catch phrases that were being bandied about, often enough, with their implications and meanings not fully grasped.<sup>129</sup>

As time went on, he was no longer compelled to write out his long sermons in their entirety. He would make outlines of them, and then supply them with a generous supply of quotations, and would then use them for his own personal meditation. He never preached without first meditating on the sermon he was to deliver. This habit of his stood him in good stead once at St. Firmus' Major.

The preacher assigned to speak for a Feast of St. Michael the Arch-Angel, did not appear, and Fr. Bertoni was called upon to give the sermon. Without any apparent preparation, he improvised a message that gave the impression that he had indeed prepared himself very well. This incident was remembered for a long time.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Mss. n. 9, Sermon IV.

<sup>127</sup> I.c. Sermon XXVIII.

<sup>128</sup> Letters: M. Canossa-Durini, Gen. Arch, Canossian Sisters, Rome.

<sup>129</sup> Mss. n. 9, Sermon XL & XLII.

<sup>130</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 336.

## **The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**

Early in his priesthood, he became adroit in preaching the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It was recorded that he had copied this entire book out, “word for word.” While doing so, he had frequently consulted other editions of it, and books of various authors that expounded this method.<sup>131</sup> The Ignatian method of retreats became the foundation of Fr. Bertoni’s preaching ministry, in addition to being the base of his own personal spirituality, as has already been mentioned. His former teachers, Fathers Avesani and Fortis, once had occasion to hear him preach a course of the Exercises at St. Sebastian’s, and they agreed that he had captured their spirit, as few had succeeded in doing. They concurred that their former student was able to draw from this treasure of reflection, so many practical applications, with which the work is so full.<sup>132</sup>

To bring this Chapter to a close, it should be pointed out that Fr. Bertoni had the joy of seeing this phase of his priestly ministry greatly blessed by God. His preaching very clearly appealed not only to the ordinary faithful, but even to the most cultured. The likes of Anthony Cesari and the poet, Hyppolitus Pindemonte, both admired, and were much inspired by his preaching.<sup>133</sup>

## **As a Confessor**

Fr. Bertoni received his first faculties for the Sacrament of Penance on May 9, 1805. Almost immediately he was much sought after as a confessor, and one of his first penitents was none other than his own mother.<sup>134</sup>

## **Other Priestly Ministry**

The young priest was always most prompt to fulfill the services that were assigned to him in the Church. He celebrated his Mass at the indicated hour, established for the convenience of the faithful. There were times, too, that he would wait in the sacristy in the event that one of the other priests assigned to a given Mass, for some reason or other, might be hindered in fulfilling his assignment. On Holy Days, if he had no other obligations, he would stay in Church all morning, either near his confessional, or in the old choir section, with his surplice on, and his stole over his arm, always ready to assist distributing Holy Communion.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Mss. n. 12; Doc. XX, p. 153.

<sup>132</sup> Doc. XX, p. 153, f.; XXVI, p. 335, ff.

<sup>133</sup> Doc. XXI, p. 208.

<sup>134</sup> Signed Statement, now at S. Cong. of Rites.

<sup>135</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 333, f.

## CHAPTER III

**THE APOSTLE OF YOUTH - THE MARIAN ORATORIES****“The Missionary to the Youth”**

One Sunday in 1802, he was in his customary place in the Church. The Pastor, who had been studying him closely, ‘saw in him the qualities of a real missionary. The old priest came up to his young curate, and said: “Understand me well - you are to be the missionary to the youth.” He, then, told him that he was going to make the First Communion class his personal responsibility, adding: “Consider them as yours.”

With this, Fr. Bertoni was entrusted with his first parish responsibility. From the charge that he received this day, the Parish Marian Oratories of Verona had their beginning.<sup>136</sup>

**The Early Days of the Marian Oratory: Its First Difficulties**

On the Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 20, 1802,<sup>137</sup> this already experienced instructor of children, who had not as yet received their First Communion, started a rather new youth program. The nucleus of the first Marian Oratory consisted of those children who had recently received Communion for the first time. According to the custom of that period, these children would have been twelve or thirteen years of age. As this idea of the Oratory developed, boys who were older were received into the organization, and later there were programs even for married men. The total enrollment was divided into various groups, according to age and the amount of instruction that had already been received. There were “Seniors”, or those who had not yet received Communion; the “Juniors,” were those preparing for their first Confession; and there was a “Prayer Class,” who were receiving their first instructions in the catechism.<sup>138</sup> All started off very well, but soon the group outgrew its meeting place.

To initiate this Oratory, the Pastor had permitted the first floor of the Rectory, but soon, because of renovations, the children had to meet in a shed that was badly in need of repair. As the membership continued to increase, it became evident that the newly established Marian Oratory was interfering somewhat with the life of the Parish. To many, it seemed to be just a passing novelty; to others, it was an enterprise that was potentially dangerous. It was difficult at this time for Fr. Bertoni not to give in to discouragement. He made a few adjustments, and kept his equilibrium in the face of the unwarranted criticism. Some of the gossip was so pointed, that it did succeed in deeply disturbing him. He was forced to give endless explanations, and at the same time, to give encouragement to his assistants - and all the while, struggling to see that this new endeavor would not be crushed. He

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<sup>136</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 339, f.; XXI, p. 206.

<sup>137</sup> Doc. XXXII, p. 619, f., n. 1.

<sup>138</sup> Doc. XXXII, p. 620, f.; 629, f.

went on, drawing up his plans, and added his own prayers to the project. Very soon, the old shed, which he used to call "The Cave of Bethlehem," was overcrowded, and it was apparent that "there was no room for them in the inn!"<sup>139</sup> On the other hand, bands of youths - roaming the streets, as sheep without shepherds, at the mercy of the wolves - were an all too familiar scene. They would terrorize the city, as they marched along to the beat of drums, shouting the slogans of the Revolution, "Freedom, Equality and Fraternity," and their bonfires around their so-called "Liberty Trees."<sup>140</sup>

### Early Organization

Finally, after much prayer, the Church of the "Tertiaries," called the "Little Sisters," or the "Paoline," dedicated to St. Francis di Paola, that was within the parish confines, was offered to them. The use of this Church, with its adjoining property, afforded the opportunity of dividing the group. This had become an urgent necessity, because of the large number of members and the drastic age differences. The Oratory was moved to this new locale, and its organization was completed. We do not have the exact date of this, but it was certainly before 1806. A little later, perhaps during this same year, the Oratory moved again, this time to the Church of St. James of Galicia, which was also within the Parish boundaries of St. Paul's in Campo Marzio.<sup>141</sup>

Between the "Aggregates," and the "Enrolled," this first Oratory soon counter 400 members, which was more or less, the number of children in the parish.<sup>142</sup>

In this work, Fr. Bertoni had collaborators. One was Fr. Matthew Farinati, a young priest, who had been ordained in 1802. There was also Fr. Cajetan Allegri, who began helping out as a student and then, after his ordination in 1805, also as a priest.

These three young priests were called "a triple band," because of the extraordinary harmony that existed between them. Fr. Giacobbe, who supplies us with this information, goes on to say that "they so united the hearts of the young members, that once they had come to know these three priests, that they had no desire to be left out of the Oratory." In 1805, a young boy, of 15, joined the Oratory. Shortly afterward, he sought out Fr. Bertoni for guidance, and during that next year, on the Feast of the Epiphany, he was vested as a seminarian. His name was John Mary Marani.<sup>143</sup>

With such valid assistance, and the use of the Church of St. Francis di Paola, the Oratory began to meet every Sunday and Holy Day. Each group had its own

<sup>139</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 340, f.; XXXII, p. 620.

<sup>140</sup> J. Fiorio, "Vita del Servo di Dio," Verona, 1922, p. 47, f.

<sup>141</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 341, f.; XXXII, p. 620.

<sup>142</sup> Doc. XX, p. 148; XXVI, p. 343; XXXII, p. 620.

<sup>143</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 342.

program, after the total enrollment had been broken down into three separate classes. There were those, as we have seen previously, who had already received their First Communion, those under preparation, and lastly, those younger members.<sup>144</sup>

The usual program for the day went as follows: a spiritual reading, the “Little Chaplet,” in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a brief talk by their Director, or by one taking his place, then the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a hymn. The boys would then form a procession, that was always remembered as being “well ordered and disciplined,” and they would go to the parish church for Holy Mass, and Communion for those who were going to receive.<sup>145</sup>

### **A Lost Sheep**

The story of a wayward young boy has come down to us. He had made fun of the Oratory, and spoke in strong language about his hatred for Fr. Bertoni. One day he was asked to come along to see the man he had cursed without ever having met him. Perhaps more out of human respect than anything else, he did agree to go with his friends. After hearing the prayers, the songs and the sermon of Fr. Bertoni, and seeing for himself the order, discipline and the unmistakable sincere piety in both churches, as well as in the procession between time, deeply moved the boy. He felt so ashamed that he could not look the priest in the eye, whom he had not cared to meet. When Mass was over, he left a far different young man than he was before taking part in the program that day. From that time onward, there was no one as attached to the Oratory as he was.

His life was not destined to be a long one, and shortly afterward, he died an enviable death. His mother, rather than being embittered over his death, thanked God and the boy who had persuaded her prodigal son to take part in the Oratory that first time.<sup>146</sup>

### **A Punishment**

Fr. Lenotti also tells the story of a young Oratorian, who “had been corrected by Fr. Bertoni, and in the presence of his companions, he opened cursed and swore that he was going to get even. However, it seemed that the divine wrath had been incited, and shortly after this occurrence, the boy died a painful death”.

This made a tremendous impression on those who had heard his terrible blasphemy.”<sup>147</sup> It was an incident that they never forgot.

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<sup>144</sup> I.c., p. 341; Doc. XXXII, p. 620.

<sup>145</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 346. These were practices that remained for a long time in the Marian Oratories of Verona.

<sup>146</sup> I.c., p. 347; Doc. XX, p. 146.

<sup>147</sup> Doc. XX, p. 146.

### **In the Bertoni Home**

On Sundays and Holy Days, Fr. Bertoni's morning was entirely dedicated to the youth. When the Oratory program was completed for the morning, a number of the boys used to meet at his home. There, they were helped with their lessons, and then passed the remaining hours until dinner, playing musical instruments, or in some other constructive way.<sup>148</sup>

### **Sunday Afternoons - Christian Doctrine and the Recreation Program**

In the afternoon, Fr. Bertoni conducted the Stations of the Cross, at which attendance was optional. Then, followed catechism. When this was over, the boys separated into their various groups, heard short talks on the commandments, that were gauged for their age bracket, as was the custom in the parish.<sup>149</sup>

Then followed Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, after which the boys marched to the above mentioned "Campo Fiore." There they played a variety of sports. The losers had to pay the penalty of saying a few prayers, on their knees, right there on the field for the winners. This was the sum and substance of the recreation phase of the Oratory. A number of the older boys, perhaps not as interested in the games for the younger members, were encouraged to organize discussion groups, or reading clubs. They also formed choral groups. When the shrill whistle was blown, this meant that the period was over. The group would then line up for their 'march homeward. On their way back, they would make a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and about the hour of the "Angelus," the younger boys would be returned right to their homes.<sup>150</sup>

### **The "Marian Cohort"**

The organization and discipline were such that they gave to the Marian Congregation a military aspect. This gave birth to the idea of forming within the group a so-called "Marian Cohort," or a little army dedicated to the Blessed Mother. From among the members of the "Aggregates," and those in the "Enrolled" group, two groups were formed called "Regiments," and 4 "Divisions," comprising 100 members. These groups were then subdivided into "Companies," "Detachments," and "Squads," each of which had their own "Officers," All these different subdivisions had their own "government," or "jurisdiction," as can be seen from a chart compiled in Fr. Bertoni's own hand, that has come down to us.

There were also eight separate "Presidents," or "Chairmen", over each phase of the program. There was a different one for "Spirit," "Hospitality," "Studies," "Recreation," "Music," "Instruction," "Catechism," and "Penmanship." There was also an "Orchestra," as well as a "Choral Group," and a "Band." All of this development would make it very clear that the entire program could not have

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<sup>148</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 348.

<sup>149</sup> Doc. XX, p. 147, XXVI, p. 348, f.; XXXII, p. 621.

<sup>150</sup> Doc. XXVI, .p. 349, ff.; XXXII, p. 621.



possibly been managed in the Church of St. Francis de Paola, and meeting only once a week. Doubtlessly, they also made use of the area around the Church, and in addition to Sundays, they would meet on week days and holiday afternoons.<sup>151</sup>

### **Evenings in the Bertoni Home**

As long as his mother was in good health, the Bertoni home became a meeting place for the Oratory. Certainly all the members did not invade it, but just a few of its leaders. There they alternated devotions, study and music, or just passed pleasant times together.

They prepared for little shows, and also exhibits. Surely, these were not works of art, as their authors and actors were just rough and tumble boys of the times. Occasionally, though, something worthwhile would be produced, and their authors would be singled out, and then honored by the choir or orchestra. This was not an earth shaking program, but a number of young boys were off the streets, and were passing their time constructively.

In the group, there were those who were interested in deepening their knowledge of their religion. One of the young members had learned some special music for the "Pange Lingua", but stated that he did not understand what the words meant. Fr. Bertoni took up the commentary of this Eucharistic hymn, and explained its meaning to the boy and his friends for six months, in the period that was devoted to religion.

The boys were also taught to practice Christian mortification.

This was not reserved just for the leaders, but was explained to all the oratorians. It is true, in the beginning, Fr. Bertoni did use the allurements of a promised lunch to attract the boys, but this did not last long. Even though for a while, the boys did go to Campo Fiore for the little picnic that was part of the afternoon schedule, after a while more and more frequently, they chose to go without it. Those, who did bring along something for themselves, were good naturedly made the object of the others' jokes.

There was an anecdote concerning outlets that has come down to us, that took place in the Bertoni home. After the table had been very tastefully set, and the boys' appetites had been whetted, they were served only radishes - but later, they did agree that they had not had a happier "meal."

The young men were taught that the cafés, taverns and some of the plays and exhibits were not for them. One time, one of the married members accused himself openly, in the presence of the others, who were present, that he was wandering around the streets of the "Listone," in "Piazza Bra", during the "Mardi Gras" celebration.

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<sup>151</sup> Doc. XXXII, p. 620, f; 629, f.

He asked that his imprudence be forgiven, and then for a penance from Fr. Bertoni. It would seem that they were not only being taught to avoid sin, but were also gradually being led to seek Christian perfection.

Despite these "Austerities," the ranks of the Oratory were not reduced. Fr. Lenotti was to write years later that Fr. Bertoni "seemed to be a magician, the way he attracted and managed these young men, in accord with what he felt was best for them.

It seemed that those boys would have gone to the ends of the earth for him."<sup>152</sup>

### **A Special Example**

One example of the training in character provided by the Oratory, has come down to us - that of "John Baptist Ruffoni, a servant of the Servants of the Marian Congregation of St. Paul's Parish." This was the way that he used to sign his name after he had been appointed the Prefect of that first Oratory.<sup>153</sup> By nature, he was somewhat prone to anger in the beginning, but evidence of his relentless quest for virtue is found in the meekness that he later acquired. So many who came to know him only after this transition had taken place, felt that by nature he was easy going. He was a young man that was totally unselfish, and always sincerely considered others to have more merit than he did himself. He seemed oblivious to the demands of his senses, and he was a model of purity. He also had another most praiseworthy characteristic - in the early days of the Oratory, when the others made fun of his ways, he would not answer them in kind, but went on as though nothing had been said. After a while, he won the affection and admiration of them all.

It seems that God had destined him for the path of suffering.

He took it all without complaint, even when he was suffering terribly from the torture of a very painful cancer. The slightest movement caused him excruciating agony, but supported by Christian hope, and his tranquil conscience, he spoke of his approaching death as one who had already had a foretaste of eternal happiness. He never yearned for death just to bring an end to his agony. He stated that he was even willing to have it increased or prolonged if this is what would be pleasing to God, and if He would grant him an increase of patience.<sup>154</sup>

In a letter, dated February 18, 1813, Fr. Bertoni made mention of him: "The dying lad keeps me very busy."<sup>155</sup> We can only conjecture that Fr. Bertoni was at the bed side of this 24 year old Ruffone, as he met the death for which he was so well prepared, on the 9th or' that March. Perhaps it was to this young man that Fr.

<sup>152</sup> Doc. XX, p. 145; 147, f.; XXVI, p. 351-357; XXXII, p. 621.

<sup>153</sup> From a fragment of Ruffoni's letter found among the Mss. of Fr. Bertoni, n. 97, "Miscellanea."

<sup>154</sup> From the Latin "Epigraphies", commemorative booklet printed in Verona, by the friends of the deceased.

<sup>155</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Feb. 28, 1813, Mss. n. 69-8.

Bertoni referred, when he wrote in his Spiritual Diary: "What a disgrace it is to see so much holiness among the laity, and so many vices and imperfections in a priest."<sup>156</sup>

### **Spiritual Exercises**

Returning now to the narration of the development of the Oratory at the Church of St. Francis de Paola, there was a brief course of the Spiritual Exercises that the young oratorians made that should be pointed out. It was held during the few days of the "Mardi Gras" observance in 1806. From the schedule of this retreat that is still extant, and in Fr. Bertoni's handwriting, we find that its "Directors" were Fr. Matthew Farinati, Fr. Cajetan Allegri and Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. It was Fr. Bertoni who set the following purposes for the retreat: "1.) To give glory to God in these very days when sinners were offending Him; 2.) To draw light and blessing on our Congregation, and that Mr. Marani will soon establish his congregation successfully."<sup>157</sup>

This referred to an additional Oratory that the newly vested, John Marani, was about to organize. The foundation of many other Oratories was in the minds of the leaders of this first one, and in the prayers of all of its members.

### **Other Oratories Begin**

We do have documented proof that additional Oratories were springing up. In the city, on the Austrian side of the Adige, Marian Oratories were begun in the Parishes of St. George and Sts. Nazarius and Celsus. There were also others through the countryside outside the city, and the groundwork had already been laid for still more of them.<sup>158</sup>

### **An Advertising Campaign**

For the opening of these new Oratories, the Marian Cohort of St. Paul's in Campo Marzio would put in an appearance. The first "Regiment" of Our Lady's militia, comprised of either all, or nearly all of the members called the "Aggregates," would march to the respective parishes, with Fr. Bertoni at their head. The young boys seemed not to be bothered by human respect in these parades. They brought their norms and by-laws to life, by their example.

If they had a long distance to cover, they would set out the day before in their "Detachments." They would move 'out in small groups until they had reached the little town that was their destination. They would be met by their rearranged ritual: "Who goes there?" And the answer would be, "The members of the Marian Congregation!" Then, they would hear: "How welcome you are!" After they had all assembled, they would meet the local Pastor and the villagers.

<sup>156</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 664, note: Dec. 2nd.

<sup>157</sup> Doc. XXXII, p. 630, f., n. 3.

<sup>158</sup> Summar. p. 57, parag. 7.

These young boys from the city, who obeyed the commands of their priest, and who had marched with military discipline, made a good impression everywhere they went. They were content with their corn meal and beans, and they camped out at night in the fields.

It was also noted how well they sang, and how devoutly they prayed.

In Church, they knelt up straight on the floor, even for long periods of time. The sermon of their Director was always a memorable one - then, they would have their breakfast, that consisted of a bun and some fruit. After this, they went back into Church for their devotions.

"Their dinner consisted in some warmed over meat, and a little rice that they ate under the open sky, as they sat around in the fields. "When everything was over, they would leave as they had come".<sup>159</sup> Everywhere that they visited, they were remembered a long time.

### **An Apostolic Outing**

In the fall of 1806, Fr. Bertoni organized an outing for about 20 priests and seminarians from both sides of the Adige. By this time, Verona was once again under single rule. It was a "holiday" for all the heads of the Marian Oratories then in existence, and those that were in the planning stage. It does not seem too much to imagine, that this outing was set up to discuss the problems that had been encountered in this special apostolate for the youth, and to solidify the more their programs.

It is hard to determine if this was just an outing, or if it also had the aspect of a pilgrimage. We lean toward the latter possibility, as there was a most natural goal that these men of the cloth of Verona would tend toward, especially since it was one of Fr. Bertoni's favorites - the Shrine of the "Madonna della Corona," the Sanctuary of Monte Baldo, overlooking the Adige flowing below. It was 'a three or four day outing, during which the "pilgrims" cared for themselves in a way that each one brought all that he would need for his journey. They all took along their own food, a large cauldron served as their kitchen and the grass was their bed...<sup>160</sup>

Fr. Bertoni enjoyed excursions such as this a great deal.

There is also recorded another excursion that lasted four or five days, with a similar group. The above mentioned Sanctuary was also their goal this time, too. They all camped out, despite the fact that an uncle of Fr. Bertoni, who lived at Caprino, made every effort to have his nephew come in and sleep in his home. One of those, that was on this outing, has stated: "It must have been quite a struggle for the poor man, but Fr. Bertoni won out. After having slept out all night, 'the worst bed in the world, would have been better,' was the common consensus of all. They

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<sup>159</sup> Doc. XX, p. 148; XXVI, p. 373, ff.; XXXII, p. 622.

<sup>160</sup> From a card of Fr. Bertoni, Mss. n. 97, "Miscellanea."

paid for it, however, for, after getting up very early, so that they would reach the Sanctuary at their agreed time, they lost their way. They were scarcely able to reach their destination by 11:00 o'clock in the morning. They were worn out and simply exhausted from their hike and from their anxiety."<sup>161</sup>

No record has come down to us concerning the previously mentioned hike, so we will not venture to give an account of it. Nonetheless, their enthusiasm was such, as the following narrative will indicate, we can be certain that they still would have gone, even in the face of a gale or a storm! For this common purpose, so close was their bond, they would accept anything as the will of God. The changing fortunes soon demanded great sacrifices from them.

### **The Suppression of the Marian Congregations**

There were unmistakable, ominous signs, and perhaps even overt manifestations of opposition that began to appear to the propagators of the Marian Oratories. Finally, an official notice was received by the Capitular Curia, that was ruling the Diocese since the resignation of Bishop Avogadro. The extent and vigor of the civil opposition was fully realized when an 'Imperial Decree, dated May 26, 1807, eliminated in one fell swoop all lay confraternities, congregations, companies and all religious societies, except for that of the church caretakers, and one confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament that were allowed for each parish. The "Marian Congregations," or the "Societies of St. Aloysius," as they were also known, not only were not exempted from this prohibition, but the Decree specifically stated that they merited special attention." The official reason given was that "in addition to the correspondence that was had between these groups, it was recognized that they had a certain central organization." Moreover, they were affiliated with the Congregation of the Annunciation, attached to the "Prima Primaria" of the Roman College by their Indulgences and Privileges. Therefore, it was "especially necessary to maintain a vigilance over their "Preachers and Missionaries," who were the most zealous proponents of the above mentioned Societies; it is possible, too, that these Oratories were considered local organizations, immediately subject to the Pope.

At any rate, Monsignor Gualfardo, the Vicar Capitular, and shortly to be named Bishop of Rimini, made a report to the Government, dated July 3, 1807. He stated, in reference to the Marian Congregations: "They began to spring up in the Diocese, a few years ago. On the left bank of the Adige, there were a few of them, but as far as I am able to determine, they have all been entirely eradicated."

Following this, the Marian Congregations no longer went by that name, and all exterior activities were discontinued, as was every public manifestation outside of Church. The "Marian Cohort" put in no more appearances, and the meetings in the Bertoni home halted. In the Parish Churches, however, some activities were continued for the good of the youth.

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<sup>161</sup> Doc. XXV, p. 287.

This was the policy in Venice where the Patriarch was a liege of the Government. There were two Cavanis brothers, Counts by birth, and who had become priests; they continued their Marian Congregation there in the Church of St. Agnes. It was carried on this way in St. Paul's Parish in Verona, and also elsewhere. All the activities went "underground," but they would see a future in which they would flourish even more than they had in the past.

In addition to this anguish, we learn that Fr. Bertoni "had much to suffer from the French Government". From the Police Headquarters there were warnings, threats, and perhaps even the annoyance of special surveillance. However, we have no documented proof that would further specify just how he did suffer from the government.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Doc. XXXII, p. 621, f., n. 2.

## CHAPTER IV

**FR. BERTONI AND HIS FAMILY****Still in the Family Home**

All this while, he remained with his mother in the old family home, and was as obedient to her as he was as a boy. Every Sunday, she used to make a ritual out of giving him the money for his needs through the week. He would always express his thanks with the same simplicity as long ago - but we do now know if or how he ever spent this money.

He still did errands for her, as any dutiful son would. In this Simple life, his spirituality was developing, and there were some instances of lofty graces of union, even as he was making his way "along the street," not unlike those he would experience at the al tar.

An example of his simplicity might be found in a fact that has been recorded. He went to the granary one time to sell eight or nine sacks of corn meal for his mother. After stating that he was not entirely familiar with such matters, he left the entire decision as to the price up to the dealer, much to the latter's surprise, as he did not barter as was customary in such dealings.<sup>163</sup>

As for the matters of the soul, though, he understood those fully. The young priest was the Spiritual Father for his own mother. We are told that it was a moving sight to see this son assisting his mother down the street to the Church, as she was by now, almost blind. It was even more edifying to see him lead her to his own confessional, to impart to her absolution and bring even greater peace to her soul.

They had a mutual and profound esteem, one for the other. On her part, she did all she could that she would not be too great a burden on him. In her profound piety, she took every precaution not to impede his ministry, even at the cost of her personal sacrifice.<sup>164</sup> We can only imagine, for example, the inconvenience caused to her during those meetings that her son conducted for the "Marian Cohort:" Both of them had to make sacrifices during the trying times, and especially accepting the visits of death to the home.

**The Death of Anthony Mary Bertoni**

On November 26, 1802, death came to the Bertoni home once again - this time for the Notary, Anthony Mary Bertoni. He had been very close to his nephew, Fr. Gaspar, and had extended numberless kindnesses to his sister-in-law, Brunora. He suffered a sudden stroke, and the last Sacraments were administered. He also received the Papal Blessing and all the comforts of the Church, and rendered his soul to God at the age of "almost 67." His body was brought to St. Paul's in Campo

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<sup>163</sup> Doc. XX, p. 169; XXVI, p. 359, f., XXXV, p. 663, note of Oct. 25th.

<sup>164</sup> Doc. XX, p. 169, f.; XXVI, p. 360, f.

Marzio, and there it was buried in the lot of the members of the "Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament," of which he was a member.<sup>165</sup>

### **The Death of Paula Bertoni**

In 1808, Fr. Bertoni's Aunt Paula died. She had always had a special affection for her priest nephew. Strengthened by the Sacraments of the Church and the last anointing, and comforted by the Papal Blessing, she passed away on February 10th, at the age of almost 70.<sup>166</sup>

It would seem that Fr. Bertoni assisted at these deaths of his loved ones and administered the Last Sacraments to them, but we do not have any documented proof that he did.

### **Hard Times**

Fr. Bertoni and his mother did act as a mutual support one to the other in the many travails that beset them at this time. They began to feel the pinch of real poverty. In addition to what we will narrate below, the Bertoni farms, both because of the unfavorable weather, and the soldiers marching back and forth over them, had a scant harvest. There just was not the wherewithal to supply for the crop failure. Fr. Bertoni noted in his Spiritual Diary: "Adversity and poverty were joyfully accepted with thanksgiving to God; .... if God should so will it, I am willing to accept even greater hardships and suffering; .... there was a desire to imitate Christ in His poverty and in its consequences. This is the greatest gift, although I am unworthy of it. May God be praised always".<sup>167</sup>

### **His Relationship with his Father**

He would have good reason to repeat that ejaculation, for the anguish that was soon to visit his heart. His father, Francis Louis Bertoni, was living all this time out at the Caldiero.

A woman, by the name of Catherine Slavier, kept house for him there. She was about the same age that he was, and had been the wife of one of the workers on the Bertoni estate, who had recently passed away. There is nothing in the documents that have come down to us to make us believe that this was an immoral relationship.

Whatever contact Francis Bertoni had with his wife Brunora, had been minutely spelled out in the document that they all signed on April 18, 1800. The first indication that we have of any further discord that troubled the family, occurred at the opening and the reading of his brother Anthony's will. In this will,

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<sup>165</sup> Register of Deaths, St. Paul's in Campo Marzio

<sup>166</sup> I.c.

<sup>167</sup> Doc. XXV, p. 662, note of Oct. 22nd.



some provision had been made for Fr. Bertoni, described in the document as “my most beloved and dear nephew, Fr. Gaspar, the son of my brother.”

Fr. Bertoni was made the heir of his uncle’s holdings, with the obligation of meeting some of his unpaid commitments. Among these, there was an annual allotment to be paid to his brother, Francis. Paula, who was the sister of both Francis and Anthony, was left those amounts that would accrue to the estate over the year.

However, Francis Bertoni contested his brother’s will, on the strength of an old law, that had actually been abrogated by the Napoleonic Code. The old prescript had stated that when one lacks children of his own, his estate must pass on a “horizontal line,” or the fraternal line. Neither Aunt Paula nor Fr. Gaspar had any inclination to support their rights by means of a bitter court case.

For the sake of peace, Fr. Bertoni renounced his rights as an heir. He did, however, ratify and sign an agreement, whereby Paula, who did qualify as an heir according to the horizontal, or fraternal line principle, became the heir. Francis Bertoni was awarded a share in the property and more than the annual allotment his deceased brother had thought was proper for him. This new disposition was signed on March 6, 1803.<sup>168</sup>

After the harvest that year, Brunora was asked for an increased allotment in view of new income that had come to the estate. Francis, however, refused to make any such payment. Brunora and Fr. Bertoni exhausted every possible means to reach an understanding, but after six months, they were forced to take the matter to court. The case, however, was finally settled by a compromise proposed by the judges that became the terms for the settlement.

These terms were agreed upon, and it was signed on September 30, 1804.<sup>169</sup>

After Paula Bertoni’s death, her will was read, and Fr. Gaspar, “her most worthy nephew,” became the heir of the family estate. This time, the will was not contested. This was because she had granted her brother, Francis, several pieces of land before her death, after discussing the matter with her nephew. This land, and the other grants awarded Francis, were given for the purpose of ending any further litigation in the family.<sup>170</sup>

Meanwhile, though, Francis, either because of the difficult times, or because of his own natural inclination to speculate, had incurred more debts. These, at times, used the entire estate as security, and there were other instances of his

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<sup>168</sup> Doc. VI, n. 2, p. 26, f.

<sup>169</sup> I.c., p. 27.

<sup>170</sup> I.c., p. 28.

selling parts of the estate without the knowledge, or authorization of its co-holders.<sup>171</sup>

### **The Death of his Mother**

Through all these machinations, Brunora Bavelli suffered a great and heavy burden. Fr. Gaspar would speak of the effect that it all had on her, years later to Fr. Giacobbe, who was his first biographer. She was torn between the great love that she had for her son, and the humiliations that were awaiting him. Fr. Bertoni said of her that she was “so prudent and endowed with foresight, that she predicted what he himself had not even imagined as possible. She knew only too well all that her son would have to endure from his own father after her death.”<sup>172</sup>

Her many infirmities weighed heavily upon her, and eventually, she seemed to suffer from spells of dropsy. She lingered for a long time, but was comforted, supported and cared for by her loving son. When the end drew near, it was he that administered the Last Sacraments”, and all the comforts of the Church, including the Papal Blessing. She died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1810, at the age of 64. Fr. Gaspar was at her bedside when the end came. She was laid to rest in St. Bernardine’s Cemetery.<sup>173</sup>

### **He Leaves his Family Home**

A priest friend of Fr. Bertoni, Fr. Mark Marchi, has left the following testimony: “At the death of his mother, we both assisted. After she had gone, Fr. Gaspar then left his family home, as a modern St. Francis of Assisi, saying, ‘Our Father ...’ ”<sup>174</sup>

This statement cannot be applied in the present case as a valid comparison. The Saint of Assisi, made himself an “orphan,” and left his home, saying the Lord’s prayer; and this was done during his father’s lifetime, for the sake of mortification.

Francis Bertoni had not lived in Verona for some time. Sometime after his wife’s death, he returned to the family home, and brought with him the widow, Catherine Slavier. She was his maid, or housekeeper, but she did give the impression that she was taking the place of the late Mrs. Bertoni.

Fr. Gaspar, therefore, left the house, and also was transferred from St. Paul’s Parish. He showed no interest in that share of the house that was rightfully his, on the strength of his Aunt Paula’s will, nor did he demand any rent for the use of it. However, later, after the death of his father, he did initiate a case to get the keys to the house back from Catherine Slavier. He did leave his home out of respect for his

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<sup>171</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>172</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 360.

<sup>173</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 362, f.; p. 118, n. 1 “Statement of Death of Brunora Ravelli Bertoni”, Register of Deaths, St. Paul’s in Campo Marzio.

<sup>174</sup> Doc. XX, p. 118, n. 1.

mother's memory, and also because of his priestly dignity. He took up residence with his Uncle and Aunt, Joseph and Rose Scudellini. His Aunt Rose was the sister of his late mother, Brunora, and it was said that she reminded Fr. Bertoni a great deal of his mother.

The Diocesan Authorities made Fr. Bertoni's transfer official on April 1, 1810: The Priest, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, is hereby transferred from St. Paul's Parish in Campo Marzio, on the left bank of the Adige, to that of Saints Firmus and Rusticus, at the Bridge, on the right side of the river." This Church was popularly known as "St. Firmus Major."<sup>175</sup>

His Uncle, by marriage, Joseph Scudellini, was a businessman who had been very successful. He had been a long time friend of the Bertoni, dating back to the time of old Fr. James Bertoni's death. Frequently, over the years, he had served Brunora as a legal counsel, and was practically, the executor of her legal affairs. He had also advised his nephew many times over the ten years, preceding her death.

Fr. Bertoni, now alone, made his uncle the Executor of the entire estate, with a signed and notarized document, dated February 8, 1810. This act seems to have been done to comply with a suggestion made to him by his mother.<sup>176</sup>

However, to salvage something from the machinations of his father, further litigations were to ensue.

### **Controversies with his Father**

With the authorization of Fr. Bertoni, the following suits were initiated against his father:

Reimbursement for the marriage dowry of his mother, in addition to that extra "gift" that was added to it, as listed in the Ravelli papers, under the date of July 9, 1776;

Reimbursement for some taxes recently paid to the government, by the son in behalf of the father;

Reimbursement for the ecclesiastical patrimony of the son, promised by the Father, under the title of "paternal goods".

The legal procedures were most intricate. All efforts at reaching an agreement outside of court, proved to be useless. Finally, a date was set for the trial. Francis Bertoni, cited before the court, initiated a counter-suit against his son; "to respond to certain questions as to his truthfulness and candor," the citation read. This counter suit was initiated and worded by the father's lawyer, but with his full consent. However, the embarrassment of appearing in court again was reason to withdraw his claim, which ordered the case returned to the good judgment of

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<sup>175</sup> Doc. VI, n. 3, p. 29, 39

<sup>176</sup> I.c., p. 28, 36: Conclusions, n. 3, a.

the respective lawyers to work out an agreement that would safeguard the rights of both parties.

The ultimate decision was that Francis Louis Bertoni “Was a true and real debtor, as regards his son, concerning the dowry and the added gift as contained in the Ravelli papers”. The father was also responsible for the taxes that the son had paid. This judgment also stipulated both the amount and the rate of the payments to be made, but made no further claim on the promises ecclesiastical patrimony. This judgment was signed and sealed on August 20, 1810.<sup>177</sup>

### **An Annuity for Francis Bertoni**

While the lawyers were in the very process of working out the final details of this suit, Francis Bertoni entered into a new transition with his largest creditor. By an annuity he established with this man, Fr. Gaspar, for all practical purposes, was disinherited from the very sum and substance of the family estate. This transition involved all the tillable land, the meadows, gardens, vineyards and orchards, as well as the mansion, servants’ quarters and the little chapel that constituted the villa of the Bertoni family in Caldiero. In return, Francis Bertoni was to receive a very modest annual allotment. The benefit derived from this arrangement was to prove to be extremely modest, as he would die on December 27, 1813. His death occurred even before he had made any disposition of a certain amount of goods that he had kept aside for his own personal use during his own lifetime. Furthermore, there was a clause that he would provide an annual allotment for Catherine Slavier, the maid and governess of his house. The widow Slavier was to receive 1,045 Italian lire and 32 hundredths, annually, for as long as she would like.

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Catherine than was legally constituted as a beneficiary of the estate. Fr. Gaspar was specifically identified in this document, “to express the determined will of the testator, his father. The document reads: -In so far as the testator has only one son, a priest, who, in addition to his own personal patrimony (Which, of course, his father had never established!), also has other sources of income, beyond his needs.” Such was the wording of the document. The “patrimony that was mentioned, not only was never established, but now was bereft of all backing in the family estate, which, for all practical purposes, no longer existed.

This annuity was couched in legal phrases, with several clauses that were binding as of July 1st, and August 30th, 1910.

The settlement of the reciprocal legal suit between the father and the son was signed and sealed on August 20, 1810, as was seen above. The payments were

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<sup>177</sup> I.c., p. 28, ff.

to be fulfilled, more or less punctually, and no further mention was made of the ecclesiastical patrimony.<sup>178</sup>

### **Further Involvements**

Francis Bertoni had wanted to provide more substantially for Catherine Slavier in his will. Therefore, he left to her “the use and the enjoyment of the entire half” of the Bertoni home, that is, the portion of the house that was legally his. He granted her the right of renting it, as she saw fit. He added, further, that if the “heir,” which meant his son, should in any bother her, he would thereby be deprived of all the benefits of the inheritance. In so far as it was legally possible for him to do so, Francis Bertoni went to the limit to provide for Catherine Slavier, in his will, signed September 16, 1813.<sup>179</sup>

On the following December 22nd, while he was actually on his death bed, he assured his housekeeper that he would recover. However, he did add another clause to his will in which he stipulated that she was also to be allowed “all the currency and valuables” of her original dowry. Evidently, all of these were now tied up in the remainder of the Bertoni estate, and this clause was to insure her of receiving what was rightfully hers, independent of all that had been provided for her.

The whole matter was even more complicated by a claim that had been advanced by her brother, one Innocent Slavier. Francis Bertoni was in debt to him, so whatever remained of this responsibility was to be provided for by means of the added clauses.<sup>180</sup> Doubtlessly, Fr. Bertoni did have some idea of all these machinations that were going on. The terms of all these agreements, however, he only learned after his father’s death.

### **Francis Bertoni’s Death**

As was mentioned above, Francis Bertoni lay mortally ill in that December of 1813. In a letter dated the 14th of this month, Fr. Gaspar mentioned this fact to Mother Naudet: “I ask you, Reverend Mother, to pray for my poor father, who has taken a turn for the worse.” It seems that from this day onward, his condition weakened steadily. A subsequent heart attack complicated his condition still further. There is no record to settle the question as to whether Fr. Bertoni did visit his father during this last illness.

On December 27th, 1813, Francis Louis Bertoni’s troubled life ended. The Register of St. Paul’s Parish reads: “He passed away, after receiving Holy Communion.”

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<sup>178</sup> I.c., p. 30, f.

<sup>179</sup> I.c., p. 31.

<sup>180</sup> I.c., p. 32.

Fr. Gaspar celebrated his father's funeral Mass and offered many prayers for the repose of his soul. Francis Bertoni's body was interred, alongside his wife's, Brunora Ravelli, in St. Bernadine's Cemetery.<sup>181</sup>

### **After His Father's Death**

Fr. Bertoni's uncle, Joseph Scudellini, as executor of his nephew's estate, had quite an involved task ahead of him. The old estate had been reduced to shambles by the contract of annuity that had been signed by Francis Bertoni. In addition to that, the multiple debts, that he left behind, convinced Scudellini that it would be necessary to obtain a "legal inventory," or clarification of the exact status of the estate, and what its legal debts truly were. In the light of this inventory, the liberality of the deceased in behalf of Catherine Slavier was considered by Scudellini as unjust. To meet all the commitments to her, Fr. Bertoni would have been deprived still further of what should have been rightfully his.

So, another suit was initiated as the only possible means of settling the entanglement. An agreement was finally worked out on April 18, 1814.<sup>182</sup> Catherine Slavier renounced all rights to the Bertoni home. She was allowed to compensate for her dowry by taking whatever movable property she chose from it. She also agreed to a reduction in her annual allotment, provided for in the contract that established the annuity of Francis Bertoni. She further agreed to relinquish all future claim on the Bertoni home, and in the agreement signed that May 8, 1814, she declared that she was fully satisfied with its terms.<sup>183</sup>

### **Final Settlement**

There were still a number of involvements that had to be unraveled. Several additional claims were advanced against the estate that came as a complete surprise to Fr. Bertoni. His father had disposed of large segments of the estate, with little obligations accruing to the recipients. Its debts, however, then fell to the legal heir, his son. To pay them off, Fr. Bertoni was practically disinherited of the entirety of the once substantial estate. He was finally forced to sell his share of the family home to meet these unexpected debts.

The ecclesiastical patrimony, that had been promised by his father, of course, had never been a reality. Fr. Bertoni, therefore, had to substitute for it by some other means. This he did by a notarized deed, signed May 1, 1814.<sup>184</sup> In truth he could now repeat the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, who was also deprived of his father's estate.

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<sup>181</sup> I.c., p. 31; Statement of Death, "Register of Deaths," as above. Note on the estate in the Archives of the Stimate, Verona.

<sup>182</sup> Doc. VI, n.4, p. 32, f.

<sup>183</sup> I.c., p. 33.

<sup>184</sup> I.c., p. 34.

## CHAPTER V

**COUNSELLOR OF SOULS AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR TO THE CLERGY**

All these controversies and litigations, treated in the preceding Chapter, apparently in no way tarnished the reputation of Fr. Bertoni.

**Spiritual Director of the “Canossian Retreat”**

The new Bishop of Verona, Bishop Innocent Liruti, took over the See on March 20, 1808. Shortly after his arrival, he appointed the young priest, just over 30, as the Spiritual Director of the so-called “Canossian Retreat,” located in the parish confines of St. Zeno. In May of this same year, a group of Sisters had taken over an old Monastery, whose previous occupants had been disbanded. There, Mother Madeline di Canossa (now “Saint”), and Mother Leopoldina Naudet were working together in a common enterprise.

Mother Naudet came from a noble French family, and had once served the Court of Vienna. She had also been the Superior of a Congregation of Sisters that had recently been suppressed.

These two women were endeavoring to look after the poor children, and the young girls of the slum sections of Verona. In this work, they both laid the foundation for two separate Congregations of Sisters - “The Daughters of Charity” (founded by Mother di Canossa) and the “Sisters of the Holy Family,” founded by Mother Naudet.<sup>185</sup>

**The “Definitor Theologian”**

In February of the following year, the Bishop reorganized some of the diocesan offices, and made a new distribution of personnel. Some of these changes involved the old so-called “Congregations,” or “Colleges for the Cases of Conscience and Liturgy.”

Fr. Bertoni was named “Definitor” for the “College of St. Nicholas.”<sup>186</sup>

Among his manuscripts that have come down to us, there are a number of them that are entitled “Definitions,” that demonstrate clearly the work that he would put into these solutions of cases that were sent to him. One of them especially stands out, in that it is a vigorous defense of the frequent reception of Holy Communion, that was unusual for those times.<sup>187</sup>

Perhaps it was one of these solutions, that were described as “most learned and traditional, that incurred the wrath of a priest in 1814. A Veronese chronicler has left a record of the fact that “a certain priest, of Jansenistic leanings, strenuously

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<sup>185</sup> Doc. XX, p. 122, Text, n. 6; XXVI, p. 363, ff.

<sup>186</sup> Doc. XVI, a), p. 85, f.

<sup>187</sup> Mss., n. 38.

objected, and read from his paper, that was so full of errors that it astonished his hearers." When this incident reached the ears of the Bishop, he lashed out against the audacity, and forbade this misguided priest from celebrating in his Diocese.<sup>188</sup>

With the mention of this incident, there is also another that has come down to us, that happened to Fr. Bertoni near St. Firmus Major. He encountered a man, whom Fr. Giacobbe has described as "a most ardent Jansenist. The man was most obnoxious in presenting his argument, but Fr. Bertoni soundly defeated his reasoning. With this, the Jansenist shouted that the Church had no further claim on him. He then turned violent, and shouted the most insane threats at Fr. Bertoni, who made no further response, and acted as if he had not even heard him. Later, however, this unpleasant encounter, and the struggle he had undergone to restrain his own temper, left Fr. Bertoni emotionally drained."<sup>189</sup>

### **A Master to the Clergy**

These manifestations of the Bishop's confidence in Fr. Bertoni preceded those terrible controversies he had with his father.

Even following them, in the summer of 1810, the Bishop appointed this young priest, of only 33, as Spiritual Director of the Seminary. This assignment included the responsibility of preaching the annual retreats, the monthly days of recollection, as well as the Sunday and Holy Day meditations to the Major Seminarians. It also meant that he had to preach the retreats to the seminarians about to receive Holy Orders, and also those to the young priests, who had received their first faculties for confessions. The Canons of the Cathedral also persuaded him to care for their time honored College, that was independent of the Seminary for the "Acolytes of the Cathedral."<sup>190</sup>

Naturally, with this contact with the seminarians, he was also afforded the opportunity of reaching the older members of the clergy indirectly.<sup>191</sup> The Seminary, then, became the second great apostolate of his vocation - the first one had been the Marian Oratory.

Between each of these fields of endeavor, there was a perfect analogy. The Marian Oratories had brought about a reflourishing of the true Christian life in families, and in the laity, through the youth. In like manner, the renovation of the clergy would be achieved through its younger members. "One must begin with these young students ... for the older priests are already feeling the weight of their years ... God always wants the youth; not just those young in years, but those young in fervor ..."<sup>192</sup> "As I must go to the very root of the matter, I have the honor, as well as the duty, to tell you that the vocation to the priesthood is, of necessity, a

<sup>188</sup> Doc. XXVIII, p. 589, Text b.

<sup>189</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 532.

<sup>190</sup> Doc. XXIV, Intr. p. 267, f.; Text n. 2, p. 272; XXVI, p. 376, 379, f.

<sup>191</sup> Mss., n. 16, "Esercizi Spirituali ai Sacerdoti," Medit.; Mss., n. 17, "Istruzioni,".

<sup>192</sup> Mss. n. 16, "Esercizi ..," 5th Day, Medit. II; "La Vita Privata di Gesù Cristo," Part I, n. 1.



call to holiness. If the monk, as such, fulfills his vocation by yearning and striving for holiness, the priest does not fulfill his unless by being perfect and holy. This truth is incontestable, as it is the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor.”<sup>193</sup> AS we will see, for him this was not a mere suggestion, but it was, as it were, the very decree of God. ‘He felt that this truth should be preached the more, because of the tremendous calamities that were then enveloping the Church through Napoleon.

He was neither imperious, nor exaggerating, in pointing out that whoever had been called to the priesthood, had “to forget his own people and the house of his father.”<sup>194</sup> “Whenever the wishes of parents prove to be an impediment to duty, each one must reflect on ‘He, who does not hate his mother and father, cannot be My disciple.’ It would be better to leave these thoughts as they are, as they do not need any explanations, although there may be those who are stung by them, and who may reprimand me for this.

It is necessary to obey God, rather than men. We should not remain with loved ones, any more than the Will of God demands.”

He pointed out that Christ always referred to His “Heavenly Father, in that He did not have an earthly Father - “neither does the priest have an earthly father.”<sup>195</sup> The priest must be another “Melchisedech - described in Sacred Writ, as being without father or mother.”<sup>196</sup>

He did not spare his youthful listeners from another stern warning: “Do not think that priests are immune from the great snare of possessions, as a great number of priests are trapped by them.

An even more subtle snare is that of self-interest, that can be scarcely noticed by a priest. Happy is he who can disentangle himself from this trap.”<sup>197</sup>

As regards avarice, he bitterly deplored its frequency in priests: “If only these terrible wounds could remain concealed in the Sanctuary - but, there are so many scandalous cases in our times. The civil tribunals resound with the shame of such priests!”<sup>198</sup>

We will not cite here his comments on the canons concerning “suspicious cohabitation” with women. He stated that it was an “obligation of the natural law,” as it were, that each one should avoid even giving the suspicion of this.<sup>199</sup> He urged on the priests the careful observance of the great precautions in this matter.

<sup>193</sup> 1st Day, Medit. II, “Fine del Sacerdote, “Point I, n. 3; Cfr. II-II, q. 84, a. 8, ad I.

<sup>194</sup> I.c., 7th Day, Medit. I, Point I, n. 1.

<sup>195</sup> I.c., 5th Day, Medit. II, “La Vita Privata di Gesù Cristo,” Part I, Point I, nn. 2, 3.

<sup>196</sup> Mss., n. 20, “Avarizia”.

<sup>197</sup> Mss., n. 16, “Esercizi ..,” Medit. I, Part II, Point III, n. 3.

<sup>198</sup> Mss., n. 20, “Avarizia”.

<sup>199</sup> I.c., “Fuggire le Occasioni”.

We do not know if he was motivated in these remarks by the unfortunate situation existing in his own home at this time. At any rate, he was preaching the priestly life as it was supposed to be lived.

In this important phase of the ministry, Fr. Bertoni did not compromise. He had worked very hard in the apostolate of the Marian Oratory, and in his preaching to those young men, one of his purposes was to prepare gradually others to carry it on in the future.

There is a recorded example of this, in a little notebook that he kept with citations from "The Way of Perfection," by Fr. Alphonse Rodrigues. This was found among Fr. Bertoni's papers. There are also evidences, here and there, of the handwriting of Fr. Matthew Farinati, as well as that of Fr. Cajetan Allegri. In one instance, Fr. Bertoni paraphrases Rodrigues somewhat: "The priesthood is a state of perfection - anyone who does not strive to be perfect in the priesthood, is a false priest."<sup>200</sup>

About this time, too, he organized small, informal discussion groups, on sacred and profane subjects. In the early years, they were held in the old Bertoni home, then they were conducted in the Scudellini home in St. Firmus' Parish - and, a few years afterwards, they were continued at the Stimate.

In these discussions, the Summa of St. Thomas held the place of honor. In time, the Moral Theology of St. Alphonsus Liguori was studied, and was used as the norm for the solution of the cases. St. Alphonsus was not very widely accepted in those times, as even among the more dedicated members of the clergy, there were a number of almost insurmountable prejudices lodged against his theories.<sup>201</sup>

We will now take a closer look at Fr. Bertoni's apostolate in the Seminary of Verona.

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<sup>200</sup> Mss. at the S. Cong. of Rites.

<sup>201</sup> Doc. XXVIII, n. 1, p. 589, Text a); n. 4, p. 593, f., Intr. & Text.

## CHAPTER VI

**A TWO YEAR ASSIGNMENT AT THE DIOCESAN SEMINARY (November 1810 - August 1812)****A Course of the Spiritual Exercises**

For this assignment, Fr. Bertoni had hardly any warning. He was sent right into the very soul of seminary life, and was told to preach a course or the Spiritual Exercises, in the traditional method of St. Ignatius. In addition to the seminarians, his audience was also to include the priests from the parishes of Verona, and the Diocese. How apropos it was that he launched this appeal to perfection and holiness to these diocesan priests. The full scope of Napoleon's Revolution was being felt in all its wrath, in the suppression of all Orders and Institutes, whose members made juridical profession in the canonical state of perfection. Fr. Bertoni's sole, and constant intention, was to instill the spirit of this canonical state among these priests.<sup>202</sup> Rather than commenting on it, we can refer to his handwritten text of this retreat that has come down to us.<sup>203</sup>

**The Sunday and Holy Day Meditations**

When this retreat had been concluded, the school year began.

On Sunday, November 18th, Fr. Bertoni began preaching the series of Sunday and Holy Day meditations that Bishop Liruti had ordered for the seminarians. For two straight years, Fr. Bertoni developed his thoughts from the First Book of Kings, using as well the Commentary on this book that is at the back of the "Opera Omnia" of St. Gregory the Great. He had been strictly enjoined not to deviate from the traditional Church teaching.<sup>204</sup>

The political background either directly or indirectly had a bearing on the thoughts that Fr. Bertoni proposed for the reflection of his hearers. The Holy Father, Pope Pius VII, was Napoleon's prisoner at Savona. The College of Cardinals was divided into two camps: the so-called "black" Cardinals, faithful to the Pope, and the "red" Cardinals, who paid homage to Napoleon. There were Bishops and Prelates who had been imprisoned or exiled - there were others, collaborating with the despot, hoping to bend the will of Pius VII. Bishops were being appointed to vacant Sees, without the mandate of the Pope.

In high places, as well as in low, there was a division there were defections, scandals and so many other irregularities that flowed from the agitated spirit of those times.

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<sup>202</sup> Bartholomew Sorio recounting the life of the Servant of God; Doc. XXVI, Intr., p. 288.

<sup>203</sup> Mss., n. 16.

<sup>204</sup> Mss., 23, 24.

This untoward situation served as a stimulus to Fr. Bertoni to bring up to date his vast documentation on the Primacy of the Pope. He applied himself to the arduous task of gathering quotations from the documents and acts of the contemporary Pontificate. He also obtained material from diplomatic correspondence, the acts of Bishops and governments, and even from some manuscripts that had not previously been made public, that treated of the capture of the Holy Father.<sup>205</sup>

### **Samples of Fr. Bertoni's Teachings**

"The Church, to which priests have given their lives, is a House of God." "This House of God must be recognized in the following: 1.) in the principal persons that comprise it, and in their relationship to Christ, the Spouse of the Church. His Spouse, which is the Church, must be recognized also in their offspring, the laity; 2.) in the marvelous economy of its government; 3.) in all the contacts, or contact in relation to it - if this is evil, it must be shunned, and when it is good, it must be furthered."

"Christ offers us its 'Key,' which is the word of Sacred Scripture. To employ this fruitfully, understanding and wisdom are needed."

"Mary, who is the 'Gate of Heaven,' takes under the mantle of her protection these instructions; both those who listen to them, and the one who delivers them."<sup>206</sup>

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No one "legitimately serves God in His House, unless by Divine vocation. This is the effect of the free choice, in the part of her Spouse, Who is Christ."

"This vocation is preceded by both remote and proximate preparations, by which God is pleased to form in His chosen ones very basic dispositions, such as that justice common to all Christians, as well as that perfection that is demanded by the priesthood. His Spouse, which is the Church, collaborates with Him in her motherly solicitude, that requires the free cooperation of His chosen ones."<sup>207</sup>

"Such dispositions, then, will be perfected through the visitations and the consolations of the Good Spirit - through Divine Grace, both operating and cooperating, where both the acquired and the infused virtues work, as well as the Gifts of the Holy Spirit."

As Fr. Bertoni preached these ideals, and even better, as his written sermons are pondered now, his style seems so spontaneous, it would appear that he was speaking from his own personal experience.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Mss., n. 66.

<sup>206</sup> Mss., n. 23, Medit. I.

<sup>207</sup> I.c., Medit. 6, 7.

<sup>208</sup> I.c., Medit. 8-10.

As regards “the increase of virtue, and its perfection, the chosen one is put to the test, as time goes on, by the removal of the visitation of this Good Spirit. Simultaneously, as it usually occurs, the temptation of the Evil Spirit accompanies him. Reinforced by his two allies, the spirit of the flesh and that of the world, he effects weakness and negligence of so many priests, who are so close to that one specially chosen by God, because of their intimate relationship with him, and their sublime position.”<sup>209</sup>

The defect and failure of every human spirit among the ministers of the Church, both in low positions, as well as in high, are contrasted and to be reprovved by the unwavering rectitude of the Prime Rock (here Fr. Bertoni referred to Pope Pius VII). Through his unvacillating firmness, the Divine Spirit enters wherever steadfastness may be wavering, or where it has completely broken down.”<sup>210</sup>

“There is evident an invitation, or a General Vocation of the Spirit of the Creator, in a two-fold sign, or decree. There is this invitation or call, “that is recognized in circumstances, that is by seeing this decree in events as they unfold, which are really the voice of God.”

“There is a renewal of the Divine Spirit in His ministers, which is a two-fold renovation: that of the initial creation, that is the ‘new creation,’ or the conferral of the vocation - and that renewal of reform and restoration. These decrees are for all the destruction of the ‘old spirit,’ that the way of renewal might not be blocked. This is necessitated by the reform of the new spirit.”

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The following is the plan of this Reform or Restoration:

“An open confession of the Faith, without weakness or fear; “Imitation of the Passion of Christ, rejecting the comforts of life, and holding death itself in disdain;

“Uniting with true priests, to seek together the Glory of God, without ever departing from them, either through love of self, or because of love of family;

“Desiring heaven, and no longer the rewards of this earth, or the honors of this world.

“When this plan of Reform, or Renewal, is firmly established and grounded in the new spirit of the young elect, this is the ultimate and proximate preparation for a priestly vocation.

“When the work on this foundation stone is perfected and completed, there only remains for the Lord to take it from His workshop and to place it in its proper place in His Temple. He then will establish it on His First Rock, or Cornerstone,

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<sup>209</sup> I.c., Medit. 13 (Mss. # 5300)

<sup>210</sup> I.c., Medit. 13.

according to His blueprint. Its firmness must be derived solely from the Rock that supports it ...

“Whoever finds these words hard, should depart now!”<sup>211</sup> Fr. Bertoni felt that there was no place in the priesthood for such a soul.

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Up until this point, he had considered God’s part in the preparation of a vocation. He then took up the discussion of what followed this initial preparation:

“From here on in, we intend to speak of a vocation that is enveloped by special circumstances, as has already been implicitly stated. This is the vocation of future ministers, endowed with this New Spirit. They are called by the Holy Spirit, ‘Who renews and restores all things,’ to renew and restore the ministry.

Through this apostolate, the Church will abolish the Old Spirit of mankind, and He will excite the renewed, or divine spirit, from that steadfastness and firmness that is derived from the First Rock.”<sup>212</sup>

For those exceptional times through which the Church was then passing, Fr. Bertoni felt there was all the more need for an adequate priestly formation.

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These thoughts were taken from the copious material prepared by Fr. Bertoni concerning the training of a man of God. These are merely the highlights, or an outline of his ideals on this subject. It is evident that they do betray the fervent heart of an apostle.

He continued this line of thought in further meditations on the times and the manner of the bestowal of a vocation, with which the “Chosen ones” must comply. He spoke of the “Signs” that unmistakably manifest to the individual soul the path that he is to follow. He also treated of the “Effects” that will be felt by the people when this vocation is generously followed, as well as by the future priest himself, when he heeds this call. These effects would not be temporary, but everlasting.<sup>213</sup>

This should be a sufficient commentary to get a good idea of the direct manner in which Fr. Bertoni spoke to these young seminarians. To continue this discussion further, then, would carry this book beyond its scope. On the other hand, his profound attachment to the Holy See impels us to extend this review, to include some additional thoughts that he presented to these young men.

This was the very era in which the Rock of Peter was caught up in the whirlwind, created by Napoleon’s escapade. Fr. Bertoni’s warnings could have been directed as well to rulers and certain Church dignitaries:

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<sup>211</sup> I. c., Medit. 14.

<sup>212</sup> I. c., Medit. 16, (b).

<sup>213</sup> I.c. Med. 15, 16, (a), (b); 24; 26 (a), (b).

"Earthly powers did not establish the Rock of Peter, nor did their powerful councils - (it might be noted here that the National Council of Paris was just about to be convened). This Rock was founded by the same 'Word' Who created heaven and earth."<sup>214</sup>

He went on, citing St. Augustine: "There were several Apostles, but He said to only one: 'Feed My sheep!'"<sup>215</sup>

He also discussed the election and the installation of Bishop's: "To make such choices, there is needed the light of God, Who gave such light to Samuel - just confer the First Book of Kings. To discern the hidden designs of Divine Providence concerning the election of the Shepherds, there is needed the Supreme Pastor."<sup>216</sup>

"The best way to call down the castigation of God is to appoint 'carnal pastors' who wish to be named, independent of the First Pastor."<sup>217</sup>

"The reason that some Shepherds achieve such success in their undertakings is due to their adhesion and to their dependence on the First Shepherd. The decadence and the ruin of the reprobate are due entirely to his 'disunion,' that leads to 'disobedience' to the Holy See."

"Hence, that very form of virtue and the action of the Holy Spirit, both as regards the universal good, as well as the interior government of individual consciences, are one and the same. It is the very form of rectitude -in good Church administration, that is demanded of all Shepherds. They do well in proportion to the harmony that exists among them. This, too, is the source of all common happiness among the faithful."<sup>218</sup>

He also emphasized the impossibility of convoking a Council without the Holy Father: "'Where Peter is, there is the Church.' Where the head is, there is the body as well. A body without a head is no longer a body. The trunk itself does not have a soul, but only when the body is united to the head."<sup>219</sup>

This is truly an excellent description of the tragedy of the schismatic Churches.<sup>220</sup> The controversy of that time that was raging everywhere, called "Jansenism," seemed to be heading in a similar direction.

Fr. Bertoni remarked: "The Corner Stone is not lacking, but it will either support me, or it will crush me. If I crash up against it, it will split my head open - but if I lean on it, it holds me up."

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<sup>214</sup> Mss., n. 24, Med. 30. The Council was convoked by Napoleon in June 1810 - it was then suspended by him, and then dissolved when he saw that he did not succeed in his attempt to brow-beat Pius VII.

<sup>215</sup> Mss., n. 23, Med. 28.

<sup>216</sup> I.c., n. 24, Med. 32.

<sup>217</sup> I.c., n. 23, Med. 27; n. 24, Med. 46.

<sup>218</sup> I.c., Med. 46-48.

<sup>219</sup> I.c., Med. 30.

<sup>220</sup> I.c., n. 23, Med. 19.

In the confusing times in which they lived, he set down some guidelines for those youthful seminarians, in his meditations on "The Sign of a Vocation," and "The True Ecclesiastical Spirit."

He considered one of these "signs" to be the emulation of saintly men, "but added the caution that "only those that were genuinely holy; that is, those who were attached by a sincere love to the Holy See."<sup>221</sup> He warned them to disregard "those men proposed as holy by the Jansenists."

He stated that a special sign was "the yearning to imitate the Good Shepherds, such as St. Charles Borromeo, St. Ambrose and Bishop Giberti (a former Bishop of Verona). But, we also have the Apostolic Shepherd to imitate, Pope Pius VII."<sup>222</sup>

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Briefly, then, Fr. Bertoni, in his series of 75 Meditations, some of which were not completed in a single period, outlined and developed a school of elevated and solid spirituality. It was in complete harmony with the sublimity of a vocation which, because of those tumultuous times, made the Lord's warning to the Prophet more pressing than ever: "I placed you to rout, and to destroy, and so dissipate and to disperse!" He then added that they had also been called by God "to build and to plant." This indicated that they were "to build a new and divine spirit," and that they were obliged to avoid any change in the Lord's saying: "You are the salt of the earth."<sup>223</sup>

He prayed: "Grant us, therefore, O Lord, diffidence toward ourselves, and confidence in You." He seemed to be reiterating the Lord's words: "Do not be afraid!"<sup>224</sup>

"We know that God has called us here, but we do now know where He wishes to lead us."<sup>225</sup> However, "we cannot even imagine what God would do with us, and what He would achieve in and through us, who are the pupil of His eyes - if we did not place obstacles to His Grace, but freely and totally committed ourselves into His hands."<sup>226</sup> "The Lord supports with His Grace anyone who abandons himself to Him. God gives unmistakable signs of His Divine call. These signs are that holiness and that doctrine which are more of heaven than they are of this earth whenever there is harmony between one's preaching and his life."<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> I.c., n. 24, Med. 50.

<sup>222</sup> I.c., Med. 31. John Matthew Giberti (1495-1543) - Leader in the Counter-Reformation. His "Constitutions" were taken as a model in many other Dioceses.

<sup>223</sup> Mss., n. 23, Med. 17.

<sup>224</sup> I.c., n. 24, Med. 48.

<sup>225</sup> I.c., n. 23, Med. 20.

<sup>226</sup> I. c., Med. 16 (a).

<sup>227</sup> I. c., Med. 16 (b).



After a number of these sermons had been delivered, Fr. Louis Trevisani said of him: "I would say that he is a man, trained by God, to fill this "Chair of Divine Science". Fr. Trevisani was at this time, the most illustrious member of the seminary faculty and, perhaps, of the entire diocesan clergy of Verona.<sup>228</sup>

### **Study, Prayer, and Penance**

How much study, meditation and prayer were required in the preparation of these "meditations," we can only imagine. From the few citations given above, although they are but a very small fraction of all the sermons he gave, do afford some idea. The manuscripts that have come down to us, give abundant proof of the profound research that went into them.

There is, however, the testimony of one who heard Fr. Bertoni preach to the seminarians. For a while these sermons were given in the Church next to the seminary. Fr. Bertoni would customarily go there on Saturday nights, or the vigils of the holy days on which he was to preach. There was a little room provided for him there, in a section of the Church. Every now and then, he would be accompanied on these vigils by one of the students, who did not board at the seminary. This was Louis Bragato, whose name will figure most prominently in our narrative.

One Saturday evening, Fr. Bertoni and young Bragato, still a seminarian, went to this Church. They were also accompanied by another young priest, Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego, who was by this time a very close collaborator with Fr. Bertoni. When they had arrived at the Seminary Church, Fr. Bertoni told the two to be seated on the bed that had been prepared for him. He sat down himself at the foot of the bed, and informally discussed those words of the Psalm (according to the old translation), "In peace in the self-same, I will sleep and take my rest." More than forty years later, when he was exchanging reminiscences with Fr. John Mary Marani, by letter, Fr. Bragato wrote: On that occasion, he gave one of his customary discourses, of which you are so familiar, that was so full of unction and wisdom." He went on to say that Fr. Bertoni took a small lamp and went to one of the old stalls in the Church. He told them that he himself had to meditate first before the Blessed Sacrament, on the thoughts that he was going to present to the seminarians the following day. After he had left the room, Fr. Bragato continued, "I cannot say that he returned to it at all. He left us to our restful sleep. When morning came, we found him in the Church." Fr. Bragato stated that he believed Fr. Bertoni spent every Saturday night in this same way.<sup>229</sup>

Fr. Bragato has also left recorded other phases of Fr. Bertoni's work at the seminary. He said that Fr. Gaspar just did not go there to preach, but that he also returned there often during the week, and for a number of years, almost daily. In those days, the seminary library occupied a number of different rooms, and during the winter they would be so cold, that they were almost unbearable. Fr. Bertoni

<sup>228</sup> Fr. Louis Trevisani (1754-1821); Doc. XXIV, p. 274, f.

<sup>229</sup> I.c., p. 278, f.

would stay there for hours on end, pouring over the old tomes containing the works of the Fathers of the Church. He would be jotting down “those texts that he felt that he could incorporate into his Meditations.” It also seemed very evident that “he put up with the intense cold and those long hours for another purpose. He wanted to win for God, and to give spiritual direction to those students who would come to him, being attracted by his evident virtue.”<sup>230</sup>

It was Fr. Bertoni’s custom to accompany his preaching ministry with his own personal penance and fasting, as this phase of Our Lord’s life had so deeply impressed him. In two separate entries of his Spiritual Diary (September 25th and November 16, 1808), we read: “Christ preached in Jerusalem after having fasted the whole day, and in the evening, He returned to Bethania.” He also noted, “Love motivated His work.” (September 25, 1808).

Two months later, he jotted the following: “There has been some progress in rising on time, in fasting and in dedicating more time to prayer.” (November 16, 1808).<sup>231</sup>

His mortifications seemed to increase after his mother’s death, as in her lifetime, she used to chide him about his penances. More and more frequently, he would skip meals, set his own time for retiring. There were times that he would stretch out on a table, or on the floor itself, using a wooden footstool for the pillow.<sup>232</sup>

We have documented testimony also that he made use of some instruments of penance. “A discipline and a hair shirt were found in a hiding place after his death.” It would not be much of a guess to state that “he had often made good use of them.”<sup>233</sup>

There seems to be some allusion to his long time use of these instruments, during the retreat that he preached in 1810 to the Seminarians. In his sermon on “Hell,” he stated: “You should think seriously of making use of a little scourge, or the discipline.”<sup>234</sup>



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<sup>230</sup> l.c., p. 279, f.

<sup>231</sup> Doc. XXXV, pp. 660, 663.

<sup>232</sup> Doc. XX, p. 130, n. 17; XXV, n. 4, p. 287.

<sup>233</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 524.

<sup>234</sup> Mss., n. 16.

## CHAPTER VII

**OTHER MINISTRY - FR. BERTONI'S ILLNESS****At the College of the Acolytes**

His regular assignment at the Seminary did not take up all his time. It did include preaching the monthly days of recollection, those special retreats for those about to receive Holy Orders, as well as those who had received their first faculties for hearing Confessions,<sup>235</sup> and those general retreats for all the clergy.

There was, therefore, ample opportunity for him in the apostolate, outside his work at the Seminary.

He had a similar assignment for a number of years at the old "College of Acolytes," that was maintained to provide servers for the Cathedral services. He also gave them both their monthly and annual retreats. The opinion these young men had of him, may be found in a commemorative booklet they had printed in his honor. Fr. Bertoni was described in its pages as "a worthy guide of seminarians, and Spiritual Father, a priest of consummate virtue, and a true man of God."

Among his papers that have survived, there are a few handwritten "Instructions to the Acolytes." In no way does the scrutiny of these papers now, lessen the praise, so enthusiastically heaped upon him by these young men. These "Instructions" are full of substance and fervor.<sup>236</sup>

**Sermons to the Faithful**

Fr. Bertoni did not neglect the "Ministry of the Word" to the faithful during these years at St. Firmus Major. These were sermons that he gave to various groups, as well as to the general faithful. He also preached a number of times at St. Sebastian's School, where every year at Easter time the students customarily made a retreat.<sup>237</sup>

**A Discussion in "Piazza Bra"**

He had, then a very busy and varied life, but seemed always ready to render any service on behalf of souls. This sometimes required of him, even on the street!

A few of the daily patrons at a cafe, in "Piazza Bra", had noticed that a young priest would pass by at the same hour on certain days. It was Fr. Bertoni, on his way either from St. Paul's or from St. Firmus', on his way to the Canossian Retreat, in the heart of St. Zeno's Parish. They decided that they would stop him one day. One of the patrons got up from his place, and with a show of courtesy, bowed low before him. He then asked Fr. Bertoni for a clarification of a doubt concerning a

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<sup>235</sup> Mss., n. 20.

<sup>236</sup> Doc. XXIV, n. 2, p. 272, f.

<sup>237</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 375, f.

dogma of faith. Fr. Bertoni kept his composure, and asked with equal courtesy: "Tell me, sir, do you know the Apostle's Creed?" The man answered that he did, so Fr. Bertoni asked him to recite it, and then stopped him when he came to the article in question. "Stop here," he said, "you see, then, that it is a truth of our faith that has been revealed. A Christian does not need profound intelligence in order to believe. He does not need explanations - for him, faith is enough, and he simply believes. Now that you have made your act of faith, the following are some of the more convincing arguments and comments of the theologians."

Fr. Bertoni then went into a rather complete presentation of reasons and arguments that refuted some of the man's still unexpressed objections. It was said from that day onward, the patrons of the cafe greeted the young priest with the most profound respect.<sup>238</sup>

### **At the Canossian Retreat**

All this while, Fr. Bertoni was also the confessor and the Spiritual Director of the so-called "Canossian Retreat." His duties required the direction of about twenty women, who were living as Religious Sisters, but who had not yet been formally recognized as such. They had been recruited by two Foundresses to care for a number of young girls, who had been taken in off the street by the boundless charity of Mother Madeline di Canossa. Fr. Bertoni also had the care of a small group of lay people of the district, who regularly attended the little Church next to the Convent.<sup>239</sup>

In addition to his learning, his charity and his zeal, Fr. Bertoni was becoming known more and more for his absolute refusal of any remuneration for whatever work that he did. He came to be admired as well for his spirit of prayer, his mortification and self sacrifice. Over the years, there were also entire nights, sometimes one right after another, that he spent between the death beds of those gravely ill, and the choir stalls of the Church. At such times, he absolutely refused the room and bed that had been prepared for him. For four and one half years he had this assignment, and during all this time, there were at least seven deaths among the young girls that were being housed there, all dying of consumption. There was also an epidemic in August of 1810, and there were a number of serious cases among the adults as well. There were no deaths, but his genuine concern for those afflicted was most evident. He prayed at these times especially to the Heart of Mary for their recovery.<sup>240</sup>

### **Fr. Bertoni's First Sickness - He Gives Up the Care of the Canossian Retreat**

His excessive fatigue, coupled with the penitential life of fasting and hard work, as well as a number of unpleasant incidents on his walk from St. Paul's, and

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<sup>238</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 464, f.

<sup>239</sup> Doc. XXXV, Intr. p. 655.

<sup>240</sup> Doc. XX, Intr., p. 112, ff.; p. 121, f., n. 6; p. 130, f., n.8; XXVI, Intr., p. 298, f.; pp. 363-369.

later from Firmus', finally took their toll. The holes in the road, after a rain, became puddles, and not being able to see in the darkness, made this, at times an arduous walk. He never used an umbrella, and many nights he was chilled to the bone. Toward the end of October of 1812, he became seriously ill, and ran an alarmingly high temperature. His malady became diagnosed as a severe case of "miliary fever," that placed his life in jeopardy.

On hearing this, the good women at the Canossian Retreat prayed both in common and privately for his recovery. As he was now well known in Verona, prayers were said for him in a number of the houses and institutions in the city. The intention used and expressed that they would not lose prematurely this man of God. It can readily be noted how this priest, of only 35, was considered in the city of his birth.<sup>241</sup>

Meanwhile, Fr. Fortis had returned to Verona for a while, at this same time. Every night he stayed at the bed side of his student of long ago. He prayed quietly over Fr. Bertoni, a prayer that was most familiar to the both of them: "... Receive, O Lord, through the hands of St. Ignatius, all my liberty ... grant me Thy love, with Thy grace ... Fr. Gaspar seemed to follow along with his lips.

Al though very much weakened, he did recover from this serious illness, but in his convalescence, he was forced to reduce his apostolate drastically. Furthermore, his duties had been somewhat expanded at the Seminary. He would now be expected to take over a more ample "spiritual direction of the Major Seminarians," and he was also to have the special responsibility "of those priests who had been sent there on penance. Bishop Liruti had initiated this practice that certain priests, "after accepting correction and penance, might be led back to a better way of life." If they did comply with this new program, they would be allowed to resume their ministry.

Bishop Liruti officially informed the Canossian Retreat of this change, stating: "The common good of the entire Diocese had to come before the particular good of any single place." He put the matter to the good women there rather emphatically, so that they would not register any appeals for Fr. Bertoni's return as Confessor to the Community.

Fr. Bertoni genuinely felt sorry for this, as he stated that his work there had been for him an occasion for furthering God's glory. He also remarked that it had been for him "a most efficacious means of salvation," and that his only regret was that he did not profit from it as much as he might have. He wrote that he was nonetheless at peace, and that "he was just as disposed to go anywhere that God willed, as he was to come wherever He willed".

However, the Bishop also proposed that he accept the office of Vice-Rector of the Seminary. This time, Fr. Bertoni strenuously objected against the

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<sup>241</sup> Doc. V, p. 22; XX, p. 137, Intr.; 138, Text; XXVI, p. 416, ff.; XXXV, p. 676.

appointment, as “alien to his vocation.” He did not say as much, but perhaps he also felt there was an incompatibility between the post of Spiritual Director, and the office of Vice-Rector.<sup>242</sup>

### **He Continues the Care of Mother Naudet**

All in the Community at the “Canossian Retreat” felt his loss keenly, but in a special way did Mother Leopoldina Naudet. She had been the local Superior of the Convent there almost since the foundation of the group, and continued to fill the office until she branched out to start her own Congregation, in November of 1816.

She felt that Fr. Bertoni had been a great deal of help to her in the years that he had been coming there. One day, she just decided to ask him if he would continue to direct her personally.

She stated that this thought had come to her in prayer - “entrust yourself to his direction... as this would stand very well with Me,” the Lord seemed to be saying to her.

One night, while praying for light in her dilemma, she felt she understood more clearly the inspiration she had received from God. She wrote in her Diary: “He (Fr. Bertoni) has agreed to accept what God asks of me.” The facts here presented are taken from her Diary, under the dates of January 9th and 10th of 1811.

Comparing Fr. Bertoni’s own Diary, under the 12th of that January, we read: “Do not have recourse to study for the direction of ... (Mother Naudet), but rather have recourse to the font of all light. In this way, it will also be beneficial for you. Do not be pressed, but follow the Lord, Who illumines her, and Who will suggest to you, after you pray to Him, the best path for her to correspond with and follow.”<sup>243</sup>

These lines seem so characteristic of Fr. Bertoni, the humble Servant of God, and the simple servant of that soul, which was, as it were, engaged to a mystical marriage with God. For whatever he was able to do, he did not expect even her gratitude. He wrote: “I have already been paid well enough by God, Who is so sublime and so good.” He felt that the plan Mother Naudet had for her future Congregation, was part and parcel of her personal vocation. He was only too willing to serve as her collaborator in this endeavor.<sup>244</sup>

Fr. Matthew Farinati, who was described as the “other ego” of Fr. Bertoni<sup>245</sup>, was assigned to care for the Canossian Retreat. Mother Naudet still preferred to have Fr. Bertoni as her Director, and also a few of her companions, who had ideals

<sup>242</sup> Doc. XXIV, Intr., p. 269, f.; XXXV, Letters, nn. 2 & 3, pp. 677, f. ; 680.

<sup>243</sup> Doc. V, entirely, especially p. 15, f. & pp. 20-22; XXXV, p. 670.

<sup>244</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 714.

<sup>245</sup> Doc. VIII, p. 46, f.

similar to her own. After many prayers, and mutual patience, it was arranged that Fr. Bertoni would be able to come to the Convent twice a month.<sup>246</sup>

Meanwhile, Mother Madeline di Canossa was in Venice where she was working very hard to lay the foundation for her “Daughters of Charity.” When she heard that Fr. Bertoni was no longer the Spiritual Director of her Convent in Verona, she wrote about the matter to her own Spiritual Father, Fr. Galvani. He doubtlessly counseled the Bishop, in the first place, so, when he wrote back to her, he advised her against making any appeal to the Bishop.<sup>247</sup> She did not; therefore pursue the matter any further.

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<sup>246</sup> Doc. V. p. 16.

<sup>247</sup> Doc. VIII, p. 47.

## CHAPTER VIII

**ADDITIONAL DUTIES AT THE SEMINARY - HIS RELAPSE**

Fr. Bertoni's assignment to take a more active and fuller role as the Spiritual Director of the Diocesan Seminary was but a part of the larger plan of its reorganization. The Bishop had instituted an over-haul of its discipline and curriculum of studies. As a result of the absence of leadership, after Bishop Avogadro's resignation, the Seminary suffered a financial, disciplinary and moral collapse that brought it to the brink of ruin in 1806.<sup>248</sup>

Although Fr. Bertoni had only apparently recovered his health, nonetheless he took up again the series of Meditations on Sundays and Holy Days. As he expressed it, this new series passed "from the allegories of sacred history, to the letter of the Gospel."

He specified these new Meditations as coming out "from the shadows of figures to the Truth, which is Christ - from the conversations of the servants, to the dialogue of the Master, or the Spouse, for the sake of imitating Him." In brief, these new Meditations were to be based on the Gospel of St. Matthew, rather than on the First Book of Kings.<sup>249</sup> He was also now to give religious instructions in the afternoons of the days that he would be at the Seminary, in addition to the morning Meditation. He also began to give more time to private consultations with the students, and he all but lived at the Seminary.<sup>250</sup>

However, Man only proposes, and it is God Who disposes. Fr. Bertoni suffered a relapse, and although he was not in any danger of death, he was confined to the house through December and January. He wrote that "he was under obedience to the Vicar, as well as under the careful scrutiny of his doctor." The "Vicar" was Monsignor Dionisi, and the "doctor" was his uncle, Dr. Ravelli, the brother of his late mother.<sup>251</sup>

During this illness, it seems that Fr. Fortis was appointed his substitute at the Seminary, perhaps, though, with a less demanding schedule.<sup>252</sup> This may explain why his "Commentary on St. Matthew" has so many pages with just the Evangelist's text, and no development, or application made of it.<sup>253</sup>

<sup>248</sup> Doc. XXIV, intr., p. 268, f.; cfr. C.C. Bresciani, "Collezioni Funebri e Orazioni," Verona, 1866, Vol. II, pp. 97, 98.

<sup>249</sup> Doc. XXIV, n. 1., p. 271.

<sup>250</sup> I.c., Intr. p. 367, ff.

<sup>251</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. n. 73-6.

<sup>252</sup> It is so stated in a Biography about Fr. Fortis by John Ignatius Berretta, "De Vita Aloysii Fortis ... Commentarium", Verona, 1833.

<sup>253</sup> Mss., n. 21.



### His Sickness of the Summer of 1811

That summer, his fever of the previous year returned. Fr. Bertoni was to write that this time he owed his cure to the “Blessed Virgin, because of the Charity of Mother Naudet, and the faith of Fr. Peter.”<sup>254</sup> He refers here to Fr. Peter Leonardi, who was a very holy man, and an Apostolic Missionary in the technical sense of the word. Fr. Leonardi, in the years of his priesthood, had suffered from the bitter persecutions, and was also imprisoned. He was a promoter of all sorts of apostolic endeavors, and he also founded a Congregation of Sisters that he called the “Daughters of Jesus.”<sup>255</sup>

Fr. Bertoni felt that a bodily cure was one matter, but in his mind, his soul was in greater need of recovery. He wrote:

My soul is in poorer health than is my body. Please pray that I might serve our Lord and God, and His Church, as He commands me to do. Pray that I might attain, after laboring for Him, to that perfect and immortal life. In this present life, outside of serving Him, and being able to suffer for Him, experience teaches that no other delights can satisfy our desires.”<sup>256</sup>

He went out into the country side to convalesce. One day the news reached him that a rumor was going around to the effect that he was about to be named the Vice Rector of the Seminary. This upset him considerably, because he saw in his role as Spiritual Director, and the proposed appointment as Vice Rector, an impossible situation. Furthermore, this honor that was being rumored about, directly ran contrary to his deep sense of humility. These disturbances more than slowed down his recovery. He did not write directly refusing the post, but made a few contacts, that they might present to the authorities his inability to accept the assignment, as well as to present the reasons for his unwillingness. He felt that his appointment “would not be for God’s glory,” and that those who were suggesting it, were “taking a false step, and that they were motivated only by human reasoning.” He also felt that someone should have written to him about it to explain the situation. He stated that it was not just to shun a cross, nor merely to avoid the unpleasant situations that he would meet in this assignment that he refused it. He had once written: “A child is never more secure than when he sleeps in the arms of his mother, abandoning every care and concern about himself ...”<sup>257</sup>

As it turned out, he was not named the Vice Rector, and the reason given was “his health has not returned to what it was previously.”<sup>258</sup> For the new school year, Fr. Fortis was assigned to the morning Meditations, and the afternoon

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<sup>254</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss., 93-6.

<sup>255</sup> Doc. XXX, n. 3, p. 611, f., Intr.

<sup>256</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 717, f., n. 15, Intr.

<sup>257</sup> I.c., p. 718, f. Text.

<sup>258</sup> I.c., p. 718, Text.

Instructions at the Seminary.<sup>259</sup> Meanwhile, the tumultuous Fr. Louis Alberghini, who was the Rector of the Seminary, was happy that his authority was in no way lessened by the appointment of any Vice Rector.<sup>260</sup> A period of calm then settled over Fr. Bertoni, but it was not to be long lived.

On the 27th of December, his father died. There followed then the very annoying settlement of his affairs. The next May, 1814, he suffered still another relapse. Concerning his trials, he wrote to Mother Naudet: -This seems to be a special school that God wants me to attend. Please pray that I may profit by it all."

He did not say Mass again until the 12th of June.<sup>261</sup>

### **The Retreat of September 1814**

Fr. Bertoni was soon to find out how he would next serve God.

Ordinations were set at the Seminary for the Ember Days of that following September. Fr. Fortis would not be present to preach the customary Retreat before Ordinations.

He too had been sick when Pope Pius VII reestablished the Society of Jesus. His ailments served to purify his ardor of rejoining the Society, through his abandonment to the Good Pleasure of God.<sup>262</sup> The Retreat, then, fell on Fr. Bertoni's shoulders.

One in that ordination class, jotted down in his personal diary, a reproach directed at himself. He wrote that he was "not getting out of the Retreat all that Fr. Bertoni was putting into it." He seems to have been using Fr. Bertoni as a model, to spur himself on in his own efforts.

This same student noted the following: "How much can be derived from the example of that priest - that integrity, that sense of purpose and holiness that I should bring to all that I do, as I see Fr. Bertoni putting into his own life." This was Fr. Louis Bragato, who has been mentioned previously, reflecting on the very eve of his Ordination to the priesthood.<sup>263</sup>

### **A Double Loss**

The effort required to conduct this Retreat, wore down Fr. Bertoni's resistance. For the new school year, therefore, a substitute had to be provided for him. The following tribute was paid to his years of work there: "In his labors at this Seminary, he was ideal - or, I might say, he was trained by God Himself to hold the Chair of the Divine Sciences."

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<sup>259</sup> Beretta, l.c.

<sup>260</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 718, n. 15, Intr.

<sup>261</sup> Letter; Bertoni-Naudet, Mss., 67-18.

<sup>262</sup> Beretta, l.c.

<sup>263</sup> Doc. XXV, p. 281, Intr. & p. 282, Text a).

The second loss was Fr. Louis Fortis, who left Verona to rejoin the Society of Jesus. He was praised “as one no less worthy than the former, for his wisdom, and for his holiness. But, he has been called back by God to that place, where, in his early years, he had made the sacrifice of himself to God. This same source, still addressing the Seminarians, then returned to his tribute of Fr. Bertoni:

“Ask God that he might restore health to the man that gave such spiritual nourishment to your souls, with his heavenly doctrine, and who has helped me personally with his light, assistance and support.

These were the words of Fr. Louis Jerome Trevisani. He was known throughout Verona, simply as the “Master.” As Prefect of Studies at the Seminary, he, more than anyone else, reorganized the institution. Fr. Trevisani was always among the first to be consulted by the Bishop in anything that pertained to the Seminary. It was he, and Fr. Nicholas Galvani, who first suggested Fr. Bertoni’s name to hold the “Chair of Divine Science.” When Fr. Bertoni became ill, Fr. Trevisani took his place.<sup>264</sup>

The prayers for Fr. Bertoni’s health were heard, and he did recover. He did not, however, give as much to the work at the Seminary as he had done in the previous years.



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<sup>264</sup> Doc. XXIV, p. 273, n. 3, Intr. & Text.

## CHAPTER IX

**THE REBIRTH AND SPREAD OF THE MARIAN ORATORIES - OTHER MINISTRY****The Oratory of St. Firmus Major**

From the time that he was first assigned to St. Firmus Major, neither his illness, nor his work at the Seminary, or any other ministry, kept the youth of his new Parish far from Fr. Bertoni's thoughts. His first plan, on arriving there, was to establish in the Parish, a Marian Oratory. Even though all exterior programs came to a halt, with the Imperial Decree of 1807, in the privacy of the Church itself, a certain margin of freedom was left.

With Napoleon's defeat, and his complete military and political downfall in 1814, almost complete liberty was restored to these youth activities.

Whenever Fr. Bertoni was unable to take part in the Oratory, his close associates did so in his place. Two of them, who were Ordained in 1814, had followed him from St. Paul's to St. Firmus'. One was Fr. John Mary Marani<sup>265</sup>, whom he had already met before, and the other was Fr. Nicholas Mazza - whose Cause for Beatification is now under consideration. Fr. Mazza had had Fr. Bertoni as his Spiritual Director, and also as the "director in his studies."<sup>266</sup> There were other priests who helped, especially Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego, who had been ordained in 1806.<sup>267</sup>

There are documents that attest to the fact that, on February 25, 1816, Sts. Firmus and Rusticus Parish had its own Oratory. Its title was: "The Congregation of the Purity of the Virgin Mary."

The first two names on its Register are Fr. Gaspar Bertoni and Fr. Nicholas Mazza.<sup>268</sup> This new Oratory did not have the diversified organization of the old "Marian Cohort," but it was modelled after it. In their turn, other similar Oratories were established and copied the organization and the customs of this one at St. Firmus'.<sup>269</sup>

As soon as the French had relinquished their conquests in Italy, the old Oratory at St. Paul's in Campo Marzio came to life, and Spread to other parishes at the same time. By 1816, it was all over Verona, and within a few years, the Oratory had spread throughout the Diocese. The old Bishop expressed his satisfaction with this development, and in a Report that he sent to the Holy See, he stated that it was with "heartfelt joy," that he could point out two characteristics of this rapidly increasing Oratory movement. There was between them a "holy rivalry, throughout

<sup>265</sup> May 5, 1790-July 1, 1871. Cfr. Doc. XXIII, p. 254, f.

<sup>266</sup> Mar. 17, 1790-Aug. 2, 1875. Doc. XXVIII, pp. 587, 593, f.

<sup>267</sup> Sept. 28, 1783-July 30, 1853. Cfr. Doc. XXIX, p. 594, f.

<sup>268</sup> Doc. XXVIII, p. 594.

<sup>269</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 372, ff.

the Diocese, and that he considered this to be “a great blessing,” because of their “timeliness and their holy purposes.”<sup>270</sup>

Fr. Bertoni used, as the by-laws for these Congregations, the “Rules” that had been published by Monsignor Louis Pacetti, a Canon, who was honored by the Holy See with the title of Apostolic Missionary.” Monsignor Pacetti, a native of Marche, found that his text was accepted generally almost everywhere.<sup>271</sup>

A few years later, from the Stimate, Fr. Bertoni still supervised the Oratory at St. Firmus Major. Toward the end of 1819, however, he also established one at the Stimate.<sup>272</sup>

With this Oratory for boys at St. Firmus and Rusticus “al Ponte,” Fr. Bertoni also organized a Marian Congregation for the girls of the Parish.<sup>273</sup>

### Hospitals and Prisons

There are two phases of Fr. Bertoni’s ministry that have not as yet been mentioned. Even as a boy, and then through his years in the Seminary, the spiritual care of the sick in hospitals had appealed to him. As a young priest, he enrolled in the “Pious Union of the Hospital Brothers” of Verona. Fr. Peter Leonardi, who has already been mentioned, established this Union in 1796. Its purpose was to afford voluntary spiritual and corporal assistance to those confined to hospitals. The group had a schedule worked out, so that there were volunteers on duty for every hour of the day and night. By 1802 it had been recognized by two Apostolic Briefs, and had been granted indulgences and privileges by two separate Popes, Plus VI and Pius VII.<sup>274</sup>

Fr. Bertoni wrote that he did not have “to overcome any repugnance or aversion that sometimes afflict our nature.” He found in the work instead “all his delight.” This might have been his life’s work, if he had not been forbidden “by a Superior, who had complete charge of him.” We feel that he refers here to Fr. Nicholas Galvani, his Confessor, who felt that such work was dangerous for his precarious health. Then, under the Austrian Regime, it was forbidden for anyone

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<sup>270</sup> Doc. XXXII, Intr., p. 622; Text n. 4, p. 631.

<sup>271</sup> Louis Pacificus Pacetti was born at Aso, Fermo, on July 29, 1761, and died on Dec. 18, 1819. From 1797 on, he went all over Northern Italy as an “Apostolic Missionary.” In 1789 he originated the “Morning Oratories.” In 1804, he met Mother Madeline di Canossa who then had him as her Spiritual Father. He always attempted, after giving a Mission, to organize in each Parish one or two Marian Congregations. He was a personal friend of Plus VII. Under the French he suffered imprisonment - under the Austrians, he was exiled from their dominions. He was most enthusiastically received by the people everywhere he went and accomplished a great deal of good. Cfr. Doc. VII, Intr., p. 43, f.

<sup>272</sup> Doc. XXXII, Intr. p. 623.

<sup>273</sup> I.c., p. 624, n. 5.

<sup>274</sup> Rescript on Indulgences, Verona, Bisesti, 1802.

who taught school to the young, to frequent hospitals. So, after the school had been established at the Stimate, Fr. Bertoni gave up this work.<sup>275</sup>

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As for his work in the prison, we have a record of only one fact, which, however, is most extraordinary. It was the last minute “conversion of a priest, an ex-Religious, and an apostate, condemned to death for parricide!” He had prepared poison for a half-brother of his, but the preparation was taken by his stepmother, and she died from it.

For a long time, this unfortunate man hurled only imprecations and blasphemies at anyone who came near him. He openly stated that he wanted to be executed. All the appeals of other priests had fallen on deaf ears. Then, one day, Fr. Bertoni visited him, expecting a similar treatment. Instead, the condemned man said to his visitor: “This is one who will restore me to God’s grace!”

He knelt down, and went to confession. Fr. Bertoni had spent the whole previous night in prayer. That morning, he had said a special Mass for this poor soul that God’s mercy might spare him. His last hours were spent in prayer. On the 8th of July, 1813, this priest, formerly of the Congregation of the “Gerolimini,” Angelo Allegri, was executed.

The Prefect of the Department of the Adige had asked for a priest to make one last effort to reach the condemned man before his death. The Vicar General decided on Fr. Bertoni. The thought of having this condemned priest die without the Sacraments, had moved the Prefect to make his appeal.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 537.

<sup>276</sup> Doc. XX, p. 119, f., n. 3; p. 131, n. 19; XXVI, p. 485, f.

## CHAPTER X

**FR. BERTONI'S SPIRITUAL DIARY**

We will interrupt our narrative here, to consider the fragmentary Spiritual Diary of Fr. Bertoni that has come down to us. It was a little notebook, started when he was 31, and which he kept for about five years. In this booklet, he jotted thoughts that were intended for his eyes alone. There seems to have possibly been more to it, but this notebook somehow managed to have escaped from the flames. While writing it, his humility intended it to be destroyed one day."<sup>277</sup>

It is a document that is both brief and sparse. It is, however, with the exception of his letters the sole source of his inner personal spiritual life that he left for his biographer. From this source, something of his activities of those days can be learned, as well as his hopes for the future. Hence, it should not be neglected.

These scant notes assume a great importance in that they record his practical resolutions and plans for his everyday life.

For him, they were a clear indication of God's will in his own regard.

There are evidences of special "graces of prayer," and other such favors of advanced souls. A careful reading of this Diary reveals that his prayer life was far from ordinary. This seems borne out by the fact that he was so intent on destroying what he had written in it. It is a record of a "Priest at the Altar," as well as a synthesis of his priestly ideals.

"July 2, 1808: The Feast of the Sacred Heart was transferred to this day. Throughout Mass today, but especially at the Consecration and the Communion, I experienced tears of compunction. There was a most unusual experience at Communion - for a moment, I felt detached from every creature, and was in total homage to the Creator."<sup>278</sup> This entry should be compared to that of May 30, 1812, the Saturday after the Feast of Corpus Christi:

'While saying the prayers in preparation for Mass, I experienced a sort of slumber. It seemed as though the crucifix spoke directly to my heart. I heard: 'Look at this, My heart:' These words brought a marvelous light to my mind, and a great and sudden ardor to my heart. As I arose in spirit to get a closer look at that beloved Object, I felt a shiver run through my whole body. My eyes and my mouth were shut, but my soul was wide awake, and full of Joy. It seemed that my soul wished to leave my body. Once again, I made an act of desire for the One Who spoke. A shiver again passed through my body, as the effect of a sort of death, simultaneously painful and sweet. Then, my soul seemed uncertain as to what it should do. It seemed so vivid, that if this condition lasted, my soul would either die

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<sup>277</sup> Doc. XXVI, pp. 463, 469; In the "Summar. Add" this "Memoriale Privato" occupies pp. 656-672 of Doc. XXXV.

<sup>278</sup> Doc. XXXV p. 656.

or be separated from my body. It was impeded, joyfully supported by the hand of God. The moment was so quiet, it seemed as though my soul was dead. After another moment, the use of my senses was restored as before.”

“The effect was a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, and a great affection throughout the Mass - during it, I experienced sweet tears at Communion, and afterwards, great recollection and consolation throughout the day, with an increase of the three theological virtues.”<sup>279</sup>

Let us return, though, to that July of 1808:

“July 11<sup>th</sup>: During thanksgiving after Mass. I experienced a very vivid sentiment of faith in the presence of God. There was also a feeling of great confidence, and a yearning to offer my-self to suffer with and for Him, even further vexations.”

“July 12<sup>th</sup>: At Mass, acts of thanksgiving, and reverential fear. “

“July 24<sup>th</sup>: During Mass, accompanied with such fervor, I had the gift from God of an actual and continual offering of my work in the Holy Sacrifice.”

In the month of September of that 1808, he jotted the following:

“11<sup>th</sup>: Toward the end of Mass, there was great recollection, and a deep sense of modesty. These sentiments did not last long, because in the exercise of charity, I have gone somewhat astray.”

Fr. Bertoni’s entry for October 9, 1808, is extraordinary.

We have already referred to it when treating of his First Holy Communion ... It seems appropriate here, however, to cite the text in its entirety. This date was his 31st birthday:

“October 9, 1808: The Feast of St. Denis, and the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today, during Mass, at the pause in the ‘Memento,’ my mind seemed to be opened to grasp to Whom it was I was speaking. This was accompanied by fervent affections, and my heart seemed to open up in prayer. There followed certain inclinations toward God, and impulses in my soul directed toward Him. I felt like a person meeting again a long lost friend. At this first meeting, after so long a time, it was as if I wanted to throw my arms around Him to embrace Him. An ever more ardent desire seemed to broaden my view still further, and I was impelled to reach out for this Supreme Good. But, feeling there was danger to vanity in this, as I was in public, I began to think of very grave sins. This thought only increased my yearning. The realization of His Goodness and love brought affectionate tears to my eyes that continued through Communion. Faith and confidence deepened consider-

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<sup>279</sup> I.c., p. 675. In this text, the parentheses have been added to fill in for some incomplete words. As for the texts that follow, it would seem superfluous to indicate the pages. These texts are sufficiently determined by their dates.



ably, concurrently with humility and loving reverence. Finally, at Holy Communion, there were affections and much devotion, like those of my First Communion Day, which I had not experienced since that day. This deep recollection lasted an hour after Mass, and then through the evening."

Fr. Bertoni noted further during this month of October: "10th: During Mass, there were tears, and after it, much recollection and silence."

About two weeks later, he wrote:

"23rd: There was much recollection and reverence during Mass. This recollection lasted for a long time, even after hearing Confessions."

"25th: I experienced brief, but very clear illustrations. There was a deep feeling of being transformed into Him. Christ seemed to be living in me, and no longer I. After Mass. this grace of union disappeared. But, it came back again, as I was walking along the street, on an errand concerning family matters. It was like it was in Church."

Fr. Bertoni made two annotations during December:

"11th: There was a rather vivid sentiment, reverential and loving, of the presence of God, the Father, at the 'Te, igitur...' of the Mass. It was accompanied by a lively confidence and love for the Son. At the Consecration, I experienced a sense of the priestly dignity, in representing the person of Christ before His Father. There followed an even greater tenderness and profound humility in holding Christ in my hands, right after the Consecration. The Supreme Goodness was joined to the greatest wickedness; the most pure to the greatest impurity; the most holy to the greatest sinner. This feeling lasted until after Holy Communion, and was followed by compunction until evening."

On Christmas Day, he wrote:

"25th: Throughout all three Masses, there were recollection and the feeling of the great blessing of my vocation. Oh! How good it is to forget and to be despoiled of all that is created, and to seek God alone! Oh! How God honored and loved His humiliated Son! Oh! What a debt is ours to do for Him, at least in part, what He has first done for us!"

Fr. Bertoni jotted one note in January of the new year, 1809: "11th: At the Consecration, I experienced a rather vivid sentiment of the presence of Christ, as one Friend talking to another. There was also a feeling of the Father's presence. This gave me in a certain manner, a feeling of the distinction of these Divine

Persons in one, sole Nature. Feelings of reverence and love then followed, and recollection lasted a half hour afterwards.”

In February, he noted:

“1st: At the Consecration, there was a very vivid and affectionate sentiment of the presence of Christ. I felt a disposition for the ignominies of Christ.”

Fr. Bertoni made two very brief notes in July of that year:

“24th: I celebrated Mass, united to Jesus Christ - recollection lasted until right after dinner.”

“30th: At the Solemn Mass, I assisted as Deacon. There were feelings of reverence. At the ‘Credo,’ I experienced a great love for the Incarnation. After the consecration, “I felt a deep faith and a spirit of prayer. Recollection lasted even after Mass.”

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The following is an inspiration he received during Benediction in March of 1809:

“16th: During Benediction, I experienced sentiments of great tenderness and love, and also of oblation. It was a sentiment of Christ attracting hearts, as when He said: ‘I will draw all things to Myself.’ All goodness, delight and knowledge, that are found in creatures, are entirely His. He alone must be praised and loved in them all.”

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He noted the following after making the Stations of the Cross in October 1808:

“24th: While making the Way of the Cross, I thought of the following: ‘If I (Jesus Christ), being innocent, allow Myself to be condemned, why, then, do you, guilty of a thousand faults, take such care to be justified before men?’”

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After a meditation in July 1808, Fr. Bertoni noted:

“5th: While meditating again on the Garden of Gethsemane, I noticed the Disciples sleeping. Christ was in agony and sweating blood for them. Even John, who had but a little while before, reclined on His breast, was also asleep. The others were all sleeping, just after they had received Holy Communion - ‘Watch and Pray!’”

We should compare this note with another one of April 1811:

"28th: 'Watch and pray!' In this all the warnings of Sacred Scripture and the Gospel are synthesized:

'Watch'; and such a one is ready and on the alert, and is strong, but he lacks weapons.

'Pray': such a one could be well armed but asleep. If he were suddenly attacked, his arms would be taken away from him, and he could be stealthily killed.

'Watch and pray!' - this is the strong man, on the alert, and armed - such a one cannot be conquered."

Let us return to his note of September of 1808:

"17th: Meditation on death: 'The past is no more - the future has not yet come - only the present matters.' It is in my power to live from one day to the next - or even from morning until noon, and from noon until night - and to do everything with the greatest possible perfection. Perhaps there is not much time left to glorify God."

On the 25th and 27th of that same September, the spirit of his morning prayer, remained with him all day:

"25th: Christ, the King: - I was inspired to follow our Lord most closely. I would do this even at the cost of life itself, through poverty and ignominy.

"During Mass, I was very recollected, with a feeling of reverence. I taught Catechism (as this day was a Sunday) with much zeal and persuasion, and even some eloquence ..."

"27th: The Incarnation - there were sentiments of gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity, coupled with a desire of correspondence to Jesus Christ. I would have been obliged to love God even if He did not become a man. How much greater should my love be now!

"At the evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament, I was inspired to ask for pardon. There was a sentiment of great love to the Most Blessed Trinity for giving us the, Son. This was coupled with great tenderness for Him, and at the same time, a lively faith. There was also a great desire of union and association with His sufferings and ignominy. I asked for the grace to suffer and to be disdained for Him."

On the following day, Fr. Bertoni wrote:

"28th: During meditation and afterwards, I was inspired with the desire to make a petition for martyrdom. There was also a profound interior exhortation."

He made this note for the month of July, 1809:

“30th: During my meditation on the crossing of the Jordan, I felt the need of having the image of the Son appear in us for the Divine Father.”

This seems to have been a development of what he had written that previous February:

Il 26th: We must draw in ourselves the portrait of Jesus Christ. “His note of August 17, 1808, reveals the prayer life of Fr. Bertoni:

“In prayer, one begins with Christ and with His Passion; then, if the soul is set free, God draws it still further.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Fr. Bertoni had some notes concerning the Examen of Conscience.

One of his characteristic principles concerning it may be found in his entry of July 30, 1808:

“To make an examination of conscience, choose a Saint who had a similar vocation, as a mirror. Then, you will find something to confess every day. Whatever is lacking of his perfection is a defect.”

For Fr. Bertoni, this Saint was St. Ignatius Loyola.

On October 27, 1808, there is evidence of a special grace of prayer that came to him during the Examen:

“During the first part of the noon Examen, that is devoted to thanksgiving, I felt as though I were prostrate on the ground, before the sight of heaven. There followed a profound sentiment of the Divine Presence, coupled with feelings of love and oblation.”

He recorded a resolution on September 30, 1812:

“Tomorrow I will be more diligent in doing everything out of pure love for God, and to please Him.”

Fr. Bertoni made a number of annotations concerning Spiritual Reading:

“October 13, 1808: While reading of the indwelling of God, that is, of God being within us, I realized that it was not necessary to seek Him outside. As St. Thomas stated, whoever has food in the house, should not go outside looking for it. Such a one would go hungry. This thought impressed me very deeply. Profound recollection followed, that lasted for some time afterward, despite the fact that I was, as usual distracted. I experienced a great desire of pleasing His Divine Majesty in everything.”

“December 17, 1808: After reading Scupoli again, and the ‘Imitation of Christ,’ I understood the need of gaining perfection and of combating every negligence.”

“July 15, 1809: To act solely through natural instinct, even for an instant, impedes God’s work. This gives occasion for creatures to have their influence. (The Life of Fr. Surin, I, II, c. 14.)”.

“July 16, 1809: Absolutely avoid doing your own will. In all you do, act only when moved by the Will of God, to please and honor Him. (Scupoli, Sequel to the ‘Spiritual Combat’).”

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On October 12, 1808, Fr. Bertoni jotted down a thought that is most significant. It reveals what was for him a characteristic trait, that is, the notion of Holy Abandonment:

“Whoever is drawn to a way of greater perfection, as is total abandonment to God, must not resent it when others, of inferior virtue, employ lesser means, which however, may be useful in their own right.”

To this, we should add his annotation of the December 20th:

“When we discover that we are called by God to a certain grade of perfection, we must be careful not to esteem as less those who do not care to follow us. Before God, they may be of equal or even greater merit. Although all have the same end, all do not achieve it by the same means.”

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He also had a norm to regulate his own external comportment, dated January 4, 1809:

“The manner of one’s walking should bespeak of maturity and gravity. It should not be preoccupied or hurried. Whoever desires interior recollection should protect it with his exterior modesty. His eyes should not be allowed to wander, nor should he move about in an unbecoming manner.”

On November 20, 1808, Fr. Bertoni recorded a happening of that day:

“The Bishop dropped in for a visit, while I was teaching catechism to the adults. He bade me to continue, but my mind was all confused, and all my thoughts seemed to vanish. The only thing that I could think of was to make a review of the matter that had already been discussed. This, I did, not knowing what he would say to me.”

“Meanwhile, I was thinking, how it would have been if my soul had been called before the Tribunal of Christ, to render an account of my priestly ministry. Even if I had lived in absolute innocence and had done my duty thoroughly - Oh! What shame and fear there would be for me in that moment! You must, then, prepare yourself to stand confidently before Christ. At that time, He will no longer be as a Father, but as a Judge.”

Here are a few notes taken at random:

“July 30, 1808: Seek God alone, and to see Him in everything is to be above all that is merely human. Everything depends on making the resolution to serve God, at any cost. You must avoid weak resolutions, that can always be discerned by their results.

They give in to difficulties, and fall apart. A strong resolution lasts, and becomes stronger and more solid in the face of difficulty.”

“Think of heaven as at the far end of a narrow path, all overgrown with thorns, brush and thickets. Keep your eye in the goal, and not in the thorns. As you go along, remove the thorny brush as it is met. Do not rest until you reach your goal.”

“August 24, 1806: At the very base of one’s own nothingness, God is found.”

“While reflecting on the sublimity of Divine things, I experienced a profound understanding of myself.”

“Tonight I saw a picture, depicting the Most Holy Trinity. It gave rise to great reverence and love of the three Divine Persons. The Eternal Father stood with open arms. This indicated to me His Mercy and His readiness to bestow His gifts.”

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Let us conclude this Chapter, with a thought Fr. Bertoni noted on May 18, 1810:

“What does it cost Mary to intercede? What does it cost Christ to grant us a grace? Our task is to purify completely and entirely, our spirit.”

The following is a fervent prayer that issued from the heart of Fr. Bertoni. It may have been his daily consecration to Mary, even as a boy. It was the formula of a life that we say, was “Mary centered”:

“I greet you, O my Mother, give me your blessing: Bless me and all who are dear to me. Vouchsafe to offer to God all that I have to do and suffer today, in union with your merits, as well as those of your Blessed Son. I offer you, and consecrate to your service, all my being and whatever belongs to me, placing everything under your protection. Obtain for me, my dear Lady, purity of soul and body, and grant that I may not do anything today displeasing to God; I entreat you through your Immaculate Conception and your perfect Virginity.”

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## CHAPTER XI

**TOWARD THE FOUNDATION OF A CONGREGATION****The Design is Traced and Gradually Clarified**

We are now at that part of Fr. Bertoni's life, in which he was to play the role of a Founder of a Congregation. This was to be the third phase of his personal vocation, that completed and integrated the other two.

Fr. Giacobbe tells us that he had been thinking of a Congregation of Priests that would be applied to the apostolate, "from the time that he was a Seminarian."<sup>280</sup> Perhaps the idea came to him while he was teaching catechism. He felt there were so many young souls who needed this "bread of instruction, but there was no one to break it for them."

Then he found himself the central figure of a few companions in the apostolate for the youth. They banded around his leadership in other aspects of the ministry, and also for those discussions on sacred and profane studies, as we have seen.

In this way, a small circle of intimate associated was formed.

He refers to this group in his Spiritual Diary. One day, they all made a visit to St. Sebastian's, the Jesuit Church in Verona.

The text reads:

"During a visit to the altar of St. Ignatius with my companions, I felt much devotion and recollection. Although our visit was short, I did experience great interior devotion and much fervor. It seemed to me that the Saint welcomed our coming. He seemed to be inviting us to promote the greater glory of God, as he had done. We were to employ the same general means that he did, but not precisely the exact same methods. It seemed to me that he wanted to say: 'Onward, soldiers of Christ' Gird yourselves with fortitude and the shield of faith, and put on the helmet of salvation. Take hold of the sword of the Divine Word, and fight with the ancient serpent. Make my spirit come alive again in yourselves, and then in others through you."<sup>281</sup>

Only Fr. Bertoni had this experience. On July 23rd, and 24th, 1809, he felt the urgent need for a more intense spiritual preparation. This he duly recorded in his Spiritual Diary:

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<sup>280</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 342.

<sup>281</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 659, f.

"To begin this undertaking (the foundation of a Congregation, when God would will it), it is necessary to have acquired great, heroic virtue. 'Poverty is the basic requirement, then all the other virtues,' Not even the least duty should be neglected. Do not be hesitant in following inspirations. Prepare for a bitter struggle with the powers of hell. There is needed the following: 1.) profound humility, to draw down help from heaven: 'Put on the armament of God;' 2.) detachment from all things, that the devil might not be able to ensnare us ..." <sup>282</sup>

His words of May 18, 1811, have the tone of a warning:

"Follow the narrow spiritual path of penance."

"I will overlook your sins, and I will show you how much must be suffered in My Name:"

Fr. Bertoni also synthesized this well known maxim of St.

Ignatius:

"Very few are they who grasp what God would have of them - if only He were not thwarted by them in His designs." <sup>283</sup>

On June 21, 1813, he wrote:

"At St. Sebastian's, God encouraged me to recall those graces already received. He had me observe His Omnipotence, that will conquer all my sins." <sup>284</sup>

Prior to this, he had made this entry on July 15, 1810: "Today I experienced a strong impulse of God to be recollected. This was accompanied by a yearning to be dedicated perpetually for the good of my neighbor."

Fr. Bertoni's two closest associates had a similar inspiration that same day. They all had taken part this day in the solemn transferral of the body of St. Gualfardo from a Church that had been closed, to the Mother Church of St. Firmus. These three were assigned to carry the sacred relics in procession. <sup>285</sup>

Sometime during these years, Fr. Bertoni saw the image, or a symbol of his future Congregation. It was in an unspecified "vision," reported by one who enjoyed Fr. Bertoni's confidence. <sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> I.c., p. 668.

<sup>283</sup> I.c., p. 661.

<sup>284</sup> I.c., p. 672.

<sup>285</sup> Doc. XX, p. 132, n. 22. Mss. Lenotti, "The Life of Fr. M. Gramego" Archives of the Stimmate, Verona.

<sup>286</sup> Doc. XX, p. 132, n. 23; XXIII, Intr. p. 219; text, p. 265.



## The Reestablishment of the Society of Jesus

On the Octave of the Feast of St. Ignatius, August 7, 1814, the Holy Father, Pope Pius VII, solemnly reestablished the Society of Jesus. Several of Fr. Bertoni's closest associates, greatly influenced by Fr. Louis Fortis, seemed headed to join the Society.

Fr. Louis Bragato expressed this intention this same year in his Diary: "When will I be able to enter the Company, and be able to live as dead in the world of the senses! How I yearn to think and live only for God!"<sup>287</sup>

The following year, Fr. Farinati and Fr. Gramego<sup>288</sup> were making preparations to go to Rome. Fr. Farinati was actually just about to set out, when he encountered "the resistance of the Bishop." Fr. Nicholas Galvani mentioned this in a letter, dated November of that 1815, to Mother di Canossa. He wrote: "Our good Bishop is firm in his refusal to allow Fr. Farinati to leave."<sup>289</sup> This refusal applied not only to Fr. Farinati, but also to the others who wanted to become Jesuits. The Society would admit no one without the approval of his Bishop.

The Bishop's position in this case brought this movement to a halt among his priests. Fr. Bertoni, Fr. Gramego and Fr. Farinati then continued their joint efforts.

## The Mission at St. Firmus Major: May 4 - 26, 1816

For Fr. Bertoni, this Mission would prove to be the decisive event in the establishing of his future Congregation. During these hectic days, he had a preview of the ideal apostolic life that he envisioned. The Mission was very well attended, and a large number returned to the Sacraments. This was a Mission that was long remembered throughout the Diocese.

Monsignor Louis Pacificus Pacetti, a Canon, and an "Apostolic Missionary," conducted it. He was to write later: "All the powers of hell had broken out to thwart this Mission." When he arrived in Verona, he found himself quite alone. Later he wrote, in his simplicity: "My Mother, the Blessed Virgin, came to my rescue!"<sup>290</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's services were enlisted, not only for the "endless confessions," but also to deliver the principal sermon, or the meditation to the people. Monsignor Pacetti was most impressed with his delivery and his material. He stated that Fr. Bertoni had surprised him in his fervor and ability to lead souls to an effective amendment. It has been recorded that his preaching proved to be most effective.<sup>291</sup>

<sup>287</sup> Mss. Bragato: Sp. Notes, Arch. Stimm. - Verona.

<sup>288</sup> Lenotti: "Life of Fr. Gramego".

<sup>289</sup> Letter: Galvani-Canossa, Oct. 2nd & Nov. 11, 1815, Gen. Arch. of Canossians, Rome.

<sup>290</sup> Letter: Pacetti-Canossa, June 11, 1816. Gen. Arch. of the Canossian Sisters, Rome.

<sup>291</sup> Doc. XX, p.131. f., n.20; XXI, p.208; XXVI, p.377. Mss. Lenotti, "Life of Fr. Gramego." already cited Summarium, p. 56, par. 3.

Agitators were most active - demonstrations became most frequent in opposition to Monsignor Pacetti. It was said that the preaching that attracted the crowds was merely "quackery." Everywhere there were criticisms, discussions and derision. Pressure was brought to bear on the police, church authorities, and on the Central Government. There were prohibitions, suspensions and counter orders. Finally, the Mission was cut short in its 22nd day, five days short of its scheduled closing.<sup>292</sup>

Monsignor Pacetti wrote later: "I disregarded all the opposition that I met. I know full well that in all the Churches of Verona, preparation for this Mission went on day and night. I found there such marvelous dispositions that I had never encountered before. There were more and greater conversions than I had ever seen. God showed Verona how much He loved her, and could accomplish in her."

The memory of this Mission lasted through several generations.

It was always considered as without equal in the annals of the city.<sup>293</sup>

When the Mission had concluded, Fr. Bertoni went on working that its effects would endure. In place of his usual sermon, he conducted the Way of the Cross, preaching briefly at each Station. He and his companions, for several months following the Mission, heard an increasing number of Confessions, both day and night.<sup>294</sup>

His fundamental idea of "Apostolic Missionaries for the assistance of Bishops" was conceived during this Mission. Understanding the "Apostolic Mission," in an even wider sense, he made it the scope of his Congregation, soon to be born.<sup>295</sup> This gave rise to the old custom in the Congregation of invoking Saints Firmus and Rusticus at night prayers.

### **Retreat for the Clergy at Mantua**

Following this Mission, Monsignor Pacetti asked Fr. Bertoni for his help in his next undertaking. During October of that same year, the Monsignor was to preach two series of the annual retreat to the Diocesan Clergy of Mantua. Fr. Bertoni accompanied him, and this constituted his first ministry outside his native Diocese.<sup>296</sup> Forty years after this retreat, "some of the older priests (of Mantua) still remembered him. The name and the memory of Fr. Bertoni had always been revered among them."<sup>297</sup>

<sup>292</sup> Papers of Julius Sommacompagna, b.114, Comm. Lib. of Verona.

<sup>293</sup> Letter: Pacetti-Canossa, l.c. & Mss. Lenotti, "The Life of Fr. M. Gramego".

<sup>294</sup> Doc. XX, p. 182, n. 21; XXVI, p. 377; Mss. Lenotti, "Life ..."

<sup>295</sup> Original Constitutions, #1.

<sup>296</sup> Doc. XX, p. 132, n. 22 & p. 154; XXVI, p. 377; Letter: Bertoni-Naudet from Mantua, October 13, 1816.

<sup>297</sup> Doc. XX, p. 132, n. 22; p. 154; XXVI, p. 377, f.

**“Apostolic Missionary”**

Sometime later, Monsignor Pacetti returned to Rome. There he obtained for Fr. Bertoni the title of “Apostolic Missionary.”

This was granted to him by Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, on December 20, 1817.<sup>298</sup>

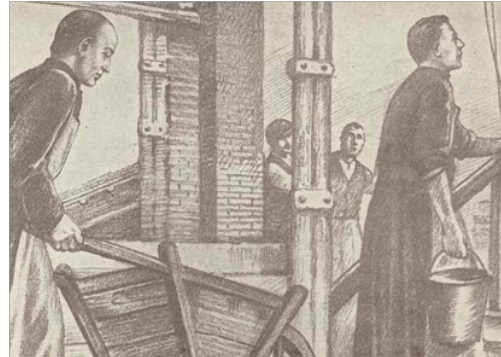
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<sup>298</sup> Doc. VII, p. 42, ff.

**THIRD PERIOD: 1816-1853****FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE CONGREGATION TO THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD**

From his entrance into the Stimate, until, his death, "in the arms of God." A thirty-seven year period during which he founded and formed a Congregation of Priests and Brothers at the Stimate - a period of an even more varied apostolate, during which his years of teaching school, were coupled with extensive counselling, while enduring excruciating suffering, until his death.



## CHAPTER I

## THE BEGINNING OF THE CONGREGATION

## The Offer of the Stimate

"Fr. Galvani has offered me the Stimate, as an opportune place to establish a Congregation of Priests, who will live according to the Rules of St. Ignatius!" This was the joyful news that Fr. Gaspar Bertoni wrote to Mother Leopoldina Naudet in his letter of August 17, 1816. The "Stimate," included the Church, named for the Stigmata of St. Francis, and the adjoining house and property. This property was within the confines of the Parish of the Most Holy Trinity in Verona.<sup>299</sup>

Fr. Galvani had received a number of places of worship that had once belonged to religious groups that had been suppressed. These were hard years, and he found himself short of funds to maintain the apostolic works that were being conducted in them. Furthermore, this year of 1816 was a particularly hard one, and was long to be remembered as the year of the famine. He was asking Fr. Bertoni to assume the outright responsibility of maintaining the school that was initiated the previous year at the Stimate. Fr. Bertoni was to continue the little tuition-free school. As the government was opposed to most associations of priests, the school would justify their coming together at the Stimate. No suspicions would thereby be aroused concerning their long range plan of banding together.<sup>300</sup>

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A Joseph Bellotti had fared very well in his miller's trade in Verona. He was an apostolic individual, and on October 11, 1813, he bought back from the government, the little Church with its Oratory, a small house and the garden. These had been previously confiscated, and then were sold by the government. With the help of Fr. Galvani's intercession, Mr. Bellotti was able to purchase this plot of land and the small buildings that were on it. In 1815, he opened a small school for the children of the neighborhood; however, he died a year later, on July 27, 1816. Before he passed away, he had pleaded with Fr. Galvani, "in the compassion of Jesus Christ," to accept what was stipulated in his will. Bellotti left him the Stimate, and two other similar places. He begged Fr. Galvani "to perpetuate and to spread the work that had been begun in them."<sup>301</sup> In the financial difficulties, however, that he was facing, Fr. Galvani turned to Fr. Bertoni for a solution.

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<sup>299</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 217, & Text, p. 244.

<sup>300</sup> Doc. XX, p. 161; XXIII, p. 258; XXV, p. 283, f.; XXVI, p. 382.

<sup>301</sup> Doc. XII, Intr. p.57, & Text, p.58; "Breve Cronaca della Congregazione dei Preti delle Stimate di N.S.G.C.," Verona, 1917, p. 23, n. 10.

It might be well here to trace briefly the life of Fr. Nicholas Galvani. The early community at the Stimmate used to refer to him as "Our good Grandfather Galvani" - and that he was to the Congregation.<sup>302</sup>

He was born at San Ambrogio, in Valpolicella, near Verona, on March 25, 1752. He attended the courses of Philosophy and Theology at the Diocesan Seminary, as an extern student. As a very young priest, he was appointed to the chair of Moral Theology at the Seminary from which he had been ordained. He taught there for 25 straight years, even for that period of time in which the classes were held at the Bishop's Residence. Fr. Bertoni would one day describe him as: "Conspicuous primarily for his candor and prudence. He based his life on those divine norms that were the object of his teaching."<sup>303</sup>

He organized an informal theological discussion group for priests and Seminarians, in St. Stephen's Parish.<sup>304</sup> He also had the spiritual care of an orphanage for young boys and girls, called the "Dereletti," in that Parish.

In 1795, he was appointed Arch-Priest and Pastor of St. John's Church in Foro - thereafter, he was named the President of the "Congregation of the Local Clergy." In 1801, he represented the Clergy at the Assembly of Lyons, where the "IInd Cisalpine Republic" was born.<sup>305</sup> Under the "Italic Kingdom," he was a member of the "Electoral College of the Learned." In 1809, he was the "Diocesan Prior General" of the Apostolate of Christian Doctrine.

In 1806, his name appeared on the list proposed to the civil authorities as "episcopal timber." But, he remained what he was, a Simple man, at the disposition of anyone who wanted him. He was an element of cohesion between the civil government and the church authorities. He was a humble counselor of souls from all walks of life - Bishops, priests, dignitaries, the nobility - and even the peasant women.

Although he was very well to do in his own right, he lived in abject poverty. He himself, and with others, bought back, from the government, properties that had been confiscated from religious. Once these had been purchased, he would support the apostolic endeavors conducted in them.

Fr. Galvani was the confessor and the counselor of Mother Madeline di Canossa for almost 24 years. At his death, on January 6, 1823, she wrote of him to one of her sisters:

"As for the Very Reverend Arch-Priest, Fr. Galvani, I am convinced that he is in heaven. He died as he had lived. His was a very holy and tranquil

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<sup>302</sup> This sketch is from Doc. VII, Intr., pp. 44-46. There is added, however, some further particulars.

<sup>303</sup> Taken from the inscription on his grave, which will be mentioned later. "He was remarkable above all (or, "in a special way") for the candor of his soul, and for his prudence."

<sup>304</sup> "Acts" of Bertolini, Sept. 22, 1795, Diocesan Arch. Verona, File "St. Euphemia," (or "St. John in Foro").

<sup>305</sup> Also called "The Italic Republic".

death, and he was spared the throes of a last agony. He knew and foretold the very hour of his death. There were ten priests assisting him ... I am looking now to see if I can obtain something of his to keep as a relic. If I do get something that can be divided, I will send you a part of it." (This letter was dated January 22, 1823).

Gaspar Bertoni met Fr. Galvani for the first time when he was enrolled in his class of Moral Theology, at the Seminary of Verona. Fr. Giacobbe tells us that soon their relationship was as a father to his son. Perhaps it would be even more true to state that, despite their age difference, they were as brothers. We know that young Bertoni chose Fr. Galvani as his Spiritual Director. Years later, when Fr. Bertoni was himself the Spiritual Father of the Canossian Retreat, he still consulted Fr. Galvani. In his work at the Seminary, Fr. Bertoni would discuss with him the difficulties that he encountered in this delicate assignment. Now it was Fr. Galvani who was encouraging Fr. Bertoni to establish a Congregation. As time went on, Fr. Galvani would give him all the property of religious institutes that he had acquired, with the permission of Pope Pius VII.

After his death, Fr. Bertoni paid tribute to his former teacher and guide: "He was a credit to his religion and to his country."

In his will, Fr. Galvani specified that his funeral was to be "most ordinary, and in every way like that accorded to the poor." He did ask for a number of "Low Masses, but without the solemnity of the Office. These were to be celebrated on the third, and seventh days after his death, as well as a Month's Mind Mass, and an anniversary Mass, but these, too, were to be celebrated without the Office."

He was laid to rest in the cloister of St. Bernardine's, which was then the civic cemetery. The sole eulogy of him, that has come down to us, is the Latin inscription on his stone.<sup>306</sup>

We will now return to our narrative, and the early Community there.

### **The First Community at the Stimate**

On November 4, 1816, Fr. Bertoni took over the Stimate, as "head and Father of the new Community." With him was Fr. John Mary Marani, his long time protege, who was, therefore, "the first son of the entire Congregation." "Mr. Paul Zanolli comprised the third member" of the original group. He was a "turner" by trade, but he was to serve as "secretary, buyer, cook - and other jobs that he did not know how to do!" but which he fulfilled. The early Chronicle also remarks that they lived in the disorder that greeted them at the Stimate, "as best they could."

Nine days later, school opened. For the first few weeks, Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego came each day to the Stimate to teach then, on December 4th, he took up residence with the other three there. A sincere act of thanksgiving was said, in

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<sup>306</sup> Galvani Will, Arch. Stimm-Verona.

addition to the prayer that he would never leave the Community. On New Year's Day, 1817, Fr. Matthew Farinati came.<sup>307</sup> That same year, on October 11th, just before the second school year opened, Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli<sup>308</sup> entered. He had had rather extensive training in architecture and engineering. All of these vocations seemed to flourish from their joint efforts in the Marian Oratories. Most of the early vocations, although they were few in number, seemed to come from that apostolate.

### **First Organization**

Fr. Bertoni and his first companions used the small rooms off the Church, both as bed rooms and class rooms. After its confiscation, the Church had been used as a blacksmith shop, and to repair the military carriages. So, when the first Community went there, it was in complete disorder. The adjoining house, furthermore, had not as yet been vacated, and was not until March 24, 1817. Their first winter, then, was spent in the cold Church.

As the months went by, Fr. Bertoni's first expenses were for windows. Then, many of the tiles on the roof had to be replaced. From those earliest times, he absolutely refused any donations.<sup>309</sup>

Up until September 6, 1818, the Fathers were unable to celebrate Mass there, although they were already very busy hearing men's confessions. For all their services, the Fathers went across the garden to St. Teresa's Chapel. Finally, on that September 6th, we read in Fr. Gramego's first Chronicle of the Congregation: "Dear Lord! We celebrated Mass in our little Oratory within the Stimate. It is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of that Most Holy Virgin Mary: 'O Saving Host ...' "

Private Masses were celebrated within the Church on a side altar, on November 25, 1820. It was the Feast of St. Catherine, Virgin and Martyr, to whom the altar was dedicated. Again, in Fr. Gramego's Chronicle, we read: "We hope that the Holy Spouses will help us to complete our renovations. When the Church is all in order, and the other altars are ready, we hope to open the Church to the public. 'To God alone be honor and glory.' " <sup>310</sup>

The Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, became the Patrons of the Congregation, right from the start.

### **The Opening of the Church**

The Holy Patrons did come to their aid! On the afternoon of October 3, 1822, "the blessed and long awaited hour," had finally arrived. The Church of the Stimate had been so thoroughly renovated, that it was said to have been "rebuilt,

<sup>307</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 1, Text a), p. 597.

<sup>308</sup> "Memorie", Gramego, Arch. Stimm.-Verona.

<sup>309</sup> Doc. XX, p. 133, n. 24; XXVI, p. 385, n. 1, Intr., p. 596, & n. 6, Text a), p. 606.

<sup>310</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 1, intr., p. 596.



and most decorously arranged.” A brand new Main Altar, dedicated to the Espousals of the Virgin Mary to St. Joseph, had been purchased. Fr. Bertoni paid for all of the renovations, except for the bell tower - this was “the gift of Grandfather Galvani”. Fr. Brugnoli preached at the service conducted for the inauguration of the Church. His theme was: “What a blessing it was from God to open a Temple for His Worship.”

On the following day, the Feast of St. Francis d’Assisi, 68 Masses were celebrated in the Church. Among the celebrants that signed the Mass Register that day was the well known Priest of the Oratory of St. Philip, Fr. Anthony Cesari. Conspicuous by his absence was Fr. Nicholas Galvani. His health had failed considerably, and he was to live only a few more months.

A sermon on St. Francis d’Assisi highlighted the evening service. The old Chronicle records: “There were so many people in attendance, that it was unbelievable!”<sup>311</sup>

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Meanwhile, earlier that year of 1822, a priest of noble birth had entered the Stimate on March 14th. He was Fr. Francis Cartolari<sup>312</sup>, who had been working with Fr. Bertoni even before this date. Fr. Matthew Farinati, however, had left the Community. The Bishop and the Vicar General, Monsignor Dionisi, had asked for a priest to care for the typhoid victims in the prison. Fr. Bertoni asked Fr. Farinati if he would go, and he did. In this apostolate, he contracted a violent fever. He returned to his native village of Alcenago in the hopes of a cure, but it was to no avail. He died on September 17, 1820, shortly after Fr. Bertoni had visited him for the last time. Fr. Bertoni always envied Fr. Farinati’s death - in truth, he was a martyr to charity.<sup>313</sup>

On October 25, 1818, Fr. Louis Bragato had entered, as he had wanted to do for a long time. He ardently desired to be associated with Fr. Bertoni, whom he greatly admired, in this new undertaking of his. Soon after his entrance, however, it was evident that he was suffering from a chest ailment. After only eight months, Fr. Bragato returned to his family, “leaving only his heart at the Stimate.” He would, however, one day return.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> “Memorie,” Gramego, Arch. Stimm.-Verona; Doc. XXII, p. 593; XXVIII, n. 1, Text a), p. 589; “Breve Cronaca ...”, I.c., n. 25, p. 31, f.; Register of Masses, Library-Stimm. Verona. This restoration did not include the façade. This - and rather extensive repairs on the roof - were done in 1845, as appears from a document found in File #493 of the Building Commission, Verona, Section of the Archives of State.

<sup>312</sup> Doc. XXVII n. 3, Intr., p. 584.

<sup>313</sup> Doc. XII, ntr., p. 58; XXVI, pp. 485, 538; Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Sept. 17, 1820, Mss. 71-4.

<sup>314</sup> Doc. XXV, Intr., p. 280.

## CHAPTER II

**CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSE, AND INCREASE IN THE COMMUNITY**

Once the Church was opened to the public, its side rooms could no longer be used for teaching school. This was further necessitated because of the fact that Bishop Liruti had stated that "since there was a Union of Priests there, I want them to reserve the Most

Blessed Sacrament."<sup>315</sup> Hence, it was decided that as their apostolate was widening, the Fathers needed a new building at the Stimate.

**The Galvani Heredity**

Just three months after the Church opened, "Their good 'Grandfather,' Nicholas Galvani, 'died the death of the just.' "

He passed away in the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1823.

Fr. Bertoni then became the heir of four pieces of property that Fr. Galvani and Joseph Bellotti had bought back from the government. In addition to the Stimate of St. Francis, which they were now occupying, Fr. Bertoni also became the owner of St. Teresa's Convent, its Church and property. He was likewise the heir of an old Monastery of Vallambrosian Monks, in the parish of the Most Holy Trinity. The old building was called the "Trinity." Lastly, Fr. Bertoni also became the owner of the old orphanage in St. Stephen's Parish, that was called the "Dereletti." Some other lesser properties passed to Fr. Bertoni at this time.<sup>316</sup>

A few years before his death, Fr. Galvani had to use all the eloquence at his command, to persuade Fr. Bertoni to accept such an inheritance! He had said to Fr. Galvani at that time: "If you are willing, just leave us the Stimate." But, Fr. Galvani stuck to his guns, and convinced Fr. Bertoni to accept all four places.<sup>317</sup> This was the only instance of Fr. Bertoni ever accepting anything in behalf of his endeavor. He stated that Fr. Galvani's reasons were so clear, that it would have been unreasonable to reject them." Throughout the rest of his life, this was the only exception Fr. Bertoni ever made in regard to receiving donations.<sup>318</sup>

As for the other properties that had been given, Fr. Bertoni acted as if they were not his. He left the endeavors that Fr. Galvani had initiated, in the houses where they had been started. Mother Leopoldina Naudet was able to establish her Sisters in St. Teresa's Convent. At the Dereletti and the Trinità, the two orphanages for poor girls, were able to continue.<sup>319</sup>

<sup>315</sup> Doc. XII, p. 59; XXIII, pp. 260, 266.

<sup>316</sup> Doc. VIII, n. 2, p. 47, ff., Intr. & Text.

<sup>317</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 266.

<sup>318</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 1, p. 581, f., text b).

<sup>319</sup> "Breve Cronaca ...," l.c., p. 35, n. 29.

## Construction of the House

In the difficulties in which the Community found itself, Fr. Bertoni decided that a new building was a necessity. He very easily could have told Mother Naudet “that she would have to return the Monastery and the property of St. Teresa’s.” It would have more than served his purpose, as this property was adjacent to the property of the Stimmate. Moreover, Fr. Galvani’s will stated, explicitly: “If Fr. Bertoni wishes, he may permit Mother Naudet to continue her work. However, he is in no wise constrained, being the absolute owner.” By so doing he could have avoided both the expense and the inconvenience required in the laborious construction of a new building. Naturally speaking, he was within his rights, but he saw in this situation a change to further the purposes of God.

He limited himself, therefore, to a minimum of St. Teresa’s property. It was but a “little section of the land that his great urgency” compelled him to take, as he phrased it to Mother Naudet. Then, the construction got underway.<sup>320</sup> For the project, Fr. Bertoni asked financial help from no one. He stated: “He who wants to do good for souls, must not be preoccupied with its finances.” He declined a number of offers that were spontaneously made by good and generous persons.<sup>321</sup>

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This was always a characteristic of Fr. Bertoni. When he was renovating the Church, a very wealthy and charitable merchant met him one day. The merchant advised him that “he should ask for donations.” When this approach did not work, he insisted that Fr. Bertoni “accept some money to further his endeavor.” Finally, when he realized that he was getting no where, he departed, but “left behind a deposit of gold.” He placed it on the altar unnoticed, and then went home. Fr. Bertoni later discovered it, and returned it intact to his benefactor, thanking him courteously.”<sup>322</sup>

A few years later, either this same man, or someone else, asked Fr. Bertoni to accept a substantial sum of money for Masses. After a lengthy discussion, the kind gentleman was persuaded to give the money to a Religious who was in need.<sup>323</sup>

From that time onward, Fr. Bertoni would only accept Masses according to the stipend established by the Diocese.<sup>324</sup>

Let us return now to the construction of the building.

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<sup>320</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 267; Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, no date, Mss., n.76-12.

<sup>321</sup> Doc. XXV, p. 284, f.

<sup>322</sup> Doc. XX, p. 178.

<sup>323</sup> Doc. XXVI, pp. 333, 488.

<sup>324</sup> Summar., p. 177, par. 3; p. 185, par. 29.

Slowly but surely, the house under construction arose, one wing at a time. It was not a meager looking building, or one that seemed financed by a strict budget. It was a solid building, that followed a functional plan. It took the better part of five years, from 1823-1828, as work was in progress only during the warm seasons.

The small bell tower was not completed until the following year. Then, in 1833, six beautiful sounding bells replaced the old one.<sup>325</sup>

The school was now in full swing. There were two junior high school classes, plus four years of Grammar School. The courses of the Humanities and Rhetoric had also been added, as the construction progressed.<sup>326</sup> During these years, a great deal of ingenuity had to be mustered. The use of the available space during the hustle and bustle of the working hours was changed several times a day. Fr. Bertoni wrote: "The fire had to be lit, and the meals cooked in the same room in which they were to be eaten. My fellow masons and I, as progress was made, put the stove in one bed room, and then ate in another. This 'Refectory' was my bed room, and my class room. Our table was the students' desks."<sup>327</sup>

These hard working priests made a profound impression on those who saw them thus engaged. Fr. Bertoni himself worked along with them, whenever' his health permitted. He worked right alongside his priests during all of his free time. He served as a sort of supplier, getting materials for the workers as they were needed.<sup>328</sup>

Young Cajetan Giacobbe had, even as an old man, vivid recollections of these times. He recalled seeing Fr. Bertoni pushing a wheelbarrow during the work done on the Church.<sup>329</sup>

The blueprints for the building, as well as its technical direction, were entrusted to Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli. During his lifetime, he would also supervise other similar constructions. Before he was ordained a priest, he had studied engineering at Padua. He had also served Napoleon as a Captain in the Corps of Engineers. Then, at Modena, he graduated from the school of military engineering. The old "Recollections of the Early Fathers and Brothers," printed some years later, stated that his best field was architecture. Although these talents might not be specifically ecclesiastical, he put them to good use for the Community that he loved dearly. He was a stickler for detail, and worked wonders.<sup>330</sup> The early Community was effusive in its gratitude to him.

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<sup>325</sup> "Breve Cronaca ...", I.c., p. 37, n. 31; p. 50, n. 47.

<sup>326</sup> I.c., p. 36, n. 30; p. 37, n. 31.

<sup>327</sup> I.c., p. 36, n. 30; Footnote #2.

<sup>328</sup> I.c., p. 37, n. 31.

<sup>329</sup> Summar., p. 100, par. 55.

<sup>330</sup> "Memorie intorno ai Padri e Fratelli della Congregazione", Verona, 1866, pp. 56-58.

## The Community Grows

As the work progressed, the little Community increased almost unnoticed. A few candidates also applied when the construction was over.

In 1824, Fr. Modesto Cainer entered. He was 26 years old, and already ordained. He was not brilliant by any means, but he lived up to his name, by his extraordinary modesty. He was a very generous and submissive individual, endowed with an unusual spirit of self sacrifice. He served as the “Holy Martha” of the Community.<sup>331</sup>

In 1826, a young boy of 16 entered. He was Charles Fedelini, who had a brilliant mind, and a most willing nature. Fr. Bertoni had taught him in his course of the Humanities and Rhetoric. He then entered the Diocesan Seminary, where he studied for the priesthood. During his years there, he compiled a brilliant record.

During these years, he often came to the Stimate, where Fr. Bertoni tutored him. Years later, Fr. Fedelini returned to the Seminary as Professor of Moral Theology, and was a most ardent defender of the doctrine of St. Alphonsus Liguori.<sup>332</sup> In Fr. Gramego’s Chronicle for October 4, 1828, there is this entry: “Louis Biadego, a young cleric arrived at dawn - and, perhaps even a little too early! He is an enthusiastic youth, with much good will, but also serious and timid. He has come to console us. He has made our Patron Feast of St. Francis a happy one!” Young Biadego had left his home very early that day, unknown to his father. He knocked at the door of the Stimate before the morning “Angelus.” There is still extant an old letter from his father, dated that same day. “You have acted in accord with the Gospel, and therefore, I pardon you.” His whole life was to be dedicated to study, sacrifice and prayer, and ended with his enviable death when he was only thirty-four.<sup>333</sup>

A few weeks later, Fr. Louis Bragato returned to the Stimate. He wrote that he had already been “reunited” in spirit with the Community there since July 25, 1825. We also learn from his Diary, that he had come back to the Stimate periodically to renew his vows. ‘He finally rejoined Fr. Bertoni there on October 30, 1828. Fr. Bertoni wrote: “This is a wonderful step, both useful to himself, and bringing glory to God. However, the crown is reserved for the one who perseveres until death.”<sup>334</sup> Fr. Bragato was to play a significant role in the years ahead.

Fr. Francis Benciolini, a priest but two months, entered on November 11, 1829, at the age of twenty-three. He was candor personified. He had been a teacher, and was to develop into an ardent preacher. He was most zealous for

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<sup>331</sup> Doc. XXIX, Intr. p. 595.

<sup>332</sup> Doc. XX, p. 123, f., n. 8, Intr.

<sup>333</sup> “Memorie,” Gramego; “Chronicles”, Zara, Arch. Stimm.-Verona; Doc. XXVI, pp. 394, 474; XXIX, p. 605, f., Intr. & Text.

<sup>334</sup> Doc. XXV, p. 280 intr.; & Letter to Naudet, no date, Mss 73-13.

souls, and all his life, he manifested a compassionate love for the poor. He would be the last to die, of those who lived with Fr. Bertoni.<sup>335</sup>

Fr. Innocent Venturini, aged 26, and ordained the year before, entered on September 12, 1820. Throughout his life, he manifested a sincere devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. He eventually became a much sought after preacher, and an excellent instructor. The catechism classes that he taught in his native dialect, were to become most popular. Years later, he would be remembered also for his work on "Death's Row," in the prisons, and for his unselfish care of souls during a cholera epidemic.<sup>336</sup>

Finally, on March 17, 1831, Fr. Vincent Raimondi surprised those in the clerical circle by his entrance. He was only 27 years old, but had already been appointed Professor of Church History at the Diocesan Seminary. He was a man of extraordinary ability. Twelve years afterwards, however, he left and entered the Society of Jesus. He died two years to the day after Fr. Bertoni, as an "approved Jesuit scholastic."<sup>337</sup>

With the Ordinations of Louis Biadego in 1831, and Charles Fedelini in 1834, the Community at the Stimate numbered twelve priests. Several Brothers had also entered in these years, and the house was just about full.<sup>338</sup>



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<sup>335</sup> Doc. XX, Intr., p. 106, f.; XXIX, n. 2, p. 599, f.

<sup>336</sup> Doc. XXIX, Intr., p. 595; "Memorie intorno ...," l.c., p. 71.

<sup>337</sup> Doc. XIII, n. 1, p. 64.

<sup>338</sup> Doc. XII, B, p. 60.

## CHAPTER III

## THE SPIRITUAL EDIFICE

**“In the Manner of Religious”**

As necessary as the building was for Fr. Bertoni's plans, it was but a shadow of the spiritual edifice that he had to construct. His priests and his brothers were the stones that would go into this building.

In that house, all selfishness had been left outside. They were his sons, and heirs, entirely dedicated to God the Father.

They entrusted themselves to Him, body and soul.<sup>339</sup> They lived “a most exacting common life, and one of perfect observance. Theirs was an exercise of a prompt obedience, founded on a solid piety.” The bond of charity seasoned every task with a spiritual sweetness.” These are some of the remarks that have come down to us from those who were part of the life at the Stimate in those times.<sup>340</sup>

The austerity of their lives was very well known. Fr. Bertoni's personal life exemplified the strict program that he always presented to priests, and those who were training for the priesthood. In the beginning, people used to think that the hard life that was lived at the Stimate, was because of the famine. There is no doubt that at the Stimate all were exhorted to look on those hard times, as an affliction that God had sent to them.<sup>341</sup> When the famine was over, however, this rigor was not lessened. Those not belonging to the Community began to say that “the penance that Bertoni demanded was forbidding.” This remark, and others like it, did not lack the element of exaggeration. The only justification offered by Fr. Bertoni was: “When a Congregation is just beginning, penance can never be excessive. The passing of time, and man's needs, will mitigate it enough.”<sup>342</sup>

Later, when some relaxation was introduced and incorporated into the Constitutions, Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego expressed his displeasure. He, it should be pointed out, was most jovial by nature, and was called “the delight of the early Congregation.” As changes were made in the Rule, he said the Stimate was no longer what it had been in the old days.<sup>343</sup>

**Criticisms**

Even in those earliest days at the Stimate, there were those who said that the new Community was not sincere. It was said that the Community there was setting up its own little kingdom, independent of the needs of the Bishop and the

<sup>339</sup> Cf. small “Records of the Marian Oratory”, par. “Confessor”, Arch. Stim. Verona.

<sup>340</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 259; XXV, p. 284.

<sup>341</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 522; Summar. p. 198, par. 40.

<sup>342</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 7, p. 608.

<sup>343</sup> “Memorie intorno... “ o.c., p.51; Doc. XXIX, n. 6, Text c), p. 607

Diocese. The Fathers were accused of choosing what ministry they liked, and it was rumored about that “they must certainly be enjoying all the comforts of life there.” These remarks were made by a priest. Perhaps he had been one who had been stung by Fr. Bertoni’s efforts for the reform and renewal of the clergy. Eventually this complaint reached the Bishop. The old Benedictine, Bishop Liruti, invited the malcontents to accompany him to the Stimate. He, too, wanted to see everything for himself, and asked all kinds of questions on the day of his visit. When he had seen and heard enough, he quoted the words of St. Paul to the Philippians to the Community: “You are my joy and crown!” He then exhorted them all to persevere, and to continue on as they were: “So remain before the Lord, my beloved!”<sup>344</sup>

It was noted that from that day onward, the Bishop visited the Stimate more frequently. He also entrusted more delicate tasks to Fr. Bertoni than he had done previously. He appointed Fr. Bertoni the permanent Pro-synodal Examiner, and the Scrutineer of Vocations at the Seminary. He later submitted a glowing report to the Holy See concerning the Community at the Stimate, and singled out the Superior for special praise. He stated that Fr. Bertoni was to him a counselor and a friend. During his many illnesses, when he was confined to his room, the Bishop would come to see him and there is recorded that a number of times he had to be carried up the stairs.<sup>345</sup>

Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego noted in his Chronicle, on September 28, 1818: “Our foes press on from every side - You aid supply, You strength bestow!’ There have been fears and hopes, consolations, and afflictions. But, St. Michael, the Archangel, has won out!” This seems to have been recorded in connection with the Bishop’s visit, and the subsequent exoneration.<sup>346</sup>

### **Ignatian Training**

It has been said that during the early days at the Stimate, no particular rule was followed. In a sense, this is true. Fr. Bertoni governed his Community without any written Constitutions. The only rule of life was his word, and his even more vivid example. However, several handwritten copies of Rules for the Jesuits were circulated. The influence of St. Ignatius was very evident.

It might be recalled here that Fr. Bertoni had chosen St. Ignatius as his Patron Saint.

The Ignatian atmosphere that was created resulted also from a number of standard Jesuit texts. The “Spiritual Exercises” of St. Ignatius had an honored place. There was also “The Way of Perfection,” by Rodriguez. Fr. Bertoni himself worked on a critical edition of this text that was published by DeGiorgi in 1840. The “Meditations” of the Venerable Father DaPonte was likewise in general use by the

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<sup>344</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 534 f.

<sup>345</sup> Doc. XIV, n. 1, Intr. p. 85 and Text b) p.86.

<sup>346</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 535, footnote.



early Community. Bartolli's "Lives of the Saints, and Other Jesuits" was often read in common. Another book frequently used was the "Pious Recollections of the Religious of the Company of Jesus," and the "Monologue," by the Jesuit, Patrigagni. The writings of Segneri, and other Jesuits, both Italian, and foreign, enjoyed a general acceptance by the early Stigma tines. These books served both for common and private spiritual reading.<sup>347</sup>

However, the early members were in no way restrained to these sources. The Community also derived spiritual nourishment from other fonts of the vast ecclesiastical tradition. The Jesuits were admired, but Fr. Bertoni's plan was to provide a well rounded background of various schools of thought. This was achieved in so far as "the ordinary forces of human weakness would allow."<sup>348</sup>

There was no forced program of spirituality as such, but the overall result achieved in the Community was a marvel. Fr. Bertoni's method was the way of faith and charity. This was achieved, despite the fact that it was said that he was both loved and feared.<sup>349</sup>

In truth, it did seem to many that, within the Community, each and every one fitted into the same mould.<sup>350</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's program did take into account the varying temperaments and personalities of the various members. He took each man as he was, and trained him in virtue and in study, as well as in the ministry. Each man was treated in accord with his own aptitudes and needs. Fr. Bertoni considered both study and the sacred ministry - with the former orientated to the latter - in the light of virtue. Application to either duty of the priest was, for him, an act of virtue.<sup>351</sup>

Therefore, he considered study, "the principal endeavor of the Congregation after charity and the other virtues." The Congregation, he taught, "could not continue, unless there was a wealth of knowledge among its members." He used to say; "The first germ of corruption is ignorance. This can happen, even to intelligent men, who study badly, or who have lost 'Good Taste' "<sup>352</sup> This, for him, meant to study solely to become more apt instruments to carry out the will of God.

### Family Recollections

We might recall here a number of incidents recorded by the early Fathers and Brothers, that attest to the spirit of docility that pervaded the Stimmate. Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego was long remembered for the "most sincere manner in

<sup>347</sup> Taken from the Bertoni Mss., now at the S. Cong. of Rites and the Mss. of his first companions, Arch. Stimm., Verona. As for the Veronese edition of Rodriguez, cfr. Summar., p. 245, 6.

<sup>348</sup> Doc. XXII, n. 1, Text, a), p. 212.

<sup>349</sup> Giacobbe Papers, Arch. Stimm. Verona.

<sup>350</sup> Doc. XIII, n. 2, p. 66; XVII, n. 1, p. 97; XXII, p. 209; XXVI, p. 384.

<sup>351</sup> Doc. XXIX, nn. 2-5, Text a), pp. 599-606.

<sup>352</sup> Doc. XXXV, Text a), p. 714, ff.

which he used to kiss Fr. Bertoni's hand after being given a correction, instruction or a penance.

There was one time that Fr. Bertoni said to him: "Fr. Michael, you know that small tree that you have been nursing along? Would you be willing to uproot it?"

Fr. Gramego's answer was: "Year, Father, right away."

There was another incident that involved a nest of birds that Fr. Gramego used to look after with much solicitude. One day, Fr. Bertoni opened their cage, and set them all free, saying: "Go with God - Fr. Gramego gives to you your freedom!" For the moment, it took the starch right out of Fr. Gramego, but later he recognized it for the mortification that it was intended to be.<sup>353</sup>

Among Fr. Benciolini's papers, his own personal Spiritual Diary was found. One of its entries reads as follows: "Fr. Gaspar accepted you into the House of God. Look upon him, not only as your Superior, with authority invested in him by God, but also as your greatest benefactor. He is the father of your soul. The daily help he gives you is given not out of any merit of yours - he gives it out of his pure love for God; he nourishes you with his heavenly wisdom, and feeds you with his holy example. What about the corrections that he lovingly points out to you and his acts of virtue that inspire you - and all the other good that he does for you? Have for him, then, obedience, love and respect!"<sup>354</sup>

Fr. Innocent Venturini used to feel that he was "the most useless of all at the Stimate." Whenever he wrote out his retreat sermons for the Seminarians, invariably he would write: "These notes are truly a miracle wrought by the Holy Spouses." Then he would add: "... and they are due to the patience of the Superior ..."<sup>355</sup>

Fr. Cainer once wrote: "The Stimate is elevated and blessed to have a Superior with such faith and holiness."<sup>356</sup>

Fr. Marani gloried in only one title - that he was "a son and disciple of Fr. Bertoni." As Superior General, he immediately set to work to bring Fr. Bertoni "the glory of being recognized as a Founder." In the years of his administration, Fr. Marani governed the Congregation by recalling the examples and the words of Fr. Bertoni. So many times he would conclude a statement with: "This is what Fr. Gaspar used to say ..." or, "this is what he would have wanted or done."<sup>357</sup>



<sup>353</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 6, Text c), p. 607; House Traditions: Summar., p. 109, par. 15; Fiorio, "Vita del S.d.D., G. Bertoni," Verona, 1922, p. 258, f.

<sup>354</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 2, Text a), p. 600.

<sup>355</sup> I.c., n. 3, p. 600, f; Mss. Venturini, Lib. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>356</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 1, Text b), p. 598.

<sup>357</sup> Doc. XXIII, n. III, Intr., p.254; Text, n. 1, p. 256; Summar., p. 22, par. 27.

## CHAPTER IV

**SCHOOL AT THE STIMMATE**

Here we treat of the various activities that comprised the daily lives of the early members of the Congregation. In the beginning, most of their time was spent teaching school. The rudiments of Latin were always stressed to the young boys, in the unexpressed hope that there might be some vocations to the priesthood among them.<sup>358</sup> There was, though, never any effort to recruit candidates for the Stimate from among the study body. Fr. Bertoni used to say: "In the matter of vocations, rather than pushing for them, it is better to entrust the matter to God."<sup>359</sup>

Their first effort was to establish a high school. In 1818, they decided on a new policy. They would no longer accept any student who had not already learned "to read and write well."<sup>360</sup> Fr. Bertoni organized the curriculum of studies - no doubt along the lines of St. Sebastian's School that he had once attended. He wanted to continue the Jesuit scholastic traditions.<sup>361</sup> In 1818, however, the government decreed that "Education fell within its competence." A "Method of Studies" was promulgated, as well as a "Code for High Schools."<sup>362</sup>

Fr. Bertoni then set about the task of bringing the school at the Stimate into conformity with the new legislation. He also directed his priests to prepare themselves for the State Examinations, that would satisfy the legal qualifications for teachers. He himself set the example by his diligent preparation for these exams. As time went on, one by one, the priests fulfilled the requirements prescribed by the various departments of education. There were state requirements to be satisfied, as well as local, or municipal prescriptions for education to be met.<sup>363</sup> As each new school year opened, there was an approved teacher ready for the new classes that had been added.

By the time of the opening of the school year of 1824-1825, there was a complete high school, established according to the Austrian system. There were four years of Grammar, plus a two year course of the "Humanities and Rhetoric." There were also two preparatory classes, called "IInd and IIIrd Elementary." The "Ist Elementary Class" was not taught at the Stimate.<sup>364</sup>

The school, therefore, was brought into accord with all the state requirements. To these, the Fathers added their own standards, that the curriculum of studies might satisfy the requirements of the Seminary as well. There was an

<sup>358</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Microfilm, no date, but certainly in 1816.

<sup>359</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 658, Aug. 17.

<sup>360</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, no date, Mss. n. 77-2.

<sup>361</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 386, f.

<sup>362</sup> Doc. XI, Intr., p. 53; XXIII, Text n. 7, p. 258 f.

<sup>363</sup> Doc. XI, Intr., p. 53; XII, Approved Priests, p.61. Fr. Bertoni's diploma is in the papers of the Ordinary Process, fol. 400, v.

<sup>364</sup> Cfr. School Register, Arch. Stimm.-Verona.

insistence on piety and the exercise of virtue.<sup>365</sup> The school offered a solid program. Fr. Bertonì's principles pervaded the methods of teaching and the example that was given to the students. Frequently enough, the school was singled out by those competent in the field of education.<sup>366</sup>

The results were heart-warming. The celebrated Jesuit, Fr. Anthony Bresciani, wrote: "The students (from the Stimmate), in the judgment of learned men, are outstanding, as can be seen from the results of the competitive examinations."<sup>367</sup> Other Jesuits stated: "These students are far superior to all others, both in piety and in learning."<sup>368</sup>

### **A Typical School Day**

The following is a description of how an ordinary school day would be spent. The students would gradually fill their respective class rooms. The class would begin with the "Hail, Mary" directed toward a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Then, it was customary for the students to kiss the hand of their teacher. The first period was devoted to a repetition of the previous day's lesson, or passages that had been assigned for memorization. At 9:00 a.m., the bell sounded for Mass. The students would line up with their partners to go over to the Church. Each teacher would accompany his own class, and the students were expected to keep silence. Every student followed the Mass with his own Missal.

The conduct of these young boys made a lasting impression on those who saw them. In Church, they seemed to be devout and recollected, and the good example that they gave was long remembered.

A number of those who regularly attended Mass at the little Church stated they preferred the students' Mass to all others. When Mass was over, they would go back to school, as they had come.

Every class hour began with a prayer. The classes were lively, with the students' active participation being expected. Awards for achievement were distributed, accompanied by a thoughtful bit of encouragement and praise for those who had won them. There was a place of honor assigned to them, and the others took their places in accord with their scholastic achievements. Contests were held periodically, and new honors would then be awarded. A keen sense of competition pervaded the system which motivated the young students to reap an even greater profit from their studies. At regular intervals, the prize was the promotion to the rank of "Decurion." This meant that the student so honored, was the assistant teacher for the day.

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<sup>365</sup> Summar., p. 60, par. 16; Doc. XX, p. 162; XXVI, pp. 387-394, passim.

<sup>366</sup> Doc. XXVI, pp. 386, f.

<sup>367</sup> Doc. XXII, n. 2, p. 214.

<sup>368</sup> Doc. XXIV, n. 2, p. 648.

The intellectual training of the students went hand in hand with their spiritual formation. The school matter was clarified by the Use of frequent examples. The students were exposed to a great number of authors, both those who were highly approved, as well as some that were not. The boys were expected to give a proof of what they had learned both orally, and in writing. Christian Doctrine was stressed as the most important subject, and the text was that of St. Robert Bellarmine. A sense of religion and good manners pervaded the atmosphere. The purpose of the school was to train good Christians, who would therefore, be good citizens. It was often noted that the students from the Stimmate, won the prizes awarded for success in the public examinations.

At the sound of the bell, the morning classes were closed with a prayer. The students would then line up again for dismissal. A system was worked out so that the younger boys would be brought to their homes.<sup>369</sup>

For the afternoon classes, a little more informality was allowed.

Fr. Bertoni would expose his own considerations and reflections, and give examples that he had encountered in his own experience. In these informal sessions, it was recorded that many of the students felt that "Fr. Bertoni was 'worth his weight in gold.' He was so clear in expressing his own thoughts, and in relating what he had either read, heard or seen. In these periods, such was his eloquence, that he made a very deep impression on the students of his class."<sup>370</sup>

Every once in a while, he, too, would be deeply moved by the memory of an experience he was recounting. One day, he exclaimed: "Sin is such a terrible evil!" So disturbed was he, that he was unable to continue.<sup>371</sup>

The last class hour on Saturdays was devoted to an exhortation.

When school was over for the week, a good number of the students made their optional visit to the most Blessed Sacrament. On these days, as well as the vigils of Holy Days, confessions were held in the Church. The rule was that the students had to go once or twice a month, but there were many who went every week.<sup>372</sup>

### **The Sunday and Holiday Program**

To round out the scholastic curriculum, the students then participated in the Recreation Program of the Marian Oratory on Sundays and holidays from school. These days would begin with Mass. The spiritual duties of the Christian life were first fulfilled, as well as a number of devotions that were not of precept. The boys

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<sup>369</sup> Doc. XX, p. 162, f.; XXVI, p. 389, f.

<sup>370</sup> Doc. XX, p. 163.

<sup>371</sup> I.c., n.8, p. 124.

<sup>372</sup> I.c., p. 164; XXVI, p. 390.

were being trained where to find their refreshment, for their cares in life.<sup>373</sup> During these years of their schooling, there was thus integrated a thorough and balanced program.

### **Practices of Piety, and their Living of their Religion**

To increase the piety of the young students, the schedule included a number of sacred functions and particular practices. There was a monthly hour of recollection held during the last class hour, before the beginning of a new month. At Easter time, there was a three day retreat for the older students. They were expected to keep silence, and attend the spiritual readings and the sermons. They were taught how to meditate and participate properly in vocal prayer.

These little retreats were a shorter form of the Retreats that were made every year by their teachers.

The students were trained to have devotion to the Mother of God, throughout the entire school year. During the month of May, however, this was stressed by means of the daily, brief devotion that was held in her honor. The progress that the students made in their conduct, and in their studies, was soon very evident to their families.

Special devotion was always shown to the Patron of Youth, St. Aloysius Gonzaga. His Feast was always observed by their general Communion in the morning. The afternoon was given to an "Accademia." This consisted in the recitations of poems, and the reading of essays that the students themselves composed. A special program of music was also prepared for the Feast.<sup>374</sup>

### **The Closing of the School Year**

Each school year came to a close with a solemn ceremony. Awards for excellence were distributed, and the "Te Deum" was sung. There was a brief talk, and the students received their "Ten Commandments for the Vacation." This was a series of ten resolutions that the students promised that they would keep, so that the vacation time would integrate the scholastic program of the year. These "Commandments were as follows:

- 1.) A brief meditation every morning;
- 2.) Hear Mass, if possible;
- 3.) Every night, a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and in honor of the Mother of God;
- 4.) A recitation of the third part of the Rosary;
- 5.) A brief spiritual reading;
- 6.) An examen of conscience, before going to bed;

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<sup>373</sup> Doc. XX, p. 164. The School Register has a mark before each student's name who belonged to the various Oratories. Arch. Stimm.; Verona.

<sup>374</sup> Doc. XX, p. 164, f.; XXVI, p. 390, f.

- 7.) Regular Confession;
- 8.) Frequent Communion;
- 9.) Avoid bad companions, and all occasions that might soil purity;
- 10.) Try to recall the presence of God, always and everywhere.

Then, there would be added a few closing suggestions regarding their studies. They were asked to devote one half hour a day to review the matter that had been covered during the school year. They were also told to take over the subjects they would have for the coming year.<sup>375</sup>

Then, it was: "So long - until November!"

### **Corrections and Penalties**

Some may be wondering about this phase of the scholastic life. There were never any bodily punishments meted out - but there was extra study assigned to those who had been negligent.

Fr. Bertoni manifested a certain ingenuity in this aspect of the life of a student. He was always gentle and kind, and full of charity, trying first to point out the reasonableness of the demands of the curriculum. Frequently, he would alleviate the tension, by telling a joke to get his idea across. He was an expert in imitating the mannerisms, the voice and the gait of the student that was out of order. Usually, this would bring a smile to the face of the student who had been called to task.

However, whenever he encountered a grave fault, stubbornness or - bad example, he was a different man. One of his former students recalled many years later, that on such occasions, the words that he used, and his tone of voice clearly showed that he meant business.

Fr. Bertoni's policy was that it was better to try to avoid such instances than it was to try to correct them. He enlisted the cooperation of the students' families, and believed strongly in meeting their parents and talking over their sons' problems. Whenever a student became either a scholastic or a disciplinary problem, his parents would be immediately notified. If any student showed clearly that he was "incorrigible," or was a bad influence on the others, he would be expelled.<sup>376</sup>

One who knew this school well, and how it was run, stated years later: "The discipline which was maintained there made it a model for any school."<sup>377</sup> Occasionally, important citizens, or visiting dignitaries, even Bishops and other Prelates, dropped in on the school. Some of these instances were recorded and the visitors remarked: "They were quite satisfied."<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Doc. XX, p. 165; XXVI, p. 393.

<sup>376</sup> Doc. XX, pp. 163, 165; XXVI, p. 392.

<sup>377</sup> Doc. XVII, n. 1, p. 96.

<sup>378</sup> Doc. XX, p. 165.

At the end of April 1825, the Austrian Sovereigns made an unannounced visit to the school. Fr. Marani recorded "They expressed their complete satisfaction."<sup>379</sup> Fr. Bertoni's account of their visit was: "They manifested their benign indulgence, even with our poor efforts."<sup>380</sup>

In the Diocesan Process for Fr. Bertoni's Beatification, the following testimony was given concerning the school: "Its success may be attributed to Fr. Bertoni's spirit that permeated the young students. A great number of priests and religious, who now bring glory to the Church, graduated from that school." Fr. Lenotti tells us that others of the alumni "became fathers of families who were outstanding in their Christian piety, and in the way they managed their homes."<sup>381</sup>

Years later, in 1843, Fr. Bertoni found that he had to close the school. This became necessary after the decline in the membership in the Community, so he sent the students to the recently opened Jesuit school. When the families of the students heard that the school at the Stimmate would not open in the fall, they expressed a genuine and general disappointment.<sup>382</sup>

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There are two official reports concerning the school that have come down to us. These reports were the responses given to a questionnaire that was sent out by the State Department of Education. One of these reports, dated November 1822, is in Fr. Bertoni's own handwriting. The other one, dated May 23, 1827, was drawn up by Fr. Cartolari.

In Fr. Bertoni's report, the fact that he refers to Fr. Nicholas Galvani as "the owner and founder of this establishment," seems so characteristic of him. Fr. Bertoni made no attempt to refer to his own role in the work. There was not even a hint that he personally had assumed its entire financial burden. With a stroke of his pen, he wrote: "Priests direct this school." He did not even bring up the matter as to how it was possible to maintain a tuition free school! There is no doubt that the other priests did make a significant contribution to the school, through their capable instruction. His humility, however, seems to have prohibited any mention of how its financial burdens were met.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 260.

<sup>380</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 76-10.

<sup>381</sup> Summ. Sup. Intr. Causam, p. 39, f., n. II; XX, 165, f.

<sup>382</sup> O. Cagnoli, "Statistical Report of Verona," 1849.

<sup>383</sup> Doc. XI, nn. 1 & 2, pp. 53-56.



## CHAPTER V

**MORE ON THE MARIAN ORATORIES****An Oratory Established at the Stimate**

There was no Marian Oratory at the Stimate before the 1819-1820 school year. For the first few weeks, the priests who were teaching there, helped out in the other Oratories that had already been instituted. Sometimes, too, they were called upon to assist in the foundation of new Oratories throughout the Diocese.

In November 1819, the Marian Congregation was established at the Stimate. The initial enrollment there numbered about 30 new members. Another 50 of the students, meanwhile, were already participating in the ten other Oratories that had been established in Parishes throughout Verona. As each year went by, more of the students enrolled at the new Oratory at the Stimate. Within a few years, practically the entire student body was enrolled in it.<sup>384</sup>

In the beginning, they met in the little Chapel or Oratory at the Stimate, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. As the renovations in the Church were completed, they took over one of its free alcoves. When the Church was opened to the public, the Marian Oratory then comprised boys, young men as well as adults, who had no other connection with the school there. In 1824, at the invitation of the Pastor of the Most Holy Church, the Oratory of the Stimate became a Parish Oratory. However, membership was not restricted to parishioners, as members were also enrolled from other parishes and neighborhoods.

On April 4th, 1824, this Oratory became an aggregate of the "Prima Primaria Congregation" of the Roman College, and was entitled "The Purity of the Virgin Mary.' It obtained associate membership with the Arch-Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, on May 21, 1829. These two devotions were already the very heart and soul of the new Oratory.<sup>385</sup>

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Fr. Bertoni poured his heart and soul into this new Oratory, and was not satisfied with just establishing it. He dedicated himself to it that it would develop properly. Before long, the majority of the members had asked him to be their regular confessor, as each member was required to choose his own Spiritual Director. As a result of his lengthy and repeated illnesses, however, he soon had to direct the members to his companions and sons at the Stimate.

He was restricted in his work with the Oratory, and was only able to give the exhortations. Nevertheless, he still would see anyone who insisted on seeing him. His many visitors came not only from Verona proper, but also from outside the city.

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<sup>384</sup> School Register, Arch. Stimm. Verona.

<sup>385</sup> Doc. XII, p. 63; XXXII, n. 9, p. 636.

The spontaneous tribute paid by old Bishop Liruti to these Oratories, is indeed unusual. After completing a Pastoral Visitation of his Diocese, the Bishop wrote:

“I can grasp in an instant, the state of a good parish, and one whose administration leaves something to be desired. As soon as I arrive, I ask if an Oratory has been established there. If I find there is one, I conclude that the Visit will go well. Facts have proven that I am not deceived. If there is no Oratory, these same facts show that I have every good reason to fear.”<sup>386</sup>

Therefore, the Marian Oratory, as a special endeavor, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, became a cure-all in the Diocese. It was the necessary ingredient for the renewal of a Parish and its people. Whenever real desperate Parish situation came to Fr. Bertoni’s attention, he would immediately cut off all recriminations and accusations. He would state: “There must always be hope in the Mother of Good Hope.” He would then prescribe this solution, which he felt would never fail, but gave every promise of success. Many times those who had been involved in trying to find a solution to their difficulties, somewhat later would return in gratitude for the success they had met. He was so often told that the results had been excellent, and far beyond their hopes.<sup>387</sup>

### **The Predominant Force in the Veronese Oratories**

As long as he lived, Fr. Bertoni was the central figure in Verona of all the Marian Oratories. Promoters of the Oratory appeared wherever he was living. New organizations were again and again modelled after those already established at St. Paul’s, St. Firmus’ and at the Stimate.

Mother Madeline di Canossa always considered Fr. Bertoni in a class by himself in this apostolate to the youth. She asked her nephew, the future Cardinal Louis di Canossa, to obtain for her the plan of the Oratory at the Stimate. As a young man he was Prefect of an Oratory in Verona, and she wanted to establish one in Verona.<sup>388</sup>

Over the years, as Fr. Bertoni became more and more of an invalid, the original Oratory of St. Paul’s annually made a pilgrimage to the Stimate. Its Director in those times was a Fr. John Baptist Peruzzi. Later he served for many years as Pastor of St. Nicholas’ Parish in Verona. He was always an ardent promoter of Fr. Bertoni’s Cause of Beatification. He left the following testimony:

“Until I reached the age of 45, I was assigned to St. Paul’s Parish Oratory. For several years, I was also its Director. I had the good fortune of both seeing and hearing that holy man speak a number of times. I also frequently benefitted from his wise counsels. Every year, on the second Sunday of July, we used to bring our Oratorians to the Church of the Stimate. When the program for the morning was

<sup>386</sup> Doc. XX, p. 152; XXVI, p. 344. A similar statement was made by Bishop Liruti’s successor, Bishop J. Grassier.

<sup>387</sup> Doc. XX, p. 151-153; XXVI, p. 403, f.

<sup>388</sup> Doc. XXXII, n. 6, p. 633.

over, those over 20 years of age would be brought upstairs to see this priest in his room. How eager were those boys, as they used to say, to see the Saint! He would greet all those he knew by name. Like Tobias of old, he would give each and everyone, 'a word of salvation.' "<sup>389</sup>

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Even in the last years of his life, Fr. Bertoni repeatedly had the occasion, and the joy, to be of service to some division or other of the Oratory. A "Committee" of the Marian Congregation would assemble in the Domestic Chapel, which became a "semi-public oratory, next to his room. There would be about 30 young men and adults, "the more fervent members." To qualify for selection, they had to be outstanding for their "recollection, and the frequent reception of the Sacraments, as well as for devotion and piety." Fr. Lenotti records: "How wonderful it was to see, the venerable old man make his way from his room. Leaning on his cane, he would stand at the altar and give the boys a little sermon." There were other times that "this select circle would be called into his room. Gathered around the table there, or his bed, he would give his short talk to them. How edified and happy they all were to be there!" Fr. Giacobbe had this opportunity when he was a boy. He wrote: "Today we heard Fr. Bertoni preach from his bed. How lucky are we to have heard his words in these last days of his life. It was like listening to St. John, the Evangelist, in his last days!" It would seem that instances such as these were not rare.<sup>390</sup>

### **The Recreation Program**

As at St. Paul's, and then at St. Firmus', so, too, the morning program of the Oratory gave way to its recreational phase in the afternoon.

When the morning catechism was over in the Parishes, all roads seemed to lead to the Stimate. The "Decurions" leading their little groups, marched orderly out through the "Porta Nuova." The ball field was in a little valley which extended as far as the wall of St. Michael's. There some of the boys played ball; others played "skittles," or "bocce." They were not allowed to bet money on their games, but sometimes prayers. At appointed times, the boys would kneel right where they were to bless the hour. Along the sidelines, "the 'old-timers' would sit there on the grass, or on large stones. They often had lively discussions on subjects that were of interest to them." Three or four priests would make the rounds, "to cheer the boys onward, both the smaller ones, and the bigger players, too.

They kept the games alive, and were at times called upon to act as referees to settle the disputes that would arise." Fr. Lenotti wrote many years later: "It was a delight to see so many boys from ordinary backgrounds, as sons of artisans, craftsmen, and tradesmen, playing happily with boys of rich families."

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<sup>389</sup> Doc. XXXI, n. 1, p. 616.

<sup>390</sup> Doc. XX, p. 149, f.; XXVI, p. 412; XXXII, n. 5, p. 632.

The Recreation Program would come to an end with a loud blast from a shrill whistle. The little companies often reformed, and their "Decurions" led them on their return march. They would sing all the way to the city gate, the old "stand-bys", which were well known at that time, for various church groups: "On us, O Lord, have mercy! ... Sin no more; the world is no longer for me!" Thus they returned to the Stimmate.

"Those were happy and wonderful days. If only they could have continued! But, the devil's influence was felt even here!" This was Fr. Lenotti's lament after 1848, when the Austrian Government promulgated numerous prohibitions, required by the gathering storms.<sup>391</sup>

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These restrictions were only temporary, but they did limit various phases of the life of the Oratory. After Fr. Bertoni's death, through his Congregation of Priests and Brothers, the Oratories flourished once again. However, the nostalgia for the "old days," and what the Oratories were and accomplished during the first half of the 1800's remained down through the years.

### **The August Testimony of Cardinal Louis di Canossa, Bishop of Verona**

Toward the end of the last century, the Veronese poet, Vegliardo (1809-1900), of noble birth, expressed his nostalgia. Long years before, he had been a very active member of the Oratory, and a dedicated promoter of the organization.

There was also one that recorded this same sentiment in an official document. Cardinal Louis di Canossa, Bishop of Verona from 1863-1900, saw in the Oratory an infallible means for the good of his people. Shortly before his death, he expressed the hope that this apostolate would continue in the new century that was about to dawn.<sup>392</sup>

It was to Fr. Bertoni that credit was due for the initial foundation and development in Verona of the Oratory. These organizations that he established were the models for so many others throughout the Diocese. Near the end of his long life, Cardinal di Canossa issued a Pastoral Letter. In it, he traced the highlights of the traditions of the Diocese. He stated that the Marian Oratories arose providentially, as dikes, to stem the raging tides of irreligion. They held in check the wave of licentiousness that flooded Verona in the late 1700's, and the early XIX<sup>th</sup> century. The Cardinal credited the Oratory, not only with preserving the faith, purity and morals of the people, but also for the fact that they went a long way in the renewal of the Diocese. He lauded the organization as a school that prepared good Christians and citizens. It was both the training grounds and the fortress for

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<sup>391</sup> Doc. XX, p. 150, f.

<sup>392</sup> Doc. XXXI, n.2, Intr., p.617. This same testimony constitutes n.9, of Doc. XXXII, pp. 635-638.

the youth of Verona; it was also a fertile nursery of many religious and priestly vocations.<sup>393</sup>

The Cardinal went on to say: "It was Fr. Bertoni who gave to our Oratories that particular spirit that they have. He breathed into them his own holy life, emphasizing especially devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to the Mother of God. He cultivated the Oratory movement with a holy passion. In this he was assisted by other holy priests, and zealous laymen. From the Oratories, he reaped a most abundant harvest, which diffused among us the good odor of Jesus Christ. These Oratories helped in the formation of illustrious and learned men, as well as that of brilliant writers, even beyond the confines of this Diocese."<sup>394</sup>

The Pastoral Letter concluded with: "May glory and eternal recognition be accorded these zealous priests and laymen, who dedicated themselves to this apostolate. But, above all, may eternal rewards come to him who started it all - Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, the Father of our Oratories.

### **Some of Fr. Bertoni's Principles**

As the first biographer of Fr. Bertoni had written: "Perhaps it will not offend the reader if we touch on a few providential directives that the Servant of God himself faithfully observed. These were some of his recommendations to all Directors of the Oratories. He felt they were most relevant and necessary, to bring to reality all they hoped the youth would one day produce." There are eight observations which Fr. Giacobbe heard from Fr. Bertoni:

"1.) The Director should not be concerned with the number of the members, but with their virtue;

2.) No hard and fast rule should be made on the frequency of Holy Communion;

3.) Only the Director, or some prudent priest chosen by him, should keep a personal register of those who do go to Confession. As the rule requires, this should be at least once a month. It is the Director's responsibility to remind those that neglect it. In a charitable manner, he must exhort them to attend to it regularly.

Those who lack docility, or who are headstrong, must be converted and fulfill this duty;

4.) The Director will exercise this supervision over the members of his own Oratory. He should also concern himself with the students and those who work in

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<sup>393</sup> Bishop Grasser wrote this in his Triennial Report in 1834: "The Oratory of Priests with good reason, I have called a 'Seminary' (not in the technical sense); because from those Priests many and excellent vocations have come and are still coming." Doc. XXXII, n. 7, p. 634.

<sup>394</sup> So wrote the Viennese Priest, Dr. Louis Schlör, in "Die Philanthropie des Glaubens," Vienna 1840. (It was quoted in part in the Moroni Dictionary, Vol. 94, V, Verona, p. 144, f.) Also, Fr. A. Bresciani, S.J., in "Ebreo di Verona," *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1850, Vol. II, p. 169.

the shops. It is most important for him to know who their associates are. The harm of bad language, or the bad habits of one, can easily influence his companions. Here, there is also needed much charity and prudence in giving corrections.

He must not give the impression that any members have fallen into disfavor with the rest of the group. He must try not to offend whenever he gives corrections;

5.) The money of any Oratorian, or that of his family, must never be used in behalf of the Oratory, no matter how paltry the sum. It may not even be used for an object of piety, as for charity. The material well being of the Oratory would then betray its spiritual well being. The Director must never inquire as to their spiritual lives as long as they satisfy the basic requirements;

6.) If some poor member has need of anything, the Director will, if he is able, assist the boy himself. He will never personally distribute anything from his own hand, but through one of his priests, or some other prudent assistant. Otherwise, the Director would set a precedent that his successor perhaps could not follow. This latter, then, only with great difficulty, could take over when the previous Director was gone. The successor would be looked upon in an unfavorable light. It also might happen that the new members would be attracted to the Oratory from what they could get out of it. It might also Occur, that similar cases would rapidly increase. Pretexts and rights would be presented, in the hope that each one might receive such alleviation;

7.) During games and the recreation periods, the boys must be forbidden to engage in secret and confidential conversations. Boys act more naturally when they are playing, and the Director will be able to obtain a good idea of their true character. In their various programs, and above all, in their conversations, constructive discussions, which engender piety, and further edification, should be introduced and encouraged. Mundane discussions should be sublimated, to something more useful and constructive;

8.) The games have no other purpose than to provide moderate physical exercise and mental recreation. Therefore, absolutely no betting is to be allowed on the outcome of the games. This includes even very small sums, or even fruit or bread, or anything of this nature ...

"These, and others," Fr. Giacobbe tells us, "were Fr. Bertoni's wise and prudent directives."<sup>395</sup>

We are indeed grateful to learn what these principles are, but it certainly would have been of no small interest also to know what these "others" were, too. We can derive some profit from these teachings that have come down to us.

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<sup>395</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 357, f.

## CHAPTER VI

### EXERCISE OF THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY

#### The Sacrament of Penance

Scarcely had Fr. Bertoni moved into the Stimate, and the solitude of the place, gave it the aspect of a hermitage. The priests that lived there soon acquired a reputation for their readiness and their patience with which they fulfilled the ministry. It was perhaps due to the fact that these priests were among the first to follow the doctrine of St. Alphonsus Liguori. This system, in time, would temper the excessive rigorism that was so predominant in that era. The priests, then, were soon very much in demand. "Those who preferred to unburden their conscience in absolute privacy," soon were in the habit of coming to the Stimate. It became well known, that "Confessors were always available there, both day and night."<sup>396</sup>

After the triumphal return of the Holy Father, Pope Pius VII to Rome, and Napoleon's complete capitulation, many heads began to clear from the orgy of the Revolution. Many souls tired of the moral and intellectual licentiousness of the epoch that had just passed. They began to comprehend that there could be no peace until they were reinstated in God's grace. In a short time, "in a daily increasing: number, penitents were converted from a depraved way of life to God."

Fathers Bertoni, Farinati and Gramego bore the initial brunt of the long lines of confessions that were forming at the Stimate. Fr. Marani was only 28 years of age at this time, and had not received faculties for Confessions. Very shortly, the Fathers at the Stimate realized "they needed more extensive and special faculties," to deal with the cases that were coming to them. On June 6, 1817, they submitted a petition to the Chancery Office for these faculties, which were granted for two years. These were requested for a like period of time in 1819, and the names of other Confessors were presented for approval. This time, approbation was granted indefinitely.

These identical faculties were renewed and confirmed by the successive Bishops of Verona, throughout Fr. Bertoni's lifetime.<sup>397</sup> There is documented testimony of the many Confessions that were being heard at this time there. As long as Fr. Bertoni lived, the confessions of women were not heard at the Stimate.<sup>398</sup>

#### Conversions

Among the many conversations that were attributed to the Stimate, one case in particular stands out. It was that of Fr. Charles Allegri, who had given public scandal by his well known apostasy and adherence to anti-Catholic groups. Fr. Mark

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<sup>396</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 261.

<sup>397</sup> Doc. IX, p. 49, f.

<sup>398</sup> Summar. p. 224, par. 2; Doc. XX, p. 158.

Marchi sent this priest to his friend, Fr. Bertoni. In a short time, he managed to convince Fr. Allegri of his need for God. This poor prodigal son finally returned to his Father's house. On June 15, 1823, after many years, he celebrated what was for him his second "First Mass."<sup>399</sup>

Fr. Marani also recorded the case of a rich man, who occasionally fell into serious sin. He would manifest his sorrow, but would not follow through and go to confession. One day, Fr. Marani said to him: "Let's go to see Fr. Bertoni." The man agreed, and Fr. Bertoni managed to get to the root of his problem, and he finally went to confession. He agreed, too, to avoid the occasion of his lapses.

Over the last 20 years of his life, this man celebrated the 8th of December, every year, with a personal solemnity, as the date of his "return to God."<sup>400</sup>

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Especially during the periodic "Jubilee Years," both those that were celebrated at regular intervals, and those that commemorated special events, Fr. Bertoni used to enlist the services and help of a number of food souls. He used to tell them: "Pray that even our insignificant efforts may reap most significant results!" There were times that he was suddenly called upon to preach on these occasions, and would not have had time for preparation. He remarked: "It seems that God preaches in His own stead, when His ministers cannot of themselves. We, sometimes, without even opening our mouths, are besieged with those that God sends to us. On so many instances, their souls are already ripe for conversion. In any Mission, we could not hope for more. 'The hand of God is never withdrawn.' God always seems to extend it."<sup>401</sup>

### **Other Ministry**

When their work with the Oratory, and their teaching allowed, the Priests of the Stimmate put no limit to their ministry.

They devoted much of their time to preaching the Word of God. They taught Instruction Classes in various Parishes, and preach Novenas - they conducted the services held during the Octaves of Feasts, and gave Triduums. They also preached many Retreats to various groups, but especially to seminarians and priests, which were held both at the Seminary and at the Stimmate. Often they were called upon to deliver the customary Meditations and Instructions to the Seminarians through the year. Over the years, they were also appointed to the Office of the Scrutineer of Vocations, and they served as substitute Seminary Professors.

Through it all, their sacred canon of rendering their services entirely gratuitously was strictly maintained. They often gave spiritual assistance to the sick

<sup>399</sup> Doc. XXVIII, n. 1, Text c), p. 590.

<sup>400</sup> Summar., p. 141, par. 9.

<sup>401</sup> Letters: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 76-6; l.c., n.75-2; Doc. XX, p.158.



and the dying. They instructed and brought what help they could to those in prison and frequently they accompanied condemned criminals to their execution.<sup>402</sup>

Fr. Bertoni anonymously contributed to the translation and publication of "Christian Reflections for Every Day in the Year" by Fr. Bourhours, S.J. This work was published by De Giorgi, in Verona, in 1840.<sup>403</sup> As we mentioned earlier, this same year De Giorgi also published Rodriguez' "The Way of Perfection," the text of which, Fr. Bertoni prepared.<sup>404</sup> He also collaborated in "The Manual for the Month of March," that appeared in 1844. He had expressed his contentment with an earlier edition of this book of devotions in honor of St. Joseph. In one of his letters to Mother Naudet, we read that earlier he had sent her a copy of it.<sup>405</sup>

In the Diocesan phase of his Cause for Beatification, Fr. Giacobbe gives a more complete picture of Fr. Bertoni's varied ministry. He states that Fr. Gaspar "was the first in the city to emphasize devotion to St. Joseph."<sup>406</sup> He and Mother Naudet initially promoted this devotion.

In the Apostolic Process of his Cause, we read: "It was Fr. Bertoni the first to introduce, and then to revive this devotion in Verona. He was also tireless in working for its spread."<sup>407</sup>

His panegyric in honor of St. Zeno was also published. After his name, appears the title: "Master of Human Letters." We will see later how he tried to have this title withdrawn.<sup>408</sup>

### **The Regular Services at the Stimate**

In the ordinary care of the Church at the Stimate, there was never the element of display. The services, however, were conducted with dignity and with exemplary diligence.

Holy Mass was always celebrated punctually at its appointed time. There was an evident decorum in its celebration, and in the administration of the Sacraments. The early Fathers were kept very busy hearing the many Confessions, and also in distributing Holy Communion.

As we have already seen, there were special services held for the opening of the school year. The Marian Oratory, too, had its regularly scheduled devotions. In addition to these, there were regular weekly devotions held at the Stimate. Fr. Bertoni inaugurated the Friday Devotions in honor of the "Five Most Sacred Wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ." They were instituted on the advice and the

<sup>402</sup> Doc. XXIII, pp. 252, 260, ff.; XXIV, p. 277, f.

<sup>403</sup> Doc. XVI, p. 567; Mss. n. 11.

<sup>404</sup> Title Page of Vol. I.

<sup>405</sup> Summar., p.89, par. 5; Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, no date, Mss. n.67-5.

<sup>406</sup> Doc. XX, p.122, f., n. 7, Intr. & Text; Summar. p. 102, par. 61.

<sup>407</sup> Doc. XX, p. 123.

<sup>408</sup> It was inserted by order of Bishop Grassi.

encouragement of the Vicar General of the Diocese, the Marquis, Monsignor Dennis Dionisi. It was a service especially dear to the heart of Fr. Bertoni. He kept for himself the privilege of delivering the weekly sermon, until he could no longer climb the altar steps. There were even a few times when he was carried up to the altar to preach.<sup>409</sup>

His sermons would usually last about one half hour. They would be preceded by the singing of the "Stages of the Passion." He would then be followed by the recitation of some prayers in honor of the Five Wounds, before the "Altar of the Crucifixion." His talks were directed to present an understanding and the practice of Christian virtues. His intention was to further the worship of Christ Crucified.

Fr. Bertoni would be anguished "to find Christ neglected, or to see the love of Him overlooked, either through the lack of faith, or the passions of man. He used to say that men do not love Jesus Christ, because they do not reflect on His Passion, "the sign of His charity. Contemplate Christ suffering - and you could not help but love Him."<sup>410</sup>

Fr. Bertoni petitioned several Popes to enrich this devotion with indulgences. His reason for one petition was "to animate the faithful even more to venerate Christ Crucified." Another petition was sent later, and the reason given was that "the piety of the faithful toward the Passion of Our Lord - a piety that, sad to say, each day seems less fervent - with God's help might be enkindled anew." Indulgences "would greatly increase the attendance of the faithful to hear the Word of God."

Pope Gregory XVI graciously granted a number of indulgences.

There was a Plenary Indulgence that could be obtained, under the usual conditions. There was another Plenary Indulgence that could be obtained on six First Fridays of the year, which days were to be specified by the Local Ordinary. There were also indulgences of seven years and seven quarantines for every other Friday. A special Plenary Indulgence could be obtained, under the usual conditions, on the Friday following the IIIrd Sunday of Lent. This was the old liturgical commemoration of the Feast of the Sacred Stigmata. It was applicable to the souls in Purgatory, from the First Vespers, until the sunset of the Feast itself.<sup>411</sup>

### **The More Solemn Observances**

Fr. Giacobbe has left a description of the observance of the more solemn Feasts. He writes: "As for the solemnities (if we can use that word to describe the observances Fr. Bertoni introduced in his Church), he had a definite rule. All

<sup>409</sup> Doc. XII, p. 61, f.; Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, June 9, 1826, Mss.74-7.

<sup>410</sup> Sermon for the Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis d'Assisi, Lib. Stimm., Verona; Microfilm at the S. Cong. of Rites.

<sup>411</sup> Petition with Rescript, Apr. 23, 1844, Arch. Stimm. Verona.

solemnity was intended only to reap the fruit of solid piety and devotion, and never to distract from it."

The principal special Feasts observed in the Church, were first and foremost, the Holy Espousals of Mary and Joseph. Thus, on January 23rd each year, the Holy Patrons of the Congregation were commemorated - the Main Altar had already been dedicated to their honor. September 17th was also solemnly observed, as it was the old titular feast of the Church, the Stigmata of St. Francis. Both of these were "First Class Feasts," and a Plenary Indulgence could be obtained on these days as well. October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis, was a "Feast of the II<sup>nd</sup> Class," and a Plenary Indulgence could, however, be obtained. Fr. Bertoni absolutely forbade any pompous program of music, as well as any distracting decorations. There was no noisy advertisement of the solemnity being observed. He did direct that there be the harmonious pealing of the Church bells. There was no single Solemn High Mass, but as many priests as possible were invited to celebrate Low Masses. The Mass vestments, however, that he obtained for the Church, were always most precious.

The Church was frequently crowded mornings for Confessions the evening service consisted in a few prayers, and a brief sermon by one of the priests. The Congregation joined in the singing of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Then, followed Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament and the veneration of the relic.<sup>412</sup>

During the last years of Fr. Bertoni's life, greater solemnity was accorded to the Feast of the Sacred Stigmata, as we have already mentioned.

Holy Week was always observed with much solemnity. Fr. Bertoni was celebrant on these days only a few times, due to his many long illnesses.<sup>413</sup> Gregorian Chant was the rule of the Church, that was strictly maintained. Other Festivities of the year were also observed at the Stimate, in the customary manner.

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The observations of two successive Bishops of Verona, made after their Pastoral Visitations, have come down to us. They both bear eloquent testimony:

Bishop Grasser wrote in 1828: "We declare that everything corresponds perfectly to our desires and expectation. There only remains to laud the zeal of the priests who have assembled here for the glory of God, and for the good of souls, especially the youth. We, therefore, exhort them to advance even further in the ways of the Lord."<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Doc. XII, p. 62, f.; XXVI, p. 513.

<sup>413</sup> Register of Masses, Libr. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>414</sup> Doc. XVI, n.2, Text c), p. 90.

Eight years later, Bishop Mutti stated that he had the “pleasure of finding everything beyond his expectations, as regards the Church and the elegance of the sacred appurtenances. This is certainly due to the owner, Reverend Gaspar Bertoni, and to those who work with him for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of souls. We impart to all, with joyful soul, our paternal blessing.”<sup>415</sup>



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<sup>415</sup> I.c., n. 3, Text b), p. 94.

## CHAPTER VII

**FR. BERTONI'S ILLNESSES**

Serious illness, as we have seen, had visited Fr. Bertoni for the first time in October of 1812. This was followed by his relapse of August 1813, and then again, by that of May 1814. This suffering was but a preview of what was to characterize the remainder of his life.

In 1817, he was afflicted with what was described as a "coetaneous eruption." Although this was not serious in itself, it did seem to indicate that the germ of the military fever had not completely left him. This is what had caused his grave illness earlier.<sup>416</sup>

In 1819, he was seriously ill once again. By this time, he had already taken up again the special Instructions or Meditations to the Seminarians. It was on this occasion that the young "Acolytes" prepared a commemorative booklet that gives us a record of this relapse. Fr. Louis Jerome Trevisani, known throughout Verona, as the "Master," enjoyed the confidence of the Bishop perhaps more than anyone else. It was he and Fr. Nicholas Galvani who had suggested Fr. Bertoni's name to the Bishop as the Spiritual Director of the Seminary. Fr. Trevisani wrote to Mother di Canossa that he was "quite disturbed" at Fr. Bertoni's frequent relapses. She wrote back to Fr. Trevisani to encourage him: "Do not be upset about good Fr. Bertoni - I am sure that he will be all right".<sup>417</sup>

Fr. Bertoni did recover this time, but toward the end of 1821 and the early months of 1822, he was seriously sick once more. By this time, however, Fr. Trevisani was already dead. The seminarians offered special prayers for his recovery. Fr. Bertoni was still their Spiritual Director and was also Diocesan Scrutineer of Vocations.<sup>418</sup>

**Serious Leg Inflammation: 1824-1828**

Perhaps during that May of 1824, and certainly during the latter half of this year, Fr. Bertoni was struck down again. His usual 'phrase to express these recurring illnesses was: "We are back to 'school' - this is the 'school' that God wills I attend!" He was suffering excruciating pain, and this was to last for a long time.

**The "Holy Prince"**

Through Mother Leopoldina Naudet, Fr. Bertoni came in contact with a young priest whom they referred to as "the Holy Prince." He was Fr. Alexander Leopold Hohenloe. At this period Fr. Hohenloe was about 30 years of age, and was later to be the Titular Bishop of Sardica. He had achieved the reputation of being

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<sup>416</sup> Doc. XX, p. 137, n. 2, Intr.

<sup>417</sup> Doc. XXIV, n. 3, p. 174, Intr.

<sup>418</sup> I.c., n. 4, p. 276; Intr. & Texts a) & b).

able to work cures, if the suffering person would unite with him in prayer, even from afar. He used to cite this passage: "If two of you come together on earth, whatever they ask, will be done to them, by My Father, Who is in heaven."<sup>419</sup>

Fr. Bertoni and the "Holy Prince" continued their prayers over the entire four year period of the leg infection. It did not please God, however, that the "wonder worker" would restore Fr. Bertoni's health miraculously. At one period of his illness, Fr. Bertoni remarked that this was his own fault. He wrote that "his own faith was so poor, that it could even thwart the saints." He then added: "I cannot deny, however, that the prayers of the 'Holy Prince' have helped me somewhat. They have even overcome the obstacles that I have placed in the way."<sup>420</sup> During this prolonged suffering, Fr. Bertoni wrote: "I think that Divine Providence plays certain jokes on me. They leave me utterly speechless - but, may God be praised!"<sup>421</sup>

Still another time he wrote, "God wills to multiply His miracles. Sometimes, though, it seems that he is not performing any. So many say so much - but I say nothing, but leave it all up to Him, Who knows what is best. It is sufficient to recall: 'Whether we live, or die, we are the Lord's' "<sup>422</sup>

In April 1825, Fr. Bertoni expressed once again his continual need for prayers in his malady. He wrote: "I believe that not once, but many times, my life was saved by that man of God."<sup>423</sup> He later wrote: "I am grateful to your Most Reverence Highness for your efficacious prayers. They both restored my life and healed my leg."<sup>424</sup>

### **First Phase: 1824-1825**

This inflammation was located in the right leg. There was an ugly swelling that appeared first on the shin, and then extended to the knee. It soon developed into a hard mass, like a tumor. Despite various treatments by the doctors, the infection spread to the thigh. Surgery seemed to be the only solution.<sup>425</sup>

Fr. Bertoni agreed to it all, through what he felt was obedience. During those cruel operations, he would pray, especially repeating over and over again the "Hail Mary." Once in a while, when the pain was unbearable, his voice could be heard. He would then apologize for giving so little edification. The surgeon answered on one occasion: "You may say as many prayers as you wish, provided that you let us operate." Fr. Bertoni replied: "Only those who are masters of their trade can do as they wish."

<sup>419</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 731, n.24, Intr., p. 733, Text.

<sup>420</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 76-9.

<sup>421</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 76-8.

<sup>422</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 72-14.

<sup>423</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 74-5.

<sup>424</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. 3, p. 741.

<sup>425</sup> Doc. XX, p. 136, n. 35; XXVI, p. 148.

Another time the doctor said: "We have been rather rough on you, haven't we, Fr. Gaspar?" He answered: "Not too bad - the good judgment and charity you have shown in my behalf are more than I deserve."

When they operated on his thigh, the pain was so severe that he cried out. There were more than 200 painful incisions made on this extremely sensitive area. In addition to these, there were numberless lancing, more or less deep - heat applications, and pressure applied to the infected area, in an effort to' draw it out. The entire leg and thigh were so cut up that the flesh was stripped practically all the way up to his side. Still, the angry looking mass would not heal. Then poultices of gauze were applied which tore the sensitive flesh and opened the sore once again. Next packs of a special preparation were placed on the open sore so that it would not heal over until it had had a chance to drain thoroughly. To absorb the drainage, cotton was applied, after a seton thread was inserted to keep the incision open. Fr. Bertoni was directed to lie perfectly still all through this process.<sup>426</sup>

There were occasions when the doctor's assistant could not bear to watch. The surgeon, Dr. Louis Manzoni, was much respected in his time. He, too, was amazed at the amount of pain that Fr. Bertoni was able to endure. He stated later that his patient never manifested the "least sign of impatience, anger or complaint. I have never seen a patient endure my surgery as he did; I consider him to be a Saint."<sup>427</sup> "The Lord keeps me in bed, and under the knife! May He be blessed! 'I will bless the Lord at all times!' As long as He is served, is all that I care." He did ask good people to pray for him "that God may continually grant me the patience that He does bestow. 'Without Me, you can do nothing!' "<sup>428</sup>

He asked his closest associates that they continually pray for him: "Please pray, pray, my brothers, that God may grant me, and conserve me in patience. Pray, because I do feel a great, great need of it."<sup>429</sup>

The agony of these months can well be imagined. From the summer of 1824, until the following summer, he suffered much disappointment. In April, he wrote: "My thigh is not too good, and I do not feel any better, no matter what the doctors say."<sup>430</sup> In May, he wrote:

"Tomorrow, once again, they are going to cut me."<sup>431</sup> By the end of that July, however, he did feel somewhat improved - "If appearances can be believed, as I have been fooled so many times."<sup>432</sup>

<sup>426</sup> Doc. XX, pp. 138, f.; XXVI, p. 418, f.

<sup>427</sup> Doc. XXXI, n. 2 p. 618.

<sup>428</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 727, n. 21, Intr.

<sup>429</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 421.

<sup>430</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. n. 74-5.

<sup>431</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 71-3.

<sup>432</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 77-12.

This time he did heal fairly well. On September 15th, after fourteen long months, once again, he did say Mass. He was, however, carried to the altar.<sup>433</sup>

### **A Brief Respite: 1826**

He was not completely recovered. There were continual indications of an eventual recurrence. By the end of 1825, and throughout the entire subsequent year, he was able to handle "a great many intricate matters." He used to say these besieged him all the time. When he was able to leave his room, at long last, it was recorded that he seemed to jump through the door!<sup>434</sup> He went back to teaching school, although there were times he would have to miss it, as he was confined to his room, and unable to say Mass.<sup>435</sup>

In 1826, he was able to give vent to his priestly zeal, during the additional six months the Jubilee Indulgences were extended after the Holy Year of 1825.<sup>436</sup> Despite his "poor leg," he wrote he was able to take care of some matters that necessitated his leaving the house.<sup>437</sup>

### **A Jansenistic Defection**

Both his superiors and his penitents brought him many cases for solution. Often, these were very delicate and difficult in nature. We will cite here only one such instance, involving the defection of a Jansenist. In this case, Fr. Bertoni found himself at odds with some individuals in high station. He had already expressed his grave concern, after reading about "the spread that the little Church of Utrecht was attempting." This Church was the cradle of Jansenism.

He also decried the activity of the French in furthering the so-called "Gallican Propositions." He wrote: "They have devised a new means of strengthening the camp of the Jansenists". The specter of Jansenism dividing the Church was feared in many circles. The French Catholics, and the "Ultramontanists", were separated into those who "followed Bossuet," and those who remained with the Pope.<sup>438</sup> Fr. Bertoni at this time expressed a high regard for Lammenais, the champion of the Apostolic See. For his troubles, Lammenais was condemned by the Parliament. Later, Fr. Bertoni was to express his profound regret when Lammenais toppled, and was himself a rebel.<sup>439</sup>

Fr. Bertoni was put to the task of settling a problem caused by Jansenist. Murmuring spread far and wide concerning his involvement in the case, which was a matter of grave concern to him.

<sup>433</sup> Register of Masses, Libr. Stimm. Verona.

<sup>434</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Oct. 16, 1825, Mss. n. 71-5.

<sup>435</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 75-3; also Register of Masses, Libr. Stimm. Verona.

<sup>436</sup> Letter: Bertoni to Naudet, Mss., nn. 67-21, 76-6.

<sup>437</sup> *Ib.*, June 3, 1826, Microfilm: June 9, 1826, Mss. n. 71-6.

<sup>438</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 75-2.

<sup>439</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. 24, pp. 730-733, Intr. & Text.



He wrote: "I did not volunteer for this, but I was asked, or rather, I was ordered to do so by my superior. The Bishop has asked for my considered opinion that I was to offer only after mature reflection on the nature of this defection."

"I thought it over, I prayed and I asked counsel from others.

I gave whatever advice which before God, I felt that I should. Whatever I did, I considered it to be most in accord with the laws of the Church, and in God's best interests. I admit that others have disagreed with my reasons. I could not accept their advice, as it was not in accord with the laws of the Church. This case will be as a knife in the throat of anyone who wants to defend that defection."

Fr. Bertoni then went on to illustrate his point: "One of the friends, and most ardent defenders of this Jansenist, withdrew entirely from his support, as soon as he learned of his defection. The superiors of others involved in defending this evil, have acted similarly. 'Iniquity only deceives itself.'

"However," Fr. Bertoni concluded, "It is necessary that there be heresies so that the strong among us be clearly manifested."

He then asked for prayers: "that we might give proof before God of our faith. Pray, too, that weak souls be not misled in such great dangers of seduction."

His handling of this case was characteristic of him. The case itself, too, was typical of the sort, and the gravity of the difficulties that were entrusted to him. We would have known nothing at all of this case, had not certain criticisms and indiscretions leveled at him reached Mother Naudet. From his letter in response to one of hers, these few particulars have come down to us. He wrote that he was "most grateful and appreciative for her charitable concern." He also thanked her for not asking for all sorts of explanations of the case.<sup>440</sup>

### **Second Phase of his Illness: 1827**

This whole period was only a truce in his sickness. It seemed to Fr. Bertoni that Divine Providence had granted him "temporarily that amount of health that was necessary to go on, and to accomplish something."<sup>441</sup> In February of 1827, however, we read that his malady had returned.<sup>442</sup> On the Feast of St. Joseph, he wrote that a full relapse had occurred.<sup>443</sup> Again, we read in his letters, that "he was nailed to his bed!" Once more, he "blessed God, while under the knife."<sup>444</sup>

<sup>440</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 75-3.

<sup>441</sup> *Ib.*, Mss., n. 67-21.

<sup>442</sup> *Ib.*, Mss., n. 77-9.

<sup>443</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 77-11, St. Joseph, 1828.

<sup>444</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. l n. 71-8, May 11, 1827.

By mid July, it seemed that his life needed the blessing of God on all the remedies that were being employed.<sup>445</sup> In late December, practically all hope for his recovery was given up.

Verona then demonstrated the affection she had for him. Many among the clergy and the laity felt they were threatened with a personal tragedy. His imminent death was considered as such, both for the Church and for the city. Days of adoration were organized, and there was a marked increase in attendance at Benediction. Services were held at St. Firmus' and also at St. Paul's in Camp Marzio. A special period exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament was held at the "Madonna del Popolo" in the Cathedral. Public and private prayers were offered in a number of Churches and in many homes. There were general and individual acts of sacrifice offered for his recovery, as well as pilgrimages. Little by little, Fr. Bertoni did improve. By New Year's Day, there was a marked improvement. It seemed to be the beginning of a complete cure. The ugly swelling in his leg subsided, and the incisions seemed almost healed. Here and there it was rumored about that a miracle had been performed.<sup>446</sup> Fr. Bertoni was allowed to sit up, and then after a while, he was permitted to walk about his room. Finally, he was able to say Mass once again. On February 27, 1827, he celebrated his first Mass in over 11 months.<sup>447</sup>

### Third Phase: 1828

In the second week of March 1828, Fr. Bertoni mentioned again that all was not well: "I still do not feel right. I do say Mass, but my legs bother me, especially the right one, which is troublesome. It is swollen and gives certain signs that are just all too familiar. But, 'Thy Will be done!'"<sup>448</sup> Soon he was right back where it all started. The swelling had spread from his foot up to his knee. The ugly sore had returned, and it was extremely painful even to touch it. Hot packs were again prescribed, and we read on the Vigil of the Feast of St. Joseph, that he was still confined to bed.<sup>449</sup>

Before too long," the Lord allowed him to be up and around once more. He was able to say his Breviary and celebrate Mass. He wrote: "The infection on my knee, has broken up, and it is now draining. We will see what the Lord has in mind!" In another letter, we read: "Here we go again! They had to open me up once more!"<sup>450</sup> At long last, the leg healed, and the surgeons were satisfied with it.<sup>451</sup> The infection finally faded away, during the year of 1828.

It is true that all traces of the infection were gone. But, the scars of this terrible ordeal, and its after effects, he would bear with him until the end of his life.

<sup>445</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 71-9, July 20, 1827.

<sup>446</sup> Doc. XX, p. 138, f.; XXIV, p.419, f.; XXVIII. p. 589, Text a).

<sup>447</sup> Register of Masses.

<sup>448</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Feb. & Mar. 9, 1828, Mss. nn. 71 - 11-17.

<sup>449</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 77-11, St. Joseph, 1828.

<sup>450</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 77-6, 74-1.

<sup>451</sup> *Ib.*, Mss. n. 75-8.

His health was never completely restored. There were certain periods of time when he was quite well, but there were many others that confined him to his room and to his bed.<sup>452</sup> In a sense, for the remainder of his life, Fr. Bertoni was a convalescent, until his last illness. Fr. Giacobbe tells us that for the last 11 years of his life, he was practically an invalid.



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<sup>452</sup> E.g., on June 10, 1836. Fr. Modesto Cainer wrote: "Today, after several months, our beloved Superior celebrated privately, on a side altar, assisted by Fr. Cainer. All praise to Jesus, Mary, St. Joseph, St. Ignatius and St. Teresa of Jesus [i.e. St. Teresa of Avila]. God grant that through their merits, he might continue to progress, 'For the Greater Honor and Glory of God,' - in spite of the devil." 1839, Cfr. Doc. XX, p. 195; XXVI, p. 455, f.

## CHAPTER VIII

**FR. BERTONI AND THE NEW BISHOP, HIS EXCELLENCY, JOSEPH GRASSER****Two Friends and Protectors of Fr. Bertoni**

The venerable old Bishop of Verona, Bishop Innocent Liruti, died on August 11, 1827. As we have seen, he had repeatedly shown his confidence in Fr. Bertoni. In 1822, Bishop Liruti sent a report to Rome, praising him highly. The Bishop was over 80 when he sent this laudatory report on Fr. Bertoni, who was 45. Bishop Liruti described Fr. Bertoni, not only as “learned in letters,” but also “to be venerated for his piety.” The Bishop described the other priests at the Stimate, as “emulators of his virtues.”<sup>453</sup>

**The Marquis, Monsignor Denis Dionisi**

After the Bishop’s death, the ordinary government of the Diocese passed to the Vicar Capitular, Monsignor Denis Dionisi. This illustrious member of the noble Dionisi family, had been Vicar General since 1807.

Fr. Lenotti tells us that the Monsignor, too, had for Fr. Bertoni “a great esteem and affection. He continued to entrust him with the more difficult cases, which required great prudence. He often visited Fr. Bertoni, both when he was well and also when he was sick in bed.”<sup>454</sup> Fr. Giacobbe has recorded that “Fr. Bertoni often times had to use all the persuasion at his command, to refuse the generous donations of the good Monsignor.”<sup>455</sup>

We have already seen his paternal concern for Fr. Bertoni, while he was assigned to St. Firmus’ Parish. Then, again, in 1813, Monsignor Dionisi asked him to visit the condemned apostate priest, who was awaiting execution.

It was said of the Vicar General, that one day while he was going past the Stimate, sometime after Fr. Bertoni had gone there in 1816, the Monsignor turned to his companion, and remarked: “Do you see that house over there? A Saint lives in it.”<sup>456</sup>

Then when the plague broke out in the prison, again the Monsignor turned to the Stimate for help.

In 1818, the Abbot Angelo Mai came to Verona. He was doing research, studying the codices of the Chapter of the Canons. Monsignor Dionisi suggested that Fr. Bertoni should assist Abbot Mai, who was a great student of the ancient

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<sup>453</sup> Doc. XVI, n. 1, p. 86, Text b).

<sup>454</sup> Doc. XX, p. 166.

<sup>455</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 542.

<sup>456</sup> Doc. XX, p. 119, n.3.

parchments. The Monsignor stated that Fr. Bertoni was both intelligent, and that he knew his way around the library quite well.<sup>457</sup>

We have also already recorded the fact that it was Monsignor Dionisi who suggested to Fr. Bertoni the Friday Devotions to be held at the Stimate. These were the Devotions in honor of the "Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ," popularly known as the "Devotions for a Good Death."

One day Monsignor Dionisi got the idea to make Fr. Bertoni a Canon of the Cathedral. He told Fr. Bertoni of these intentions of his - and the response was immediate! He later remarked that it was unbelievable to see and hear Fr. Bertoni's reaction. The Monsignor stated that he was told that Fr. Bertoni was unable to sleep several nights in succession. He prayed that another might receive the honor. Finally, the good Monsignor told Fr. Bertoni that another had been appointed, and that the danger had passed!<sup>458</sup>

Monsignor Dionisi was also Vicar General under the new Bishop; he died in 1831.

### **The New Bishop**

The new Bishop of Verona was Bishop Joseph Grasser, who was transferred from Treviso. His appointment was made public, the latter part of 1828. He formally took possession of the See of Verona on March 24, 1829. Fr. Bertoni described him as: "One who truly desires what is best. He wants to see for himself, and to be informed of everything, right down to the last detail. He is a man who is hurried by nothing - but he is very active and efficient. He is most prudent, and courteous and good; in brief, he is a man of God."

Fr. Bertoni also stated that "he was a Bishop who enjoys the esteem of the government and the confidence of the Emperor."<sup>459</sup> Because he was Tyrolean by birth, and had a German pronunciation of the language, his entry was marred by some demonstrations. A number of the clergy also took part in these protests. However, a decade later, when Bishop Grasser died, at the age of only 57, he was universally mourned throughout Verona. His charity and his administration were long remembered.<sup>460</sup>

Fr. Bertoni already had a high regard for Bishop Grasser as a man. To this was added his deep respect for the office that he held.

Fr. Bertoni had now recovered, as we have seen, from his long and painful illness, and so he was called upon to give the customary annual retreat to some of the Diocesan Clergy. As soon as he had completed preaching it, Fr. Giacobbe tells

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<sup>457</sup> I.c, p. 185; Doc. XXVI, p. 568.

<sup>458</sup> Doc. XX, p. 166, f.; XXVI, p. 547, f.

<sup>459</sup> Letters: Bertoni-Naudet, Mar. 28, 1829, Mss. n.72-3; one without date, n. 75-12.

<sup>460</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "Collezione Orazioni Funebre," Verona, 1866, Vol. I, p. 96, ff.

us, he gave the retreatants an example of the profound respect that he had recommended in his talks for the Bishop. Bishop Grasser came into the sacristy to greet all the priests who had just finished their retreat. In the presence of them all, Fr. Bertoni spontaneously knelt down, and kissed the Bishop's feet, as if he were the Pope. This incident took them all by surprise, and it was never forgotten.<sup>461</sup>

Another time, Fr. Bertoni happened to run into the Bishop alone one of Verona's downtown streets. Once again, he knelt down right where they met, in front of the Bishop, as though this were the usual thing to do.<sup>462</sup>

Fr. Bertoni and Bishop Grasser had the highest regard, one for the other. Fr. Bertoni had for him "such esteem and veneration, and a sincere filial love. The Bishop frequently honored him with his visits, often consulted him in grave matters and was seen to hold long conversations with Fr. Bertoni."<sup>463</sup>

The Bishop, on his part, had a real affection for Fr. Bertoni, and often referred to him as *limy Fr. Gaspar!*" One day' the Bishop remarked: "I would not in the least be surprised, if I should outlive Fr. Gaspar, that I would hear that the Church had designated him for the honors of the Altar."<sup>464</sup>

Bishop Grasser was "always most gracious also to the members of the Congregation. When he confirmed Fr. Gaspar in the position of the Pro-Synodal Examiner in 1833, he showed the esteem and the affection that he has for this holy Congregation."<sup>465</sup>

A complaint was once registered with the Bishop that the bells of the Stimmate were disturbing someone's sleep too early in the morning. The Bishop retorted that such a complaint was merely a cover to give vent to the spleen that was directed at "those excellent priests. With their example, they edify the entire city; with their tuition free school, they are making a significant contribution to the morals and the education of this city. As for their bells, they have a most agreeable sound, and are quite distant from the Palace section." The complain had come from this sector. Furthermore, the Bishop went on, "at the break of dawn, they are but an invitation to begin the day with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." Therefore, the complaint was disallowed.<sup>466</sup>

### **A Triduum of Penance Preached by Fr. Bertoni**

In 1831, Bishop Grasser ordered a triduum in his Cathedral as a penitential means to be offered to turn aside a grave threat to Verona. A terrible epidemic of cholera was coming down from the North and seriously menaced the city. The

<sup>461</sup> Doc. XXV, p. 285, f., n. 3; XXVI, p. 554.

<sup>462</sup> Doc. XX, p. 170.

<sup>463</sup> I.c., p. 170, f.

<sup>464</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 571.

<sup>465</sup> Doc. XVI, n. 2, Text d), p. 91.

<sup>466</sup> I.c., Text a), p. 88.

Bishop asked Fr. Bertoni to preach on the supreme rights of God and His divine hatred for sin. He wanted the sermons to emphasize the efficacy of prayer as a remedy for every pestilence, and that penance engenders a well founded hope in the mercy of God. The infallible promises of God were to be stressed, and the proofs that God has given to these promises.<sup>467</sup>

This time the epidemic did not prove to be serious. In five years time, however, cholera would claim many victims. This later plague would bring into clear light the endless charity of the Bishop, and the talent of organization to aid the victims, that his heart manifested. The Bishop's performance at this time of crisis cancelled forever the prejudices of many of his flock.<sup>468</sup>

### **Retreats for the Clergy**

With the Bishop's high opinion of Fr. Bertoni, he extended even further his apostolate, especially in behalf of the clergy. We do not know how many times Bishop Grassi appointed Fr. Bertoni to preach the annual retreat to the priests, nor how many times he was assigned to preach to the Seminarians, both at the Stimate and at the Seminary, where the young men would make their proximate preparation for the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe has recalled a Retreat that Fr. Bertoni preached during Lent of 1843. It was conducted in the Chapel of the Stimate, dedicated to the Immaculate Conceptions. We are told that Fr. Bertoni preached 40 separate sermons between his "Instructions" and his "Meditations," on one single text of the Apocalypse: "And to the Angel of Philadelphia, write: 'These things saith the Holy One and the true one, he that hath the key of David; he that openeth, and no man shutteth, shutteth and no man openeth.'" (Apoc. III, 5). Fr. Giacobbe noted: "What fecundity there is in the Divine Word! I can only admire the fecundity of the lips of him who developed this verse for us - he who lovingly meditates on it, day and night!"<sup>469</sup>

When his health impeded him from accepting so much work, or when it kept him from completing what he had begun, there were those of his Community who were "Ready for all tasks." Frequently Fr. Bertoni called upon Fr. Bragato or Fr. Marani, who would step in and take his place. Fr. Bragato took his place as Pro-Synodal Examiner<sup>470</sup>, and Fr. Marani eventually succeeded him as Diocesan Scrutineer of Vocations.<sup>471</sup> Bishop Grassi, too, began to count on these two priests more and more. They were men endowed with pleasing personalities, as well as capabilities.

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<sup>467</sup> C. C. Bresciani, o.c., p. 96, f.

<sup>468</sup> Mss. n. 33.

<sup>469</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 506.

<sup>470</sup> Year 1834.

<sup>471</sup> Doc. XXXV. p. 744.

## CHAPTER IX

**A PRIEST FROM THE STIMMATE AT THE COURT OF THE HAPSBURGS**

Fr. Louis Bragato had succeeded the renowned Fr. Louis Trevisani as the Diocesan Prefect of Studies in the Seminary. At the request of the Bishop, Fr. Bertoni was directed to allow one of his men to fill in this vacancy on the Seminary Faculty. Moreover, Fr. Bragato now about 40 years of age, was asked by Fr. Bertoni to return to the Seminary classroom to take a course of "Methodology," with the young seminarians. An imperial decree had made this course obligatory for the teaching profession. Fr. Bragato found himself right at home with his much younger fellow students. The Professor of that course manifested every mark of respect toward his illustrious pupil. One day, this became known to Bishop Grasser. Even though he could have procured an exemption for him, he did not prevent him from making this humiliation.<sup>472</sup>

**July 5, 1835**

Fr. Giacobbe tells us that Bishop Grasser realized that he had in Fr. Bragato "a treasure of knowledge and virtue." When Ferdinand of the Hapsburgs succeeded Francis I on the Imperial Throne of Vienna, he asked three Bishops to suggest an Italian Confessor for his wife, the Empress Maria Anna Carolina Pia of Savoy. Bishop Grass was one of the three to whom this request was sent. He then made his way to the Stimate on July 1, 1835, and was closeted in conference for a long time with Fr. Bertoni and Fr. Bragato. For the next three days, Fathers Bertoni and Bragato, and the three oldest priests in the house, had many "secret conferences, in all their free moments, both day and night. Finally, on July 5th, the Community was assembled."

At this period in its history, the Community at the Stimate was at its height - at least, it was enjoying its best days that Fr. Bertoni would see during his own lifetime. There were twelve priests, four brothers and two students for the priesthood - one 18, and the other 15.

They all gathered in the recreation room, and formed a circle around Fr. Bertoni. He then revealed to them the secret: "As it is the will of God, manifested to us through our most zealous Bishop, our brother, Fr. Bragato, will leave us and depart for Vienna. He will leave tomorrow, the 6th of July, on the 'Express.' Each of us will pray for him that God might bless the work he is about to undertake - 'Hallowed be Thy Name - Thy Will be done!' "

The amazement of the Community was registered in the house Chronicle: "How is it that a humble priest, from our insignificant Stimate, is assigned to the Court of Vienna!? Let us .lower our heads, and adore the inscrutable judgment of God!" In the Community, there was "much rejoicing." We can only imagine the

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<sup>472</sup> Giacobbe, "Funeral Eulogies", Verona, 1915, pp. 125, f.



cordial best wishes that were heaped on their departing companion, and his expressions of gratitude to them.

The Chronicle goes on: "Blessings anti thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father, Who has deigned to make use of one of us, for so great an assignment in His service." The Chronicle then added a sobering thought: "May this God, Who is so good, bless us by sending more candidates - good ones, healthy and capable. Otherwise, what will become of us?"

On this occasion, Fr. Cainer expressed his misgivings: "The Stimmate will have to be exalted and blessed by the faith and holiness of our Superior - how we need them now!"<sup>473</sup> Perhaps Fr. Cainer could have reflected that the Sacred Stigmata are only glorious after the Resurrection. The Stigmata on earth can only mean Calvary - their future was in the hands of God.

### **The Departure of Fr. Bragato for Vienna**

On the following day, Fr. Bragato left on the "most important assignment that was awaiting him." He left with the injunction to fill that lofty post, but to adhere strictly to the canon always observed at the Stimmate - "to render his services absolutely gratuitously. "

Chancellor Von Metternich soon was amazed, as well as edified, at Fr. Bragato's observance of this Rule. The Chancellor spoke with the Sovereigns to overcome Fr. Bragato's reluctance to leave the humble dwelling that he had in Vienna. He insisted that the Confessor should take up residence within the Imperial Palace itself. This would mean a new policy at the Court of the Apostolic Emperor.<sup>474</sup>

As a result, on November 14, 1835, Fr. Louis Bragato "moved into the Court, with the title of 'Honorary Chaplain.' He was to receive no reimbursement, and was to retain the humble habit as was worn at the Stimmate."<sup>475</sup>

Soon, however, it seemed to be offensive to the Sovereign decorum that the Court Chaplain was receiving no fixed salary. Fr. Bragato was finally imposed upon to accept an agreed emolument. "By order of Fr. Bertoni, he was strictly prohibited from sending any of it to the Stimmate. He was directed to use it, as alms for pious works, which he did."<sup>476</sup>

### **Confessor and Almsmoner of the Empress**

Upon meeting Fr. Bragato, the Empress from the start considered him as a true father of her soul. She soon appointed him the administrator of her extensive program of almsgiving. Even from afar, Fr. Bertoni continued to display his paternal

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<sup>473</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 1, Text b), p. 198, f.

<sup>474</sup> Doc. XX, p. 180; Giacobbe, o.c., p. 127.

<sup>475</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 1, Text b), p. 599.

<sup>476</sup> Doc. XX, p. 180.

concern for Fr. Bragato. He wrote from Verona: "Take good care of your health, so that those old maladies of your youth, might not return."<sup>477</sup> This seems to have been a reference to the period when Fr. Bragato was spitting up blood, a number of years earlier. How well Fr. Bragato heeded this advice from his Superior is proven by the fact that he lived to be more than 84 years of age.

As Fr. Bragato had been Chaplain and Almoner of the Court since his first arrival there, just before their abdication in 1848, they offered to intercede to obtain the mitre for him. He graciously declined the suggestion, and was much gratified by Fr. Bertoni's reaction to this news: "You do owe gratitude," Fr. Bertoni wrote, "to the one who made you this offer. But, you have chosen to heed Fr. Galvani's old motto: 'Be humble and unobserved, like the animals of the field in their dens, and children at their game in their hiding place.'"

'He will save the humble of spirit!' "<sup>478</sup>

Fr. Bragato remained with the Sovereigns after their abdication.

He accompanied them to the improvised Court at Prague. Five years later, he was unable to refuse the Titular Hungarian Abbacy that Franz Joseph procured for him. Fr. Bragato, however, never used the mitre which was the symbol of this honor.

Pope Pius IX conferred a number of ecclesiastical honors upon him. In 1846, he was named "Secret Supernumerarius Chamberlain"; in 1852, he was appointed a Protonotary Apostolic and in 1866, a Domestic Prelate, with very ample privileges.

Until his dying day, Fr. Bragato led the exact same life, amidst the splendors of the Court, that he did at the Stimate. He retained down through the years the same spirit as did his distant companions. He was always simply called "Fr. Louis," or "Fr. Bragato." His greatest happiness came in those times that he would get a brief respite from his duties, and was able to return to his native land to be with his brothers in Religion. He would fit right into the community, eat with his confreres, and live again, for a time at least, the common life with them.<sup>479</sup>

### **The Kindnesses of the Court Chaplain**

Because of his prestige in the Court, Fr. Bragato was able to extend a great many kindnesses. He was sought out by representatives of new, as well as of old Religious Institutes, that needed a favor from the Sovereigns. The Society of Jesus for many years considered him as one of her benefactors.<sup>480</sup> Throughout the Province of Veneto, the "Ministers of the Sick" (the Camillians), the "Company of Mary," who were dedicated to the care of the Deaf-Mutes, and the "Sisters of

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<sup>477</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 755.

<sup>478</sup> I.c., "And He will save the humble of spirit."

<sup>479</sup> Giacobbe, o.c., p. 127.

<sup>480</sup> Correspondence: Bragato-Prep. Gen. of the Soc. of Jesus, Gen. Arch., Rome.

Mercy," all established in his native Verona, all were recipients of his efficacious assistance. The "Sons of Mary Immaculate," founded in Brescia, by the Venerable Pavoni<sup>481</sup>, the "Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy," founded in Vicenza, by Bishop Farina<sup>482</sup>, "The Schools of Charity," founded by two Counts, Fathers Anthony Angelo and Mark Anthony Cavanis of Venice<sup>483</sup>, and "The Institute of Charity," founded by Fr. Rosmini<sup>484</sup> - all received help from Fr. Bragato. These are but a few names that occur to us, without making any particular research on the matter.

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As for the Congregation at the Stimate, "many times the Empress wanted to make a substantial offering" to Fr. Bertoni. There is recorded, in particular, "an extremely large sum of gold that she sent for the celebration of 100 Masses." Fr. Bertoni graciously responded that he would willingly say the Masses, but that he could not accept the alms that she had sent.<sup>485</sup> Regardless as to the source that gifts were offered, he was always firm, but courteous in his refusal.

### **The Bertoni-Bragato Correspondence**

Due to his long stay at the Imperial Court, Fr. Bragato maintained a continual correspondence with Fr. Bertoni over the years.

It has been estimated that each of them wrote about 100 letters. Fr. Bragato kept every single one of the letters that Fr. Bertoni had sent to him. His idea was to keep them together, and leave them as a "sacred inheritance," to those who would come after them. He entrusted this entire file to Fr. Bertoni's successor, Fr. John Mary Marani.

In 1866, there is a startling entry in the Chronicle: "A misfortune has occurred!" During this year, Veneto passed into the new Kingdom of Italy. The Chronicle continues: "A search of the Stimate was ordered for political reasons. To remove all suspicion of any contact with foreign Courts, it was judged better to burn immediately" this precious folder. While the letters were burning, one of the members of the Community saw what had happened, and managed to salvage a few of them. These fragments were then hidden away, out of devotion to the one who had written them. So it is, that only two complete letters, plus fragments from about nine others, have come down to us. The Chronicle then states: "With the burning of these letters, we were deprived of a rich treasury of advice and counsel, dictated by the holiness and prudence of Fr. Bertoni to his beloved son, who regulated his life by them."<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Archives of various Institutes of Verona, and Brescia.

<sup>482</sup> Doc. XXX, n. 4, p. 613.

<sup>483</sup> F. S. Zanon, "I Servi di Dio, P. Anton Angelo e P. Marcantonio Cavanis," Venice, 1925, p. 203.

<sup>484</sup> Doc. XV, n. 7, p. 83, f.

<sup>485</sup> Doc. XX, p. 180.

<sup>486</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. IV, p. 734, f., Intr.

We can only add that we, too, have been deprived of the most complete and authentic picture of the soul of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni in its full maturity. His few lines that were salvaged give eloquent testimony of this. Between Fr. Bertoni and Fr. Bragato, there was a complete and genuine exchange of ideas. They treated of lofty spiritual matters, spontaneously and penetratingly with one another. Their reactions to the happenings of the times were duly recorded, that certainly put much light on their interior lives. They completely exposed their hearts and minds to one another. We would have had a much easier time in this narration, if we could now cite this abundant correspondence.

Let us now, however, return to the little Community.

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## CHAPTER X

**AGAIN WITH THE COMMUNITY AT THE STIMATE**

We have seen already that at the departure of Fr. Bragato, the Community at the Stimmate, as regards number, had reached its zenith. We saw that there were twelve priests, four brothers and two students for the priesthood.

The two young clerics were John Baptist Lenotti and young Louis Ferrari. They had both attended school at the Stimmate, and then entered the Community - Lenotti, in April 1834, and Ferrari, the following July. It is interesting to read the references in the house Chronicle to these two young men at their entrance. John Lenotti was not yet 17. The Chronicle noted: "The timid rabbit, J. B. Lenotti, has come to stay with us! May God preserve his good will, and his health, that he might do great things for God!"

Louis Ferrari had not yet reached his 14th birthday. The Chronicle recorded: "Blessed is he whom you have chosen and taken ... What will this little innocent dove accomplish? We will see if he will make his nest with us".<sup>487</sup>

It might seem strange that these two boys were referred to as "a rabbit," and "a dove." Part of the explanation may be in the fact that shortly before them, a priest had entered the Community - the illustrious Professor, Fr. Vincent Raimondi. News of his entrance was published, and it was stated that "he had turned his back on all the fascination that this world has to offer, and unreservedly has given himself to the Stigmatine Congregation." He wanted to embrace the Community's common life of poverty and obedience, and have a share in its busy apostolate. His was the temper of a heroic soul.

The source we have been citing, went on to say: "May God watch over these Stigmatine Priests for a long time, and call many others like them, that we might continue to witness so many benefits, so much good brought to the Church of Verona. May they accomplish ever greater things in the years ahead."<sup>488</sup>

Sad to say, though, for the remainder of Fr. Bertoni's life, no other priest or student entered. Of the Brothers that entered over the years, to assist the old and faithful Br. Zanoli, only three persevered.

Fr. Michael Gramego carefully recorded every entrance and departure. From the notes that he left, a food idea of the spirit that prevailed in those times may be had. Here is an entry recorded between the entrance dates of John Lenotti and Louis Ferrari:

"July 6, 1834: A note tearfully recorded - poor Louis Zocca has returned home for good, after being with us for three years, one month and 4 days. He must

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<sup>487</sup> Gramego, "Memorie," Mss. Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>488</sup> Doc. XIII, n. 1

be most fearful! What a sad day it is for all of us! But, it must be even worse for him, who has turned back! My Jesus, save me!”

On April 3, 1835, Fr. Gramego had to register the first death in the Congregation:

“The Feast of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (this was the commemoration of this Feast which was observed at that time, during Lent) - our good Brother Angelo Cassella was taken from us so suddenly! He is the first of us who has gone from this house to Eternity - and, I hope, happily. As happy as we are for his holy life and death, we are nevertheless just as crushed, because we did not expect this sudden call from our Lord, God. This time, He did not give any warning, as He had done other times - He did not even raise His sword! He just gave the word, and the blow fell! Let us lower our heads, and adore His sublime, but inscrutable ways - and prepare for our own turn!”

Fr. Gramego made the following annotation, when two Brother candidates entered on April 6, 1839. They were another Louis Ferrari and Francis Stevanoni, both 27 years of age:

“After four years and three days, it seems that Brother Cassella has paid his debt by sending us two more Brothers in his place. May God grant that they may be similar to that good soul.”<sup>489</sup>

Thanks be to God, they were both very similar to Brother Cassella and they both persevered until their deaths.

### **The House of the Dereletti in St. Stephen's Parish**

At this stage of our narrative, Fr. Bertoni had been trying for three years to extend the activity still further. He wanted to establish a continuation of the Apostolate, being conducted at the Stimate, into one of the most heavily populated sectors of the city. This area was covered by St. Stephen's Parish, on the left bank of the Adige.

In force of the Galvani will, Fr. Bertoni did own a house there called the “Derelitti.” It was near a rather run-down Church, badly in need of repair, which had long been named “Santa Maria del Giglio.” For a number of years, he had allowed this house to continue its charitable endeavor, that had been begun there, before he became its owner. The group that was directing a little orphanage there, finally obtained its own place, and they moved out of the Dereletti, in 1835. As it was now vacant, Fr. Bertoni felt that it could become a filial house of the Stimate. The Pastor of St. Stephen's Parish was most desirous of such a move, as he needed help in his Parish. The decision was made to open the Derelitti as a house of the Congregation.

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<sup>489</sup> Gramego, o.c.

On March 1, 1836, Fr. Gramego noted in his Chronicle that a Mission had started in the Parish, "to accomplish some good at St. Stephen's."

Fr. John Mary Marani, Fr. Bertoni's first companion, was sent there to take up residence. Br. Paul Zanolì, the first Brother of the Congregation, was sent along to assist him. The Chronicle reads: "The former has but little health, and the latter has much fatigue." He was, in truth, worn out. The spirits of both of them, however, spurred their run-down bodies onward.<sup>490</sup>

Fr. Bertoni has left a glowing record of Fr. Marani's efforts at the Dereletti. In his correspondence with Fr. Bragato, Fr. Bertoni would customarily send along news about the Community in Verona. In his letter, Fr. Bertoni stated that he wanted to send him "A little material for his own diversion like in those days of our famous 'Chilo!' " (This seems to be a reference to some private joke between Fathers Bertoni and Bragato).

"Fr. Marani still teaches school every day at the Stimate, but every evening, and free day, he stays at the Dereletti. At the Stimate, he teaches school, and then studies for a while in the library. He hears many Confessions on Saturday evenings and on Sundays at the Dereletti, and he is doing a great deal of good in that sector. Every other evening, he holds a conference in Moral Theology, for about ten or twelve priests ... After his methodical explanation, he then makes a practical application, to the most intricate cases that come to him every day. God has blessed him with an intelligence, prudence and a clarity, that are far from ordinary.

"On Thursdays, he holds the usual scrutiny for the Seminarians that are sent to him. He receives his penitents from all walks of life, at any hour, interrupting his dinner or supper, and delaying his rest. On Holy Days, he hears Confessions at St. Stephen's, until he has to go over to St. Sebastian's for catechism. He will go on like this, until the Lord knows when. The people enjoy his sermons very much - it seems that among them, the Word of God is not wasted, but is received in good soil.

"I have sent him to Saint Zeno's, to preach the Octave Service for the Poor Souls ... " (This letter was dated December 1, 1837).<sup>491</sup>

In 1840, Fr. Benciolini was sent to the Dereletti to assist Fr. Marani and Brother Zanolì. With his work with the Marian Oratory, and his other ministry, Fr. Benciolini was to remain the Apostle of that neighborhood for over 40 years.

Establishing the filial house of the Dereletti had to be done with caution, due to the still unfavorable government that forbade Communities of Priests. Fr. Bertoni's answer was that "he placed them there to care for the Church." He added: "some of the priests were always sent there to help out at the nearby

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<sup>490</sup> "Breve Cronaca ...," Verona, 1917, n.53; Doc. XXIX, Note, Text b), 599.

<sup>491</sup> Doc. XXXV, nn. IV, 4, pp. 743, f.

parish”.<sup>492</sup> An insignificant Community, such as it was, nonetheless would have vexed Joseph II.

### **Government of the Community**

The assignment of Fr. Bragato to the Imperial Court, gave a good example of how the Community was governed. Fr. Bertoni was the only Superior, and to assist him, the three oldest among the priests served as his Council. Fr. Bertoni submitted to them in every matter, even the unimportant ones. Their decisions were reached only after asking direction of the God of light, that they might always be for the betterment of the Community.<sup>493</sup> The remaining members, both young and old, tranquilly fulfilled their assigned tasks, and recognized the will of Fr. Bertoni as the will of God for them.

As for the religious formation of every one of them, he proceeded gradually and patiently. We know that they entrusted their consciences to him entirely, and that for them, his example was the school where they learned. Moreover, he gave them instructions, both in private and in common.

### **Fr. Bertoni's Domestic Instructions**

One of the salvaged letters from Fr. Bertoni to Fr. Bragato at Vienna, is dated the second half of September, 1840. Fr. Bertoni extended an invitation to Fr. Bragato, telling him that he would be welcome to attend a series of formal instructions that he was then giving. They were held right after Matins had been said for the following day, in the Community Chapel of the Transfiguration.<sup>494</sup>

His Instructions, however, could be given at any time or place.

Sometimes, during supper, the Instruction took the place of the customary reading that was had during meals. These Instructions were long remembered as “discourses, so full of wisdom and unction.”<sup>495</sup> Some fragments of them were jotted down in the personal spiritual diaries of those who had heard them, and some are contained in his first biography.

Always faithful to his method, we find from these fragments, that his discourses were replete with scriptural and patristic citations, and, at times, they contained quotes from the liturgy.

At supper, on Saturday, November 8, 1834, he commented on the Oration from the Mass of the Vth Sunday after the Epiphany, used for the last Sundays after Pentecost. Part of his discourse was recorded in the Chronicle. The Oration reads: “Preserve, O Lord, Thy servant in continual piety, that what is founded in the sole

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<sup>492</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 222.

<sup>493</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 495.

<sup>494</sup> Doc. XXXV, P.s., n. 8, p. 751.

<sup>495</sup> Doc. XXIV, n. 6, p. 279.



hope of heavenly grace, may always be fortified by Thy protection ...”<sup>496</sup> Fr. Bertoni’s comment was that they should neither have, nor wish to have any support, other than celestial hope. This seemed to him to be the ideal ambition for that first Community, that was entirely divorced from any earthly support. Hence, the iron clad policy of performing gratuitously all their ministry, and the ordinary refusal of gifts offered for any reason were never suspended. By his principles, Fr. Bertoni wanted understood above all that these would contribute to the glory of God, in the circumstances that prevailed in that era.<sup>497</sup> He wished that each and every one of them would make these principles so much a part of themselves, that “they could not ever be dissuaded from them,” as would later be said of that early Community.<sup>498</sup>

“By this hope,” Fr. Bertoni went on, “we honor God in a most eminent manner, and in a way that inclines His divine Goodness to favor us absolutely. The more we trust in God, in His power, in His promises and in His goodness, all the more do we come to grasp what

He is.”<sup>499</sup> Fr. Bertoni seemed to be echoing maxims that were dear to his old Confessor and Teacher, Fr. Nicholas Galvani. He used to say: “He that trusts in God, deals with God, as God ... He who has confidence in God, inclines Him to treat with him insofar as He is God ... He who trusts in God, in a certain sense, becomes the master of the heart of God.”<sup>500</sup>

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Perhaps these citations are enough to get a general idea of the life in the early Community. However, we are also motivated here by the motto: “Collect the fragments, lest they be lost.” So we will continue further the consideration of these Instructions of Fr. Bertoni.

Another time he said, “We do not seek, my sons, our reward on this earth. We turn our eyes solely to the eternal reward that God in His Mercy will bestow on us in heaven. That is the blessed homeland to which we aspire, and where we are called.” He then would substantiate what he had said with a quotation from Scripture: “We do not have here a lasting home, but we seek a future home.”

He very often used St. Augustine’s well known saying: “He, Who created you without your help, will not save you without your help. Before we die, therefore, we will have to feel sure of having done much good ...” He explained that this meant: “Something meritorious of great worth.”<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Cainer, “Memorie,” Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>497</sup> Doc. XXVIII, n. 1, Text b), p. 581, f.

<sup>498</sup> I.c., n. 2, p. 583.

<sup>499</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 470, f.

<sup>500</sup> Doc. VIII, n. 1, p. 47.

<sup>501</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 470.

Those who were a part of that early Community, have stated “that they never heard him speak of God, and the truths of the life to come, without feeling inspired and enkindled by the very same spirit with which he was inspired.”<sup>502</sup> Certain matters would seem “to so affect him, because of his own deep faith, that it would show in his eyes and face.” This, then, would have its effect on those who were listening to him.

Fr. Giacobbe then goes on with a list of such subjects that would so deeply move him: “Whenever he spoke of God, or of the Church, or mentioned the victories of the Martyrs, or the Holy Fathers in defending or spreading the faith. It would happen whenever he commented on the power or wisdom of God, as manifested by miracles that would corroborate faith in Jesus Christ. His early sons would never forget that alacrity and special force with which, many times they heard their Father exhort and inspire them with a desire of martyrdom. He himself often prayed for the special grace of martyrdom at Mass.”<sup>503</sup>

Those early companions of his never forgot the impression made on them by the unction and force of his scriptural and patristic citations. In his sermons, it seemed to them that “God Himself had spoken to them through the lips of Fr. Bertoni.”

Fr. Giacobbe states that Sacred Scripture and the writings of the Fathers were “among the greatest inheritances” left to them by their Father. Not only “his reverence and zealous love for the Word of God,” but the reading of it, and the practice of referring to it in every difficulty. Furthermore, Fr. Bertoni left them his example of reading it every day, and of learning its texts by heart - in brief, his meditation on it, day and night.”<sup>504</sup>

### **“His Sane Principles”**

Fr. Bertoni was tireless in forming in his sons his own “Sane ideals.” He wanted them, too, to have “boundless and blind submission,” as he put it, “to the statements of the Vatican.” This spirit was the “richest and most precious heredity that he has left to the Congregation.”<sup>505</sup> In Fr. Bertoni such was “the affection and union with the Church of Rome and the Supreme Pontiff,” that this would permeate anyone who lived with him. Whenever he heard the Pope’s name mentioned, spontaneously he would make some external gesture of respect. He often prayed for the Holy Father, and always asked others to do so. If anyone went to Rome, or returned from there, and had brought back the Pope’s blessing, he would receive it with noticeable exaltation. He used to say that for him he had more confidence in it, than in any other human means.

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<sup>502</sup> I.c., p. 481.

<sup>503</sup> I.c., pp. 461, 463.

<sup>504</sup> I.c., p.461, f.

<sup>505</sup> Doc. XXIII, nn. III, 1, p. 256.

Any official act of the Supreme Pontiff, such as a Papal Brief, Bull or Encyclical - he would consider truly as the Acts of God's representative. He showed the greatest respect for them, even kissing them, as he would the Gospel. He always read them, or listened to them being read, with his head uncovered, and often times on his knees. He would then kiss them again, and say: "Here, through the lips of Pope Pius - or Leo, or Gregory - Peter has spoken."<sup>506</sup>

His reaction would be immediate if any criticized, or passed judgment, even in jest, on the Vicar of Christ. This would actually anger him. He was never so eloquent as on such occasions, and often enough, it would come as a surprise even to himself. Those who had respect for Christ's Vicar, found their fervor increased by talking with Fr. Bertoni- those who did not, were soon defeated by his words and were left without any further come-back.<sup>507</sup>

He manifested a similar respect towards the Bishops of the Diocese, to whom he often referred, in the language of the Apocalypse, as "Angels." He also showed a marked deference for the Sovereigns and all legitimate authority.

In the strong wave of nationalism that swept Italy in 1848, and during his last years, perhaps politically, he was a conservative.

We read of him: "He never was ashamed to believe, to profess and loudly proclaim: 'Render to Caesar what are Caesar's!' ... and he firmly believed and preached the second half of this principle: '... and to God the things that are God's!' 'All power is from God ... he who resists lawful authority, resists God.'" he so often stated."<sup>508</sup> This was the policy at the Stimmat. In his Constitutions, he wrote: "The observance of civil precepts, is one of the means of perfection."<sup>509</sup>

All of the preceding was but the logical deduction from his "sane ideals." As is evident, he instinctively abhorred the spirit of novelty, and the systematic lack of docility. These were the greatest evils of his time. He had but loathing for the least slur directed toward the Church of Rome, and those who wanted to pass judgment on her, according to the principles of that era. His personal principle of not preceding, but of always awaiting a manifestation of God's will, motivated most of his opinions on politics. He opposed novelty in any sphere, whether doctrinal or disciplinary. He used to say:

"May God keep me from it!" He would make this remark with such conviction, that it never failed to impress those who heard it. He wanted a similar conviction in his sons.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 465.

<sup>507</sup> I.c., p. 559.

<sup>508</sup> Doc. XX, p. 172; XXVI, p. 559.

<sup>509</sup> Constitutions. Mss., n. 102, Part IV, "De progressu," Chap. I, "De Profectu Suiipsius," n. 2.

<sup>510</sup> Doc. XVII, n. 1, p. 97.

### **His Emphasis on Profound Study**

Fr. Bertoni assimilated the doctrine contained in the work entitled “Monastic Studies”, by the celebrated Monk of Sainte Maure, Mabillon. This treatise shows that at the base of the monastic life of discipline, hand in hand with the exercise of virtue, study must also be placed.<sup>511</sup>

Fr. Bertoni considered that profound study provided a solid defense of his “sane ideals”. He understood this by experience, and he wished that his sons would grasp it in the same way. The Community at the Stimmate, therefore, was a Community of studious men.<sup>512</sup>

### **Studies for His Students for the Priesthood**

Although there were only four young students for the priesthood in the Congregation during Fr. Bertoni’s lifetime, he personally directed their curriculum of studies. In this, he was most conscientious.

The students of the Congregation ordinarily attended the courses of Philosophy and Theology at the Diocesan Seminary, with the students studying for the Diocese, Fr. Bertoni added other matters for his students, and extended their years of study at home, after they had completed the Seminary course.

Furthermore, when the students returned home from their classes for the day, he gave them additional help and explanations. The students could not help but profit greatly from his tutoring. Before they would go off to classes in the morning, they were expected to have already pre read the matter that was to be covered that day. As for their call days in school, they already had been subjected to Fr. Bertoni’s questioning, or to some one of the priests who he had assigned. What the students did not understand, would be clarified and explained before they left for class. Fr. Bertoni reserved the matter of Philosophy for himself. Receiving so much help at home, the young Clerics from the Stimmate, performed brilliantly at the Seminary. Fr. Bertoni had instructed them that they were not to have their books open on their desks, when the Professor might call on them to recite. It was not unusual that the students from the Stimmate would be praised publicly, and rewarded for their scholastic performance. The most extraordinary reward of all, was that on very rare occasions, when they would be dispensed from the examinations.

At home, the students, and any young priest, would have to take part in the daily recitations. Ten minutes were devoted to Greek grammar and translation. Then, as their studies progressed, there would be similar recitations in Hebrew, French or “Tuscany,” as their native Italian was called at that time. Among the texts that they used, was “The Practice of Crusca” (from the old Florentine Academy of

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<sup>511</sup> Mss. n. 93.

<sup>512</sup> Doc. XVII, n. 1, p. 96.

Letters.) They also used the traditional author, Passavanti, and his text of grammar: "The Mirror of True Penance." There would first be reading, and then dictation, to see if the student could compare with what had been read. In this the method of Anthony Cesari was followed. If all else had to be put aside, this was one exercise that was never neglected. The students also studied the theory and the practice of Gregorian Chant. There was a brief practice session every day in the Refectory. The students coined a rhyme: "To leave the table, we can't - until the practice of Gregorian Chant."<sup>513</sup>

In the Refectory, there was also reading on a variety of subjects.

Over the years, the students would hear Fr. Daniel Bartoli's books on "Asia," or "England." The "Annuals" of the Venerable Cardinal Baronius was another favorite. Many years later, Fr. John Lenotti stated that as a student, he had heard "a great part" of them.<sup>514</sup>

It is Fr. Lenotti, too, who tells us of another custom of those years. The students had one half hour a day dedicated to Sacred Scripture. He states that he read Sacred Scripture aloud in Italian the first time - from cover to cover, with all the prefaces to the various books, and that Fr. Bertoni listened to him." The second time, "he read it from the beginning to end, along with the Commentary by Tirino." He also states that he read it "entirely with the commentators, Marianna and Emmanuel Sa."

These are just a few indications of the demanding program that young John Lenotti followed under the guidance of Fr. Bertoni. Fr. Lenotti stated that all this was in addition to his regular studies. He continued these habits of his student days down through the years of his priesthood.

Fr. Bertoni's program of studies included Theology, both Moral and Dogma, Liturgy, Canon Law, the Church Fathers, Sacred Eloquence, various and voluminous writings of Church erudition and even Art and Agriculture!

In Moral, the rigid text of Fr. Antoine was the standard of that age - but, this was tempered and enlarged upon by the three volumes of St. Alphonsus Liguori, and his "Homo Apostolicus". In Dogma, the students used Petavius, which was a large tome of parchments, as well as Deschamp's "Jansenistic Heresy," that was similarly bound, and other authors. For Canon Law, they had the double edition of the "Institutions" of John Devoti. They studied the Church Fathers, especially the four large volumes of St. Gregory the Great. They used the celebrated Jesuit Lancisio for Ascetical Theology. This was certainly an impressive array of studies, to say nothing of the rigorous application that was needed to study them.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 4, pp. 602-605.

<sup>514</sup> l.c., p. 604; Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, no date, Mss. 74-6.

<sup>515</sup> This is a summary of Doc. XXIX, n. 4, pp. 601-605.

It is true that Fr. Bertoni adjusted it somewhat, according to the development and the natural ability of the individual students.

His program demanded obedience from beginning to end. One of the students of that period, Louis Biadego, made the following resolution, which he had derived from Venerable Vincent Caraffa, S.J.:

"Keep uppermost in your mind that you study first and foremost to obey. You never obey to study, but you study to obey. If you will do this, at the end of your life, you can say candidly to your God, as did that holy man: 'I did what You ordered - You do what You promised!'"<sup>516</sup> When anyone reasons this way, there is no fear that study could be an obstacle to the religious formation of any temperament. This attitude considerably contributes to religious formation, while affording the body a most fruitful means of punishment.

The relationship that grew between Fr. Bertoni and these young students, was like that of a father for his own sons. These young men were most expressive in their filial veneration of him. Here and there in their papers that they compiled later in life, we find occasional and fragmentary evidences of this.

Some are found, for example, in the papers of Fr. Fedelini, who for many years slept in the same room with Fr. Bertoni and served as his infirmarian.<sup>517</sup> Fr. Louis Biadego, who so many times recited the Breviary with Fr. Bertoni, has left his reminiscences. The two youngest students, John Lenotti and Louis Ferrari, who often went out on walks with Fr. Bertoni, until he was over 60 years of age, have left their recollections. They recall that Fr. Bertoni, walking between them, and by now an old priest, kept his hat in his hand. Fr. Lenotti tells us that this was his customary procedure, out of his respect for the presence of God. He stated that they used to walk along with him, with their hats on their heads, and how sometimes they would feel "a little embarrassed." Fr. Lenotti explained, that this was because "the people going by seemed to observe this."<sup>518</sup> Nonetheless, others felt that these young students, with the elderly priest presented an edifying sight.<sup>519</sup>

### **More Ideals**

We will insert here other fragments of Fr. Bertoni's substantial ideals that he presented to his Community at the Stimate, which have come down to us.

He had a pervading sense of gratitude. At every significant happening, whether favorable or unfavorable, he used to make a remark such as: "Be grateful to God for all that He has done in His Mercy. Give praise to Him, for being treated as we are by a Father such as He is. Let us thank him for everything - and sing now a

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<sup>516</sup> Doc XXIX, n. 5, Text a).

<sup>517</sup> Doc. XX; n, 8, Intr., p. 123.

<sup>518</sup> Lenotti, "Life of Fr. Louis Biadego," Mss. Arch. Stim. Verona.

<sup>519</sup> Doc. XX, p. 188.

solemn “Te Deum!” He, then would intone that hymn of thanksgiving with much enthusiasm.

Whatever glory came from any good deed, or reported victory, he would tell his sons to refer it always to God, and to offer it for His glory.<sup>520</sup>

He was most exacting about the daily meditations. He said: “This exercise was the supreme requirement for every priestly man.” He wanted his followers to consider it as “their most strict duty,” in their every difficulty. He directed that they should always make the meditation, as far as possible, before Holy Mass. “No matter how important your labors may be, or how little time you have had for sleep, do not allow this hour, that is entirely yours, and so necessary for you, to be overlooked.” Fr. Giacobbe tells us: “He would have tolerated the omission of any other duty in his sons, but never meditation.”<sup>521</sup>

Fr. Bertoni also frequently stressed the importance of prudence:

“My sons, be careful in your conversations. You must be most guarded in confiding the secrets of your hearts to anyone. In conversing, do not ever be in the position of regretting that you have spoken with your friends, if one day, they should be your enemies.”

He would never let a manifestation of imprudence pass without a correction and a good penance. He wanted his Religious to be well practiced in this virtue. “Do not trust in yourselves,” he used to say, “and never have over-confidence in your own opinion: ‘Salvation is is had when there has been much counsel; my son, do nothing without counsel’ ”<sup>522</sup>

Fr. Bertoni laid great stress on the relationship with one’s fellow man. So many times, he quoted St. Paul’s principle: “You owe nothing to one another, other than you love one another.” He used to say jokingly: “As for me, I want neither credits nor debts.” He never let the day go by before he had even his least debts squared away. Perhaps this is why he was personally known in every sector of the city.<sup>523</sup>

His own love for his fellow man was such that he even desired martyrdom, or the grace to die for his neighbor. He often would recall the example of his beloved Fr. Matthew Farinati. He used to say that “Fr. Farinati was the most fortunate of all his sons at the Stimate. His premature death was the reward of his own fortitude. He received the palm of the martyr of charity.”<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 515.

<sup>521</sup> I.c., p.507, f.

<sup>522</sup> I.c. p. 500, f.

<sup>523</sup> I.c., p.502; XX, p.176; Summar., p.177, par. 2, 3; p. 179 #12.

<sup>524</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 538.

Fr. Bertoni always set the example to use as the lesson in the alleviation that he brought to the poor. Every day between 50 and 70 hungry unfortunate used to come to the door of the Stimmate. Fr. Lenotti tells us that "Fr. Bertoni was always generous as well to so many others who used to come to him for a hand out." To some of these, "he gave rather substantial sums of money.- The caption "Alms," or "Bread for the Poor," frequently appeared in the expenditure column of the financial records of the house.<sup>525</sup>

Inside the house, poverty reigned, in accord with Fr. Bertoni's wishes. If he had the least suspicion that there was the slightest manifestation of anyone seeking his own personal comfort, he would say: "Remember my sons, that we are poor men! We have not come here to live as lords, but as poor servants of Jesus Christ." He often recommended that in the various situations that would arise, that each one would learn to manage as best he could. He often said: "This is to learn the true practice and love for holy poverty."<sup>526</sup> Fr. Benciolini had jotted down a conclusion of an ancient Council of Bishops - all of whom were outstanding for their holiness and learning: "Poverty is glorious in a Priest!"<sup>527</sup>

Again from his own personal experience, Fr. Bertoni has left some practical guidelines for patience. He wrote: "Sickness is the moment of truth for a man. There was a person, who when he was healthy, was most industrious in devouring all sorts of spiritual books. As soon as he fell ill, though, he became a scandal to the rest of the house, because of his impatience. This was brought to his attention, and he made this remarkable reply: 'It is one thing to pray, but it is quite another matter - to do!' "<sup>528</sup>

Over the years, Fr. Bertoni gave some practical hints to his priests concerning their sacred ministry as well. What he said to Fr. Benciolini could very well be applied to anyone of us: "Fr. Francis, you must preach in accord with your own nature. You cannot try to preach as others may, not matter how well they perform. Otherwise, when you see that you cannot copy them, you will become quite discouraged. Be content with the talents that the Lord has deigned to grant you. Preach from your heart - that means, with charity!"<sup>529</sup>

Whenever he discerned some anxiety among the young for their first preaching assignment, Fr. Bertoni would call them to task for it: "Do not be over eager to preach." It was his policy that before they could give any sermons, they should first hear confessions. "No - preaching serves no purpose, unless you have

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<sup>525</sup> Doc. XX, p. 177.

<sup>526</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 539, f.; XX, p. 176.

<sup>527</sup> Benciolini, Mss. Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>528</sup> I.c.

<sup>529</sup> I.c. (Translation of the dialect.)



heard confessions. It does not make much sense to plant, unless you are going to reap the harvest.”<sup>530</sup>

The following is another custom from those times. Fr. Innocent Venturini, who became known as “one of the greatest catechists,” conducted his much attended classes in his native dialect. People from all levels of society, came to derive much profit from his instructions. Before setting out to teach, he used to give the same explanations he would later expose in class, to his confreres in the Refectory. He would then carefully note their advice and criticism.<sup>531</sup>

Sometimes, at Fr. Bertoni’s suggestion, during the recreation period, the priests who were going out to preach, would first deliver their sermons to the assembled community.<sup>532</sup>

Returning now to the old customs of the Community concerning the practice of virtues, we come to obedience. There was one very known anecdote that has been handed down to us from those early Stigmatines. Fr. Bertoni came to greet a newly ordained priest, who had graduated from the school at the Stimmat. He warmly encouraged the young priest “to be subject and obedient to his parents, and to imitate their virtues. Be subject and obedient to the Bishop in every Church matter. Be subject and obedient to the Pastor of the Church where you will be assigned. Do this always, no matter what others may tell you, whether layman or priest.”<sup>533</sup>

During the ordinary events of the day, Fr. Bertoni used to cite this motto of St. Vincent de Paul, which he also noted in his own Spiritual Diary: “Let us love God, my brothers! Let us love Him, even at the cost of a burden to our shoulders, and the sweat of our brows.”<sup>534</sup>

As for humility, we have already noted his motto, which he heard first from Fr. Galvani: “Be lowly and unobserved - like the animals of the field in their dens, and the children at their game, in their hiding place. Let us remain attached to ground only, as was Brother Giles, the companion of St. Francis. Whoever raises himself up, will fall. Whoever is standing erect, if he should fall, hurts himself somewhat. Who would stand up on a magistrate’s chair? or climb up on a table? Whoever falls from a high window, or the roof of a house, or from a tower, will certainly be hurt. Brother Giles remained to the ground - he could not fall, and harm himself.”<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> l.c.; Doc. XX, p. 159.

<sup>531</sup> “Memorie intorno ai Padri ...,” Verona, 1866, p. 69.

<sup>532</sup> Domestic Tradition.

<sup>533</sup> Doc. XX, p. 155; XXVI, p. 558.

<sup>534</sup> Mss. Benciolini, c.c.

<sup>535</sup> Mss. Lenotti, Arch.Stimm. Verona.

### **Some Outstanding Testimony: Fr. Louis Schlor of Vienna**

The results of these and other principles in vogue at the Stimate can be best expressed by those who witnessed and experienced them. About 1837 or 1838, a most observant and studious visitor from Vienna came to Verona. He was the Spiritual Director of the Diocesan Seminary of Grotto and led, as it were, the reform of the Clergy, not only of that Diocese, but also others in Austria. One of the means he employed was the return to the theme of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. About this time, he left his post as Chaplain and Confessor to the Emperor Ferdinand. He also gave up the direction of the "Noble Academy" for the formation of Churchmen. He wanted to devote himself more fully to a more perfect priestly life, and to undertake a personal renewal. He was in Verona during the last months of 1837, and the early part of the following year. One of the results of his extended stay in Verona was a book that he published on his return to Vienna, in 1839-1840. It was a study of "The Veronese Church in modern times," and was entitled: "The Philanthropy of the Faith" ("Die Philanthropie des Glaubens"). His theme was that the 'Diocese of Verona could serve as a model for other Dioceses beyond the Alps.

He devoted a part of his book to the Community at the Stimate.

The section to which we refer, was entirely translated and appeared with other quotations from his book, in a booklet entitled "Notizia." Fr. Schlor directed its publication in Rome, in 1840.

The purpose of "Notizia" was "to treat of very pious and recollected priests, who live practically the Religious Life, to seek their own perfection, and to work, as well, within their confines, for the salvation of others."

The part of Fr. Schlor's text, referring to the Stimate, is as follows: "These priests have chosen as the principal characteristic of their lives and activity, the hidden way. Nonetheless, the brilliance of their virtues, and the efficacy of their zeal is such, and is so evident, that the whole city, both among the priests and the laity, hold them in that honor and veneration as they would for holy priests.

"Their Superior, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, is a venerable and lovable old man. He is very well versed in the theological sciences, and especially in the direction of souls. He is, so to speak, the oracle of the city, and is also much sought after, even by outsiders. Some either write or come from distant places, especially and specifically to have from him counsel in matters of theology, or for their own personal spiritual direction. This man, endowed with such knowledge, knows well how to govern his Community with kindness, but also with such firmness, that a single spirit animates them all, and a single life, as it were, is manifested by them all.

"If you strike up a conversation with anyone of them, you find that each one in his outlook, his thoughts and his exterior comportment is a faithful replica of the others. If you care to know what is outstanding in them, it is their humility, their charity and their most affable manner.

"They live as very poor and mortified men. The room of each one, and all their furnishings are most simple. Throughout the entire house, there is such evidence of neatness that it is a delight to behold. Their little Church, which once belonged to the Franciscans, is wonderfully restored, and is always resplendent for its cleanliness. The priests of this Community preach at the weekly services, and hear confessions, but only of men. They do not accept gifts of any type, from any source whatsoever. They are so selfless that everyone holds these priests in high regard. Truly, I would not know any better way to classify them than to call them the I hidden pearl of the Veronese Clergy.' They conduct a public high school, where they teach a large enrollment of boys free of charge. At this school, they also stress the moral formation of these youths."<sup>536</sup>

### **The Testimony of Fr. Bartholomew Sorio, of the Oratory of St. Philip**

A few years after Fr. Schlor's glowing testimony had been circulated, there was added that of the brilliant linguist of Verona, Fr. Bartholomew Sorio, of the Oratory of St. Philip. To him, the Community at the Stimmate was at one and the same time, a "witness" and a "sign". He wrote: "This Congregation of priests, which is without canonical status, is a most luminous example for these times. As the spirit of the general breakdown of docility to all authority predominates everywhere, these priests have the obedience of children, for even the least manifestation of Fr. Bertoni's will. They obey in every matter, even the least significant, and they lead a most arduous and mortified life. This has been going on for some time, quite spontaneously, and entirely by their choice."

The "sign" and "witness" that Fr. Sorio noted in this Community was "the great reward that they found for their well known strict way of life, in their perpetual Superior, and in his manner of governing. They manifest a contentment of soul, the likes of which has not been seen for a long time. They give visible testimony of those truths, as recorded by the Chronicles of the Church, and propounded by those ancient Religious Communities. They prove that to delight man, this is not achieved by satisfying his passions, nor by satiating him with earthly pleasures. Many are only truly delighted by bridling them, and disciplining them, and feeding his spirit, with those supreme goods that cannot be discerned by anyone whose faith has been somewhat lost."<sup>537</sup>




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<sup>536</sup> Doc. XIII, n. 2, pp. 65-67.

<sup>537</sup> Doc. XVII, p. 97, n. 1.

## CHAPTER XI

**THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE OF A FOUNDER****More about Bishop Grasser and Fr. Bertoni**

Bishop Joseph Grasser had approved wholeheartedly Fr. Bertoni's entire program. None of it was unknown to him, as Fr. Bertoni kept no secrets from him. He once stated that "his plans and intentions to establish his Congregation were known and fully understood only by Bishop Grasser and a few others."<sup>538</sup>

Even his lesser projects, such as the renovation of his Church, and the construction of a house, the life that was led in it, and the apostolate of the Community were all very familiar to Bishop Grasser. The Bishop also was well informed about Fr. Bertoni's efforts of many years to build up a "well equipped library of the ecclesiastical sciences." This library had thousands of volumes, and each one was so carefully catalogued that it was evident that for Fr. Bertoni, even this endeavor was a labor of love. It was proof that in his mind, the Congregation was hoping for a long future.<sup>539</sup>

The Bishop was also aware of the sum of money that was being held in abeyance for some future need of the Community. It was earmarked to procure property that would further insure the Community's security. Despite all this, there were a number of occasions when Fr. Bertoni, much like Abraham of old, was poised, ready to offer the holocaust of his entire Community and all that it owned.

**Generous Offers to the Company of Jesus**

Early in January of 1837, negotiations were underway for the return of the Society of Jesus to Verona. Fr. Joseph Ferrari was sent by the Jesuit Superior General to the city, with Fr. John Nepomucenus Stoeger. They sought out Fr. Bertoni from the outset, due to the unique prestige he enjoyed in Verona, to seek his advice. For a while, it seemed as though all their hopes were to be dashed. First of all, they were blocked in their every attempt to get back again the old Jesuit Boarding School and Church of St. Sebastian's. Furthermore, they were unable to procure a House of Novitiate. They thought of giving up their efforts of returning to Verona.

Fr. Bertoni was "most anxious that the Jesuits might establish a Novitiate in Verona, as soon as possible. He was convinced that this would greatly benefit the entire area. He then offered the two houses that he owned - the Dereletti, and the old monastery, called the Trinità, near the Church of the Most Holy Trinity. In the case that neither one of these places would meet their specifications, he next offered the 5timmate itself. He would only reserve a few rooms in it for his own

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<sup>538</sup> Doc. XX, p. 171.

<sup>539</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 218.

needs. He next offered the school itself and promised that he himself would care for the support of its teachers.

Fr. Ferrari was deeply moved and edified by such generosity. He refused outright the offer of the Stimate and its school, saying: "It is being run so well by the Congregation." He reserved judgment on the remaining offers of a house suitable for a Jesuit Novitiate. He stated that he would only accept the Dereletti or the Trinita, in case of necessity, and then only on a temporary basis.<sup>540</sup>

As it turned out, the Jesuits did not meet this necessity. They finally managed to acquire a suitable residence for their Novitiate. After exerting much patience, the Church, the school and college at St. Sebastian's were returned to them, and for a number of years thereafter, they remained there. However, they never forgot Fr. Bertoni. His extraordinary kindness toward them made its way into the pages of their local Chronicles, the History of their Province of Veneto, and eventually into the General Annals of the Society of Jesus.<sup>541</sup>

### **The Congregation acquires Security**

After the gracious refusal of the Jesuits of Fr. Bertoni's offer, they sincerely encouraged him to continue on in the work he had begun. It now became apparent to him that Providence had recommitted to his care, the creature of his own hands, which he had been so willing to sacrifice. Now he felt a pressing urge to give it all his solicitude that would bring it to maturity in the designs of God.

One care, in particular, that he was to manifest toward it, was imposed in him in the form of an earnest exhortation. For Fr. Bertoni, it seemed to be an "express command," as its source was Bishop Grasser.

On August 17, 1837, a number of properties, with buildings on them, were put up for public sale. There were two places in particular that drew the Bishop's attention. They were in Sezano and Stallavena, and for centuries had been owned by the "Olivetian Monks," who lived in this pleasant, rural Veronese countryside. At the first sale, no bids were placed on them, as they seemed to appeal to no one. This gave Fr. Bertoni food for thought, although he was little inclined to look into them, in the beginning. He did have the necessary capital, but this was held in reserve against a possible future "rainy day."

However, then Bishop Grasser intervened, with this reasoning: "It would seem better that property which once belonged to the Church, should now be returned to it. I will take care of obtaining the necessary permissions and dispensations.

A second public sale of these same properties was held the following November 22<sup>nd</sup>. The only bid that was placed on them, was one offered by a Dr.

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<sup>540</sup> Doc. XXXIV, Intr., pp. 641-644; n. 1, pp. 645-647; n. 2, pp. 647-649.

<sup>541</sup> I.c., pp. 642; 645, Intr.

Lawrence Maggi, who was acting as the representative for a prospective buyer. Later, another offer, just slightly higher than his was registered after the public sale had closed. This, however, was not presented in legal form, which prompted a third public sale, held on March 22, 1838. Dr. Lawrence Maggi then raised his previous bid to 160,000 Austrian lire, and no other higher bid was registered.

His bid, therefore, was accepted, and upon payment, all the legal rights to the properties would pass to him, as the highest bidder. On August 7th of that year, total payment was completed, and Dr. Maggi stated that he had represented the Reverend Father Gaspar Bertoni in this purchase.<sup>542</sup>

Just two days later, as if to calm his conscience, Fr. Bertoni made an outright offer of all his holdings to the Holy Father, Pope Gregory XVI.

### **A Total Offer to the Supreme Pontiff**

The following is the text of Fr. Bertoni's letter to the Pope:

"Most Holy Father:

"The least of Your servants, the undersigned Priest, with a few companions, has lived in common the clerical life for the past 22 years. We have served the Spouse of Christ, all this time gratuitously, to honor in Her, the common Creator and Savior.

"Two successive Bishops of this Diocese have found that this endeavor is not entirely useless. From this, the undersigned has taken heart, and renovated and restored a Church, and has constructed a suitable dwelling. Now that his age is advancing, a sum of money was set aside for the purchase of property, so that the apostolate of might endure and not cease with his death.

"Recently, our most zealous Bishop exhorted him to acquire some property, which once belonged to a Religious Family, that the Department of the Treasury offered for sale. With this encouragement, therefore, he did purchase it for the price of 160,000 Austrian lire. This transaction now being completed, he presents it at the feet of the Vicar of Christ, and the Successor of Peter and the Apostles.

"If it should seem to the Holy Spirit, and to You, most Holy Father, that it might bedbound to the honor of Jesus Christ, and might serve some utility for the Church, to use this property of Yours for the purposes I intended in its purchase, I will receive it as a gift from heaven.

"If, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit and Your prudence should decide on some other purpose for it, I would be even more happy and rewarded, knowing that the Lord, and You, consider me worthy, to accept from my hands, this gift,

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<sup>542</sup> Doc. XIV, p.67, f., Intr.

although insignificant. It would be as a little amount of gold that, with all confidence, I have placed at Your most holy feet.

“Not only will our service rendered up until now, be not discontinued, but I would consider this fact as all the more reason to be able to continue it in an even better manner, and to pursue it with greater perfection. This is my firm decision, and that of my companions: to spend ourselves entirely in the service of Our Lord and His Church, if You deem this worthwhile.”

Next, Fr. Bertoni offered to the Vicar of Christ some books that he had obtained from various libraries of religious houses that had been suppressed by the revolutionary policies of various governments. His letter continues:

“Furthermore, with other means, I have built up a substantial library of ecclesiastical sciences, in so far as the circumstances of the times have allowed. I have come into the possession of a number of volumes that were sold at auctions, following the dispersion of various religious groups, and the confiscation of their properties.

“I beseech Your Holiness, to allow me to keep them for the purposes I have indicated, or to tell me in the Lord, what would serve His honor more advantageously.

“With all the strength of my faith and devotion, humbly prostrate before Your Beatitude, I kiss Your Holy Feet.

“From Verona, August 9, 1838.

Your most humble, obedient and devoted Son, Gaspar Bertoni”

It was said that this letter “evoked tears of tenderness” from the eyes of the Vicar of Christ. This letter does give a good indication of the true character of Fr. Bertoni. In it, there are manifest his spirit of a lively faith, his detachment from the goods of this world, his zeal for the service of God and his unique desire for the most humble hidden way. This traces clearly before the eyes of men, the nature of his personal spirituality.

On December 7, 1838, “By the special and express Apostolic Authority,” the Sacred Penitentiary responded to Fr. Bertoni. He stated that the Vicar of Christ “benignly granted all that was requested, in accord with the petition.”<sup>543</sup>

### **The Procurator of Christ and the Church**

Once again, the properties that Fr. Bertoni had purchased, were offered, only to be refused. This time they seemed to have been returned to him from the Vicar of Christ himself. For Fr. Bertoni, the property was as if it had been reacquired, and over it he had no personal rights. For him, it was a true and

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<sup>543</sup> Doc. XIV, Text, n. 1, p. 68, ff.

precious gift from heaven that was to be employed only in a very precise and definite manner. It was to be used “in the service of God,” and to insure that the work that had been begun 22 years previously with the Community at the Stim-mate, might not be interrupted by the death of its Founder.

The transaction of purchase was then officially recorded by the state authorities on that August 28th. Furthermore, the purchaser was awarded all rights and privileges of ownership retroactively, not on the date inscribed on the deed, but from the previous Feast of St. Martin, that is, November 11, 1837. This was because of a clause which had been inserted, as reason for a prompt payment, these rights would be insured.<sup>544</sup>

In Fr. Bertoni’s mind, however, he, out of habit, simply considered that these properties belonged to the “true and legitimate owner, Christ our Lord, of Whom the Church is the Administrator.” He considered himself as a “Procurator,” answerable to Christ and the Church. Any transaction concerning these holdings, was to be determined within the scope which Rome had sanctioned in his acquisition of them.

With these safeguards, dictated by his delicate conscience as “Procurator of Christ and the Church,” he took steps to establish legal possession of them. He gave notice to the tenants on the properties that they had until the subsequent Feast of St. Martin, in 1839, to vacate them, and to make their payments from the previous Feast of St. Martin, that of 1837.<sup>545</sup>

### **Immersed in Business Affairs**

Meanwhile, the deeds to these properties indicated to him that substantially, they were chiefly comprised of large tracts of land.

However, they also included “other small holdings, and ‘other rights to tithes and many leases.” These were holdings and rights of ecclesiastical corporations, that were still valid. They were, though, either “obscure, or of small amount, or difficult to collect.”<sup>546</sup> They presaged clearly, “the sea of involvements,” as he would describe them later. It was clear that he would have to attend meetings and discussions - there would be bartering, and some sales of rights. These were the inevitable surprises met in the intricate phraseology of the leases. Small wonder, then, that he summed them all up as “a sea of involvements, disputes and litigations.”<sup>547</sup> These problems all had to be met, so he took it upon himself to see them through. He stated: “It is not licit to disengage oneself from a lease, that will

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<sup>544</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, July 20, 1827, Mss. n. 71-9.

<sup>545</sup> Doc. XIV, Intr., n. 68.

<sup>546</sup> I.c., Text, n. 2, pp. 70-72.

<sup>547</sup> Doc. XXV, nn. IV 10, p. 752, Intr. and text.



prove damaging to the legitimate owner, who in this case, is Christ, our Lord, Whose Administrator is the Church.”<sup>548</sup>

### Further Recourse to Rome

As these affairs became increasingly more involved, it seemed to Fr. Bertoni that the “Benign Rescript” of December 7, 1838, was no longer valid. The situation had undergone drastic changes since that date. He sent another petition to Rome on April 20, 1840, bringing the situation up to date in the hopes of obtaining another Rescript that would include all the adjustments that had been made. Furthermore, he wishes to legalize his additional and substantial acquisition of books, that were also on the ecclesiastical sciences, and to obtain a permanent faculty to procure more of them in the future, as the opportunities presented themselves.

The crux of his problem was that he had “to exchange and sell” certain accessories of the goods that he had acquired. He then had to “convert them into a stable sum, of equal value that would draw interest.”<sup>549</sup> This, evidently had to be done, without prejudice to the rightful owner, Christ, and His Administrator, the Church.

Since this second petition came 20 months after the initial petition, it somehow was submerged in red tape. Opinions were asked of those competent in such matters, additional information was sought as to the principles involved in the transactions, their procedures and the time involved in such adjustments. Finally, it was decided that the Ordinary of the place should be consulted. However, Verona at that time was without a Bishop, due to the death of Bishop Grassi (November 22, 1839). Therefore, the Vicar Capitular, Monsignor Belloni, responded by letter, dated May 19, 1840. His reply was addressed to Cardinal Constantine Patrizi, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in Rome.

We will cite here two points made by Monsignor Belloni. He wrote:

“I. The petitioner, a priest (that is, Fr. Bertoni), and ten other priests with him, have been together under his direction, in a particular Congregation. By means of this Congregation, they have been the mirror and the flower of the Veronese Clergy, for their piety, their studies, their counsels, their example and for their prudent and untiring zeal.”

“II. In accord with the Benign Rescript of the Sacred Penitentiary, there might be an extension of it by implicit concession, to cover future eventualities. Their latest petition was occasioned by “the unusual delicacy of conscience, so characteristic of these priests, anxious to put their minds completely at rest. This is

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<sup>548</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, v.s., note 7.

<sup>549</sup> Doc. XIV, Text, n. 2, pp. 70-72.

but a further manifestation of that most profound respect and complete dependence with which each one of them, without exception, is characterized.”<sup>550</sup>

With the reception of this clarification, Cardinal Patrizi, decided to cut all red tape, prepared to send a second Rescript, upon receipt of still another letter of recommendation. This one was from the former Cardinal, Fr. Charles Odescalchi, S.J. At this time, Fr. Odescalchi resided in Verona, and except in this one instance, in Fr. Bertoni's behalf, he was adamant in refusing to intervene in any way, with the affairs of the Roman Curia. Cardinal Patrizi complied with the wishes of his venerable ex-colleague, stating: “This, then, will quiet the conscience of that excellent priest.” However, the Rescript still was phrased down in vague language, and Fr. Bertoni was not put at ease.<sup>551</sup>

Then Fr. Odescalchi wrote to Arch-Bishop Anthony Mary Traversi, in June 1840. He was the Titular Patriarch of Constantinople, and had ready access to Pope Gregory XVI, whose attention Fr. Odescalchi sought. In his letter from Verona, Fr. Odescalchi wrote: “(Fr. Bertoni) is one of the most learned, prudent and virtuous churchmen that I have ever known. He, and a number of other excellent priests, whom he directs, do a great deal of good in this Diocese.” Fr. Odescalchi then went on to request an answer to their second petition, that would be “analogous to the first one they received. Let it then be simple, brief and to the point, without all those formulae that some times are perplexing, especially for such a delicate conscience, as Fr. Bertoni has. His spirit, sense of religion and devoted affection for the Holy See are most evident in the sentiments he has expressed, in the two petitions he submitted. His very phraseology should merit some consideration.”<sup>552</sup>

This letter seemed to do the trick. Pope Gregory received exact information “of the merit of this excellent priest and his magnanimous endeavors, from the scope, not only of his first petition, but of his second supplication as well. To quiet his conscience perfectly, the Pope benignly deigned to grant all that the petitions had requested. Fr. Bertoni, then, was “Accorded all the faculties, both necessary and opportune,” which was the very wording of his petition. This was received by letter of July 8, 1840, to Fr. Odescalchi from Archbishop Traversi. At long last, “the delicate conscience of the excellent priest,” was put at rest.<sup>553</sup>

### **“A Sea of Involvements, Litigations and Disputes”**

We will not attempt to unravel all the entanglements of those controversies and litigations that Fr. Bertoni had to struggle through in the Court of Appeals. Starting in 1840, these were to last a number of years. There were three cases involving tenants whose leases had terminated, and these were settled with some measure of success. Fr. Bertoni had another case seeking a reimbursement from

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<sup>550</sup> I.c., n. 3, Intr. & Text, p. 72, f.

<sup>551</sup> I.c., n. 4, Intr., p. 73.

<sup>552</sup> I.c., Text, n. 4, p. 74.

<sup>553</sup> I.c., Text, n. 5, p. 75.

the Department of Finances, which he lost. There were various others initiated to protect certain rights and to establish others, concerning the annual rent of several tenants. These were relative to their regular payments, and the alternative rights of being released from certain Obligations as land lord.<sup>554</sup> These intricate legal maneuverings did sprinkle a number of crosses over the last years of his life. Since it was a question of the rights of the Church, they extracted from him a conscientious defense.

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These new properties, then, had caused a great deal of unexpected concern. The most natural thing in the world would have been for Fr. Bertoni to visit these places which had cost him so much money, worry and annoyance. He, however, never went out to see them, even though all kinds of gracious and courteous invitations were directed to him to do so. He was even offered “to be brought out there in a most comfortable and proper manner, considering the state of his health.”

Fr. Giacobbe tells us that “this was because of his rare and even unique sense of mortification, and of the unusual desire that was his as his life drew to a close. He wanted to be even more mortified and detached from the goods of this earth. He had no other wish than to see and to yearn for the blessings of God and of heaven alone.”<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Acts, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>555</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 520.

## CHAPTER XII

**THE PASSING OF A GREAT FRIEND - BISHOP JOSEPH GRASSER**

The development of its activity assured the young Congregation of a lasting existence and life. It had also acquired some means that were in proportion to the apostolate that it was to fulfill. Already the Congregation had surpassed the expectation of the one who had given so much impetus to it - Bishop Joseph Grasser. However, Providence was not to grant him enough time to see Fr. Bertoni bring to a close the litigations over the property he had urged him to procure. God did, though, grant to the Bishop one last moment of glory before calling him to Himself.

**The Special Observances of the Feast of Saint Zeno: 1839**

Glory came to the Bishop on March 22, 1839, through the joyous recovery of the body of Zeno in the crypt of his large Basilica. The Bishop, therefore, decreed that there would be a special observance honoring the holy Bishop and Patron of Verona. It began with First Vespers on August 17, 1839, and lasted one entire week. It was a solemn period, highlighted by three Pontifical Masses celebrated by Bishop John Baptist Belli of Treviso, Bishop Sebastian Soldati of Mantua and Cardinal Jacob Monico, the Patriarch of Venice, and the Metropolitan of the State of Veneto. The Cardinal also preached during his Mass.

For this occasion, the better known orators of Verona were each assigned a day on which to preach. Fr. Bertoni was chosen for one of the days, and in the commemorative booklet that was distributed, after his name there appears the title: "Master of Human Letters."<sup>556</sup>

Moreover, during this summer, Fr. Bertoni was confined for the majority of it to his bed and room.

There is an anecdote of this period involving Fr. Bertoni and Br. Zanolli that has come down to us. A short while before his assigned day to preach arrived, Fr. Bertoni asked Br. Paul, his infirmarian: "Paul, do you think we'll make it to St. Zeno's?" The good Brother responded in his concise, frank way: "Time will tell."

Fr. Bertoni then asked: "Do you think, Paul, we'll be in the cemetery by then?"

The Brother answered: "Surely someday you'll be there - you and many others!"

Much amused, Fr. Bertoni replied: "This is Paul, who always says frankly what he thinks!"

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<sup>556</sup> Cfr. "Description of the Solemnity celebrated in Verona, from August 15-21, for the joyous recovery of the Body, of its VIII<sup>th</sup> Bishop, and Principal Patron, St. Zeno ..." Verona, Libanti, 1839. (Fr. Bertoni's Sermon is on pp. 103-126)

This little story was repeated time and time again down through the years. Perhaps, Fr. Bertoni was experiencing some sort of a premonition of his death. Fr. Lenotti recorded the following: "However the fact is that Fr. Bertoni did make it to St. Zeno's, and he did preach - he was not in the cemetery by then!"<sup>557</sup>

### **Fr. Bertoni's Theme: "The Father of the Veronese Church"**

Fr. Bertoni was assigned to preach on August 19th. His sermon, that day, from a critical point of view, was not a masterpiece of sacred eloquence. It was certainly, however, a good specimen of the style of that era. It was also an exemplary tribute to his balanced love for his native land. He stated: "Every level, every class and every condition of men throng to this profession of faith in praise of their Father. From the greatest, to the least among them, this sincere outpouring of each one is most acceptable. Hence, I, least of all, cannot shrink from the honorable duty which has been imposed on me by you. Thus, I honor my fatherland, to which I owe everything whatever learning I may have, or ability to speak. If I had spent my entire life, using my tongue to communicate to you the little fruit of my learning in exhorting you to good and more perfect lives, I would thereby only be fulfilling the duty to which God has called me. Therefore, how sweet it is now, to bring my career to a close, in the service of your good pleasure, by such holy sentiments, in the praise of our Patron Saint on my lips."<sup>558</sup>

This seemed to be for Fr. Bertoni his "Nunc Dimittis". This occasion proved to be the last solemn service to which he was invited to speak. Among his papers, there was found another panegyric, well composed and ready for the solemnities, following the canonization of St. Veronica Giuliani in 1839. However, the final copy, as well as its delivery, were entrusted to his most faithful first follower, Fr. Marani.<sup>559</sup>

### **A Cardinal and Two Bishops Visit Fr. Bertoni**

For this occasion, Fr. Bertoni had left his sick bed to preach. When it was over, he returned to bed. During the solemn commemoration, Fr. Bertoni was honored at various times, by the Prelates who had come from their home Dioceses to add to the splendor of this celebration. He was visited by two Bishops and the Cardinal. As they came to him, he was deeply moved by their gesture. All his life, he had had such a veneration and esteem for the sublime dignity such as they had. By their honoring him, they left him genuinely bewildered. He asked: "But why do you do this for me?" - and was unable to continue, as tears had brimmed his eyes.

Bishop Sebastian Soldati was equally moved by the sight of the suffering of Fr. Bertoni. After he had left his room, the Bishop said to those of the Community

<sup>557</sup> Doc. XX, p. 195; XXVI, p. 445, f.

<sup>558</sup> Cfr. "Description ...," p. 105, f.

<sup>559</sup> Mss. Bertoni, n. 28; Mss. Marani, Lib., Stimm., Verona.

who were accompanying him to the door: "How lucky you are! You have a Saint for a Superior!"<sup>560</sup>

During this week long observance, a very young priest came to see Fr. Bertoni; his name was Fr. Peter Vignola. The Bishop had sent him to the Stimate to ask for the copy of the sermon that Fr. Bertoni had preached. The young priest explained that the Bishop was having a commemorative booklet printed that would contain the sermon that Fr. Bertoni delivered, at the Cathedral. Obedience was obedience, but Fr. Bertoni was visibly confused by it all. He had as his personal principle: "Be hidden and unobserved - as the animals of the field in their dens, and the children at their game, take to their hiding places:" All this seemed to run contrary to it.<sup>561</sup>

### **The Bishop Dies. Fr. Bertoni's Last Visit**

Hardly had the solemnity honoring St. Zeno subsided, when the vigorous Bishop, in the fullness of his manhood was struck down by a mortal illness. It was clear that he certainly would not live to see "his beloved Fr. Gaspar" raised to the honors of the altar, as he once hoped he would.

Verona became a city of prayer, in the vain hope of a miracle. The Clergy was solidly united in this crisis of the Diocese, and each wanted to have his turn at the Bishop's bedside "to assist in any way they could, to alleviate their grief - and to pray. The heads of the various Religious Orders in the city filed to his room." Fr. Cesar Camillus Bresciani stayed right with the Bishop the last 15 hours of his mortal life. He wrote later: "It was I who led Fr. Bertoni into the room of the illustrious patient. Two of those who came to visit the Bishop in his last hours left me with so lofty and so sublime impression - they were Fr. Bertoni, and the former Cardinal, Fr. Odescalchi."

We will record here only Fr. Bresciani's account of Fr. Bertoni's visit. It is as follows: "Fr. Bertoni was practically carried into the room by a few priests of the Diocese, who treated him as a Saint.

"I then went close to the Bishop and said: 'Your Excellency, Fr. Gaspar is here to see you.'

"The Bishop answered: 'How he honors me with his visit:'

"The holy priest was then overcome with such profound sorrow, that due to his sobbing and tears, he seemed unable to say even a short prayer. I believed that this was a sign that God had decided that the Bishop was a Victim, soon to be called home."<sup>562</sup>

<sup>560</sup> Doc. XX, n. 8, p. 124. XXI n. 2, p. 208; XXVI, pp. 551 f., 571.

<sup>561</sup> "Memorie intorno ai Padri ...," Verona, 1888 - Dedicated to Fr. Peter Vignola, Sup. Gen. in the years 1875-1891, p. 33.

<sup>562</sup> Doc. XVI, n. 2, Text d), p. 91.

Implied in this account, seems to be the fact that those around the Bishop's bedside, were expecting a miraculous cure, or, at least, a drastic change in the Bishop's condition. Ordinarily, perhaps, Fr. Bertoni's reputation might have been damaged, by his failure to work a cure, but such was not the case. Fr. Bresciani merely concluded that the Bishop "was a Victim soon to be called home."

It was now only a matter of hours. At dawn, on the 22nd of November, 1839, he peacefully passed away. He was mourned throughout the city as a real "Messenger of Charity."

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## CHAPTER XIII

**FR. BERTONI AND THE ENDEAVORS OF OTHERS**

At the death of Bishop Grasser, Fr. Bertoni was engaged in working out the clouded deeds to the properties of Sezano and Stallavena. These properties, as we have seen, he obtained on the advice of the Bishop. He was now immersed in his "sea of involvements, litigations and disputes," as the reader is very well aware. Nevertheless, the material existence of his Congregation was assured, as time was to prove.

Then there arose, every once in a while, the suggestion to take a step further in behalf of his Community. He was being asked to provide that the Congregation might retain its particular form, that could only be assured by a written body of rules, or constitutions. Ordinarily, to such requests, he would reply: "But, I am not of the stature to found a religious congregation."<sup>563</sup>

How this obstacle was overcome, we will put off until a little later. In this Chapter, we will consider Fr. Bertoni, both within his Congregation and outside it, assisting others in founding their Congregations and Institutes.

It was said of him, and not without a definite emphasis, that he was "the one who nurtured so many other endeavors that sprang up in the city."<sup>564</sup> Fr. Anthony Bresciani stated in a more matter of fact way:

"I always just accepted it as so that in Verona no new endeavor for God was begun without first consulting Fr. Bertoni."<sup>565</sup> We will consider here how his counsels materialized.

**The Canossian Convent**

We saw then when he was but 30 years of age, Fr. Bertoni was assigned as Confessor and Spiritual Director of the so-called "Canossian Retreat." This had been established at Saints Joseph and Fidentius Convent, within the parish lines of St. Zeno Major. This one Convent proved to be the cradle of two distinct Congregations of Sisters.

We can review this situation briefly. Bishop Liruti withdrew him from the assignment as Confessor to the Convent that he might give more of his time to the Seminary. Fr. Bertoni, however, found that his new duties did not take all of his time. He therefore, was able to continue in the Spiritual Direction of Mother Leopoldina Naudet, and a few Sisters, who with her, would form the nucleus of the Sisters of the Holy Family. For all practical purposes, Bishop Liruti had withdrawn him from the direction of Blessed Madeline di Canossa's Daughters of Charity.

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<sup>563</sup> Doc. XX, n. 8, p. 124.

<sup>564</sup> Doc. XXX, n. 6, p. 614.

<sup>565</sup> Doc. XXII, n. 2, p. 214.



Fr. Bertoni, in his four and one half years of work with Mother di Canossa's group, had given practical suggestions for her Congregation. Their original spirit, of course, came directly and principally from Mother di Canossa. Fr. Bertoni, however, did have a distinct influence upon those early Sisters. It might also be pointed out here that both Mother di Canossa and Fr. Bertoni had the same personal Spiritual Director, in Fr. Nicholas Galvani.<sup>566</sup>

### **Leopoldina Naudet and the Sisters of the Holy Family**

We will, then, consider his work with Mother Naudet. She first came to Verona in 1807, acting on the advice of Monsignor Louis Pacificus Pacetti, "Apostolic Missionary," and honorary Canon. Monsignor Pacetti, over the years, with Fr. Galvani, had been the Confessor of Mother di Canossa. Leopoldina Naudet arrived in Verona with a few Sisters who had all once belonged to a Congregation devoted to the religious education of girls. This Congregation had been known as the "Dilette" of Jesus, and also was called the "Madames of the Faith."

The Founder of this Congregation of Sisters had recently gone somewhat astray, becoming all involved in the general confusion of the tumultuous times. Mother Naudet, however, had been the Superior of this group in Rome. It was all the more to her credit that she had conserved their original ideal. She also managed to keep the reputation of her Sisters themselves untarnished in the eyes of the Church dignitaries, and of the Holy Father himself.<sup>567</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's Spiritual Direction of Mother Naudet was from 1811 onward, and it brought her thus into close collaboration with him, who would assist her so much in furthering her hopes. It was Fr. Bertoni who suggested to her that she should compile s' code of laws, or constitutions. These were to be in accord with the spirit of St. Ignatius, and were to be prepared, so that when the proper moment arrived, they could be presented to the competent authorities.

As time went on, she realized more and more the necessity of dropping the name of "Dilette" for her little group of Sisters. This title had fallen into much disfavor, because of the machinations of their Founder (Fr. Nicholas Paccanavi). Hence, Mother Naudet ultimately evolved a Congregation of Sisters that was of her own making. Her guiding principle for her Congregation strikes us as somewhat unusual.

She wrote: "May this Congregation be great before God, but as insignificant as possible in the eyes of the world." In planning for the future of her Congregation,

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<sup>566</sup> Doc. V, Intr., p. 16; VIII, p. 46, Intr. & Text.

<sup>567</sup> Leopoldina Naudet was born of an illustrious family of Soissons, in Florence, May 31, 1773. Her parents were attached to the Court of the Grand-Duke Leopold, for whom she was named at Baptism. In 1790, their august Patron succeeded Joseph II to the Imperial Throne of Austria so the family left Florence for Vienna. There Leopoldina followed the Arch-Duchess, Maria Anna Fernanda, of the Noble Chapter of Canonesses of St. George, Prague. She later went with the Canonesses to Rome to enter the Institute described in the text. Doc. V, Intr., pp. 12-16.

she had nurtured the hope that one day it would fuse with the Madames of the Sacred Heart of St. Madeline Sofia Berst. This was her plan, if the times would have permitted it.

Fr. Bertoni, who was Ignatian to the core, assisted Mother Naudet from the first moment she began compiling her Constitution. He not only advised and counseled her, but he also placed at her disposal the fruit of his own personal studies. He made translations for her, resumes and revisions that proved helpful to her. He discussed with her a great number of texts. He prayed with her and offered many Masses for a successful outcome of her efforts and always refused any stipend for them. In his ministry in their behalf, his only purpose was to direct her and her daughters in accord with the spirit which he knew was hers.

Through Mother Naudet, Fr. Bertoni was the guide and practically the instructor in the formation of those Sisters within her Congregation who would be dedicated to the teaching apostolate. He outlined a program of studies for them, suggested various authors they should study. He loaned them a number of volumes for their use from his own library. He compiles reviews of various works, gave directions and practical suggestions. He clarified the goal of their program of studies, and followed the progress of the Sisters in their fulfillment of it. He also followed their early teaching efforts with great interest. He did this within the framework of the genuine spirit and the religious exercises of the new Congregation.<sup>568</sup>

Fr. Bertoni continued this direction in a somewhat official capacity, keeping their utmost confidence until May of 1819. By this time, he had been established at the Stimate for two and a half years, and she and her group had been settled for an equal length of time in the adjoining Convent of St. Teresa's. This, as we have already seen, was due to the beneficence of the legal owner of both places, Fr. Nicholas Galvani.<sup>569</sup>

We mention the date of May 1819, because in that month, Fr. Bertoni gave up for good his office as Confessor and Spiritual Director to both Mother Naudet and her Congregation. Nine years later, in referring to this, Fr. Bertoni stated: "When God says, 'It is enough!' to anyone, it is not for him to respond: 'Just a little while longer!' Mother Naudet, of course, did her best on many occasions to dissuade him from his decision."<sup>570</sup>

We might wonder what it was that influenced Fr. Bertoni to make his decision at that particular time. He very well might have reached it from his studies in Canon Law that traditionally sets limits on the tenure of Sisters' Confessors. We believe, however, he derived the thought from the rigid enjoinder that St. Ignatius had in his Rule. It would also later be inscribed in Fr. Bertoni's Constitutions. The

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<sup>568</sup> I.c., p. 15, f. The entire tract on "Naudet" and "Bertoni."

<sup>569</sup> I.c.; and the following tract: "Naudet in the Old Monastery of St. Teresa's," p. 16, ff.

<sup>570</sup> I.c., p. 17, & Footnote, 36.

perpetual care of women and Sisters was forbidden in the Jesuit Constitutions. Furthermore, there was also the custom - that women's Confessions were not to be heard - at the Stimate.

There is also the fact that these two Religious Congregations, one of priests and brothers, and one for sisters, on adjoining properties, was not the best possible arrangement. In 1829, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Naudet: "Neither I, nor any of my priests can help you - you will, of course, be aided by Him Who is the greatest of all. I believe that Divine Providence has directly intervened in this way for you personally, and for the greater good of your Congregation.' Where good already exists, none of us can intervene, nor should we."<sup>571</sup> In this again there is evident his constant refrain: "Be lowly and unobserved!" Fr. Bertoni counted as nothing whatever contribution he had already made for her Congregation.

Mother Naudet was, of course, deeply disappointed. Fifteen months later, her anguish is still evident in a plea that she jotted in her Spiritual Diary: "I do need a guide for myself in this endeavor - think of us, O Lord, my Love!"<sup>572</sup> She was not only unable to convince him to return to his role as her Director, but she was equally powerless to get from him a suggestion as to a possible successor. She indicated this in a letter she wrote to Fr. Bertoni: "What I need now is someone like you, although I do not think this possible. I want someone to whom I might expose my plans, and then get his opinion of them. I would like also to lay before him the difficulties of my conscience, and to be guided then by his judgments for the sake of my soul." The date of this letter was February 20, 1824.<sup>573</sup>

When Fr. Bertoni was released from his canonical responsibility as her Spiritual Director, he nonetheless did occasionally offer her various suggestions. He did present his views on the rules she had compiled, and how and when she should set about to seek civil and ecclesiastical approbation. He submitted to her various revisions and also rough outlines of several projects that she had in mind, as well as a number of minute observations concerning them. There was "one isolated instance," in a letter that he sent to her, dated January 10, 1828, that contained spiritual direction, properly so called.<sup>574</sup>

After Fr. Bertoni had received his inheritance from Fr. Galvani, he was legal owner of the "Pious Places," including St. Teresa's Convent. As new owner, he imposed "no other obligations on her than (Fr. Galvani) did, while he was alive." All that she had to pay were the annual taxes. There was a time, though, that Fr. Bertoni wrote to her explaining his "extreme necessity." He told her that he had to

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<sup>571</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Septuagesima, Feb. 15, 1829, Mss. n.72-1.

<sup>572</sup> Mss. Naudet, Arch. Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

<sup>573</sup> Doc. V, Intr., p. 17.

<sup>574</sup> I.c., Mss. n. 70-10.

have just a small corner of the Convent property for the building that was to be erected on the property of the Stimmate.<sup>575</sup>

Mother Naudet opened a boarding academy for the daughters of noble families. Over the years, among her students came young girls of impressive lineage. There were three young Marquess of the Canossa Family. They were nieces of Mother Madeline di Canossa. Two of these girls eventually entered Mother Naudet's Community.

She also offered tuition free classes, at Fr. Bertoni's suggestion, for poor girls. Mother Naudet's prime personal concerns, however, were the religious formation of her own Sisters, and seeking the approbation for her Congregation from the competent authorities. To aid her in obtaining approval, Fr. Bertoni, in a deed dated April 19, 1830, granted to her Congregation the perpetual use of St. Teresa's Convent and property. Mother Naudet's responsibility was to meet the expenses for its upkeep, while Fr. Bertoni and his successors, retained the legal ownership. He also added two conditions - the property had to be used always as an academy for the girls of noble birth, and also tuition free classes to be continued for the poorer girls. Furthermore, he stipulated that this agreement would be binding only if she obtained both Church and civil approbation by 1833. Her Congregation did meet this deadline - the Imperial Decree was signed on May 5th of that year. As for the Papal Decree, she managed just to get under the wire, 11 days before the end of the year. It was signed on December 20, 1833.<sup>576</sup>

Meanwhile, Mother Naudet had purchased the nearby Church and Convent of St. Dominic's, on March 8, 1831. She opened there a second academy for the girls of the well-to-do middle class families.

When the Papal Decree was received, she was recorded as having said: "My task is over. God wants nothing more from me." She died on August 17, 1834, just about six months before her Congregation was canonically erected. She was buried in the Church of St. Dominic.

Her new little Congregation accomplished a great amount of good.

The memory of its Foundress was long held in benediction.<sup>577</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's tribute to her was: "She was one of those rare souls, whose life is a great grace which our Lord bestows. Her influence was not restricted to the few people with whom she lived in her community - but rather was felt by a multitude of her contemporaries."<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Cfr. Previous Chapters.

<sup>576</sup> Doc. V, Intr., p. 18.

<sup>577</sup> I.c.

<sup>578</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Sofia Gagnere, Aug. 17, 1834, Mss. 72-13.

A few years later, her rules were minutely examined by order of Bishop Grasser. The conclusion reached was that “they had been dictated by the Spirit of the Lord, with which the holy Foundress was permeated.” Later “a few and very insignificant changes were suggested by the Very Reverend Superior General of the Jesuits, “the Servant of God, Fr. Roothan.” He read them again and remarked: “To introduce any substantial changes would have altered the entire Congregation.” His final conclusion was: “Follow the text exactly as it was written by that holy Foundress.”<sup>579</sup> We will see how this was observed.

Several years after this, a number of new practices had infiltrated into the Congregation. Bishop Mutti put the matter into Fr. Bertoni’s hands. At first, Fr. Bertoni was most reluctant. “After explaining his reasons a number of times,” which as Fr. Lenotti states<sup>580</sup>, “stemmed from the fact that he did not feel that such an assignment was in accord with the Rule of the Congregation,” Fr. Bertoni did yield.

He then assigned the responsibility to Fr. Marani. Bishop Mutti’s successor said of Fr. Marani about 12 years later: “He is the Director of a Community of Sisters that educates young girls. Their exact Observance, their good example and the great goal they accomplish, is a tribute to the solid and prudent charity of the one who guides them.”

It seems once again, in Fr. Marani’s performance and fulfillment of the duty which was entrusted to him, he had learned well in Fr. Bertoni’s school.<sup>581</sup>

### **Theodora Campostrini and Her “Little Sisters of Charity”**

Fr. Bertoni also assisted Theodora Campostrini, who was of a noble Veronese family, in the foundation of her Congregation. It was called “The Little Sisters of Charity of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary.”

Hers was a soul most deeply attached to the interior life, and most zealous for the education of young girls. It was Fr. Bertoni who first discerned her religious vocation as a genuine call from God.

She had a one year candidacy with the Visitandine Sisters of Salò, that was as profitable to her as it was brief. She then spent a longer period at the Canossian Retreat in Verona. Both of these experiences in her life constituted her Novitiate.

She was indebted to Fr. Bertoni for the advice that he gave her. They discussed often “the order and the type of Religious Institute that she had begun to consider. He was much help to her in compiling and perfecting her rules, that were based on those of St. Augustine and St. Francis de Sales. Fr. Bertoni guided her through the various steps necessary to obtain approbation from the state as well as from the Church. She was one day to remark to her Confessor: “For various reasons,

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<sup>579</sup> Memorie, Arch. Sisters of H. Fam., Verona.

<sup>580</sup> Doc. XX, p. 170.

<sup>581</sup> Doc. XXIII, nn. II 2, p. 253.

I always prefer to have the opinion of Fr. Bertoni, as to how to proceed with the Bishop, with Rome and in every other step that must be taken.”

It was also agreed that her Confessor, as well as her ecclesiastical Superior would contact “Reverend Father Gaspar, as her plan unfolded, and difficulties arose.

She did obtain these necessary approbations. State approval was received in 1829, and Rome granted its blessing in 1833.<sup>582</sup>

While Mother di Canossa followed the plan of St. Vincent de Paul, Mother Campostrini and Mother Naudet pursued a different course. Their Congregations coupled an extensive active life, to the faithful compliance with the traditional observance of the cloister. As the years went by, however, many adjustments had to be made because of the changing times. This was more directly due to the gradual, but far-reaching modifications of Church Law.

### **Fr. Nicholas Mazza, “Servant of God”**

Fr. Bertoni had a great deal of contact with another Veronese priest, whose Cause is presently before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, in Rome. He was Fr. Nicholas Mazza, who was most fertile in his ideas for Congregations, or further the works of charity. He established several different Congregations: “The Institute of Domestic Education of Poor and Wayward Girls; The House of Poor Students, with Gifted Intelligence; and then his generous attempt at establishing an Institute for African Missions.” For this last mentioned Institute, he coined the slogan: “To redeem Africa with Africa.” All his work won the admiration of his contemporaries, and the veneration of those who have come after him.<sup>583</sup>

It is quite possible that Fr. Nicholas Mazza first met Fr. Bertoni through the Marian Oratory of St. Paul’s in Campo Marzio. His biographer only tells us that he came in closest contact with Fr. Bertoni, whom he chose as the “guide of his studies” during his Seminary days. Young Mazza took part in the informal discussion groups where the “Summa” of St. Thomas was the principal text. Here, too, Nicholas Mazza came to know the Moral Theology of St. Alphonsus. “Even when Fr. Bertoni moved away, and was assigned to a different parish, Nicholas did not lose contact with him. He followed Fr. Bertoni to St. Firmus’, and continued attending the discussions, as well as assisting Fr. Bertoni in his apostolate. However, when Fr. Bertoni went to the Stimate, “Fr. Mazza could not join him.”<sup>584</sup> His vocation was to be quite different. He did, however, retain Fr. Bertoni as his Spiritual Father.

<sup>582</sup> Doc. XXVIII, Intr., p. 587; n. 1, Text d), p. 590, n. 2, Intr. & Text, p. 59, f. T. Campostrini was born in Verona, Oct. 16, 1788 and died May 22, 1860.

<sup>583</sup> Rev. E. Crestani, “Vita del S.d.D., D. Nicola Mazza,” II Ed., Verona, 1933. Fr. Mazza was born in Verona Mar. 10, 1790 and died Aug. 2, 1865.

<sup>584</sup> Doc. XXVIII, n. 4, p. 594.

About 1829, Fr. Mazza found himself in a predicament. There were a number of young girls for whom he felt a great concern, as they had been completely left to themselves. Because of the danger that was inherent in such a situation, he, without regard for himself, took it upon himself to seek to provide some shelter and protection for them.

The problems of such an undertaking brought him to Fr. Bertoni.

In this predicament, Fr. Bertoni was the first to recognize it as an excellent opportunity for God's service. As Fr. Mazza was unfolding the difficulty, and many of its ramifications, Fr. Bertoni remarked: "But surely God will not be found lacking for anyone of his endeavors."

Fr. Mazza was taken aback at this, and stammered, "What should I do? I would not know where to begin ... nor how to go about it!"

Fr. Bertoni responded: "Just start, just get to it!"

"And so," Fr. Mazza later recounted, "I planned the Congregation."<sup>585</sup> By 1834, his enrollment was 140 young girls; within two years, it had jumped to 160. In 1848, it reached 300, which was the average enrollment during Fr. Mazza's lifetime. He, with much originality, organized it so that the girls would be broken up into little groups, and would live as families. The little colony boasted of workers that produced wonders. Especially, though, the marvelous effect that he had on these young orphan girls was borne out by the good and useful lives they were to lead.

It is only logical to deduce from the fact that Fr. Mazza so spontaneously consulted Fr. Bertoni in his first predicament, he would also ask his advice on his other Congregations. Fr. Mazza's biographers are in unanimous agreement, even though there is no documented proof of this. One fact, however, is most significant. When Fr. Mazza had prepared his first Missionaries to leave for Central Africa, he sent the entire group to the Stimmate. He wanted them to prepare themselves there, near the tomb of Fr. Bertoni, by means of a retreat. They came to the Stimmate on August 3, 1857. Fr. Lenotti recorded on that occasion: "They made their retreat with such enthusiasm and edification, and they departed most satisfied with it."<sup>586</sup>

### **Fr. Anthony Provolo and the Education of Deaf-Mutes**

"The Company of Mary, for the Education of Deaf-Mutes," was founded in Verona by Fr. Anthony Provolo. This specialized school, even in his own lifetime, was to achieve a wide and favorable reputation. Fr. Provolo used to say that "always in his doubts, he turned to Fr. Bertoni, and I was always led along the right path."

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<sup>585</sup> I.c., n. 3, p. 593.

<sup>586</sup> Lenotti, "Storia della Congregazione," Mss. Arch. Stimm., Verona.

Unfortunately, however, he died at the age of only 41. He did not have the consolation of seeing his Institute canonically established as a Religious Congregation. This joy did come to his first companion and successor, Fr. Louis Maestrelli. That he was able to follow this special vocation, was due primarily to Fr. Bertoni. As a result, as long as Fr. Bertoni lived, Fr. Maestrelli frequently turned to him for help.<sup>587</sup>

### **Fr. Camillus Cesar Bresciani and the Ministers of the Sick**

Fr. Cesar Bresciani, a native of Legnago, near Verona, took the name of “Fr. Camillus.” It was he who brought the “Religious Order of the Regular Clerics, Ministers of the Sick,” back to Verona. From this, the entire Camillian Order realized a second birth. It was not unwarranted that Fr. Bresciani thereafter was called “a second St. Camillus de Lellis.”

This man of God was a widely known orator. He referred to Fr. Bertoni not only as “my dear friend, and my beloved countryman,” but also “my beloved guide.” To his fellow Camillians, he said that in Fr. Bertoni there were “those various traits and characteristics that were evident in the Saints of old. His sense of discipline and penance exemplified the life of the ancient anachorets, coupled with his own pure light of his charity”. Fr. Bresciani went on to say that Fr. Bertoni was to be considered as a benefactor of their Community.

He stated: “It was he who planted its first seeds with his suggestions. It was he who inspired its humble beginnings, by sending young candidates from his own school to our Institute.”<sup>588</sup>

### **Further Assistance to the Society of Jesus**

We have already seen that Fr. Bertoni was willing to sacrifice his own endeavor entirely in behalf of the Society of Jesus. From his generous offer, many reached the conclusion that all in the Community at the Stimmate were going to become Jesuits.

Fr. Bertoni, however, went a step further, after his total and generous offer to the Society. Both in regard to their House of Novitiate, and their school at St. Sebastian’s, the Jesuit Fathers were in frequent consultation with him, on all sorts of matters.<sup>589</sup>

The services of Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli, described as “well trained in the school of that very holy man, Gaspar Bertoni,” were loaned to the Jesuits. Being an architect, he set about to draw up a plan for the new wing of their Novitiate, and

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<sup>587</sup> Doc. XXX, n. 2, p. 610, f.; n. 6, p. 614 - Fr. A. Provolo was born in Verona, Feb. 17, 1801, and died Nov. 4, 1844. Fr. L. Maestrelli was born in Verona in 1813, and died in 1865.

<sup>588</sup> Doc. XXI, n. 1, p. 201 and n. 2, p. 210. Fr. C.C. Bresciani was born in Legnago (Verona) on March 14, 1783 and died on July 20, 1871.

<sup>589</sup> Doc. XXXIV, intr., p. 644 f.



also the blueprint for the entire interior of their Church. Moreover, he was also on hand during the construction to direct the workers. The Jesuit Chronicle of that time records that he did this with such care, “that he became renowned within our Society.”<sup>590</sup>

Furthermore, Fr. Francis Cartolari, imbued similarly with the ideals of Fr. Bertoni, during the construction arranged to have the Jesuit Community of St. Sebastian’s housed in his family home. For two years, his own family restricted themselves to an apartment in the house, and the rest of it was at the disposal of the Jesuits. Moreover, his mother made a number of generous donations to the Jesuits for their work.”<sup>591</sup>

Fr. Bertoni also assisted the Jesuits personally. Fr. Peter Viscardini, S.J., had just begun his 30 year tenure as the Jesuit Master of Novices. He would write later: “Whenever one of the young Novices seemed uncertain about his vocation, I would send him to Fr. Bertoni. He had special lights from heaven, and the gift of discerning souls. We always relied on his judgment.”<sup>592</sup>

When Fr. Viscardini was an old man, and he would hear his judgment praised, he always recalled his friendship with that “holy man, who had shared with him the treasures of his own wonderful counsel!”<sup>593</sup>

It is small wonder, then, that when Fr. Bertoni died, the Jesuits of Verona considered it their personal loss. They offered Masses, Communions, and other prayers in their Community as suffrages for him.<sup>594</sup>

### **Fr. Mark Anthony Cavanis, “Servant of God”**

In December 1822, perhaps the 5th or 6th, the well known Venetian Count, Fr. Mark Anthony Cavanis came to the Stimmate to speak with Fr. Bertoni. He and his brother, Fr. Anthony Angelo Cavanis, had founded in Venice, “The Secular Clerics of the Schools of Charity.”

During these days, Verona was the host to that Congress of the Heads of State, and Diplomats, which history has recorded as the “Congress of Verona.” Fr. Mark Cavanis had come to Fr. Bertoni for his advice and his personal observations. Fr. Cavanis wanted some suggestions on the best method of approach in presenting himself to Francis I. The Emperor had already granted a decree in favor of the Cavanis enterprise in Venice, but the government officials there seemed to have

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<sup>590</sup> I.c. n. 3, p. 649. In the Jesuit “*Historia domus Probationis Veronensis*”, Fr. Brugnoli is called “very devout priest and full of merits for the building of our house”. In fact the text asserts that about the care shown by Brugnoli in the works of the Company one could not have desired more from a diligent member of the same Company.

<sup>591</sup> “*Breve Storia della Provincia Veneta della Compagnia di Gesù*,” etc.. Venice, 1914, p. 40 f.

<sup>592</sup> Doc. XXXIV, n. 4, text b), p.650.

<sup>593</sup> I.c. text a).

<sup>594</sup> Proc. Ap. f. 706.

disallowed it. Fr. Bertoni, in writing to Mother Naudet, stated that the "entire program had been scrapped."<sup>595</sup>

Twenty-two years later, this same Fr. Mark Cavanis returned to the Stimmate with a companion. Fr. Cavanis noted in his Diary: "I visited that holy and learned man. He conversed with us for some time. We were much encouraged by him to work all the more, with confidence in God, for the education of the youth. This most worthy priest said that he would do his part, if it pleased God, to uncover some vocations for our Congregation."<sup>596</sup>

The Congregation founded by the Cavanis brothers has kept in its Archives a letter from Fr. Bertoni addressed to "The Reverend Abbot, Count Cavanis." The biographer of these two holy brothers calls it "a precious example, both of the profound humility of the Venerable Servant of God (Fr. Bertoni), as well as a proof of the cordial friendship between the two men."<sup>597</sup>

### **Bishop John Anthony Farina**

It might seem exaggerated to state that Fr. Bertoni was also consulted for the founding of the "Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy," of Vicenza.

However, two years after the death of Fr. Bertoni, Bishop John A. Farina, then Bishop of Treviso, and later to be transferred to Vicenza, established in this latter Diocese a project that he had been considering for some time. This was the Congregation of the "Teaching Sisters of St. Dorothy."

In 1855, he stated that he had known and greatly admired Fr. Gaspar Bertoni<sup>598</sup> - this acquaintance had developed into admiration. The contact between the two had not been extensive, nor actually intimate. They had, though, confidentially and seriously thrashed out a number of matters that had been on the Bishop's mind. Just how productive their discussion was, seems evident to us in the resulting Congregation which the Bishop eventually established.

### **Fr. Anthony Rosmini and the Institute of Charity**

We have kept for the last, the most delicate case of all - that of Fr. Anthony Rosmini.

Fr. Bertoni came to know Fr. Rosmini through Mother Madeline di Canossa. This holy woman had been discussing for some time with the young priest the plan of a Congregation which would be the male branch of her "Daughters of Charity." Between the two of them, however, a disagreement had arisen. Fr. Rosmini felt that the priests of the future Congregation should also accept parishes, but Mother di Canossa was opposed to this idea. She felt that in time these would impede the

<sup>595</sup> Letter to Naudet, Mss. n.75-13.

<sup>596</sup> F.S. Zanon, "I servi di Dio P. Anton'Angelo e P. Marcantonio Conti Cavanis." Venice, 1925, vol. II, p. 285.

<sup>597</sup> I.c. vol. II, p. 16. Original copy in Mss. n. 94.

<sup>598</sup> Doc. XXV, n. 4, p. 612 f.

particular structure of the Congregation. She then suggested to Fr. Rosmini that he should discuss the matter with Fr. Bertoni. The first meeting between the two took place on February 26, 1826. Fr. Rosmini at this time was just 29, whereas Fr. Bertoni was approaching his 49th birthday.

Concerning this meeting, Fr. Rosmini noted in his "Diary of his Travels": "In Verona, I met Fr. Gaspar Bertoni who, with six other priests, does a great deal of good."

After their initial meeting, a few weeks later, on March 15th, Fr. Rosmini wrote him a letter. In it, Fr. Rosmini stated that he first intended to get the sentiments of the Holy Father. Enclosed in his letter was "The Plan for the Priests of Charity." He asked Fr. Bertoni to give it some thought, and to point out any observations that he might deem useful for the practical realization of the "Plan." Fr. Bertoni read it, and could only find satisfaction with the understanding of charity that God had communicated to Fr. Rosmini. He, therefore, wholeheartedly approved of the young priest's intention of speaking to the Pope.

The care of parishes, which Fr. Bertoni had excluded from his own Congregation, he approved the idea as Fr. Rosmini had envisioned it. Fr. Bertoni did, however, offer a few precautionary measures so that the Pastors who would be assigned might not "lose the spirit of that discipline in which they would be trained. Furthermore, they must be cautioned to take care that in exercising their parochial charity, they might not restrict their concerns to a particular area, and thereby lose sight of the more diffusive and universal charity."<sup>599</sup>

Six years later, Fr. Rosmini sent Fr. Bertoni the text of his Constitutions, before he submitted them to the Holy See. Fr. Bertoni's comment was that the manuscript was "most beautiful and precious. I had jotted down on a card some doubts that I had ... but when I had finished reading it, your booklet made them all vanish! 'The finger of God is here!' And, if this book is of such value just written, how wonderful it will be when it is put into practice? 'Blessed is the man whom you instruct, O Lord ... 'Now, what else is required, other than putting your hand to the task which the Lord has begun? 'He Who has begun it, will also perfect it!' "<sup>600</sup>

The relationship between the two priests deepened the mutual respect they had one for the other. Their contacts were frequent and most cordial. Fr. Rosmini sent a young student of his to Fr. Bertoni for spiritual direction. He also sent to the Stimmate those who were very close to him, such as his own brother, Joseph, for direction. Aspirants and members of the Institute of Charity came to the Stimmate, and a close bond grew between the two Communities. A Fr. Peter Riegler came to be a close friend with the Community at the Stimmate. Later he joined the Teutonic Order, after leaving the Rosminians, and became renowned as a theologian and an ascetical writer. At his death, he was generally regarded as a Saint.

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<sup>599</sup> Doc. XV, intr., p.76; nn. 1, 2, 3, p. 79 ff.

<sup>600</sup> I.c. n.5, p. 82 f.

Briefly then, Fr. Rosmini in his own words summed up this relationship. He stated that he was giving Fr. Bertoni “the occasion to exercise his charity, by accepting benignly those inconveniences that with utmost confidence, I so often send to him.”<sup>601</sup>

Whenever he was in Verona, Fr. Rosmini always visited the Stimate. There were times that he stayed overnight, and the Mass Register attests to the fact that he frequently said Mass there. The last recorded Mass that he celebrated at the Stimate was in October 1835, just after he had resigned his pastorate in Rovereto. He had been Pastor there for about one year. In one of his letters, dated June of 1834, Fr. Rosmini stated that Fr. Bertoni had not approved of his accepting the Pastorate in the first place:

“Fr. Gaspar does not agree or consent to this post I have accepted, and the reasons that he gives, are most sound.” Fr. Bertoni felt that he would be in a much more favorable position to work for the glory of God, if he was not tied down to that Pastorate.”<sup>602</sup>

The Archives of the Rosminians in Stresa, contain two letters of Fr. Bertoni to Fr. Rosmini. The collection of his letters contains five letters that he had sent to Fr. Bertoni. There are, from time to time, respectful and courteous references to Fr. Bertoni in Fr. Rosmini’s letters sent to Verona, until January 5, 1841, which was the last such letter. There is also a part of letter that he had written to the Stigmatine at the Imperial Court, Fr. Louis Bragato.

In this letter, Fr. Rosmini refers to the early stages of his Institute, and he recalls the advice he had received from Mother di Canossa. She had told him that “before he established his congregation, he should take counsel from Fr. Gaspar Bertoni.”

He went on to say that once Fr. Bertoni had “seen the Rules, he gave me most practical advice as to when to begin. He was able to solve all my doubts and so, in a particular way, the Institute of Charity was born in their house- (that is, the Stimate). This letter was written from Stresa, on March 18, 1846.”<sup>603</sup>

It is too bad that this story cannot finish here. The two priests had a marked difference of opinion, and they parted company. It had nothing to do with Fr. Rosmini’s philosophy, but they had two irreconcilable views on the discipline of the Church.

In the collection of Fr. Rosmini’s letters, there is reference to the fact that he had visited the Stimate in the autumn of 1841. He had explained either to Fr. Bertoni alone, or to the whole Community some ideas that he had developed into two small books that were ready for publication. They were entitled “The

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<sup>601</sup> I.c. intr., p. 77.

<sup>602</sup> I.c. intr., p. 77 and n. 6, p. 83.

<sup>603</sup> I.c. n. 7, p. 83 f.

Constitution,” and “The Five Wounds of the Church,” which sad to say, were later placed on the Index of Forbidden Books.

It was said at the time that Fr. Bertoni had told Fr. Rosmini that he should be very careful to avoid a possible condemnation of the Church. Fr. Rosmini’s intentions were excellent, but nonetheless, a misunderstanding resulted. Fr. Bertoni then told him that “the spirit of novelty” was not welcome at the Stimate.<sup>604</sup>

Later, a condemnation was promulgated - Fr. Bertoni could have told his Community that he had warned Fr. Rosmini. He might also have cited what he had said about Lammenais, whom he had once greatly admired with DeMaistre and DeBonald, as champions of the Cause of the Holy See. Fr. Bertoni was deeply saddened when Lammenais became a rebel and an apostate.<sup>605</sup>

When this occurred, Fr. Bertoni remarked: “If these powerful columns come crashing down, what will become of insignificant reeds!? Let us, then, keep close to the ground, so we will not fall by rising above the dust that we are ...”<sup>606</sup>

Nonetheless, Fr. Rosmini’s submission to the Decree of the Holy See was immediate and total. He accepted it “unquestioningly, simply and did all that could be expected of him ...”<sup>607</sup> Certainly, Fr. Bertoni would have welcomed him back, if news of his submission had reached the Stimate, above the hue and cry of all the politically motivated rumors.



<sup>604</sup> I.c. p. 78 f. “The disagreement and the separation.”

<sup>605</sup> Letter to Naudet, Mss. n. 71-14.

<sup>606</sup> Doc XXXV, nn. III, 24, intr., p. 731.

<sup>607</sup> G. Pusineri, “Rosmini.” II ed., Domodossola, 1929, p. 210. From a letter of Rosmini dated August 15, 1849: “*Sit nome Domini benedictum!* Who allowed that the two books, *Five Wounds* and the *Constitution*, could be forbidden. I was informed of the Decree ... from Viterbo on third day. With the sentiments of the most devout and obedient child of the Holy See ... I declare to submit myself purely, simply, to the prohibition of the said booklets” etc. as above.

## CHAPTER XIV

**THE ANGEL OF COUNSEL FOR ALL**

Fr. Bertoni's personal authority was recognized far and wide, both in his own locale, as well as far beyond it. Many with great personal profit to themselves, had come to him. We do not have a complete documentation of all those who had visited the Stimmate over the years for guidance, but in this Chapter, we will treat of a number of outstanding cases. Certainly in Verona, his reputation was universally accepted.

Fr. Anthony Bresciani, S.J., tells us that this was "because of the light of his counsel, which was a reflection of the Holy Spirit." The celebrated Jesuit felt that this ability of Fr. Bertoni "was the most apparent trait of his personal holiness." His light of counsel "was used both in his personal life, and in assisting others in theirs."

This ability was beyond and above "the natural wisdom with which God had so generously endowed him."

There was "such an understanding, a modesty and gravity about him the kindness and courtesy which were so evident in his every act and activity, were the fruit of that gentleness and wisdom that the Holy Spirit had infused into him. This made him an apt instrument to guide souls to eternal life."<sup>608</sup>

This was the portrait of Fr. Bertoni that was drawn by one who had visited him and had experienced all he described.

**Fr. Anthony Bresciani, S.J.**

Anthony Bresciani was very well qualified to make the tribute recorded above. He tells us that "he turned to Fr. Gaspar in all the difficulties he had in answering the call of God to the Society of Jesus. The world had shown its opposition in countless ways.

He was ordained a priest and was a Teacher in the Lyceum of Verona. To discover his goal in life, he became a "fugitive" and went off to Rome. He eventually entered the Jesuit Novitiate there at St. Andrew del Quirinale, on November 21, 1824. In order to obtain permission to remain there, he needed no less than a "Benign Rescript" of the Emperor, Francis I.

Fr. Bresciani stated: "The counsels of that man (Fr. Bertoni) guided me through so much opposition, encouraged me in the face of so much difficulty and strengthened me to confront so much perplexity. As a result, I have always thanks God and Fr. Gaspar for the great blessing of leading me to the door of the Religious life."<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Doc XXII, n. 2, p. 215.

<sup>609</sup> I.c.

## The Bishops of Verona

In Verona, almost anyone who had to handle important matters of greater or less intricacy, Fr. Bresciani tells us, almost automatically would turn to Fr. Gaspar. Among the first to do so, were the Bishops of Verona.

Starting in 1808, until Fr. Bertoni's death, they showered him with confidence, frequently consulted him, and often gave him special duties. We have already considered his relationship with Bishop Liruti and Bishop Grasser.<sup>610</sup>

As for Bishop Peter Aurelius Mutti, we can say that he followed exactly this custom of his predecessors. Fr. Bertoni served him even on his death bed, dictating letters, as he could no longer answer by his own hand.<sup>611</sup> Bishop Mutti stated that whenever he, like the Bishops who had preceded him, came across a priest or seminarian who "had persisted in a wayward path, the ultimate solution would be to send him to Fr. Bertoni."<sup>612</sup>

## Scrutineer of Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood

In addition to the Bishops, Fr. Bertoni was also sought after by a good number of the priests serving the Diocese. With his assignment by the Bishop as Spiritual Director of the Seminary and Scrutineer of Vocations, this opened up an even greater apostolate among the clergy. This might be somewhat unusual, in that his appointment there, in a sense, was imposed on them.

Fr. Giacobbe tells us that at first, it seemed as though "(Fr. Bertoni) was being sent as a disciplinarian, and as a judge. The general feeling was that he would be a man, if not austere, he certainly would not be approachable or affable. But, the exact opposite occurred. He came to us as a most affectionate father, and any one of us there at the time, would have poured out our hearts to him if he ever asked this of us."<sup>613</sup>

This, however, was not Fr. Bertoni's approach. Fr. Giacobbe goes on to say that the first time he was presented to Fr. Bertoni, almost spontaneously he began confiding in the new Spiritual Director. Fr. Bertoni seemed to sense his needs and was always most understanding. He remarked that it was as though Fr. Bertoni had been his Spiritual Director since he was a boy.<sup>614</sup>

## A Troubled Vocation

One particular case of this era stands out above all the rest.

<sup>610</sup> Doc. XVI, p. 84 f, n. 1, intr.; p. 87, n.2, intr.

<sup>611</sup> I.c. p. 92, n. 3, intr.

<sup>612</sup> Doc. XX, p. 155.

<sup>613</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 406.

<sup>614</sup> I.c. p. 407 f.

It was that of a young student by the name of Joseph Gazziero. He was a deeply religious boy, but had been very much disturbed by a sermon that he had heard, while on retreat, on "The Death of a Priest." The judgment that would be passed on a priest who had sinned was most eloquently described. Eternal damnation, and all of its ramifications for the soul of a priest were most vividly portrayed.

Young Gazziero was overcome by scruples, and manifested his hesitancy about the ordination that he was soon to receive. His superiors and his friends did all they could to restore peace of mind to his choice soul. Even Bishop Grasser talked with him, but it was all to no avail. The young man was on the verge of abandoning his vocation.

He then went to discuss the matter with Fr. Bertoni. "In one conference with him, in which Fr. Bertoni's charity was so apparent, he decided to go home for one year. When this year was up, in which he did experience other spiritual trials, he made up his mind to return to the Seminary."

On his return, he had with him a letter written by Fr. Bertoni.

This letter he was to keep, and present to his various Superiors over the years. It was a recommendation that Fr. Gazziero should be dispensed from the obligation of making the annual retreat, and that he should not be made to listen to any sermon on the last judgment. Fr. Bertoni's idea was for him to substitute fear for love. Throughout his life, Fr. Gazziero was truly a holy priest.

Over the years he did present this letter to the successive Bishops of Verona: Bishop Grasser, Bishop Mutti and Bishop Riccabona. For some unexplained reason, Fr. Gazziero neglected to make their successor, Bishop Louis di Canossa, aware of it.

Some malicious gossip caught the ear of Bishop di Canossa and told him that Fr. Gazziero never made the annual retreat. Bishop di Canossa then wrote to him and told him that if he did not make the next retreat, he would be by that very fact, suspended.

For Fr. Gazziero, this proved to be a mortal blow. Despite the fact that the Bishop, finally being made aware of the situation, and of the old letter from Fr. Bertoni, was deeply disturbed. The Bishop then retracted his letter, and directed the tale-bearer to comfort and assist Fr. Gazziero. By this time, though, his poor heart had weakened even further.

Fr. Gazziero later remarked: "If only I had presented my excuse, explained in Fr. Bertoni's letter!" He died on February 23, 1876.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Doc. XXXIII, pp. 638-641.



It was always Fr. Bertoni's policy not to interrupt, but to encourage the one who had come to him to do the talking. He made no quick judgments, but waited until the person had completely explained his difficulty.<sup>616</sup> When it was a question of a vocation to the priesthood, and the signs of a genuine vocation were lacking, he categorically would advise him "to leave the Seminary." Fr. Giacobbe tells us that he did this so firmly "that neither authority, nor any human reasons would alter his judgment. This was all the more true when the seminarian in question was for backed with independent means, or had someone to put in a good word for him."

There were cases of those who did later return "to thank him, and sincerely," for having stopped them in time from taking on the life of a priest, which would have led to their own unhappiness, and to their possible eternal ruin.<sup>617</sup>

### **A False Vocation**

Fr. Giacobbe has recorded another outstanding case. One day, a certain individual presented himself to Fr. Bertoni. "It is better not to mention his name, as we do now know how he tells the story."

The person stated that the way of life that was led at the Stimmate, appealed to him a great deal. He felt more and more attracted to enter that holy retreat. However, before doing so, he requested further information on the rules, the discipline the food and many other details.

"You are not called here by God," Fr. Bertoni graciously told him.

No matter how many others interceded for him, even among his fellow seminarians, who knew him well, Fr. Bertoni's answer remained the same.

"As for the judgment that I made in his regard, you might feel that you have better information, but it still is to no avail."

Whoever applied, lacking what was required, was sent away as having been deceived.<sup>618</sup>

### **The Care of Souls**

"How many priests of every classification, rank and grade, came to consult him!" This was the remark of one who was a daily witness of Fr. Bertoni's life for over 20 years. "The opinion, the views and the judgment of Fr. Bertoni carried the most authority and the greatest weight." This was because of "his great learning and his sublime holiness," the same eye witness has recorded.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 494.

<sup>617</sup> I.c. p. 406.

<sup>618</sup> I.c. p. 414.

<sup>619</sup> Doc. XX, p. 157.

One of the Seminary Professors, a Fr. Octavius Rossi, resigned his post to accept a Parish in his native Sirmione. He was one of the Professors whom the seminarians liked especially for his "ability to get the matter across to them." Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, who had a great admiration for him, was most distressed at his resignation.

He, therefore, went up to Fr. Rossi, and asked him: "Father, should one particular Parish benefit, rather than the entire Diocese?"

Fr. Rossi answered: "Do you know that I took advice from Fr. Bertoni before I accepted the Parish?"

Fr. Giacobbe then added: "I admit that this answer stopped me in my tracks."<sup>620</sup>

So it was with many priests, that before they accepted a Parish benefice, they wanted to get "the advice of that wise and prudent man, and to receive from him that encouragement to accept the post, as if his approval was a prerequisite." Fr. Bertoni would judge each case separately, as the circumstances varied for each, and then give his answer, positive or negative, as the case dictated.<sup>621</sup>

There were also cases of priests assigned to given posts, or specifically sent to take a position over, who were somewhat hesitant to do so. Sometimes this was because of the difficulty of the assignment, or because of their own lack of experience, or age. One such case has' been recorded. Bishop Liruti said to a young priest: "I want you to be the Pastor of this particular town - I am the Bishop, and this is my will."<sup>622</sup>

It was recorded that the priest was encouraged just hearing Fr. Bertoni exclaim, as he had expected he would: "Then, you must obey!" He would also add: "God Himself, through obedience, guarantees your protection and defense against every obstacle placed there by human malignity."<sup>623</sup>

Those appointed to positions in Verona hardly ever took up their new duties without first seeking Fr. Bertoni's counsel. They would be directed as to the best approach on achieving God's greater honor and glory, and the greatest possible benefit for souls.<sup>624</sup>

To those who found the circumstances of the times, or their particular assignment discouraging, Fr. Bertoni used to propose the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the "Mother of Good Hope," he used to say, and she is capable of working a miracle in the renewal of any parish.

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<sup>620</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 402.

<sup>621</sup> I.c.

<sup>622</sup> Papers of Giacobbe, Arch. Stimato Verona.

<sup>623</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 558.

<sup>624</sup> I.c. p. 402.

He was called upon again and again for assistance in the Marian Oratories, as he was considered to be their special Apostle. He seemed to sense when the care of the young boys and also that of the older members, would find him summoned before their Pastors. Good results seemed to follow inevitably, and often these priests would then come to him to express their gratitude.<sup>625</sup>

Many of these priests, as well as other souls from all walks of life, very often turned to Fr. Bertoni. They would ask him “to solve their personal problems, as well as get his advice on their own affairs that were of supreme importance to them at the time.” So many also wanted him as their own personal Spiritual Director.<sup>626</sup>

### **Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe**

Fr. Giacobbe, his future biographer, perhaps consulted Fr. Bertoni more than any of them. Over a period of about seven years, he was seen at the Stimmate, many, many times. In his own family circle, he had heard Fr. Bertoni spoken of as a Saint. Fr. Giacobbe met him personally first, as a seminarian, when he went in to the scrutiny concerning his vocation to the priesthood.

After he was ordained a priest, he was in his company two or three times a week. He himself tells us that he learned more from Fr. Bertoni than he did from books. In 1843, after teaching at the Minor Seminary for ten years, he was named Pastor of the Most Holy Trinity Parish. The confines of this Parish included the Stimmate.

Shortly after this, he met Fr. Bertoni one day. He humbly knelt and asked for the blessing of the new Pastor. Confronted by this unexpected act of a 66 year old priest, already venerated for his learning and his holiness, the 33 year old Pastor was more than surprised. He asked instead for Fr. Bertoni’s blessing, but he found that Fr. Bertoni would not get up until the blessing was given to him.

Fr. Giacobbe has left an account of his first meeting with Fr. Bertoni, shortly after he had received his new appointment. He tells us: “What wonderful consolation I received from him at that meeting! What he said to me seemed to be tailor-made to fit my new situation. How respectful he was, and what deference he manifested toward me. He seemed bent on encouraging me, rather than on giving me advice.”<sup>627</sup>

Fr. Giacobbe soon discovered that whenever he or anyone else went to him for counsel, he never gave the impression that he knew it all.

“You would never hear from his lips: ‘I counsel you to do this ... In my opinion, it is this way ... This is my judgment ... If it were up to me, this is what I would do.’

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<sup>625</sup> Doc. XX, p. 152 f.; XXVI, p. 403 f.

<sup>626</sup> Doc. XX, p. 156 f.

<sup>627</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 549.

"He always, rather, couched his advice in such expressions as: 'I think I read once ... I remember hearing someone or other important person put it this way ...' The authority that he would quote in such instances would then decide the matter".

"Sometimes he would cite the examples of other priests: 'When they were in this situation, they acted in this way ... and they achieved the following results ...' „<sup>628</sup>

During the early years of his tenure as Pastor, Fr. Giacobbe asked Fr. Bertoni's advice on how he should treat certain of his parishioners. They were quite negligent regarding some of the prescriptions of the Church, especially the Easter duty. Fr. Bertoni gave this suggestion:

"When you meet them, take off your hat, and show them every mark of respect."

Fr. Giacobbe said that he could not believe his ears, and asked:

"Why should the likes of them be treated in so special a manner?"

Fr. Bertoni then whispered to him: "Is it not worth this effort, that costs so little, if by it, you might gain access to them when they are on their death beds?"

"This explained so well his characteristic of external manifestations of courtesy. He would do anything to save souls, or to give glory to God." <sup>629</sup>

Fr. Giacobbe is not the only documented proof we have of Fr. Bertoni's reverence for others. In those few times especially during his last years, when he was well enough to be up and about and out of the house, there a number of recorded instances of it.

"He used to greet each and every person he met with sincere respect and an infectious courtesy. Whenever he met a priest who was perhaps not very friendly toward him, he always removed his hat, and greeted him respectfully - even those who were adamantly opposed to him. And, as he rarely wore a hat, because of his habitual reverence for the presence of God, he would go through the motions, as it were, of bringing it toward his head, and making the gesture of tipping it anyway."

"It often happened, that as his adversary thereby came to know him a little better, and seeing a proof of his sincerity, became his friend, and eventually came to be one of his admirers." <sup>630</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> I.c. p. 550.

<sup>629</sup> I.c. p. 560 f.

<sup>630</sup> Doc. XX, p. 133, footnote 14).

## Vocation to the Religious Life

It is impossible to estimate how many religious vocations took root in those years in those fertile nurseries of the Marian Oratories.

Neither could anyone calculate how many priestly vocations blossomed in those organizations, so dear to the heart of Fr. Bertoni. Vocations to the priesthood were certainly numerous.

Fr. Lenotti tells us that he “spoke with each one, encouraged him and directed him. How many others he sent to practically all of the Religious Orders of Verona, and how many he sent to the foreign missions!”<sup>631</sup>

He seemed much inclined for such an apostolate, because of his study of ascetics, and the knowledge that he had of numerous religious families. His own soul was impregnated with a profound devotion toward the Founders and Patrons of many religious orders.

Take, for example, St. Ignatius Loyola. We already know something of the role that this Saint played in the life and endeavor of Fr. Bertoni. His own manuscripts not only were permeated with the rules and constitutions of the Society of Jesus, as has already been stated, but also there were abundant references from four separate biographers of the Saint.<sup>632</sup> These extracts could very well be as an appendix to his own resolutions and notes that he jotted in his Spiritual Diary.

We could also consider St. Francis of Assisi. Fr. Bertoni had a personal devotion to him, and he preached on all of his Feasts. He was faithful, until the very end of his life, in celebrating all of his solemnities. Many of Fr. Bertoni’s expressions offer a synthesis of Franciscan spirituality, and give evidence of his good choice and inspiration. So much of what Fr. Bertoni preached, was already very evident in his personal life.<sup>633</sup>

When he wanted to set the pitch for the spirituality of his own sons, he often referred to St. Benedict and his ten degrees of humility.<sup>634</sup>

This was a most outstanding feature of his own life. When Religious of various Orders visited Fr. Bertoni, they were surprised at his wealth of information that he had concerning their own Institutes. He manifested a minute knowledge of the virtues and the lives of various Founders and Patrons. In his speech, he often betrayed a filial regard for them.

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<sup>631</sup> I.c. p. 156.

<sup>632</sup> Mss. Bertoni, nn. 34, 41, 82-86.

<sup>633</sup> Mss., nn. 26, 96; Panegyric on the Stigmata of St. Francis, presently before the Historical Section of the S. Cong. of Rites.

<sup>634</sup> Mss. n. 102, Pars VII, Sectio III, C. I.

Some Religious were so impressed with him that they would remark to the effect that Fr. Bertoni seems to have belonged to their Order since his own youth. They often noted his devotion for their Founder. It was said, not infrequently, that he would have fitted in perfectly in their Order and with their own traditions.<sup>635</sup>

We will consider here a few cases in particular:

Just shortly before he died, an old Capuchin, Fr. Emilian from Erbe, remarked: "I have been wearing this seraphic robe for 67 years. I am grateful, first to God, and then to Fr. Bertoni, who persuaded me to enter the Order."

Known to the world as John Lippa from Erbe, he felt he had a vocation to the Capuchin Order, while he was studying under Fr. Nicholas Mazza in Verona. His Spiritual Director was trying to dissuade him, as he felt that it was just a passing fancy. One day, though, Fr. Mazza said to the boy: "Go to see Fr. Bertoni, and do what he tells you."

After Fr. Bertoni heard his story, his reply was: "You should enter, my son, that holy Order - for there you will find your home."<sup>636</sup>

The case of Fr. Louis Artini is also worthy of mention. He was Pastor of St. Luke's Parish in Verona. In 1841, this excellent priest was the victim of a vicious calumny, which totally and disheartened him, and paralyzed his ministry. He poured out his heart to Fr. Ludovicus Bonvicini, who was a friend of his, and, at that time, a Jesuit Novice. Fr. Bonvicini had been Secretary to Bishop Grasser, and after his death, he entered the Jesuits. He wrote as follows to Fr. Artini:

"You know from past experience that Angel of Counsel that resides in the soul of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. Talk to him often. I believe that his holy words will comfort you. Make a few days of retreat there, and put aside all your cares for a while ..."

The following year, Fr. Artini, who had resigned his Parish, entrusted himself to Fr. Camillus C. Bresciani, and then entered the Camillian Order. In later years, he was Fr. Bresciani's right hand man. He had the makings of a Saint, and for 20 years, he was the Master of Novices. He died as the first Provincial of the Lombard - Veneto Province of the Camillians, in the year 1872.<sup>637</sup>

As for vocations to the Society of Jesus, besides those which have already been noted, we have further testimony from various other Jesuits. They do not explicitly state that Fr. Bertoni had sent them to the Society, but this does seem apparent in the writings of 'some of them.

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<sup>635</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 508, f.

<sup>636</sup> Summar., p. 165, f. par. 19.

<sup>637</sup> Doc. XXX, n. 1, p. 609, f.

In their own style, which was characteristic of that era, they have recorded that there was one safe rule by which they could measure their vocations. When anyone was trying to make up his mind about his state of life, there was no better method of achieving the greatest amount of certainty, than to send the doubtful cases to Fr. Bertoni.<sup>638</sup>

It is hard to believe now, but just two years after the Jesuits returned to Verona, they had 25 Novices. In this same 1839, nine of them were priests, four of whom were from Verona itself. There were also 16 professed students, 10 of whom were Veronese. In the years that followed, the candidates for admission were no fewer. It is impossible to estimate Fr. Bertoni's influence in sending vocations to that house of training of the Society.<sup>639</sup>

We should mention a special case in the person of Fr. Bertoni's own cousin, in the year 1842 .. This was Monsignor Francis Ravelli, a Canon of the Cathedral, and the son of Dr. Joseph Ravelli, who was the brother of Fr. Bertoni's mother, Brunora. Monsignor Ravelli, as a seminarian, used to attend those informal discussions conducted by his cousin, Fr. Bertoni. He also assisted his cousin in the Marian Oratory at Sts. Firmus and Rusticus. Now, as a Canon of the Cathedral, Monsignor Ravelli decided to enter the Society of Jesus. He died as an "Approved Jesuit Scholastic," in 1849.<sup>640</sup>

### Universal Counselor

The Jesuit records of that era tell us that "they very frequently went to Fr. Bertoni, whenever they had more difficult and serious problems, that they might obtain his prudent and practical counsel." It seems that they had established as a practical norm, that they would have recourse to him whenever they were confronted with important decisions. They decided on this because of the reputation he had. He was considered as "a man of great holiness of life." Their text concludes: "With every right, he merits the title of 'The Angel of Counsel.'"<sup>641</sup>

We have already discussed the number of priests who sought his advice. We will now direct our attention to various examples from the laity, who did likewise.

Fr. Marani wrote: "Individuals of very high station often sought him out, as they, too considered him to be an oracle."<sup>642</sup>

Fr. Anthony Bresciani, S.J., wrote: 'Serious and spiritual men entrusted themselves to his learned guidance, in matters pertaining to their souls. Fr. Bertoni was also much consulted in domestic and civil affairs, both public and private. It

<sup>638</sup> Doc. XXXIV, n. 2, p. 648.

<sup>639</sup> Diocesan Almanac of Verona, 1840, Verona, Libanti; "Breve Storia della Prov. Veneta S.J.," Venice, 1914, p. 37.

<sup>640</sup> "Breve Storia ..," o.c., p. 342, n. 8; Letter: Ravelli-Bertoni, Apr. 27, 1844; Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>641</sup> Doc. XXXIV, n. 2, p. 647, f.

<sup>642</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 263.

seemed that whoever found himself perplexed, by some difficulty, the solution of which was important to them, ordinarily would be advised to get Fr. Gaspar's opinion."<sup>643</sup>

So it was, that long lines of nobles, well-to-do citizens, and common folk, all sought him out. There were magistrates, professional men and students - they came from every walk of life, and from every level of society.

This reader may be interested in the names of some of those who flocked to Fr. Bertoni.

There was the Marquis, Boniface di Canossa, who was the brother of Blessed Madeline di Canossa. Both Boniface, and one of his sons, John, were members of the Oratory at the Stimme, and penitents of Fr. Bertoni.<sup>644</sup>

Another son of the Marquis Boniface, was Louis di Canossa. He entered the Jesuits first, but later left and became a Canon, then Bishop of his native Diocese, and finally Cardinal of the Church. He often accompanies his father, or came alone to consult Fr. Bertoni on spiritual matters.<sup>645</sup> Many years later, it was he, as Cardinal, who initiated the Cause of the Founder, and he was the first to testify in his behalf.

Other names we could mention are the Marquis Carlotti, the Marquis Fumanelli, the Honorable Cartolari, the physicist Spandri<sup>646</sup> and the barrister, Michael Angelo Smania, these and many others looked up to Fr. Bertoni as "their oracle."

Fr. Bertoni was not buoyed up by all these influential men who sought him out. He merely did his best to give his view. Once he said:

"Marquis, sir - you ought to consult Fr. Guerrieri to get his opinion. (He was a Dominican canonist who in those times was much in demand).

The Marquis answered: "But, Father, it is your opinion I would like. When I have it, I will be satisfied."<sup>647</sup>

Sometimes those who came to Fr. Bertoni were sent to Fr. Guerrieri.

As they approached the illustrious Dominican, they would say: "Fr. Bertoni send me."

It was not unusual in such circumstances for Fr. Guerrieri to respond: "Then, stick to what Fr. Bertoni advised you and said to you."<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Doc. XXII, n. 2, p. 215.

<sup>644</sup> Register of the Marian Oratory. Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>645</sup> Doc. XXXI, n.2, Intr. & Text, p.617, f.

<sup>646</sup> Summar. p. 158 par. 69 ; p. 295 par. 27; Doc. XX, p.122 n. 7 intr.

<sup>647</sup> Papers of Fr. Mark Bassi, Lib. Stimm., Verona.



"It so happened a number of times," Fr. Lenotti wrote, "that pious and illustrious noblemen would bring their children to the Stimate with them. They would be brought alone just for Fr. Bertoni's blessing."<sup>649</sup>

These demonstrations of reverence and esteem, however, sometimes were bothersome. He used to try to avoid the requests for his personal blessing, and those who would come just to kiss his hand. He usually would ask one of the other priests to take his place. However, if any one insisted on seeing him personally, he would say:

"All right - but it will be the Blessed Mother who will bless both you and me!" With this he would take out a small statue, or a relic, recite a short prayer and then both would go away contented.<sup>650</sup>

As for kissing his hand, he always seemed most reluctant, except when it was done by mail. A Canon wrote to him and concluded his letter with: "Respectfully, I kiss that hand that you have never allowed me to kiss ..."<sup>651</sup>

One day a magistrate, accompanied by another gentleman, were leaving the Stimate after having spoken with Fr. Bertoni. The magistrate is recorded to have said: "From him one can really learn!"<sup>652</sup>

A lawyer is recorded to have said to his client as they were leaving the Stimate: "What do you make of Fr. Bertoni? I have always considered him a most learned theologian, but did you ever see anyone with a better grasp of the law? It is too bad that our consultation with him could not have been written down. He could stand up to any lawyer, even those far more capable than I am."<sup>653</sup>

So it went, with people from all walks of life.

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In all these comings and goings, Fr. Bertoni used as a principle, one that he had learned in Devoti's Canon Law: "The soul of every transaction is silence." Whatever was entrusted to him, he kept absolutely to himself, as though everything were under the seal or confession. Even when these matters had already been brought to a successful conclusion, and were common knowledge, he still would not, discuss them.

Fr. Giacobbe said of him: "Fr. Gaspar always seemed to be surprised to hear of matters that had been confidentially entrusted to him, when he heard others speaking of them. He would say: 'Really? ... Is that so? ... Just Imagine! ...' It seemed

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<sup>648</sup> I.c.

<sup>649</sup> Doc. XX, p. 185, f.

<sup>650</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 551.

<sup>651</sup> Letter: Msgr. G. Polidoro-Bertoni, "18th of this month, 1845."

<sup>652</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 496.

<sup>653</sup> I.c., p. 415, f.

that he either had forgotten all that he had learned in confidence, or had never heard it at all.”<sup>654</sup>

### **Fr. Bertoni's Portrait**

One day he was tricked into a consultation. For a long time, there had been a hope that someday, there might be a portrait made of him.

A scheme was devised to make this a reality, but Fr. Bertoni became suspicious. He made it known quite clearly to those in the house that he would hear no more about it.

There was, however, an ally outside - the attorney, Michael Angelo Smania, who was also Fr. Bertoni's lawyer. He was not restricted by Fr. Bertoni's ruling. He came one day to the Stimate, and he brought along with him another man whom he introduced as his friend. Fr. Bertoni's eyesight had failed considerably by this time, and being so intent on Attorney Smania's discussion, he took no notice of the man, who had withdrawn somewhat from their conversation.

While they were talking, Fr. Bertoni's sketch was hastily drawn by pencil. When the conversation had concluded, the man returned to his study, and completed the drawing from memory. He then set about to paint the portrait.

Fr. Giacobbe has evaluated the painting in these words: "And later, that gentleman sent to the Stimate that beloved portrait. Because of the shortage of time and the conditions under which he had to labor, the painting is, of course, not a work of art. It does, nevertheless, have the merit of representing for us quite well the demeanor and the features of Fr. Bertoni.”<sup>655</sup>

### **A Consoler**

Fr. Bertoni has unveiled a much better portrait of himself in the help he gave "to those souls who turned to him in their affliction and desolation. His words were so effective, and his voice manifested such concern and feeling, that he always brought comfort. His phrases seemed to be from God Himself, as they so abounded in quotations from Sacred Scripture. He drew heavily on the lives and the words of the saints, and he always had such practical applications of them for those who were in need. He managed to lighten their burdens, and make it possible for them to carry on.”<sup>656</sup>

The above mentioned lawyer, Michael Smania, experienced this himself at the time of the death of his beloved mother. Shortly afterward, he came to Fr. Bertoni for his regular confession. In his consoling way, Fr. Bertoni lightened the crushing sorrow of his penitent by telling him that even in this harsh cross, he was

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<sup>654</sup> I.c., p. 500.

<sup>655</sup> I.c., p. 553.

<sup>656</sup> I.c. p. 473.

to recognize the paternal hand of God. Attorney Smania stated that after his confession, he expressed the debt of gratitude that was in his heart for his Confessor.<sup>657</sup>

There were times when Fr. Bertoni seemed prompted by a special grace, or moved by a particular inspiration. He used to say: "God is a good Father to all of us. He understands our miseries and weaknesses, and so He has pity on us. He loves us, so we, then, should not be afraid."<sup>658</sup>

There was a case of an unfortunate man, who had come from a highly respected family. Through changing fortunes, he had found himself in a wretched state. His good name was gone, and he felt the shame and the needs of the abject. Then, one day, he turned to Fr. Bertoni. After hearing his story, Fr. Bertoni said to him:

"Please pray, pray some more, and have confidence. Come back to me tomorrow at this same hour. I am sure of God's goodness. Tomorrow you will be here with better news."

We do not know what Fr. Bertoni did that day. However, the next day the man did return, "full of consolation. Both he and Fr. Bertoni thanked God for His goodness." Whatever had been the greatest concern to the man, had been resolved in his favor.<sup>659</sup>

A doctor states that "after receiving Fr. Bertoni's blessing," his life began to move along smoothly. Many travails and difficulties and grievances that had beset his life for months on end, had disheartened him.' Years later, when he heard that Fr. Bertoni had died, he came to the Stimate to pay his last respects. On seeing the body laid out, we are told, the doctor "kissed his hand, and dampened it with his tears."<sup>660</sup>

### **Consultations with Women**

Although Fr. Bertoni much preferred the spiritual care of men, there were some occasions in which he also assisted women. One such instance was the example of the former Superior of the suppressed Order of the Hermitesses of St. Augustine. She was Mother Teresa Gamba (baptized Julia), who tried in vain to make a donation to the Stimate.<sup>661</sup>

There was also the case of a woman, whose name has not come down to us. Fr. Giacobbe has recorded that she was a soul dedicated to "a piety, that was

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<sup>657</sup> Giacobbe Papers, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>658</sup> I.c.

<sup>659</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 474.

<sup>660</sup> Doc. XX, p. 186.

<sup>661</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 1, p. 580, ff.

understood and furthered, entirely according to her own whims." She came to talk about all the pious books that she was reading in the quest of her perfection.

Fr. Bertoni listened patiently to it all, and allowed her to unfold her involved story. He was convinced that for her, piety was her own learning, rather than obedience to the dictates to the will of God that would have demanded a more substantial effort on her part.

Finally, he said to her: "Madame, you would not have to do anything other than following the directives that St. Francis de Sales gave to 'Philothea.' " "But, I have already read that book," she replied. He answered, "Well, you should read it again."

"What should I do then?" she asked. "I would read it still another time ... and don't even put it down until you have applied its doctrine to yourself. Believe me - if you would do only what that precious book teaches you, it would be more than enough to occupy even a very long life!"<sup>662</sup>

### **Illustrious Foreign Visitors**

Fr. Bertoni was not only consulted by his fellow citizens. It has been recorded that "this Servant of God" received most illustrious personages who came to Verona during his lifetime. Many came specifically to find peace of mind and heart from him. The wisdom that they found in him, so many times even surpassed their fondest hopes.<sup>663</sup>

Priests and Bishops, of varying temperaments came in search of him. The reputation for his learning and holiness, had already spread throughout many cities of the Lombard - Veneto Province. He was known, too, throughout Italy, Austria and Germany as well."<sup>664</sup>

"Sovereigns and Princes and high ranking officials honored the room of this humble Servant of God," Fr. Giacobbe wrote. "They were attracted by no other motive than the splendor of the wisdom, and the virtues they knew they would find in him."<sup>665</sup>

Because of the great modesty and humility that were so evident in that early Community, no mention was ever made of these visits in the Chronicle, or in any other written document. If any name has come down to us, it is because of conversations that were remembered and handed down. A few names were recorded after Fr. Bertoni had died. In talking about their recollections of him, their comments were recorded and preserved.

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<sup>662</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 494.

<sup>663</sup> Doc. XXX, n. 6, p. 614.

<sup>664</sup> Doc. XX, p. 185.

<sup>665</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 569.

### **The General, Count Alexander Michaud**

The Congress of the European Powers was held in Verona the last three months of 1822. During this period, a number of eminent statesmen visited the Stimate to consult Fr. Bertoni, about spiritual matters, and for the Sacrament of Penance. Among these was a Count from Nice, General Alexander Michaud, the Adjutant counselor and confidant of the Czar, Alexander I, of Russia. He was one of many of the Piedmontese who had emigrated in Napoleon's time, and rose to important positions in the Court. In this high society, they initiated a far reaching Catholic movement.<sup>666</sup>

Fr. Lenotti has recorded that this General Michaud "used to come often to the Stimate to Fr. Bertoni, and to receive Holy Communion in the Church that was recently opened."<sup>667</sup>

This is the only documented record of arty illustrious visitors coming to the Stimate during that Congress. At this time, Verona was magnificent both for the participants in the Congress, and the many splendors that had been arranged to honor their presence. It was on this occasion there was noted a fact that perhaps is insignificant in itself. Not one window of the Stimate was opened, and none of its blinds were drawn so that the occupants might witness the tremendous display of fireworks that were set off in the neighborhood.<sup>668</sup>

In addition to General Michaud, however, there was also an Ambassador of Spain who was in Verona for a time, who came to Fr. Bertoni for Confession.<sup>669</sup>

### **Royal Visitors**

Toward the end of April 1825, the Emperor, Francis I, came to the Stimate. In a letter that Fr. Bertoni wrote during those days, he mentioned in passing that the "Sovereigns" had visited him. We do not know if this meant the Empress, or perhaps some Arch-Duke, who accompanied the Emperor.<sup>670</sup>

The official purpose of this visit was to inspect the school at the Stimate. There does not seem, however, to be any doubt that it was also to honor the Community, as was done from time to time by this House of the Hapsburgs.

The Emperor, Ferdinand I, for example, came during the summer holidays of 1838. He came specifically to see Fr. Bertoni, and the illustrious visitor was received in his humble sick room. As he was leaving, the Sovereign sincerely recommended

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<sup>666</sup> "Civiltà Cattolica," Series 9, Vol. XII, pp.345-352.

<sup>667</sup> Doc. XX, p. 157.

<sup>668</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 519.

<sup>669</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie," Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>670</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. n. 66-10.

himself to Fr. Bertoni's prayers.<sup>671</sup> We can only imagine Fr. Bertoni's uneasiness, receiving the Emperor in his room.

### Other Dignitaries

There was a Count Maruffi Villa, a dignitary from Piacenza, in the service of the Court of Parma, who regularly came to see Fr. Bertoni. "Every time he passed through Verona, which was about once a year, he visited Fr. Gaspar for whom he had such veneration. He would kneel down before him, and ask for his blessing, and then would spend several delightful hours conversing with him."

During one of his trips to Verona, the Count was informed that Fr. Bertoni was too sick to receive any visitors. The Count was deeply disappointed, and so he postponed his departure from Verona for several days. He later returned to the Stimate, "to see if he might be accorded the grace of at least greeting him, and talking with him for a few moments."

He was then permitted to do so, "to his great consolation." As he was coming down the stairs from Fr. Bertoni's room, the Count remarked: "This time, too, God granted me the grace of being able to visit him. What a holy man he is! What a man of God is Fr. Bertoni!"<sup>672</sup>

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Special mention should be made of a visit to the Stimate of a Countess from Milan, of the noble Settala family. She was passing through Verona on her way to the Court of Vienna. "She made a point of informing Fr. Bertoni of her arrival," and her destination, just in case he might have had anything to send to Fr. Bragato.

Her offer seems only to have been a cover for her hopes of being able to talk with Fr. Bertoni. Perhaps it was on that very day that he wrote to Fr. Bragato, as there is this excerpt from his letter of December 1, 1837:

"I received this lady in the Reception Parlor. By her voice and her heart, she would remind you of a field general, but the grief that pierces her, for her deceased son, shows her for what she truly is - a sorrowful mother.

Mood has a place for all sorts of souls. Please thank her, and pray that she might be holy. Pray, too, for three members of her family, whose pictures she carries with her."<sup>673</sup>

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We have already mentioned a number of Bishops and Prelates who, during their visits to Verona, came to see Fr. Bertoni. The Cardinal Patriarch, Jacob Monico,

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<sup>671</sup> Summar., p. 274, par. 29.

<sup>672</sup> Doc. XX, p. 157.

<sup>673</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. 4, p. 743.

and the Bishops of Treviso and Mantua visited him when they came to participate in the celebration in honor of St. Zeno.

The former Cardinal, Fr. Odescalchi, S.J., whose opinion of Fr. Bertoni we have already recorded, was a frequent visitor.

We might also add the Armenian Arch Bishop, Aristace Azarian, the Abbot General of the Melchites of Vienna, came to see Fr. Bertoni in 1844.<sup>674</sup>

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A number of erudite scholars also made their way to Verona, and also to the Stimate. We have already mentioned the visits of Fr. Rosmini, Fr. Peter Riegler and Dr. Louis Schlor.

The Bavarian scholar, Fr. John Evangelist Stadler, author of the Hagiographic Lexicon, "Vollständiges Heiligen Lexicon," and other exegetical works, visited the Stimate in 1832.<sup>675</sup>

So many of these, on leaving Fr. Bertoni, made comments similar to that of Count Maruffi. They felt it was "a great grace that God had granted them of being able to speak with that holy man."<sup>676</sup>

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An eye-witness to much of the activity to and from at the Stimate was Fr. Camillus Cesar Bresciani. He has left a vivid picture of those times:

"On crossing the threshold of his room, the visitor would see a priest, somewhat poorly clad, with the venerable appearance of an anchorite of old. His white hair would be ruffled, and his face had always a ready smile; its look and expression bespoke of his unassuming nature. His whole bearing manifested his courtesy and gentleness. The visitor would always be impressed with his warm and respectful greeting. Rather than giving the impression of being the lord of the household, he seemed much more like its servant. His was an ingenuous humility, and he gave the impression that he was always glad to see you. He made you feel as though he was happy to do whatever he could for you.

"His speech was gentle and plain, and there was a certain charm to his words and holy mannerisms. If the purpose of your visit was to discuss important affairs, he would immediately settle right down to the business at hand. If you had come to him for counsel, he would inspire and encourage you.

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<sup>674</sup> Doc. XXVIII, n.3, Intr. & Text, p.592, f.

<sup>675</sup> Cainer, "Memorie," Arch. Stimm., Verona; Cfr. "Kirchenlexicon," Hergenrother-Kaulen, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1899, Col. 699, f.

<sup>676</sup> Doc. XX, p. 157.

“Whether the visitor was a bishop, a cardinal, a magistrate, a general or a monarch - he would always find in him the very essence of courtesy and respect, because each one would find there a Saint.

“Just step into his room. Whether he was sick or well, or saddened himself, he was at your service. The gifts of his soul and those of his entire religious family, would be at your disposition for the asking. You could be administrators of schools, or colleges, or Superiors of monasteries - you might be orators, legislators or spiritual directors - you could be officials of a curia, missionaries, Canons, of the nobility, important citizens - it made no difference. You might even be decorated with all sorts of distinctions. Whoever you were, this holy recluse of the Stimate, from the pallet on which he lay, would communicate to each one, the divine light of his judicious counsels, and the holiness of his own conscience.

“This man, sent by God,” concluded Fr. Bresciani, in his somewhat stilted oratory, “is a witness of His truth. He is the St. Anthony of our day.”<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Doc. XXI, n. 2, p. 207, f.



## CHAPTER XV

**FR. BERTONI WRITES THE CONSTITUTIONS FOR HIS CONGREGATION****Their Preamble and their Composition**

It is time now that we return to Fr. Bertoni in his role as the Father to his little Community.

We have seen already that he restored and adorned a little Church” for his Congregation. He also had “constructed “a house to accommodate its members.” This house was in the continual process of being provided with an ever more precious library of ecclesiastical sciences. The Community had procured a number of acquisitions that would assure its existence, and the fulfillment of its apostolate, for the time when he would no longer be with them.

In addition to all this, he was to leave an even more valuable inheritance to the Community. This was his own great love and example, in living himself the evangelical counsels, and his own dedication to the apostolate for souls. At one and the same time, his contemporaries saw at the Stimate, “the hidden pearl of the Veronese Clergy, as well as its “most beautiful flower and mirror.”<sup>678</sup>

Still, Fr. Bertoni’s work for his Congregation was not complete.

His plan had not yet been totally realized. He had to safeguard what had only been designed by leaving exact guidelines for its life in the future. He had still to take another step, which was necessary to conserve and to nourish its spirit. He had to project into the future years, to illumine and to guide its activity, and to make allowances for its development, for that time when he would no longer be able to do this verbally.

Without this, the Community at the Stimate could very well remain as a group of Oblates, at the beck and call of the Bishop of Verona.<sup>679</sup>

Certainly these thoughts must have passed through his mind in his last years. Despite his personal conviction that “he was not of the stature to found a religious Congregation, these ideas still must have penetrated his soul. They were to be the object of his own “mature counsels,” but much more so, of “his protracted meditations and long prayer.”

We read, then, in a letter in which he confided to Fr. Bragato on May 11, 1841:

“Pray much for us all, and for that which I am writing in small doses, that if God wills it, it might redound to His honor. We do what we can, in accord with the grace which God gives us. God will certainly do His part, but it is not for me to find

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<sup>678</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., pp. 218, 221; XIV, n. 3, p. 73.

<sup>679</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 238.

out what that is now. I am at peace, firmly believing that whatever God wills, happens. This is always better, and far beyond our narrow views - and sometimes even contrary to them. 'I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall ever be in my mouth.'

"Help me that we might 'praise Him day and night', dwelling with Him for all eternity: 'for the figure of this world passeth'. Good bye for now."<sup>680</sup>

These words reveal, at one and the same time, both the way and the method that Fr. Bertoni employed, as he wrote and compiled the Constitutions and Rules that he would leave to his Congregation. It was an enterprise that took years. Certainly, however, the completion of the precious handwritten document, the beautiful copy that has come down to us, can be dated. There seems little doubt that it was finished before its author was confined to bed, which he would never leave again, by his last illness. This establishes the completion of the booklet of the Constitutions before December or 1850.

### **The Plan and the Work**

The Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, dated December 20, 1817, was in truth the idea that gave birth to the purpose of his Institute. This Decree conferred upon Fr. Bertoni, the title of "Apostolic Missionary."

He took this title, and the qualifications to receive it, as the scope of his Congregation. He did not give any name to his Community.

He wrote: "The end of the Congregation is Apostolic Missionaries." He then spelled out what the "Mission" would be for his "Apostles":

"For the assistance of Bishops; If this wording was not expressly contained in the Decree.

As for the "Manner" in which this Mission was to be fulfilled, he returned to the wording of the Decree. It was to be realized in obedience to, and with dependence on the Bishops of the Dioceses, and under their direction, wherever the Community would labor. There was to be absolute submission to the Bishops in all that pertained to the apostolate, in their territory - as regards permissions, faculties and the assignment of times and places for the endeavors of the Congregation.

Fr. Bertoni also added the stipulation that his Congregation would offer its services without any remuneration whatsoever: "Serve God and the Church gratuitously."

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<sup>680</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 752, n. 9.

He wanted his followers exempted from any dignities; residences, and benefices, and they were not to have the perpetual care of particular souls, or Religious Sisters.

Save for these limitations, Fr. Bertoni's idea of the "Apostolic Mission" comprised every phase of the priestly ministry, especially that of preaching. He had, however, a comprehensive view of this "Ministry of the Word." It included private conversations on holy matters, private and public catechism instructions, Parish Missions and Retreats for various groups.

He also intended by it teaching and instructing youth through Marian Oratories and schools. He laid special emphasis on the training and instruction of seminarians. He planned that the members of his community could obtain degrees, qualifying them to teach all the way up to the university level.

In brief, he envisioned the broadest possible fields of endeavor, in every Diocese of the world: "Apostolic Missionaries, for the assistance of Bishops ... going everywhere in the Diocese and the world."

Among the means to achieve this end, he prescribed the general scope of all Religious Congregations: "Perfection of oneself." Fr. Bertoni also added, however, "perfection in the ecclesiastical doctrines." These perfections were to be attained through "the common life," and the "perpetual exercise in all things of poverty, chastity, and obedience."

As for the "Manner of Living," in regard to food, clothing and dwelling, Fr. Bertoni's idea was that it should "conform to that of the more exemplary priests," in whatever area the Congregation might be established. He also set as a standard, that it be for the "edification of the faithful, both for its Christian parsimony, and evangelical poverty."

There were various levels established among the membership. First, there were to be the priests who fully assumed the "Apostolic Mission." Next, there were to be those priests with simple vows, called "Spiritual Coadjutors," who would help the "Apostolic Missionaries" in the fulfillment of their "Mission." Brothers were also to be admitted to simple vows to fill a number of needs - and whose number was to depend on these needs. They were to be called "Coadjutor Brothers," and they were to enjoy all the benefits, as well as fulfill all the obligations, proper to their state.

In brief, Fr. Bertoni envisioned a Congregation of priests -dedicated and determined in a special manner, and singled out, by its services and submission to the Bishops." This was to be analogous to the "special manner in which the Society of Jesus is dedicated and directed by its submission to the dispositions of the Supreme Pontiff." As is known, "their Professed make a (Special) vow of obedience to the Pope."

Fr. Bertoni's Constitutions did not prescribe for himself and his followers an analogous vow to any single Bishop, or to the Bishops considered collectively. This was to avoid the threat that the Congregation, its unity, cohesion and its very life would not be hindered.<sup>681</sup>

He followed faithfully the inspiration that he had received long years before in St. Sebastian's Church, in his visit to St. Ignatius' altar, on September 15, 1808. This initial inspiration was then developed in 1816, when Fr. Galvani offered him the Stimate. He considered it "an opportune place for a Congregation of Priest, who would live according to the Rules of St. Ignatius." Fr. Bertoni was thus decidedly influenced in compiling his Constitutions by having recourse to that "excellent model," which for him was the "Company of Jesus."

Furthermore, one fine day, he took down from the shelf of the house library, the XV<sup>th</sup> volume of the 1714 Venetian edition of the works of Fr. Francis Suarez, S.J. He opened to the tract "On the Religious State of the Society of Jesus, in particular." With his pen in his hand, he studied, selected, synthesized and adapted this treatise, with the care of a worker in mosaic.

Except for four Chapters that explained the internal and external discipline for each member, Fr. Bertoni principally drew on some "Questions" of the Summa of St. Thomas. It can be said that practically his entire Rule was taken from the Summa.

This painstaking, precise and patient labor gave him the means of designing his new Institute. This he always looked upon as the result of an inspiration from God. He noted in his text: "For, He Who has begun and inspired it, will also perfect it, if He is not hindered by us." This was cited to reassure human weakness against every difficulty and danger with which it might be confronted. It would be exposed to some danger and difficulty in the fulfillment of the varied and special apostolate called for by such a vocation. His view was that once inspiration had been received from heaven, the strength of the man is not all that is applied to the battle, but there is also the grace of the Holy Spirit." This is that special grace inherent in the very vocation itself, which is much more powerful than every danger and difficulty.<sup>682</sup>

His Constitutions substantially were a general plan for the beginning of the Congregation. They were somewhat lacking in that which concerned the government and the future development of the Congregation. It is quite possible; that Fr. Bertoni was making allowances for future Church legislation to fill in the voids.

There are in his writings some indications that would substantiate this. It is also possible that he felt that not everything should be contained in the rule, but

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<sup>681</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 219, f.

<sup>682</sup> I.c., p. 219.

that those that came after, could refer to the vast field of experience and the norms of the Society of Jesus, when he was gone. Furthermore, his own attitudes, that were so impressed on his followers, could be recalled when making decisions, or setting policies. In this way, there could never be any digression from the spirit of the Founder. This would be a sufficient guide, until the Church would provide norms and directives for new Institutes that might be somewhat different from the Ignatian system.<sup>683</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's manuscript, although lacking in some particulars, Was accepted as his final word. He first made a most meticulous outline of it, and then wrote out the copy that has come down to us, which was the one he gave to the Community.

All his life, he had proceeded with the same principal of adhering to the "dispositions of God." He used to say: "We must always follow these dispositions, and never anticipate them."<sup>684</sup> He was not disheartened, even when "his beloved family, rather than prospering, felt the death more and more of youthful candidates." The decline began in the Community in the early months of 1842, just after he began to write the Constitutions, and it would not abate during his few remaining years. This sad period will be treated in a subsequent Chapter.

Fr. Charles Zara has left to those who would come after him a record of Fr. Bertoni's reaction to it all:

"Fr. Bertoni did nothing to further the advantage, or to obtain an increase of members for his Congregation. He acted as though his Congregation was flourishing more than ever. He was heard to remark, that even if he came to know that the world was coming to an end on the next day, he would still continue today with the work that he was doing.-

"He would often say to his sons: 'Courage ... Let us entrust ourselves to God. Let us leave it all up to Him, Who can do all things!' This he did to instill into their lagging spirits the same confidence that he had.

"In short," Fr. Zara concludes, "in this grave period that threatened his beloved Congregation, in truth it can be said that Fr. Gaspar 'hoped against hope.'"<sup>685</sup>

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There was one aspect of Fr. Bertoni's attitude that his sons found a little hard to swallow. He did not make a single move to obtain for his Congregation canonical

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<sup>683</sup> The Congregation did this in 1871 - "Constituzioni del Ven.S.d.Dio, D.G. Bertoni," Verona, 1951, Intr., p. 28.

<sup>684</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 265, n. 3, Text.

<sup>685</sup> Doc. XXIX n.7, p. 608, f.

recognition. They were to learn later that apostolic approbation “was indeed desired” by him, but “it was not sought because of his absolute humility.”<sup>686</sup>

His innate modesty and veritable passion for the hidden way, of course, played a major role in this reluctance of his. Perhaps it was what motivated him in his attitude entirely. His hard and fast rule “of waiting for a manifestation of God’s will, and of never anticipating it,” was employed in countless other decisions during his long life. Furthermore, he certainly realized that his Congregation lacked two prerequisites for Apostolic approbation - a sufficient internal increase of membership, and an external development. He did not believe that the Congregation had anything it could call upon to supply for these deficiencies.<sup>687</sup>

Moreover, Fr. Bertoni was not oblivious to the fact that in that political milieu, of the age of Josephinism, there was little religious freedom. A recourse to the Pope, or even to the local Bishop for that matter, would either first or subsequently have to be cleared through Vienna. Otherwise, this would invite an intolerable interference, that very well could have meant ruin for the entire endeavor. Therefore, he made no petition, because of the political climate of that time, as there was no clear sign from God, or at least, none that he could recognize.

After 1848, with the elevation of Franz Joseph to the Imperial Throne, relations of the Clergy under Austria were no longer hindered.

By then, though, the conditions within the Congregation, both as regards to personnel, and foundations of the Congregation, were in a poorer state. Sad to say, Fr. Bertoni’s own physical condition had deteriorated as well. This will be treated shortly.

It is true that, after the death of Fr. Bertoni, his successor, Fr. Marani, with the Community even further reduced, did, obtain some approval, but this was with the help of Bishop Riccabona. He was very close to Pope Pius IX, and without his assistance, the Decree of Praise would not have been obtained. This is the Decree that accords canonical recognition to an Institute and to its purposes.

Moreover, this achievement was most extraordinary. It was called a “prodigy” that was attained as a reward and as an encouragement for the personal efforts that Fr. Bertoni had left behind. It was the result of the high esteem to which he personally had elevated his little Community during his lifetime.<sup>688</sup>

While he was alive, his little Community remained what is called a “Private Union, or Congregation of Diocesan Priests,” which did conform to the observances

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<sup>686</sup> Doc. XXIII, p. 263, at the end.

<sup>687</sup> I.c., Intr., p. 240.

<sup>688</sup> I.c., Intr. p. 243.

of Religious. Fr. Bragato described them as “stones already cut for the construction of a Religious Order.”<sup>689</sup>

Fr. John Rigoni entered the Stimmate a few years after the death, of the Founder. He had known Fr. Bertoni, and had at various times, consulted with him. Fr. Rigoni was, therefore, also very well acquainted with the early members of the Community. He has left some of his reminiscences about the Community of the Stimmate.

He said they all used to gather around the bed of Fr. Bertoni and that he used to read to them the Constitutions, or Rules which he had written for them. These early members listened to him attentively, and were sincere in putting their efforts into accord with the Founder’s words.<sup>690</sup>

It is most unusual that Fr. Lenotti has made no mention of this touching scene in any of his writings. It is hard to understand, too, that neither did Fr. Giacobbe, the Founder’s first biographer.

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<sup>689</sup> Doc. XXV, n. 2, p. 283.

<sup>690</sup> “Costituzioni,” o.c., Intr., p. 16.

## CHAPTER XVI

**THE DECLINE OF THE COMMUNITY AT THE STIMMATE**

As we have already intimated, Fr. Bertoni had to watch his Community languish right before his eyes. It was reduced to the extreme, during the very period in which he was writing his Constitutions.

Of the two students, John Lenotti and Louis Ferrari, the latter died. Of the 13 priests, three died - Fr. Biadego (February 17, 1842), Fr. Cainer (January 12, 1844) and Fr. Cartolari (July 3, 1846). Two others, perhaps the most endowed, left the Congregation - Fr. Raimondi in January 1843 and Fr. Fedelini in August 1847. For a long time, no priests nor students had applied for admission.

Among the Brothers, there was also a number of those who returned to their homes. Br. Francis Solari, and his younger brother, Br. Paul Solari, both left in 1843. Br. Francis had served for 13 years, and Sr. Paul Solari had served eight years. Other candidates had come and gone. Only one new aspirant came during this period who persevered - Br. John Bandoria, who entered in March 1846.

The Community was besieged with sicknesses, tribulations and tempests!

As for Fr. Bertoni, he, too, was much restricted in his activities. From 1842 onward, he hardly ever left his room, and was confined for long months on end, either to his bed, or to the chair in his room. To leave his room, he had to be carried, chair and all.

**Further Tribulations**

During these years, the Community at the Stimmate was hardly ever free from trials of one sort or other.

In addition to the internal agony that the Community was suffering, malicious tongues and pens outside it, did their best to destroy its reputation. We have already recorded one instance, earlier when Bishop Liruti intervened to silence their detractors.<sup>691</sup> Fr. Bertoni had told his sons during those years of 1819 and 1820, "to pray and to manifest a cautious and prudent charity, coupled with much patience and humility, that they might give no occasion for detraction. It is now, and always will be true, that 'those who wish to live piously in Jesus Christ will suffer persecution.' By enduring much now, one can earn that repose of the next life."<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 534, f.

<sup>692</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 77-2.



Pointed barbs were directed at the Stimmate because of Fr. Bertoni's categorical opposition to Jansenism, with the specific intent of discrediting his Community.<sup>693</sup>

In 1830, he wrote: "Because of the various shades in which these detractors vest themselves, they would be very amusing to me. However, the many and serious thoughts that press down upon me from my many cares, oblige me to continual restraint. I cannot let up for an instant, or ever let my hair down."<sup>694</sup>

We have already recorded the premature deaths of Fr. Matthew Farinati and Br. Angelo Casella. We have also seen the treatments Fr. Bertoni endured, which left his physical condition thereafter precarious, at best.

In addition to this, Fr. Michael Gramego has left in his Chronicle, the rather terse comment about the Community: "Many have been beaten over the head, and almost everyone is sick."<sup>695</sup>

Fr. Bertoni made mention of this fact to Mother Naudet, asking her to request a "Novena by that Holy Prince (the well known Monsignor Hohenlohe) for our suffering sick. Ask him to pray that we might continue to drag our cart in the service of the Lord." (1833)<sup>696</sup>

Fr. Marani had his share of suffering over the years. He suffered repeated gall bladder attacks, and gall stones had caused a dangerous inflammation that necessitated the "consultation" of several doctors.

When the crisis had passed, Fr. Bertoni wrote: "By the grace of God, he is better, but he is still quite uncomfortable. He is resigned to going back to the classroom, even with his pain. However, he can no longer teach his two classes. He will not be able to teach school during the dinner hour, and the rest period, as he has done over the years."

In this letter, Fr. Bertoni asked Mother Naudet for prayers: NI hope that you will pray much for all of us, and for poor Fr. Marani.

Ask God to grant him perseverance in willingly accepting his sufferings, which he has done up to now, with God's help, with such edification for the rest of us." (1828)<sup>697</sup> The following year, he asked for the prayers of the "Holy Prince" - that "he would put in a good word with the Lord: 'That my son be healed.'" <sup>698</sup>

Fr. Bertoni wrote on February 4, 1830, to one of the Counts Cavanis:

<sup>693</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 75-3.

<sup>694</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Jan. 29, 1830, Mss. fot.

<sup>695</sup> Gramego, "Memorie," Nov. 11, 1832, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>696</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. 72-10.

<sup>697</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. n. 76-13.

<sup>698</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, n. 72-6.

I ask you for your holy prayers for one of our companions, who has been sick now for two years. He has worked so hard in the service of God.”<sup>699</sup> In another letter to Mother Naudet in 1831, he wrote: “I earnestly ask you to recommend him to the Lord. I will also tell you to thank Him, because truly these painful visitations are very great favors.”<sup>700</sup>

### **From 1840 Onward**

Souls such as these, had an exact counterpart in Fr. Bragato. In his New Year’s greetings to Fr. Bertoni in 1840, he wrote:

“I wish you a thousand blessings, not excluding crosses.” Fr. Bertoni wrote back to thank him for his remembrance:

“Truly, what greater good could you wish for your true friends than the cross? You could not have pleased me more. It is not that I feel that I have the grace to carry it, but God gives me the grace to appreciate it. I hope that by your prayers, together with the Mercy of God, I will be able to suffer patiently. If I should see that from the very first days of this new years, the cross does come, as a man forewarned, I might be able to welcome it and say: ‘Here is the cross that my Fr. Louis told me about.’ May God be blessed.”<sup>701</sup>

Those “blessings in disguise,” did come “from the very first days” of that new year, and continued all through it. On the 26th of that September 1840, he wrote:

“What did you think of our observance of the Feast of the Stigmata? Does it not seem to you that God blessed it, in the midst of so many tribulations?”

Then he added: “God in His Mercy has visited us in still another tempest (which was not the only one that year), accompanied by what we can call a prodigious manifestation.”<sup>702</sup>

Fr. Bertoni did not give any indication as to what this was in particular - perhaps the letter that explained it, has been lost.

We can follow fairly well the subsequent developments. Brief accounts of the tragedies and the sorrows that afflicted the Community have come down to us.

### **Deaths**

During the year 1842, Fr. Gramego made these two entries in the Chronicle, within the same two or three week period:

“February 17th: At 5:00 this afternoon, my beloved Fr. Louis Biadego died ‘in the kiss of the Lord,’ saying the Holy Names of ‘Jesus and Mary,’ until his very last

<sup>699</sup> Mss. Bertoni (authentic copy), n. 94.

<sup>700</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, June 29, 1841, Mss. fot.

<sup>701</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 745, f., n. 5.

<sup>702</sup> I.c., p. 750, n. 8.

breath. He was only 34, 'but was full of days, whose memory is held in benediction.' He has left us all edified with his holy life, and his equally holy death...

"March 6th: At 2:00 o'clock this morning, our most patient little angel, the Cleric, Louis Ferrari, died in the 'kiss of the Lord.' He had suffered so much for so many years. He was with us eight years, and lived a good and exemplary life. He has consoled us, at least, even in his more holy death. He was 22 years old."<sup>703</sup>

How many times their aging Father would pass as often as he could, from one to the other, citing St. Paul:

"Have courage, Fr. Louis ... be of good cheer, Louis! 'No one of us lives for himself alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. His lesson was well taken. So often the two of them would ask each other who would be the first to go!

One day the Infirmarian brought young Ferrari something to alleviate the discomfort that was caused from the "scrofula," from which he was suffering. The young man asked: "Why do you bother about all this? I am no longer thinking of this world, but only of heaven."<sup>704</sup>

It seems that it was to one of these two that Fr. Bertoni suggested that in his long nights: "I do not tire of saying the 'Hail Mary' meditate on it, as I do, at night when I cannot sleep. I say the rosary, but I stop to reflect on the world of the 'Hail Mary.' In this way, I can pass an hour or more, on each bead. I do the same with the 'Our Father' - in this way, the nights go by."<sup>705</sup>

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Fr. Gramego made a similar entry on January 12, 1844 to record the death of the "Reverend Fr. Modesto Cainer. He suffered over four' long and continuous periods of intense illness, with the utmost patience. He died 'in the kiss of the Lord,' having prayed continuously." In his brief resume of Fr. Cainer's life, Fr. Gramego recorded that he had tirelessly assisted Fr. Gaspar in finding and in buying books for the "precious library," established at the Stimmate..

Fr. Gramego went on: " 'May he rest in peace. Amen.' He was a very patient man, charitable, diligent in assisting the sick of the house. Especially was this evident in the care, which I would call heroic that he took of the student Ferrari, in his long and terrible sickness. God will repay him!"<sup>706</sup>

Fr. Cainer was only 46.

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<sup>703</sup> Gramego, "Memorie," Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>704</sup> Doc. XXVI, p.474; "Memorie intorno ai Padri ... "Verona" 1866, p. 46.

<sup>705</sup> Doc. XX, p. 188.

<sup>706</sup> Gramego, "Memorie."

Besides these deaths, that came after much suffering, Fr. Gramego also had to record a very sudden death which struck the Community:

"July 3, 1846: After five days of a painful and dangerous illness, that is encephalitis, Fr. Francis Cartolari died 'in the kiss of the Lord,' like an angel. His death has left us with a sorrow that I cannot express. He left such a memory of his virtues and his holiness, that to describe him, would take an entire notebook. He was 51 years old, almost 52. 'May Thy Will be done!' What else can be said?"<sup>707</sup>

In the midst of all these losses, there was one First Mass, to which we have already made some reference. It was that of Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, celebrated one week after the second death in 1842, that of young Louis Ferrari.<sup>708</sup>

Deaths such as these were, no matter how they afflict the heart, and grieve human nature, with the passing of time, elevate the soul, and lead it to God.

### Departures

The separations that did not bring comfort were those which were felt when various members left the Congregation.

Fr. Gramego noted the departure from the Community of a Brother, which he could not fathom. His only explanation was that it was up to him to accept it humbly, as from the hand of God.

"After having served in the house of the Lord, for 13 years, Francis Solari has returned to serve the world, and those in the world!"<sup>709</sup>

Fr. Gramego only echoed Fr. Bertoni's often repeated phrase, "Lowly, lowly..." at the departure of a member. He also would paraphrase the words of Christ: "Do you, too, wish to go?" The door is open, I will remain here alone!" It was said that these words of his deeply moved the Community.<sup>710</sup>

Fr. Gramego's note for June 4, 1843, betrays his feelings of dejection:

"While the Fathers are sweating teaching catechism, Fr. Vincent Raimondi decides to return home! He lived with us 12 years, 2 months and 18 days. The Stimmate grows ... or rather, the Stigmata becomes more intense!"<sup>711</sup>

He noted again: "August 25, 1847: A sad day! What can I write this time? A young priest, who is 36 years old, and who has spent 21 of these years here in the Community as our brother - and the last 8 or 9 of them, he has served as a most diligent scholar and dedicated to his work, now leaves us! He is one who has been

<sup>707</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 3, Intr., p. 584.

<sup>708</sup> "Memorie intorno ai Padri ...," o.c., p. 141.

<sup>709</sup> Gramego, "Memorie," o. c., April 4, 1843.

<sup>710</sup> Zara, "Cronache," Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>711</sup> Gramego, "Memorie," o.c.

as a beloved son of Fr. Gaspar, a young man for whom we have spent, suffered and done so much and now he is going away from us!’ This is Fr. Charles Fedelini, who has been promoted to the position of Lector of Moral Theology in the Diocesan Seminary, now is going home! O! my God! my God! ... I can say no more!”<sup>712</sup>

In 1846, Fr. Vincent Raimondi entered the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus. He did come back to the Stimmate to say Mass on June 13, 1853, for the repose of the soul of his old Father, Fr. Gaspar. He died, as we have said, exactly two years to the very day of Fr. Bertoni’s death, as an “approved Scholastic of the Society of Jesus.”<sup>713</sup>

Fr. Charles Fedelini, as he was saying good bye to Fr. Bertoni, received from him the repeated recommendation of not resigning his Chair of Moral Theology:

‘Remember, now, do not abandon your classes at the Seminary!’

Fr. Fedelini retained a sincere affection for the Community at the Stimmate. Not even his family thought he would ever recover his poor health, which was the reason Why he left the Congregation at this time.

On the day Fr. Bertoni died, June 12, 1853, Fr. Fedelini was sick in bed. He had not been informed that Fr. Bertoni was so close to death. We have his account of his thoughts on hearing the news:

“About 3:00 o’clock that afternoon, the following inspiration came to me: ‘You see, your brothers at the Stimmate have all been restored to health, and they are active once again - what about you?’ I felt a strong desire to return to the Stimmate.

“Two hours later, I was informed that Fr. Gaspar was dead, and again I had an inspiration. That night, he seemed very close to me ... on the following morning, I wrote to Fr. Marani right away, asking him if I could reenter.”<sup>714</sup>

Fr. Fedelini did have to wait a while, but we find the following entry in the house Chronicle: “September 16, 1855: He returned to his old nest, on the vigil of the Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis.”<sup>715</sup>

### **The Case of Fr. Lenotti**

Fr. Bertoni’s thoughts on one returning home, because of sickness, were never made clearer than they were in the case of Fr. Lenotti. When his prescribed studies had been terminated, as a young priest, he found himself so exhausted, that he was unable to study further, and was placed under the care of a doctor. After a while, the doctor himself suggested to Fr. Lenotti that he should return to his family

<sup>712</sup> I.c.

<sup>713</sup> “Breve Storia della Prov. Veneta, S.J.,” pp. 99, 343-29.

<sup>714</sup> Doc. XX, n. 8, p.124; “Memorie” of Fr. Fedelini, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>715</sup> Lenotti, “Memorie,” continuing Gramego’s, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

for a time. Fr. Lenotti was hesitant. To solve his dilemma, he then mentioned the doctor's advice to Fr. Bertoni.

His answer was, as Fr. Lenotti recorded it many years later - that Fr. Lenotti could go back to his family, but there was no assurance that he could be readmitted later.

"Fr. Lenotti accepted this decision humbly, and then, much encouraged, he reassured his beloved Father, that he would even prefer to sacrifice his life than his vocation. He said that he would await at the Stimmate, and no where else, the dispositions of Divine Providence concerning himself."<sup>716</sup>

God thereafter blessed him with good health. He took up his studies again, began hearing Confessions once more and to preach. He accepted again his full share in the active apostolate.

### **Testimony of Bishop Mutti**

There is no wonder, then, that because of similar conditions in the Community, as we have said previously, Fr. Bertoni first was obliged to drop a few classes in the school. Then, in 1841, he closed the school altogether.

As for the rest of the ministry in which the Community was engaged, the remaining healthy members sought to extend it. Now that they were no longer obliged to teach school, they gave more time to other phases of the apostolate. The Community was, of course, hampered by the sad reduction of its personnel. The harvest was indeed great, although the workers were so few.

Therefore, Bishop Peter Aurelius Mutti, Bishop of Verona from 1841-1852, when he was made the Patriarch of Venice, gave the following recommendation for the Community. His letter was dated December 7, 1853, and was sent from Venice:

"We do not hesitate to affirm, that we could not have expected from them a greater or more advantageous service to the Diocese. They are a credit to Religion and to the Diocese."<sup>717</sup>

In a subsequent Chapter, we will discuss what happened to the Community during the hard days of 1848. The Community was called upon to render most unusual service in the needs of the Diocese.



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<sup>716</sup> "Memorie intorno at Padri ...," o.c., p. 142, ff.

<sup>717</sup> Doc. XXIII, nn. II, 1, p. 250.

## CHAPTER XVII

**THE RENUNCIATION OF THE CARTOLARI INHERITANCE****The Fact of the Renunciation**

The last death that we have mentioned was that of Fr. Francis Cartolari. His passing brought still another surprise to Fr. Bertoni.

This excellent priest, of noble birth, out of his love for Christ always considered his personal vast wealth as insignificant. In a gesture to express his gratitude to Fr. Bertoni and the Community, who had looked after his needs for many years, he made an unusual will. He always looked upon himself as a poor man, one who had received alms from the Community, far beyond his worth.<sup>718</sup>

He did have riches, and in abundance. At the death of his widowed mother, Lady Francis (Borghetti) Cartolari, in April of 1845, he received a substantial inheritance. At that time, he wanted to sign it over to the Community, but permission was not granted to him to do so. He then made out his will, and named "Reverend Fr. Gaspar Bertoni," as his beneficiary. In the event he would refuse it, Fr. Cartolari named as substitutes Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego, Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli and Fr. Francis Benciolini, in that order. The assets of this will amounted to over a half a million Austrian lire, in 1846. It would be difficult to imagine its value, by today's rate of exchange.

Fr. Cartolari, then, died on July 3, 1846, and his will was opened two days later. On reading it, the Community gave proof of how meaningful its principles were. As soon as Fr. Bertoni heard of this unexpected wish of the late Fr. Cartolari, he stated that he did not want a cent of it. He then turned to the other three who had been named as substitutes. He told them they were free to make up their own minds, and asked them to think it over. The result was, perhaps even before their meeting had come to a close, the compiling, and the signing of the following statement:

"July 5th, 1846:

"We, the undersigned, of our own free and serious will, renounce all the rights accruing to us, and those which might come to us, from the last will and testament of the, Noble, Fr. Francis Cartolari. We consign the rights therefrom to his brother, the Noble Sire, Anthony Cartolari.

"In faith whereof, we affix our signatures:

Gaspar Bertoni

Michael Angelo Gramego

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<sup>718</sup> "Memorie intorno ai Padri ...," o.c., p. 50.

Cajetan Brugnoli

Francis Benciolini.”

With this, their meeting came to a close, and Fr. Bertoni assembled all “his sons in the chapel of the house. All the candles on the altar were lit, and he then delivered a brief, but fervent sermon, in which he urged them to thank God that He had given them the courage and the grace to sign that statement. He then exhorted them to love poverty, that they might follow more closely Jesus Christ, in His poverty. To express their gratitude, the ‘Te Deum’ was sung.”

With the memory of this day still fresh in his mind, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Fr. Bragato to tell him of the event. He wrote that God had granted to him and to his companions “to reject what Fr. Cartolari had left them ...” and that they preferred rather to draw on “the inheritance of his virtues.”<sup>719</sup>

This fact, of course, was a matter of public record, and it made an enormous impression. Admiration and praise was heaped upon them from the least expected quarters among the clergy. This was a time in which “the greed of ecclesiastics” was the talk of the city. There were scandals of priests tempering with their family estates, and a widespread practice of that custom, known in legal circles as “Mortmain.” Churches, Convents and various religious corporations came to possess lands by inalienable rights. This was a favorite gripe of the era, and much political hay was made of it.

A newspaper in Milan, called “La Fama”, had an article entitled:

“Two acts that bear credit on the Church of Verona.” One of the “acts” referred to was the renunciation of the Cartolari will.<sup>720</sup>

In an article in a paper in Verona, it was stated that “this deed demonstrates how just and holy are the priests of the Stimmate. They have acted in the spirit of the Gospels. How groveling are some Religious, Pastors and priests, who not only accept their inheritances, but even impose on their penitents the burden of leaving them large sums of money.”<sup>721</sup>

Three, full years later, a booklet was published entitled: “Statistical Report,” which mentioned this renunciation in glowing terms.

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<sup>719</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 3, Intr. & Text a), p. 583, f.; XX, p. 179, f.; XXVI p. 543 – The “Awarded” Anthony Cartolari, brother of Fr. Francis, “was most grateful for this act of Fr. Bertoni and the Congregation. He often came to the Stimmate with his little son to renew this gratitude from time to time. He had a marble slab inscribed and placed in his Oratory, in memory of the event.” Lenotti, Doc. XX, p. 180. This inscription is in Doc. XXVI, p. 544.

<sup>720</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 3, Intr. & Text b) & c), pp. 584-586.

<sup>721</sup> “Almanac,” Simeoni, 1847, Verona.



“So, this vast estate was not hindered from passing on, as both natural and divine laws prescribe. The generous example - rare indeed in the annals of our land - could be imitated; and serve always as a model.”<sup>722</sup>

Twenty years later, this renunciation was offered in evidence that the Community at the Stimmate was most exceptionally exempted from those laws prejudicial to Religious Institutes. This fact was presented to the new Italian Government, that this Community was “living testimony, and a school, of the selfishness of Clerics.”<sup>723</sup>

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We should perhaps examine the will itself a little more closely.

It does not seem possible that Fr. Cartolari could have imagined that his last will, so made out, would be handled any differently than it was. Fr. Bertoni's principles and thoughts on such matters were certainly very well known to Fr. Cartolari.

He had seen Fr. Bertoni absolutely refusing “the substantial bequests” offered to him by Monsignor Dionisi, and those of the wealthy merchant, John Trevisani. This is just to mention two cases to which we have already referred. Fr. Cartolari was certainly a witness to many other similar instances. There was, for example, the outright refusal of an estate left to the Stimmate, by a certain gentleman, that was worth 60,000 lire, according to the evaluation of a century ago. There was the case of a certain noble lady, who was a penitent of Fr. Bertoni, who wanted to leave him “a substantial sum.” She was, however, “forced to change her will, if she did not want to change her Confessor.”<sup>724</sup>

The fact that a number of books, in most valuable editions, had been accepted for the library, did not change this general policy. They were the gift of a Veronese priest, the Abbot Joseph Venturi, a most learned writer, orator and philanthropist.”<sup>725</sup>

Even shortly before Fr. Cartolari's death, in May of the previous year 1845, he personally participated in a similar renunciation. The nine priests who at that time comprised the Community at the Stimmate, had renounced the will of Francis (Borghetti) Cartolari - his own widowed mother. The priests did not accept this double legacy that asked for Masses, which it imposed as an obligation on the Community. The renunciation in this occasion was a total, and all-inclusive declaration. We will here quote parts from it:

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<sup>722</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 3, Text b), p. 585, f.

<sup>723</sup> I.c., Text c), p. 586.

<sup>724</sup> I.c., p. 580, Intr.

<sup>725</sup> Bresciani, “Collezione Orazioni Funebri,” Verona, 1866, Vol.I, p.386.

### A Declaration of Policy

The priests of the Stimate ... responding to the request which has been presented to them), draw up this Instance, as a result of certain benefits accruing to them from the last will and testament of the late Lady Frances Borghetti Cartolari.

“They, being deeply moved with gratitude, toward the most pious Testatrix, are nonetheless content with the property which they now own, through their personal and civil rights. Up until this present time, they have served the Church and their country gratuitously, to the best of their ability.

“This has been accomplished without seeking or accepting benefices, salaries or pious legacies. They have likewise rejected bequests for perpetual Masses and Chaplaincies.

“Hence, they are not now to depart from this policy, being sufficient for them as remuneration, the expressed satisfaction of their Bishops, their fellow citizens and the expressed good pleasure of their Majesties ... Francis, of glorious memory, and Ferdinand, now happily reigning.

“The priests are, therefore, unanimous in the resolution to renounce the above mentioned legacies.”

“Signed: (there followed the signatures of the nine priests),

May 13, 1845.”<sup>726</sup>

Comparing the two acts of renunciation, that of 1845 and the one in 1846, there seems to be evident an inversion of proportions - there is a very solemn declaration to renounce a much lesser bequest, in 1845, and then just a few lines to reject the vast estate in 1846. The reason is, though, that the latter act presupposed the former declaration, as still the statement of policy and hence, there was no need of a repetition.

Let us return now to the question under discussion. Fr. Cartolari not only had read the declaration of 1845, and signed it, but he also had copied it. The document presently in the Archives at the Stimate, is in his handwriting.

In referring back to the signed declaration of 1845, the subscribed policy was that “the priests of the Stimate ... are content with the property which they now own, through their personal and civil rights ...”

It could not, therefore, be deduced that the Community would accept any personal property that the individual members might give for the support of the Community and its ministry . Neither could it be concluded that even though there was excluded any such support during their lives, that this would leave the door

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<sup>726</sup> Doc. XXVII, n. 2, p. 583, f.

open for them to dispose of it in favor of the Community at their deaths. The declaration that they all signed makes no such distinctions.

However, this was the first time that any member of the Community had disposed of his personal goods in its behalf by his last will and testament. Every renunciation up until this one involved gifts from outsiders. It might have been that Fr. Cartolari had reasoned in this way.

For Fr. Bertoni, however, there were no exceptions. For him, the words of the declaration were to be understood “as written,” making no distinction between gifts from outsiders, or from the members of the Community. His rule applied to all goods that the Community would own. The members were to make any disposition of their own property that they chose, except in its behalf.

Although this was a clear application of Fr. Bertoni’s personal humility, he did admit that “these principles, outlined in the declaration, greatly contributed to the honor of God.”<sup>727</sup>, and this was because of the special circumstances of those times. He always counseled others, only what was for him a practiced maxim. He had once written to Mother Naudet: “Thus, providing good things, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sign of men.” This text was especially dear to Fr. Bertoni, and he frequently cited it.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> I.c., n. 1, Intr. & Text, b).

<sup>728</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, May 1, 1824, Mss. n. 71-2.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**FR. BERTONI'S ROOM**

We will now return to the room of Fr. Bertoni, as it was described in the documents that have come down to us. As we know, he was confined to it throughout the better part of 1844 spending his days either in bed, or in his chair.

It was a large room, opening on the westward side, somewhat apart from the other bed rooms of the house, and was most simple. There was a large crucifix in it. There were a few pictures there, but in the closet, the walls were completely bare. Its inhabitant abhorred anything that smacked of luxury. In the wall between the windows from which he could have watched the sun set over Verona, there was an old fireplace. About in the middle of the inside wall, there was a door that opened into the Domestic Chapel of the Transfiguration, honoring the mystery to which its altar was dedicated.<sup>729</sup>

This door was a means of consolation for Fr. Bertoni. Through it, every day, he was able to assist at Holy Mass. Very few times did he celebrate it himself during this year" so he would receive Holy Communion at the Mass offered by one of the priests of the house. This Mass was always celebrated there, even on Holy Days, when the priests would also be in duty for the services in the Church downstairs.

He used to say: "Do not let me be deprived of this one consolation and comfort. Does not a poor, old and sick man merit at least this regard. Others have healthy legs, and they can very well go to Mass elsewhere, but how can I?" For this, there was no answer.<sup>730</sup>

Through his door, too, many times he struggled to the altar to say a few brief words to any group that might have been selected to gather there to hear him. This was, of course, in addition to those times when the small groups also gathered around his bed. We have already referred to those hand-picked members of the Marian Congregation, as well as the young seminarians making their Retreat just before their Ordination. A number of priests also heard their retreat sermons, gathered around his bed.

**Spiritual Exercises of 1849**

Forty-two years later, a priest ordained on 1849, recalled: "I can still see him and hear his holy words. His serene and kind face made such an impression on me. I can never forget the firm conviction with which he expressed the truths of our faith, and the moral code of the Gospel. He had such a natural delivery, and an unbelievable charity. He was always so modest, and only sought to mould the hearts of others, as he had already done to his own, with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the sayings of the Church Fathers, the examples of the Saints and the

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<sup>729</sup> Doc. XX, p. 176; XXVI, p. 539.

<sup>730</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 411.

opinions of the great theologians. He had these at the tips of his fingers, and it was clear that he comprehended them perfectly.<sup>731</sup>

This was the testimony of Fr. John Beltrame who had labored as a Missionary for nine years in Central Africa. He became the Superior of an Institution for girls, founded by Fr. Nicholas Mazza. He was a Professor, writer, a member of a number of institutes and academies, as well as a Knight and a Commander of the Crown of Italy. In his time, he was an influential man in Verona.<sup>732</sup>

It is clear, that Fr. Bertoni's prime concern was what pertained to the soul. The inconveniences of old age, and its ailments were overlooked, in his consuming desire to be a docile instrument in the hands of God.

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During the winter, that room, which was already bleak enough, was a true penance for the old man. He would huddle in his arm chair, with his hands joined under a shabby muff, and with his cape thrown over his shoulders. Fr. Lenotti tells us that this was "old, worn, patched and so threadbare through the shoulders, that it could be sewn no more ..." <sup>733</sup> Fr. Giacobbe adds: "It seemed more suitable to keep the cold in, than it was to keeping it out." <sup>734</sup>

Fr. Bertoni was asked on occasion: "Father, may we light a fire in the fireplace? Should we bring in a heater? Then, perhaps we might get you a new cloak."

His answer would then be most emphatic: "No, do not get a new cloak!" <sup>735</sup>

Finally, his condition and his obedience to the doctor made him relent somewhat. Fr. Giacobbe tells us that "whatever was prescribed for his health, out of his deferential nature, he would accept." <sup>736</sup>

### **Still Administrator and Head of the Household**

Through it all, whatever time he had free from his limited priestly duties, and his meetings with "men of counsels," his day passed in prayer, study and the government of his Community. Furthermore, even in these last years, he still kept an active hand in the administration of the country property. Everyone in the house gave full recognition to this room, and to its solitary occupant. <sup>737</sup> Whatever he said, was carried through. All the strings of the tapestry were firmly in his hands.

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<sup>731</sup> Letter: Beltrame-Gradinati, Feb. 10, 1891, Ap.Proc., fol. 685.

<sup>732</sup> Summar., p. 34, f., par. 80.

<sup>733</sup> Doc. XX, p. 176.

<sup>734</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 525.

<sup>735</sup> Doc. XX, p. 175, f. (not exact quotes).

<sup>736</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 525.

<sup>737</sup> Doc. XX, p. 140, f.; XXVI, p.411, f.

Fr. Lenotti states, and we have every reason to believe him, that it was most unusual for this old man, who had never seen either Sezano or Stallavena, yet manage them with such vision. He had a clear idea and comprehension of “their exact location, the state of their fields, their houses and streams, than those who had been there and studied them. He seemed to have an eye for property, and could deduce much about its topography. He would listen attentively to the descriptions of the other members of the Community who would report to him on their return from a visit to the country estates. He would also listen to the real estate agents who came to see him from time to time. He would ask them for the most minute facts. He handled every detail, and could discuss them with clarity and exactness. His memory was truly a marvel.”<sup>738</sup>

From his room were issued the plans for the renovations “for practically the entire lots, as well as for the plantings and the cultivation and the irrigation, which he devised by changing the course of the streams. He was not niggardly as regards the expenses involved, but was most practical. He manifested a real talent in such ventures. The specifications for the restoration of the houses for the workers were precise, and called for solid structures. He provided much work, both in the country and in the city, too, for the great benefit of many workmen. Fr. Bertoni had work for many poor peasants during every season of the year, to their great advantage and comfort.”<sup>739</sup>

Our source for this information could not have been better informed. We might add, however, it would be well to keep in mind the social level of a century ago.

The source just cited remarked: “... he provided much work ... in the city, too ...” In 1845, the entire roof of the Church was done over, as well as its façade, that was put into the style that can still be seen there today.<sup>740</sup>

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Neither deaths, nor departures, crosses tribulations or trials, that crushed him from time to time, were able to hinder or slow down the steady pace of this old man. His body was visibly wasting away, but his spirit was alive, and thriving in God.

He used to say that as “the waves swelled around him, he would remember that the Lord was in the boat with him, even though He did seem to be asleep; He was just biding his time, waiting for the Lord to say to him: ‘Come!’, as He did to Peter, that he might then walk on the waves. O! Most loving, although hidden,

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<sup>738</sup> Doc. XX, p. 141.

<sup>739</sup> I.c., p. 177.

<sup>740</sup> This information was found in Folder 493, of the old Archives of Verona, “Building Commission,” Section of the Archives of the State.

Providence of God! Who can fear, while he is in His hands, and under His protection?"<sup>741</sup>

Long years before, he had advised Mother Naudet: "We must throw Ourselves into the sea, and some porpoise will assist us to the beach."<sup>742</sup> "Let us trust in God, as this is a beautiful trust - let us entrust ourselves to God, and let Him, Who can do all things, take care of it all."<sup>743</sup>

### **The Year 1848**

This was Fr. Bertoni's attitude in that turbulent year of 1848.

Truly, during this period, the Jesuits were the scape-goats. A revolution had broken out in Vienna, on March 13th - Milan was under 'siege five days later. On this day, in Verona, the Jesuit Community was at supper, when they heard a noise crowd assembling outside, shouting: "Long live Italy!"; and "Death to the Jesuits!" Admittedly, this latter shout was not as general as the former, and did not seem to have been taken up by the majority of those who had gathered.

The local garrison was powerless before such a mob. For this day, and those following, neither a soldier nor a policeman could be seen anywhere. Then, the shouts became more intense, and the crowd began throwing stones at the house. Providentially, at that moment, a severe thunderstorm broke out, with a heavy downpour of rain and hailstones, and the courageous crowd ran for cover.

One of the Jesuits remarked: "Someone up there likes us!"

Many among the simple Veronese faithful always considered this storm to have been a miracle wrought by the intercession of their favorite "Madonna del Popolo."

After this demonstration, the Jesuit property had been posted with signs stating: "Property of the County," that it might be spared future assaults. On March 19th and 20th, the Jesuits all dispersed, with the help of a number of families, and a few of those who were called "Patriots". Their Novitiate was later restored to them, but their school and college remained what they had been posted to be: "Property of the County!"<sup>744</sup>

It does not seem as though this scene was repeated at the Stimate.

Malicious tongues were unloosed everywhere and Fr. Bertoni and the Community at the Stimate, were the objects of various plots and conspiracies of

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<sup>741</sup> Doc. XXXV, p. 753, n. 10.

<sup>742</sup> Letter: Bertoni-Naudet, Mss. fot., not dated, but it is from Sept. 1816.

<sup>743</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. 8, p. 750; XXVII, n. 7, p. 609.

<sup>744</sup> "Breve Storia ... S.J.," O.O., pp. 82; 246, f.

the “Libertines,” Fr. Lenotti tells us. They already had their eyes on the property, and sought its ruin.<sup>745</sup>

Eighteen years later, a good liberal, after commenting on the exemplary generosity of the Community at the Stimate, remarked: “It was said at the time, that they were opposed to every progressive move to make the people free. For my part, I do not know what they were thinking, nor do I have the right to question their motives. I look to the fruit of a tree, and when that fruit is good, I just hope that the tree will prosper.”<sup>746</sup> Most likely, in 1848, not even this author was so kind.

Fr. Bertoni had a noted aversion for what he called the sin of the Revolution, as “one of the more serious sins,” and, in a certain sense, “it was the gravest sin of all, because of the consequences that flowed from it.” Certainly, such an attitude was not one to draw the sympathy of the “Libertines.”<sup>747</sup>

Furthermore, in this turbulent era, he and his companions “were dedicated to preach and to emphasize the Catholic principle,” Fr. Lenotti states, “of faithful subjection that was due to the Sovereigns and to all authorities.”<sup>748</sup> Their frequent theme was, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God, the things that are God’s.” out of their genuine love for God and country. If Verona did not have anything comparable to the demonstrations that took place in other cities in 1848, this was due in no small way, to his ministry, and example and to that of his priests.<sup>749</sup>

It is a fact that at the first signs of the weakening of the German colossus, the cities of Lombard - Veneto, one by one, were the scenes of demonstrations that broke out. When the Piedmontese were established outside of Verona, they counted on one in Verona, but none materialized. At that moment, there was ‘some doubt as to the success of the insurrection.’<sup>750</sup> For several years, even after this, Verona was the center of operations for the forces favorable to Austria.

Nonetheless, Fr. Bertoni was to be caused much grief from a most unexpected source - the Austrian authorities.

### **“Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea”**

A large detachment of veterans from the “Battle of Santa Lucia,” of May 6, 1848, were soon to be dispatched again into the frightful conflict.

They wanted more than anything else, first to be restored to peace with God. They made arrangements with a priest at the Church of San Nicolò for

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<sup>745</sup> Doc. XX, p. 173.

<sup>746</sup> J. B. Montanari, “Che Fare?” Verona, 1866, p. 44, ff.

<sup>747</sup> Doc. XX, p. 172.

<sup>748</sup> I.c., 179.

<sup>749</sup> Doc. XVIII, n. 3, p. 104, f.; XX, p. 173.

<sup>750</sup> G. Colombo, “Punti di Storia dell’Evo Medio & Moderno”, V Ed., Piacenza, 1892, p. 701, ff.



Confessions, agreeing on a particular Sunday evening, when they all marched into the Church. There were nine priests waiting to hear the many soldiers' confessions; among the Confessors, there were two priests from the Stimate - Fr. Francis Benciolini and Fr. Innocent Venturini.

As all the confessions could not be heard that one Sunday night, it was decided to have them again on the following afternoon. Again the Church was packed with soldiers. All of a sudden, the Church was surrounded by a detail of about 70 soldiers, and every door was guarded.

It was announced that all the priests were under arrest, and each one of them was searched. If anyone of them was found to have either papers or money on his person, these were confiscated, and each one would be accused of attempting to bribe the soldiers to be loyal to the Revolution. Unfortunately, Fr. Benciolini had both papers and money - he had his catechism papers from the lesson of the day before that he had taught at St. Stephen's, and he also had some money to purchase provisions for the Dereletti.

At 11:00 o'clock that night, with the streets deserted, because of the strict curfew that had been imposed, they were marched from the Church of San Nicolò to "St. Thomas' Prison," across the bridge. It was a sad procession of nine priests, with military hats and capes on, escorted by German soldiers, as a line of convicts. Fr. Benciolini overheard their guards talking about "execution" and the "firing squad." It was truly a state of siege for them, so he suggested to his fellow priests that each one of them make an act of contrition.

At St. Thomas' Prison, all nine were locked in two damp, dark and filthy cells. In the poor light, one of the priests stumbled over two or three Piedmontese soldiers who had been captured in the Battle of Santa Lucia. The two Priests from the Stimate were kept somewhat apart from the rest of the priests. They did not taste their first food until 2:00 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon. From the nearby cells, every once in a while they would hear: "Priest, Priest, Priest - soon you'll die like a beast!"

We can just imagine their hardships - there were five cots for 12 men. Somewhat later, they were permitted to receive something for all their troubles, from the Pastor of San Nicolò, which, however, was subjected to a rigorous search. They spent nine days in this manner, although after the first four days, some information had leaked out that gave them a slight hope that their situation would be relieved.<sup>751</sup>

Fr. Bertoni was deeply concerned all throughout this obnoxious situation. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>752</sup> He used his personal influence to the utmost, beginning with the Bishop. All sorts of letters of

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<sup>751</sup> Thomas Netti, "Castelnuovo e gli Austriaci, nel 1848," Verona, 1888, c. XVI.

<sup>752</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 424.

recommendation went back and forth to the authorities. There were delays, and the reason alleged was that a state of siege had been proclaimed. Everything was to no avail, until the return of Field Marshall Radetsky, who did not arrive back in the city until July 13th, after the victory of Monte Berico. He acceded to Bishop Mutti's demands, and all the priests were finally released, after a warning was given to them.<sup>753</sup>

### **Assistance to those Condemned to Death**

We do not know the nature of the warning given to the two priests from the Stimmate. Whatever it was, it was soon to bear extraordinary fruit.

The state of siege and the subsequent declaration of martial law were not of short duration in Verona. It lasted throughout 1848 and the following year. Verona was the theatre of war and the power of Austria was now clearly struggling for survival, in hand to hand combat, in a forest of bayonets. Those captured, and condemned to death, were not few in number.

Fr. Lenotti writes: "The Military Command did allow the captured soldiers the comforts of their Religion, by permitting them to have Italian Confessors. For this task, however, it decreed that only trustworthy priests could be permitted to attend to the spiritual needs of the prisoners. The military authorities made this known to Bishop Mutti."

The Bishop then turned to Fr. Bertoni for such priests. He was more than happy to come to the aid of these poor unfortunates that were condemned to death. He "very willingly" supplied the priests.<sup>754</sup>

He chose the very two who had been imprisoned themselves, and who had been warned by Marshall Radetsky. These two priests enjoyed Fr. Bertoni's confidence in a special way. They had already had a taste of life on "death row" and so they easily won the confidence of the condemned prisoners.

Fr. Lenotti tells us: "They exercised this special ministry for several years with solicitude and zeal."<sup>755</sup>

"Their care of those unfortunate men was variously described, as a "loving service," "Charity," that became ever more intense, as the needs for it increased."<sup>756</sup>

"God, seeing their results," Fr. Lenotti continues, "blessed their efforts. The Bishop and the government were fully satisfied. Hence, Fr. Bertoni had the glory of

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<sup>753</sup> T. Netti, o.c.

<sup>754</sup> Doc. XX, p. 160.

<sup>755</sup> l.c.

<sup>756</sup> Giacobbe, "Cenni intorno all vita di Innocente Venturini," Verona, 1864, p. 13.

seeing his sons serve as Confessors to the Imperial Throne, as well as at the gallows.”<sup>757</sup>

Such a comparison may be somewhat bold, but it remains true that Christians of every lot have spiritual needs.

### **Faithful to the Pope and to the Church**

All the while, Fr. Bertoni was aging, and his discomfort was increasing. In his soul, he keenly felt the tragedy that enveloped that era.

All that happened to himself and to his Community at the Stimate, in the silence of his soul, he offered before the crucifix. All would there be forgiven and forgotten.<sup>758</sup> He prayed his heart out for the Sovereigns, for the authorities and for the state. He also asked for prayers, and had Masses celebrated for these intentions.<sup>759</sup>

As for the Church, “he always sought her glory - he rejoiced in her good fortune and prosperity, and was deeply saddened and tormented in her travails and adversity. For the Church and for the Supreme Pontiff, he prayed’ constantly, and entreated others to do so.”<sup>760</sup>

We can only imagine his anguish when he learned all that happened in Rome during this tragic year of 1848. How he grieved in the contrast of the deceitful shouts: “Long live Pius IX<sup>th</sup>”, on the lips, and in the prostrations of the very ones who harbored secret plots, leading to the assassination of the Pope’s Minister of State. How he mourned the flight of the Pope to Gaeta, the seditions and the political developments of the Mazzinian Republic, up through the middle of 1849!

Fr. Bertoni was most encouraged by the sympathy ‘that the Pope was shown”, when all of Christianity was aroused by his many trials. There was a magnificent competition of generous invitations sent to the Pope - letters, communications and protests. There was a worldwide willing to share in the Pope’s sorrow, and an unshakable loyalty manifested by the people of their filial attachment and submission.

When Fr. Bertoni received the two volumes of this collection that was entitled, “The Catholic World, Prostrate before Pius IX,” he was overjoyed. It contained over 800 pages, “in quarto,” of some of these sentiments which were sent to the Holy Father at this time. Fr. Lenotti tells us that “Fr. Bertoni wanted to read all these letters with his companions. There were letters in French, Spanish and Portuguese, and all of them were read. Although he was sick at the time, he read the two thick volumes with great contentment and satisfaction, despite the

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<sup>757</sup> Doc. XX, p. 160.

<sup>758</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 424.

<sup>759</sup> Doc. XX, p.172, f.

<sup>760</sup> I.c., p.171.

fact that so many of the letters were similar, as the circumstances that prompted their being sent, were always, or just about always, the same.”<sup>761</sup>

### **The Announcement of the Future Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception**

On February 11, 1849, in the midst of his many sufferings, Fr. Bertoni’s heart rejoiced. The Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, on that date, issued an Encyclical from his exile in Gaeta, addressed to the Catholic Episcopate. The Pope asked all Prelates for preparatory studies, with a view to the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the august Mother of God.<sup>762</sup>

This most consoling mystery had long cheered the morning routine of Fr. Bertoni in a prayer he composed containing a dally consecration to Mary. This he did even before he venerated her on the altar commemorating this title of hers, in the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception at the Stimate. This joy, of his early years, was renewed again and again, and grew throughout his entire life.

One day he came to know, from a source that has not come down to us, that Cardinal Mai had made a “precious discovery” in an old codex of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Fr. Giacobbe asked him: “What is this ‘precious discovery?’”

Fr. Bertoni responded: “Haven’t you heard? There are those who are opposed to this privilege of Mary, and who base so much of their objection on the authority of this holy Doctor. Now, however, they are subdued as their bastion has crumbled. There is an old parchment, reputed to be in the handwriting of St. Thomas Aquinas which has never been printed with his works. In this treatise, Fr. Thomas asserts and defends the privilege of the Immaculate Conception. What a treasure has Our Cardinal Mai uncovered: And what a weighty authority he adds to those who maintain this opinion that so honors Mary.”<sup>763</sup>

Fr. Bertoni’s happiness grew still more intense “when he heard that the responses and wishes of all the Bishops were in agreement. They sought and asked for the Pontiff’s declaration, which will fill the entire Catholic world with joy and consolation.”

Fr. Giacobbe then adds: “How much greater would Fr. Bertoni’s joy have been had he lived to see the day in which the Infallible Teacher raise his voice definitely to honor Mary, and to bring comfort to the souls of the faithful. However, God Himself was filling His faithful servant with a torrent of joy and happiness, in

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<sup>761</sup> I.c., p. 172; “L’Orbe Cattolico,” Naples, 1850.

<sup>762</sup> “Enciclopedia Cattolica,” Vol. VI, col. 1656.

<sup>763</sup> XXVI, p. 510, f.

the real vision of the magnificent glory with which He Willed to honor and exalt His Divine Mother.”<sup>764</sup>

### **A Detachment of Soldiers at the Stimate**

On the 12th day of April 1850, the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, after so many bitter trials “had the greatest of his joys in returning from the land of his exile to the Eternal City, near the tomb of the Apostles.”<sup>765</sup> Fr. Bertoni echoed this happiness in his own heart and spirit, by uniting himself with the joy of the Holy Father and the entire Catholic world.

He did indeed need some respite, for these were dark days at the Stimate. The Austrian authority barely escaped its disintegration and had managed to hang on with its indecisive victories of 1848 and 1849. It realized full well the precarious position that it was now in, and its uncertain future.

The historian, Todesco, states: “Austria was now hardly more than an army confined to its quarters.”<sup>766</sup>

Barracks had to be built to house these troops. In the meantime, both public and private buildings were requisitioned. At this time in the Stimate, there were no less than four sick men.

Fr. Bragato wrote from Prague to Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli: “My poor brothers! For them, peace and quiet are no more. But, God is just and holy - His judgments are inscrutable, so we must adore them!”<sup>767</sup>

He then promised to do what he could to alleviate the situation, but his efforts were in vain. Not even the fact that there were four sick men at the Stimate, and that Fr. Bertoni’s condition was truly grave, was of any avail. So many times the repose of those ill was interrupted by the noisy tenants on the floor below.

The Chronicle of that era records: “Was this situation, then, entirely a misfortune? I would not say that it was. I note only that God makes use of all things for good. The few healthy priests at the Stimate were presented with a new field for their zeal. So many of those soldiers came back to the Sacraments, and changed their ways, and began to live Christian lives.”<sup>768</sup>

In this small apostolate, the first Brother, merits special mention. “With his gentle manner,” he succeeded in convincing six or eight soldiers to come with him every Saturday to the Church to go to Confession. At the early Mass on Sunday,

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<sup>764</sup> I.c., p. 511.

<sup>765</sup> L. Todesco, “Corso di Storia della Chiesa,” Turin-Rome, 1929, Vol. V, 2nd Part, p. 289.

<sup>766</sup> I.c., p. 291.

<sup>767</sup> Letter: Bragato-Brugnoli, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>768</sup> Zara, “Cronache,” Arch., Stimm., Verona.

"how beautiful and edifying it was to see 10 or 12 of them at the Communion rail."<sup>769</sup>

The troops came into the Stimate on March 6, 1850 - and were to remain over four years. They did not depart until June 23, 1854.<sup>770</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> "Memorie intorno ai Padri ...," o.c., 79 f.

<sup>770</sup> "Breve Cronaca della Cong ...," Verona, 1917, p. 89.

## CHAPTER XIX

**“AT THE SCHOOL OF GOD”****An exemplary Patient**

We have only mentioned in passing, that Fr. Bertoni's health had weakened considerably. His illness had become progressively more serious. From December of 1850, he was confined, to his bed for the last two and one-half years of his life. Over these long last 30 months, he never got out of bed even for a single day.<sup>771</sup>

For more than 36 years, he had defined his own ailments as “the school which the Lord wants me to attend.”

Long years before his last illness, he had written this to Mother Naudet, and added: “In your charity, please pray that I may derive profit from it all, and be better disposed to serve Him.”

In his last illness, his sufferings, both of body and spirit, he kept this same outlook. He remarked to two Seminary Professors who had come to see him: “Here we are back in the School of God.” The two priests smiled at his comparison, and were more than edified in that, despite all that he was going through, he still had his sense of humor.<sup>772</sup>

How well they knew that this apparent light-heartedness concealed on the one hand, a profound spirituality - and on the other hand, Fr. Giacobbe adds, “this was the effect of his lifelong desire to suffer solely for his God. It was the result of that profound humility that motivated him to hide his real sufferings, not only from others, but even from himself, if such a thing were possible.”<sup>773</sup>

Perhaps we cannot imagine spending 30 long months in bed, “almost always in the same position, on his left side. He was not able to move, or to make the slightest change in his position. Fr. Lenotti has recorded: “Even the thought of having to move, filled him with terror.”<sup>774</sup> Just exactly what was this last illness has not been scientifically identified. The Certificate of Death stated: “Senile Cattarh!”<sup>775</sup>

Fr. Bertoni accepted the fact that he was indeed back in the school of God. He seemed to have been specially chosen by God to attend it. This was in full accord with another principle that often issued from his lips: “Sickness is the proof of a man.”<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>771</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 427.

<sup>772</sup> I.c., p. 426, Text & Footnote; XX, p. 144.

<sup>773</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 427.

<sup>774</sup> Doc. XX, p. 141

<sup>775</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 434, & Footnote, p. 436.

<sup>776</sup> Mss. Benciolini, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

Nothing else matters to him - he was content to respond to that duty which had been given to him by the Teacher, as the long hours passed, in his crucible.

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During his many lengthy illnesses, the obedience of Fr. Gaspar to the doctors, seemed to be, and was called heroic. He obeyed them with simplicity. He honored them and respected them with a singular veneration. He used to say: "Honor thy doctor ... on account of thy need!"

To this motive of his own dependence on them, he also added another characteristic norm - "Because the Most High had created them."

"He would explain to the doctors just exactly how he felt, and then would meekly accept whatever they decided. If they restricted his vocal prayers, or asked him to rest and not to concentrate his mind and heart - or if they forbade him to say his Breviary, or not to fast, or prescribed certain medicines for him, solids or liquids that were repugnant to him, he would simply obey. They left their prescriptions with full liberty, knowing that he would carry them out."

Fr. Giacobbe records that if there was some medicine particularly distasteful to him, it was a marvel to see the struggle in him. His virtue would just overpower his nature - his obedience was in complete charge. "He would not refuse what the doctors ordered, we are told by those who saw him in this state, for all the gold in the world."

There was a time in which the doctor had not come to see him for several days, and Fr. Bertoni really had needed him. It seemed that he would resent the doctor's unexplained absence. When the doctor did finally appear, Fr. Bertoni registered no complaints with him. He rather made excuses for the doctor and stated that he knew full well that the doctor had other duties to attend. Through this manifestation of his gentle manner, his sincerity and his understanding, the doctor was very moved in making his apology. Those, who witnessed this incident, never forgot it.<sup>777</sup>

Just as he showed this obedience to the doctors, in a like manner was he docile to the various infirmarians.

Again, Fr. Giacobbe tells us: "All that the infirmarians would do were to tell Fr. Bertoni what had to be done, and he would comply with it without question." He always felt that they were taking too much care of him, and he spared them as much as he could. Outside of a real necessity, he never called the infirmarian, or asked for anything.

His needs were always so few, and he would even suffer quietly when the infirmarian was delayed, even if this prolonged his discomfort. Whenever he did ask

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<sup>777</sup> Doc. XX, p. 141; XXVI, p. 421, f.



for anything, his way of asking was always so humble and so polite, that it deeply impressed all those who cared for him over the years.

Frequently, his expressions would be: "Please do me a favor ... I am sorry to be bothering you ..." or something similar. These are some of the reminiscences recorded after his death by those who were with him in his long sicknesses.<sup>778</sup>

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There is further testimony that has come down to us that attests to his charity. He did not manifest it only to those who waited on him, but those who came to visit him were deeply impressed by it. As he would listen to the afflictions of those who had sought him out, he sincerely would commiserate with them, and gave them encouragement. He never made any comparison to his own far more severe difficulties. It was only to the doctors, or to those who made it necessary for him to do so, that he ever spoke of his own sufferings. He never sought the compassion, comfort or encouragement of others for himself, nor did he ever describe, much less exaggerate, the intensity of his own discomfort.<sup>779</sup>

Whoever came to his room was received with unmistakable signs of reverence and honor. Sometimes he would introduce the conversation with: "Well" here we are at the school ... Here you see a lazy man! ... Here you see a loafer who does not deserve all the care that he gets!"

He would not refer to all that he was going through, but when his visitors were taking their leave, he would earnestly ask for their prayers. This, however, Fr. Bertoni had done all, through his life, so no one was able to discern from it, just how uncomfortable he was.<sup>780</sup>

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With every good reason does Fr. Giacobbe point out this silence that Fr. Bertoni manifested in his school of good example and Christian virtue. He tells us that he was struck by it every time that he visited the suffering priest. Fr. Bertoni's thought was that in this "school of God," his attention had to be undivided.

Fr. Giacobbe also brings up another point for our consideration. "Fr. Bertoni's apparent lack of concern for himself was neither occasional, nor extraordinary in the long course of his sufferings. He never uttered anything unusual, nor spouted off sententious wisdom. His voice was calm whenever he spoke, and from his manner, you could never deduce that he was so uncomfortable. The prayers he used to mumble in the times of his greatest pain were not audible to anyone in the room." All of this was merely the result, or the

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<sup>778</sup> Doc. XX, p. 142; XXVI, p. 422.

<sup>779</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 423.

<sup>780</sup> I.c., p. 426.

fulfillment of his resolution to keep his interior life to himself. He wanted to keep it all, as the Apostle had stated: "Hidden with Christ in God."<sup>781</sup>

A visitor might recall to his mind some good thing he had done in his long and difficult life. Poor Br. Louis Ferrari tried this just once. Br. Ferrari was the most diligent and solicitous infirmarian that there was. One day, he noticed that Fr. Bertoni was even more uncomfortable than usual. His pain, very evidently, was most intense, and there was nothing that could alleviate it. In his simplicity, the good Brother innocently remarked: "Father, you should take comfort in all the good that you have done in your life."

Later, Br. Ferrari told Fr. Giacobbe that this was one statement he never should have expressed. He then related what Fr. Bertoni replied: "No: No! Don't ever say that! I am a poor and unfortunate sinner!" Then turning to those of us who were standing around his bed, he said: 'Please pray to God for me - pray much to Him, that He may show me Mercy.'<sup>782</sup>

### **The Apostolate of a Dying Man**

It is hard to imagine a priest reduced to these extremes, still rendering services to his Diocese, but Fr. Bertoni rendered many. The Chancery Office did not spare him, even though he could no longer hold a pen in his hand. He then dictated all his replies, and struggled to sign his name.

There was one canonical case in which he arrived at a different solution than did Fr. Charles Fedelini, the Professor of Moral Theology.<sup>783</sup> He had reviewed a book that needed the "Imprimatur."<sup>784</sup>

There was another "Book of Lectures," that he reviewed, "at the express order of the Bishop". Fr. Bertoni submitted four columns of observations, in which he suggested corrections and various cautions, with an accompanying letter to Bishop Peter Aurelius Mutti.<sup>785</sup>

This letter was dated July 11, 1851. By this time, Fr. Bertoni had been in bed for eight months. This letter, and its photograph, we do have some idea of what he was like at this time. It is most clear that his mind was perfectly lucid and that he was most orderly in what he dictated. There is evidence of the delicacy of his conscience, and the balance between his frankness and his modesty - his habitual humility is ever present.

His physical condition could be deduced from the way in which he signed this letter. Out of his deference to the Bishop, he did manage to write his signature, but

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<sup>781</sup> I.c., p. 421.

<sup>782</sup> I.c., p. 469; Giacobbe Papers, Arch., Stimm., Verona.

<sup>783</sup> Ms. fot. at the S. Cong. of Rites.

<sup>784</sup> Cartolari Folder, Comm. Lib., Verona.

<sup>785</sup> Ms. orig. at the S. Cong. of Rites.

there is hardly a trace of his most careful handwriting, for which he was noted up until 1850.

It is evident that Fr. Bertoni's handwriting had depreciated even further in a solution to a canonical case he submitted in January 1852. But here, too, his mind was still very clear. These few facts then should suffice to have some idea of his activity, even from his sick bed.

As we have already mentioned, all this time he continued to receive visitors. He riveted all his attention on anyone who came to see him, and on the problems that were being discussed, giving to each one that advice he considered best. He also spent much time reading. His sons at the Stimate were always eager, too, to read to him - this practice went on, almost until the very eve of his death.<sup>786</sup>

Fr. Bertoni very well could have known and appreciated a new Review which was initiated in 1850. It was dedicated to the service of the Holy See, and was the fruit of the learning of the Fathers of the Company of Jesus. At the Stimate, their learning was always considered to be the last word. This Review has continued to this day, and is called the "Civiltà Cattolica".<sup>787</sup>

Fr. Bertoni's life was ebbing away; as the year 1853 approached it was to be the year of his death.

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<sup>786</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 427.

<sup>787</sup> Doc. XXIX, n. 4, p. 604.

## CHAPTER XX

**FR. GASPAR'S LAST MONTHS****Unbelievable sufferings**

The agony that Fr. Bertoni endured the last five months of his life demands a Chapter to itself, so indicative were these long days of the character that was his.

Fr. Lenotti noted: "His condition could draw only compassion - he was unable to make the slightest movement."<sup>788</sup>

Fr. Marani was later to call these months a time of "excruciating pain."<sup>789</sup>

Even Fr. Bertoni himself was heard to gasp expressions that he had never used before: "If you only knew, my sons, if you only knew! My suffering is such, and my agony is so terrible that I am sure I would despair, if God did not give me the help of His grace!"<sup>790</sup>

This is how he spoke, and it echoed the prayer he directed to God.

Throughout these long weeks and months, over and over again, he whispered various ejaculations and aspirations to himself. These would escape from his lips in his spasms of excruciating pain, from the very depths of his heart. "May Thy Will be done ... Blessed be God ... O! Jesus! O! Mary! O! My God! ... I can take no more!"

He also said: "My sons, please pray much for me to the Lord, that He may grant me patience. I so need His help to carry on."

"Strike me, Lord, strike me again, for you have every reason to do so. Strike me as You will, for I merit this and much more!"<sup>791</sup> His was an anguished cry, full of compunction.

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His sufferings became increasingly more acute. Then, an extremely ugly looking bed sore developed. It split open and caused the most painful annoyance. Whenever he asked the Brothers to assist him, he would say: "Please do me this favor, for I cannot do it by myself."<sup>792</sup>

During the night, he was no better off. The Brother who slept in his room, awakened by accident, sometimes would hear him moaning softly. He often heard him whisper the "Most Holy Name of Jesus." The Brother would ask if he needed

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<sup>788</sup> Doc. XX, p. 141.

<sup>789</sup> I.c., p. 142; Doc. XXVI, p. 429.

<sup>790</sup> Doc. XX, p. 143; XXV, p. 429.

<sup>791</sup> Doc. XX, p. 143, f; XXVI, p. 425 & Footnote; p. 429.

<sup>792</sup> Doc. XX, p. 142; XXVI, p. 428-430

anything. The answer would come back: "Sleep, Brother, sleep! Don't pay any attention to my annoyances."<sup>793</sup>

From remaining in one spot for a long time, this opened the laceration on his back, and then it ulcerated. One day, while they were changing his bed, it was noted that the sheet was covered with blood. One of the Brothers remarked: "We will have to send for the doctor!"

Fr. Gaspar answered: "Shame on you!" And he told them not to mention this to the others.<sup>794</sup> His nature was now such, that it made him hesitant to be the cause of concern to anyone.

This angry looking sore became worse, and the Brother felt that he was no longer obliged to keep it a secret. The doctor was then summoned. When he looked at Fr. Bertoni's back, and saw the infected sore, that went almost down to the bone, he gasped. He could hardly believe that his patient not only had not asked for help, but that he had not even mentioned the presence of the sore to anyone who had visited him. He stated that this sore had been developing over a period of time. From then on the doctor came twice a day to change the dressing and treat the sore. The pain lessened, and the open sore gradually healed. By the middle of May, it had closed completely. For over two months, though, Fr. Gaspar had to endure the excruciating pain caused by his other maladies, when he had to be turned for the treatment of this bed sore.<sup>795</sup>

In addition to all this, Fr. Lenotti has recorded that his entire body seemed to quiver with his sufferings. "Because of his extreme sensitiveness, his long years of penances, his great fatigue, his hard work, his whole constitution cringed with every spasm. The long months in the same position became a torture for him. Unaided, he was unable to move his head, legs or even his foot. Especially at night, though, he did his best to manage for himself.

There were times when the pain became unbearable, and then he would say: "Please do me a favor, and raise my leg... or, move my foot. "He was most hesitant to ask anyone to relieve the pressure on his leg by readjusting the blankets. He always needed help to be turned onto his side, or to be rolled back to find a position which was a little less uncomfortable. A comfortable position was by now, very difficult to find.<sup>796</sup>

Sometimes, after dinner, when the Community was resting, Fr. Marani stayed alone with him. As he was his first follower, he served as the "Vicar" of his "Father and Master," and was also his Confessor. Once in a while, Fr. Gaspar would wake up and ask to be moved. Fr. Marani would inquire if he could just wait a little

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<sup>793</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 429.

<sup>794</sup> Doc. XX, p. 142; XXVI, p. 430.

<sup>795</sup> I.c.

<sup>796</sup> Doc. XX, p. 143; Doc. XXVI, p. 430 f.

while longer, as the others were resting. Fr. Bertoni was like a child in obeying, and would say no more.<sup>797</sup>

All his life, he had eaten very frugally... He did, however, consider every meal as a precious gift. When he seemed to have lost his appetite entirely, it was hard to judge, as it was said, you would never be able to know what foods pleased him. Now, however, this was a new malady, in that all food nauseated him, and they did not know what he might be able to hold in his stomach.<sup>798</sup>

One day, he said he would try a sardine in an effort to restore his appetite. It was brought to him, and then he felt that he could not manage it. It was then brought back to the kitchen. A little later, he said he would try again, only to go through the same procedure. This was repeated several times, and could well have been a laughing matter, had the circumstances not been so sad.

From the month of May onward, all that he managed was a swallow of asparagus and strawberries. These brought him no comfort, as now he had no taste or desire for anything.<sup>799</sup>

### **The Lucidity of his mind**

His mind remained clear up to the very end. It would be so good now to know what thought he expressed, especially when alone with Fr. Marani, when he spoke so often about the future of the Congregation. It is certain that they discussed this, and other related subjects. There is a note in the old Archives in Fr. Marani's handwriting. It records some information that Fr. Bertoni wanted him to convey to the community, and is dated April 26, 1853, one month and 17 days before his death. It is to the effect that each one of them could respond, without scruple, if questioned about the property, or whatever was found in the house, that it was theirs.<sup>800</sup>

As for the estate, as it would be called legally, and that constituted the patrimony insuring the support of the Communities at the Stimme and at the Dereletti, he had made disposition of it in a will that was signed October 8, 1850:

"I institute and declare that the Reverend Father Francis Benciolini, son of the late Peter, presently domiciled in my house of the Dereletti, in St. Stephen's Parish, should by my universal heir..."<sup>801</sup>

He left, then, the property to an individual, and not to the Community as such. This, in future years would prove to have been very farsighted and providential.

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<sup>797</sup> I.c., p. 132 f.

<sup>798</sup> I.c., p. 143; XXVI, p. 431.

<sup>799</sup> I.c.

<sup>800</sup> Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>801</sup> Will of Fr. Bertoni. Arch., Stimm., Verona.

The lucidity of his mind, after such long and arduous suffering, is most apparent in a conversation he had with one of his sons, 15 or 20 days before his death. In it, Fr. Bertoni inspired his son to manifest always a great care for the sick. Fr. Lenotti has recorded this and states that Fr. Bertoni said it “with the most sincere expression of his heart”:

“We learn this solicitude from the Blessed Virgin Mary. I was always struck by what Mary did for Elizabeth. As soon as she had heard from the angel of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, she immediately went forth. Her only thought was to visit her cousin, and assist her in the inconveniences of her state. She set out immediately, and with haste, the Evangelist states, even though her journey was to be long and arduous. Such was her desire, to help her cousin, and such was her charity toward her. And, when she got there, she remained with her, not just for a few days, but for months on end, assisting her in her needs.”<sup>802</sup>

This thought had come to him from his already mentioned meditations.

These might be better called those manifestations of his affective prayer and true contemplation on the prayers of the Rosary. It was to these meditations that Fr. Bertoni referred a decade earlier, when he spoke to the two mortally sick members of the Community. He told them his secret of relieving his insomnia and how “to pass the night ...”

### **The promptness of his Spirit**

To return now to our theme - in Fr. Bertoni, a well known Gospel text, concerning the willingness of the spirit, and the weakness of the flesh, was fulfilled, perhaps to the letter. His flesh was indeed weak it was sick unto death - but his spirit was most willing.

Fr. Giacobbe adds: “It was so willing and vigorous that it did not seem he would die so soon.” This was also the opinion of the Community, “those who continued to come to him for counsel and their other needs, right up until the vigil of his death.”<sup>803</sup>

### **Union with Christ**

This spirit of his was nourished by his union with Jesus Christ.

Every day, during this long illness, Fr. Bertoni received Holy Communion. There were some weeks in which the Sacrament was all that he consumed he was in truth united to the suffering Christ. The members of the Community were forcefully reminded, looking down on his bed of pain, of the sufferings of the cross. They were reminded of the ancient prophecy: “As a lamb he will be led to the

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<sup>802</sup> Doc. XX, p. 144.

<sup>803</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 431, f.

slaughter, and he will not open his mouth.” He was indeed a witness of the Lamb of God.

Fr. Giacobbe noted: “The more his sons had recourse to him, it seemed that it was no longer he that was speaking to them. The expressions of his love seemed to be those of Christ on His Cross. His sole desire seemed to be to share in His Passion, and to ask for the grace to be more like Him, and to suffer still more.”<sup>804</sup>

Someone asked him: “Father, do you need anything?” His answer was: “Yes, I need to suffer.”<sup>805</sup>

His union with Christ was the result of his constant prayer, in the fulfillment of the text: “It is necessary to pray always, and never to desist.” One of his secrets was betrayed by himself - his practice he had cultivated without purpose. It was a way in which he could pass the long, sleepless nights, so they would not drag. All that Fr. Bertoni preached to others, he was most faithful to it himself.

We do learn something of Fr. Bertoni's prayer life from his Spiritual Diary, but it should be remembered that the last entry in it was dated 40 years before his death. These were 40 long years of a life of perfection, of the apostolate and of harsh suffering. They were years in which he did not waver or let up, but on the contrary, there was an evident and continual growth in the life of virtue and the spirit of prayer. When all this is taken into consideration, it would be neither just nor correct to apply those ordinary measures to the state of his actual prayer life just before his death.<sup>806</sup>

That beloved Br. Ferrari, who spent so many nights in Fr. Bertoni's room, had his own opinion in this regard. Years later, as an old man, he reminisced about those months that he served as Fr. Bertoni's infirmarian. He said: “I never noted in him anything that you would call a defect, not even the least manifestation of impatience in his sufferings.”<sup>807</sup>

Every once in a while it would happen that Fr. Gaspar, during the night, or on the following day, would ask a rather unusual question:

“Louis, did you see anything?”

When Br. Ferrari would answer that he had not, Fr. Bertoni would change the subject. He repeated this question, however, on three or four separate occasions. The Brother was convinced that Fr. Bertoni had neither been delirious nor sleeping, but that he had been in full possession of his faculties.

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<sup>804</sup> I.c., p. 423 ; Doc XX, p. 145

<sup>805</sup> Doc. XXVI, Intr. p. 301

<sup>806</sup> Doc. XXXV, n. II, Intr., p. 654, f., & Text.

<sup>807</sup> Summar., p. 300, par. 42.



"Maybe, and maybe not," Br. Ferrari said years later, "but I am sure that our Father must have had some consolation - or better, some heavenly vision."<sup>808</sup>

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It is at least unusual that with such recollection of his spirit, and with all the agony he endured, a number of times his sense of humor was still evident, as it had been down through these long years. Fr. Lenotti records such an incident 12 or 15 days before his death, while they were in the process of lifting him to change his position.

He writes: "Fr. Bertoni began to joke, with those who were assisting him, with movements of his eyes and mouth. In this way, he tempered his excruciating pain with a bit of laughter."<sup>809</sup>

To say the least, those who would witness these manifestations of his sense of humor at such a period in his life, never forgot it.

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<sup>808</sup> Doc. XX, p. 192; XXVI, p. 433.

<sup>809</sup> Doc. XX, p. 144.

## CHAPTER XXI

**THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD****His Last Communion**

Fr. Bertoni's last day dawned on Sunday, June 12, 1853. At dawn, he was awake, waiting for his last Communion. The schedule was as usual, and no one gave a thought to the fact that this was to be the last time he would receive. As every other day, on this Sunday morning, he had been fasting. All that had been offered to him to break his fast he had refused, out of reverence for the Sacrament. He would not even take water, before receiving Holy Communion, from midnight of the previous day. Because of the fever from which he suffered over these long months, frequently his throat would be parched and dry. He found difficulty in breathing, and his strength had so weakened, that he could not get rid of the phlegm that bothered him.

On that 12th of June, the sight of him would move anyone to compassion. With the greatest difficulty, and with the help of others, he prepared himself for the Sacrament. He felt he owed it to the Sacrament to remain fasting, and on his last day, he was able to receive his God.<sup>810</sup>

He had to struggle against a continual drowsiness, and his strength was evidently waning, Fr. Lenotti tells us. It was noted that he had failed quite a bit, and that they finally admitted that he was dying. The day before, he could hardly stay in one position for a half an hour, without asking to be turned. But, on this morning, he said nothing, nor did he even moan. It seemed that his heart was giving out. He seemed to be losing consciousness, and there was no doubt now that death was approaching."<sup>811</sup>

The doctor was summoned to see if this was the case. He affirmed what they feared, and suggested that his Holy Communion on this day should be administered as Viaticum. They had to wait for the word from the doctor as to Extreme Unction, as was the practice of these times.

The immediate danger subsisted for quite a while, even during Holy Communion, which he had already received for the last time. St. Alphonsus Liguori, whose doctrine was much admired by Fr. Bertoni, teaches that, in such a case, even when Holy Communion has not been distributed as Viaticum, it nonetheless may be considered as such. They decided, therefore, not to bring Holy Communion to him again. When he was informed of this, Fr. Bertoni seemed to agree."<sup>812</sup> Throughout the morning, he gradually became worse.

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<sup>810</sup> Doc. XX, p. 190; XXVI, p. 433.

<sup>811</sup> Doc. XX, p.190; XXVI, p.434.

<sup>812</sup> Doc. XX, p. 190.

### **Extreme Unction**

Shortly after noon time, while the Community was at table, the Brother, who had been assisting him, rushed into the Refectory. He announced that Fr. Bertoni seemed to have slipped into a coma, and that his color was extremely poor. They all hurried into his room; by means of a stimulant, and a few drops of fresh water, he was revived. How wonderful it was to see him, “nod courteously, and gratefully accepting the words of comfort and devotion the members addressed to him, one by one. They were, for the last time, expressing the deep affection that they had for him.”

A little later, he passed out again, and the Community assembled a second time. When the immediate danger seemed to have subsided once again, Fr. Marani asked him if he wanted to go to confession.

He answered: “Yes, very gladly.” He then made his Confession to Fr. Marani who tells us that Fr. Bertoni was “in full possession of his faculties.”

He was then told that the Sacrament of Extreme Unction was going to be administered, and this seemed to have cheered him. As it was being conferred, Fr. Bertoni did not make any of the responses. His sons were kneeling around his bed, and every now and then, they could hear the anguish of his heart in his moaning. They watched as he entered his last agony. The bell tolled from the Stimmate, that the faithful might accompany him with their prayers.

Then, Fr. Marani conferred upon him the Papal Blessing, its plenary indulgence in the instant of death. The prayers for a departing soul were begun.<sup>813</sup>

### **His Most Peaceful End**

It was now 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. As it was Sunday, of the six priests, four of them had to leave at that hour for four different Churches to teach Catechism, in what was called the “Fourth Class.”

Three of them had already set out. The fourth, Fr. Marani, passed the stole and the Ritual to Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli. Four Brothers remained with him in Fr. Bertoni's room - Brothers Paul Zanoli, Louis Ferrari, Francis Stevanoni, and the last of them to enter, Br. John Baptist Bandoria, the Community tailor. Each one of these Brothers had served the Founder as infirmarian, at various times over his long illness.

With Fr. Brugnoli, Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego remained behind. He was now in his 70's, and was visibly grief-stricken. He had entered the Stimmate one month after Fr. Bertoni and, as it would turn out, he was to die one month after him. The other priests were all gone now, leaving Fr. Bertoni in his last agony.

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<sup>813</sup> l.c., p. 191; XXVI, p. 434, f.

Being confronted with the decision of whether to go, as usual, or to remain at home, they had hesitated before setting out. Then, the training of long years, given to them by Fr. Bertoni, tipped the balance, and they left. They were always taught that the glory of God, and the good of souls, had to come first in their lives. How many times had they not heard from Fr. Bertoni's comment on the words of Christ: "Did you not know that I had to be about My Father's business?" This was the lesson the dying man had given them down over the long years.

Fr. Marani, who had already left, with his hat and cape for St. Luke's Parish, turned around and came back. He sent word on to the Pastor of St. Luke's, and returned to Fr. Gaspar's room. He joined in the prayers that were still being said.

Then, "Fr. Gramego, who had been leading the prayers from the Ritual, turned to him and said: 'Don't you see that Fr. Gaspar is dead?' So peacefully had the holy old man slipped away, that those around his bed had not even realized it."<sup>814</sup>

He seemed to be only sleeping, but his soul had taken flight, "and on his face, there was a peaceful smile."<sup>815</sup> He had lived 75 years, 8 months and 3 days.

It seemed providential to those standing around now in silence that their Fr. Gaspar should be standing before the Tribunal of God, just as his sons were ascending the pulpits for the catechism instruction. It was he himself who had trained them for this apostolate, as we have seen. How pleased was God with this catechetical instruction - no matter how common place and laborious it was, it was an even more useful and a more holy apostolate. Fr. Gaspar had always wanted his sons to prepare themselves for it, that their lectured might be "Clear, well attended, interesting, and above all, fruitful." His grieving sons, from whom he had just departed, felt that "he was receiving his reward at that very hour."<sup>816</sup>

This same thought appeared in the entry of the Chronicle: "He expired, 'in the kiss of the Lord,' after having accomplished so much good for the Church. In his last days, he manifested an indomitable patience... The same entry shows that this was not the time for many words - there then followed this little prayer: 'Remember, O Father, your poor sons, who thank you for all that you did for them.'<sup>817</sup>

Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, the Pastor of the nearby Most Holy Trinity Parish, made the following entry in the Parish Register of Deaths:

"June 12, 1853: On this day, the Reverend Father Gaspar Bertoni, of the late Francis Bertoni and Brunora (Ravelli), and Founder of an excellent Congregation, at the Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis, died at the age of 75, comforted by all the

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<sup>814</sup> Doc. xx, p. 191; XXVI, p. 435, f.

<sup>815</sup> Doc. XXI, p. 210.

<sup>816</sup> Doc. XX, pp. 192, 155, f.; XXVI, p. 436.

<sup>817</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie," after Gramego's, Stimate.

Sacraments and spiritual benefits, full of virtues and merits, and was received in the embrace of Jesus Christ.”<sup>818</sup>

Had Fr. Giacobbe been asked if he could have added anything to this entry, undoubtedly his answer would have been negative, as in that Register of ‘Deaths, there is no other entry that can compare to it.

### **“A Saint has died!”**

The unhappy news was announced by the solemn tolling of the bells, both from the Stimate, and from the Church of the Most Holy Trinity.

The grief was universal and genuine. It was said along the streets: “A Saint has died! Yes, Fr. Bertoni was a Saint!”

This was the common reaction noted at the time; this was the first comment and the initial response and judgment, a spontaneous, general and sincere reverberation. The Veronese flocked to the doors of the Stimate, to pay homage to their beloved fellow-citizen, whom they already believed to be in heaven.”<sup>819</sup>

That very evening and through the following morning, people from all walks of life, especially those who had been privileged to have been received into his room, made their way to the Stimate. For the last time they wanted to see him, and to touch his body, that seemed only to be sleeping. They wanted to kiss those hands, and to kneel and pray, asking for the graces that they needed in their lives. Some asked for things he had used, or had just touched.<sup>820</sup>

The drastic change in the weather seemed to be the homage of heaven at “the passing of a Just man.” There appeared in the sky over Verona “A most beautiful rainbow,” which the simple folk interpreted as a manifestation of the “serenity of the visage of God.” There had been a heavy downpour earlier, that had symbolized the petitions of the faithful.<sup>821</sup>

Fr. Bertoni’s own sons, without being able to explain how, saw that their heavy sorrow gradually changed into a flood of confidence and devotion. They even experienced joy in the realization that their recently departed Father, had not left them orphans, but had bequeathed them his spirit as a guarantee of his most efficacious assistance from heaven.<sup>822</sup>

From the closest friends and admirers of Fr. Bertoni, came a suggestion, which proved to be a great comfort to those who would come after him, down through the years. The proposition was advanced that a painting be made of him.

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<sup>818</sup> Doc. XIX, p. 105.

<sup>819</sup> Doc. XXI, p. 201, ff.; XXVI, p. 436; XXXI, n. 1, p. 616; Summar. p. 285, ff., 25-27; p. 287, #1 & #[???]; p. 292, #20; p. 294, #24 & 25; p. 209, #39; p.300, #42; p. 301, #45 & 46.

<sup>820</sup> Doc. XX, p. 192; XXVI, p. 496.

<sup>821</sup> C. C. Bresciani, “Collezione Orazioni Funebre,” Verona, 1866, Vol. II, p. 29, f.

<sup>822</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 439.

This could be done before the body was shown to the public. The idea was accepted and a painter and a sculptor were summoned.

Fr. Giacobbe wrote that “the work of both of them was worthy of praise, especially the bust made by the sculptor, Graziano Spazzi. He had known Fr. Bertoni in life, and so remembered much about his face.

He was, therefore, able to capture that majestic countenance, with its kind smile, that was so characteristic of Fr. Bertoni.”<sup>823</sup>

Spazzi’s work was acceptable, but with qualifications. We might record here the image Fr. Giacobbe left of Fr. Bertoni, while he was still alive. In reading it, some allowance must be made for the style of those times, which was so much a part of Fr. Giacobbe:

“Fr. Bertoni was a little less than medium height. His countenance was dignified and majestic, and seemed to bespeak of his recollection. In talking with others, he expresses himself with an ingenuous kindness, that opens to you entirely and reveals to you his heart. He has a high forehead, and his eyes seem very animated. He has a deep, strong voice, which flows easily, when he gives his firm convictions, as well as his warm encouragement.

“He has good color (this was before the miliary fever had so weakened his health); he is very moderate, gentle and is most refined. His temperament would be defined as choleric and sanguinary, that makes his eyes sparkle, and at times, his face flush.

“He has an ardent and high spirited temperament, even though everyone thought him to be of a rather phlegmatic temperament, because of his gentle and lovable nature. This was so evident in the meekness with which he accepted personal injuries, and in his patient endurance of pain - and in that control that he had, which left him unstained until his death, from every defeat of the concupiscence of the eyes and of the flesh.

“This was not the result of merely his natural temperament and graces, but it was won by his spirit and his merit of long proven virtue. By cooperating with the gifts of grace and the benignity of God in his behalf, he neutralized and rendered impotent the sway of nature. His human nature had no dominion over him, but was his servant, and obedient to him.”<sup>824</sup>

### **The Successor of the Servant of God**

The Priests at the Stimmate, left without a Father at the death of Fr. Gaspar, did not have to struggle over the choice of his successor. All eyes fell on his first follower. He was equipped for the task, not merely for his own gifts, which were

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<sup>823</sup> I.c., p. 4;7.

<sup>824</sup> I.c., p. 437.

not few in number. Especially was he qualified for the many confidences which their late and mourned Father had entrusted to him. He knew the spirit and intentions of Fr. Bertoni, and had been the recipient of so many of his counsels.

The six surviving priests assembled briefly, and absolutely devoid of any formal convocation and balloting, they unanimously made their choice known verbally. Five of the six priests decided on Fr. John Mary Marani to take the place of the Founder. "By the grace of God," all was now in order to face the future.

The four Brothers paid their respects to Fr. Marani - and Fr. Louis Bragato would return to render homage to the new Father and Superior of the Community.<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> Lenotti, "Atti E Storia della Cong.," Mss. Arch. Stimm., Verona.

## CHAPTER XXII

**FR. BERTONI'S FUNERAL AND BURIAL AT THE STIMMATE****June 13 1853**

The funeral was set for Monday, June 13th. In the paper, "Foglio Ufficiale di Verona", an article appeared that day containing a glowing tribute to the late Servant of God. It was entitled, "A Biographical Sketch," and was written by the celebrated scholar, Fr. Bartholomew Sorio, of the Oratory of St. Phillip. We have had occasion to mention him previously.

Fr. Sorio wrote: "In Fr. Bertoni, Verona has lost one of its great luminaries of learning and holiness."<sup>826</sup>

It was the Feast of St. Anthony of Padua - a Saint that was so well known to Fr. Gaspar. He always used to suggest the recitation of the Psalm that began with the words: "si quaeris", for this Saint's Feast. In Verona, the Feast was observed by weekly devotions 13 weeks in advance, and these would then be culminated on the day itself with a solemn procession. On this date, Fr. Bertoni's funeral procession was said to have been doubly solemn.<sup>827</sup>

**The Funeral Procession from the Stimate to the Parish Church**

This was held in the mid-afternoon. The body had been placed in the center of the Church of the Stimate. The body was clothed in the simple habit of the Apostolic Missionary, which he had worn during the years of his fruitful apostolate. As a guard of honor, his sons stood around the casket, both the Priests and the Brothers. The young members of the Marian Oratory all wanted the honor of carrying the casket in the procession. The older boys were busy, adjusting the tassels of the younger members' robes.<sup>828</sup>

The Very Reverend Arch-Priest, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, came to conduct the body to the Parish Church. He was preceded by the confraternity of the Most Blessed Sacrament, and the School of Christian Doctrine, whose members had asked that they might participate in the procession. The officiating Clergy entered the Church. After the initial prayers, the large procession filed out in good order. It was made up of the following: the Seminarians and the College of Acolytes, attached to the Cathedral, took care of the singing. They had been sent by order of the Vicar Capitular, Next, there were the Marian Oratories of the Stimate and St. Paul's Parish in Campo Marzio, the School of Christian Doctrine of St. Stephen's Parish, and then priests and lay people in great number. "Many devout and

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<sup>826</sup> Doc. XVII, p. 96; XX, p. 192; XXVI, p. 438.

<sup>827</sup> Doc. XX, p. 193; XXVI, p. 440, f.

<sup>828</sup> I.c.; I.c.



illustrious families of the parish and the city had sent their servants with torches, so that the ceremony might be more decorous and splendid.”<sup>829</sup>

The Community of the Stimmate, with their Superior at their head, took their places, and followed right behind the coffin.

### **“A Real Triumph”**

Rather than going by the short route, the cortege wound its way along the much longer one, through the Piazza Cittadella, along the Corso Porta Nuova, through the Collegio Angeli, and the Santissima Trinity streets. An eye-witness has stated: “It was a real triumph because of the large number of participants from every walk of life.”<sup>830</sup> “Because of the many, many candles and torches, the streets seemed to be a river of light,” another eye-witness has recorded.<sup>831</sup> “The great crowd that participated in it, silently and deeply moved, gave way as the procession arrived at the Church,” Fr. Giacobbe tells us.<sup>832</sup>

The Church had been closed up until this point so that those who had comprised the cortege might enter first. It was then opened, and the funeral Mass was celebrated with great solemnity. Fr. Giacobbe stated: “I never thought that I would ever see, or participate in so moving and so edifying a spectacle, with so many devout and pious souls.”

### **Fr. Giacobbe’s Eulogy**

Before the last “May he rest in peace,” was intoned, Fr. Giacobbe, the celebrant, turned to address all those who were present, and who had been “drawn” to this funeral. He said that they had come “more from the need they felt of recommending themselves to the intercession of the deceased, rather than praying for the repose of his soul.” He asked to be permitted “to give vent to what was in his heart, in that it only reflects what is in yours.”

Fr. Bertoni was the “greatest of priests, the most prudent of counselors and a generous and very penitential man. He was a man, powerful in deed and word, and one who hungered and thirsted for that Justice that assures the Kingdom of Heaven. In his long suffering, he had suffered for Jesus Christ, and he was one in whom Jesus Christ suffered.

“He was a humble man, who kept to the background, but Bishops and Sovereigns sought him out. He was the model and the gem of the ministers of God, whose profound learning, coupled with his genuine holiness, so honored, and so benefitted the Veronese Clergy.

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<sup>829</sup> I.c.; I.c.

<sup>830</sup> Summar, p. 305, 57.

<sup>831</sup> I.c. #56.

<sup>832</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 442.

"Is it possible that the kind, and venerable and holy man, Gaspar Bertoni is no more? Did I say, though, that he is no longer with us? He lives more gloriously than ever before in the undying memory of his work and of his virtues. How hard he tried to hide from the acclaim of others, and lead his withdrawn life! But, the wisdom of God decreed, and manifests today, this most solemn tribute."

"The assembly of this large crowd of people has not come here to weep, but to envy and to hope for themselves a death like that of this just man. This congregation has gathered, confident that he, at this hour, lives in the embrace of God. This huge gathering has not assembled at this funeral so much to honor him or to express their gratitude to him - but rather to implore graces from this blessed soul, considered now as its special protector in heaven. 'The voice of the people is the voice of God.' This man was the instrument to fulfill the word of God: 'He, who humbles himself, will be exalted.'

"His was a spotless life, as a man, and as a priest of Jesus Christ - a life without reproach, and most worthy of praise. His was a life of learning, attained at the purest of divine fonts - a life of the Christian virtues, marked by charity, and hidden in humility - a life totally with Christ in God. Such a life must attain that glory which Divine Revelation has inculcated in the humble of heart. May the Lord stamp it with the prodigies of His Omnipotence."

"After these words, so as not to offend further the modesty of the deceased, now rejoicing in the love of God, there is a word for all. Do we envy his death? Then, let us strive to imitate his virtue!

"Please pray for me, and pray for all those who are dear to you, pray for us all - that in our spirit there might live always the love of those holy virtues, which, in life, you gave us so luminous instructions and example."<sup>833</sup>

This was merely the manifestation of their unanimous desire, conviction and wish of everyone present that Fr. Giacobbe expressed.<sup>834</sup> He went on: "The sincere belief of a united people that he was in his glory is due to the humility of Fr. Bertoni. The emotion of this people, the tears of their eyes and their hearts, render this testimony all the more splendid and irrefutable concerning the holiness of the man whom they venerate and mourn".

Then, there was "simple word or two, to express the sentiments of my own heart, and the truth itself - this latter is worth a very long and studied panegyric."<sup>835</sup>

After the last "May he rest in peace," had been intoned, the clergy filed out, and the crowd gradually dispersed. The coffin remained where it was, until it was to be brought to the cemetery. Arrangements were made to procure the hearse. The burial was set for the early hours of the following day.

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<sup>833</sup> I.c., pp. 442-444.

<sup>834</sup> Doc. XX, p. 193.

<sup>835</sup> Doc. XXVI p. 444.

All the assignments were given out - the priests who were to accompany the body to the cemetery were named, the same young men who had served as pall bearers for the funeral would not give up their "coveted duty" for the burial. The time was set, the order to follow was arranged - and all plans were made.

The evening of that same June 13th, two devout and influential men sent word that the burial should not take place on the next day. They said that they were making arrangements for a better burial, within the Church of the Stimate itself.<sup>836</sup> As soon as this idea was proposed, it became the universal wish of Fr. Bertoni's many admirers.

### **A Delayed Burial - Petition for Burial at the Stimate**

Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe had the body moved to a side room, off the Church. This was 'to close off access to it, except to those who had known him well during life, and whose devotion moved them to request to go there, to render their homage to the honored remains.'<sup>837</sup>

He then tells us - "On the 14th, I was asked, not only by my own parishioners, but by many other of our fellow citizens besides, in the name of them all, to present an official petition to the "Department of Health of the Royal City of Verona," for permission for the honored remains of the priest, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, be kept at the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, until the petition for his burial in the Church of the Stimate had been processed. Fr. Giacobbe's request stated that he would accede to the wishes of the local Board of Health."<sup>838</sup>

The petition that had been sent to the Imperial Government for burial at the Stimate had been signed by the Very Reverend Doctor and Canon, Monsignor Diego Michietti, who signed for the ailing Monsignor Joseph Belloni. The Chapter of Canons and the College of Pastors of the city and many important citizens also affixed their names to the official petition.

It was described as a "petition and a statement of the hopes and wishes of all, for the burial of the body of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, in that sacred place, that for so many reasons, was so closely associated with this man of God." This first petition was then reinforced, in July 8th, by a personal note sent in my Monsignor Belloni, the Vicar Capitular."<sup>839</sup>

### **A Body Partially Incorrupt**

The response of the local Department of Health to Fr. Giacobbe, emanated on June 18th, and was received three days later. It stipulated "that the body be

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<sup>836</sup> I.c., p. 444, f.; Doc. XX, p. 193, f.

<sup>837</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 446.

<sup>838</sup> Doc. XVIII, n. 1, p. 100.

<sup>839</sup> I.c., n. 2, p. 101, ff.; n. 3, p. 103, ff.; xx, p. 194.

sealed in the manner required by law. The wooden casket must be encased, lined with lead and hermetically sealed.”

However, there was no lead available, so Fr. Marani, on July 5th, asked if zinc could be used instead. This was granted a week later, and on July 14th, the wooden casket was placed inside a metal casing, that was welded in the presence, and with the assistance of some officials of the Department of Sanitation.<sup>840</sup>

All these precautions were taken because the body had been placed in a wooden casket, upon death, which occurred on June 12th. It had hardly had any protection in its temporary resting place where it had been since the day following the death. In that warm Veronese summer, it had been there now for one month and a day. Those who had visited the body during that time, with Fr. Giacobbe’s permission, as the Fathers and Brothers from the Stimmate, and other devoted persons, testified that they had not noted “any scent coming from it. There was not the least hint of any unpleasant odor.” Fr. Giacobbe adds: “and this seems, to say the least, to be very unusual”.<sup>841</sup>

Fr. Giacobbe’s remarks were valid not only for that first month, but for the full year and more that the body remained above the ground, after that July 14, 1853. However, on this date, all the precautions of the science of that era had been taken. The first month and one day, though, before the casket had been encased in metal, gave rise to the thought, among those who had visited the body, that “it was immune from the usual decay of exhumed bodies.” It was widely believed that “the Lord had preserved it from corruption.”<sup>842</sup>

In his last years, Sr. Louis Ferrari (March 7, 1888) stated: “Once, while praying before his last remains, I experienced a great desire to look at his body. I believed that I would find it still intact.”<sup>843</sup>

Forty-six years after Fr. Bertoni’s death, in 1899, when his Cause of Beatification had been introduced, there was an official recognition of the body. When the casing was opened, it was not a skeleton that was found, but a normal body, whose flesh, for the most part, was intact, but dried. The legs had depreciated the most, especially the right one, which, as we know, had seen so much torment in his life by those repeated operations.<sup>844</sup>

### **The Preparation for Burial**

Let us now return to consider the precautions taken to keep Fr. Bertoni’s body for burial, as had been prescribed by the sanitation authorities. Between the wooden casket, and the metal casing, there was placed a glass tube, containing a

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<sup>840</sup> Authentic details contained in the “Burial of the Very Rev. G. Bertoni” Folder.1 Arch., Stimme, Verona.

<sup>841</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 448.

<sup>842</sup> I.c., p. 449.

<sup>843</sup> Summar., p. 300, 42.

<sup>844</sup> Fiorio, “Vita Del S.d.Dio ...,” Verona, 1922, p. 340.

metal cylinder. In this was a parchment inscribed in Latin with a composition by Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, concerning the life and the virtues of the deceased for the information of posterity.<sup>845</sup>

The sealing of the casket was not performed in the local mortuary, but in the more suitable chapel of the Confraternity of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The body remained there until the day of its burial. This was considered to be a more decent place, because more honor could be shown to the body there. A candle, cared for by his Community, burned there day and night. "As far as I could see," Fr. Giacobbe adds, "I can truthfully state that this duty was performed religiously."<sup>846</sup>

### The Tributes in the Press

While awaiting a reply to the petition sent to the authorities, concerning the burial of the body, the press devoted a number of articles in glowing tribute to Fr. Bertoni.

We have already mentioned an article that appeared in the "Foglio Ufficiale di Verona", written by Fr. Bartholomew Sorio. There was another tribute in the "Collettore dell'Adige", also of Verona, with the account of the funeral. It also contained a minute appraisal of Fr. Bertoni, and the paper stated that "it would be very happy to publish any other recollections of Fr. Bertoni, that would be sent to it."

Fr. Fedelini, a long time student of Fr. Bertoni, accepted this invitation. He wrote a resume of Fr. Bertoni's work and his virtues, emphasizing his consummate holiness.<sup>847</sup>

Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe then submitted an article, entitled "Biographical Sketch," in a more narrative style. This article occupied several columns in the "Collettore dell'Adige". Both these articles were reprinted and widely dispersed.<sup>848</sup>

Three newspapers in Milan, "L'Amico Cattolico", "La Bilancia", and "La Fama" also had articles, or reprints concerning Fr. Bertoni.<sup>849</sup>

Considering the modest means of communication of a century ago, these tributes were certainly out of the ordinary. They spread far and wide the reputation of Fr. Bertoni, and expressed confidence that one day all their expectations concerning him would be fulfilled.

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<sup>845</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 301, Intr.; Text, p. 447, f.

<sup>846</sup> I.c., p. 448.

<sup>847</sup> Doc. XVII, pp. 94-98.

<sup>848</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 438, f.

<sup>849</sup> Summar., p. 287, f.

### Petition Denied!

Sad to say, this widespread publicity seemed to no avail. On August 4th, the official reply was received concerning a decision that was reached the previous July 23rd. The Imperial Royal Department of Venice did not deem it opportune to grant the “Michietti Petition” for reasons of public health. It seemed that all was lost, and that Fr. Bertoni’s body would not be returned to the Stimate.<sup>850</sup>

The Community at the Stimate “were profoundly shaken at this unexpected news ... we had desired nothing more than to have him back with us, whom in life we considered and venerated as our Father.”

To “those most worthy persons who had used their influence to make our work a reality, we pray that God may reward them, and may that blessed soul intercede for all of them, that they may receive the greatest blessings.”<sup>851</sup>

### An Appeal is Sent

Gradually the idea of submitting an appeal began to circulate. Fr. Alexander Aldegheri, who belonged to Fr. Mazza’s Congregation, and who was the Titular of the Diocesan Chancery, was to add his weight to the idea, as did Monsignor Belloni, the Vicar Capitular. They recalled the fact that this honor now being denied to Fr. Bertoni, less than twenty years earlier, had been accorded to the bodies of Mother Leopoldina Naudet (August 17, 1834) who was buried in the Church of St. Dominic, and to Mother Madelen di Canossa(1835) who was buried in the Church of Sts. Joseph and Fidentius.

The appeal pointed out that in comparison to these two Churches, the Stimate was far less objectionable, from the point of view of public health. As for the merit of the individuals involved, “this did not pertain to the humble priests at the Stimate, but to their Founder ...”<sup>852</sup>

What was being privately considered in a number of quarters eventually became action. On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, a new petition was submitted, this one prepared and drawn up by the Diocesan Chancery, but signed by Fr. Marani in his own name and in that of his Community.

A second letter accompanied it, written and signed by Monsignor Joseph Belloni, the Vicar Capitular. He argued from the point of the late Fr. Bertoni’s personal merit, as well as that of his Community. He stated:

“They are all a perfect copy of him - without even mentioning the one (Fr. Louis Bragato) whom Fr. Bertoni, on being asked for a priest, had the honor of sending to the Imperial Apostolic Court of His Majesty, the Emperor Ferdinand.”

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<sup>850</sup> Doc. XVIII, n. 3, intr., p. 103.

<sup>851</sup> I.c., p. 103; cfr. Folder on the Burial.

<sup>852</sup> Doc. XVIII, p. 103.

Monsignor Belloni's letter concluded with the hope that the petition would be granted, as "there was not the least danger to either public or private health. May this favor be accorded as a special grace, just as it has been sought. It is desired not only by the Priests at the Stimate, but, I would say, that a favorable reply would be received universally with jubilation and gratitude."<sup>853</sup>

There was some beating around the bush in official circles, but this appeal went further than did the earlier petition. It went through the offices at Venice, and was forwarded to Vienna. The office there wrote back for a full report and a minute description of the Church of the Stimate." This was received on March 18th of the new year, 1854. An immediate response was drawn up that was to meet, in due time, with complete satisfaction.

However, the months passed and there was still no word. It was a delay, due "to the customary red tape, which is not easy to avoid."<sup>854</sup>

### **The Favor is Granted**

Finally, on June 22, 1854, the "gracious Decree" was signed. It stated that "by way of exception, it is hereby accorded that the body of the worthy priest, Gaspar Bertoni, who died in Verona, on June 12, 1853, might be entombed in the private Oratory of Diocesan Priests that he founded in Verona, at the Stimate ... . The good news was received at the Stimate, on the 12th of July, exactly one year and one month after his death."<sup>855</sup>

Included in this same permission, there was also a second and unexpected Imperial Decree. It called for the departure of the military detachment from the Stimate, after it had occupied the downstairs quarters for four years. The Community considered this a small gift obtained through the intercession of their Father.

Therefore, on July 24, 1854, the soldiers left the Stimate - and the Community sang a solemn "Te Deum."<sup>856</sup>

### **The Burial at the Stimate**

Immediately work began to prepare a final resting place for their Father in the center of the Church. He had died on the vigil of St. Anthony of Padua - and 14 months later, he was buried on the vigil of St. Ignatius Loyola, that is July 30, 1854.

### **A Second Triumph**

We will only cite a few particulars of "this second outpouring of the crowds. Their devotion and veneration toward the deceased had in no way lessened over

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<sup>853</sup> I.c., p. 104, f.

<sup>854</sup> Folder on the Burial.

<sup>855</sup> I.c.

<sup>856</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie," Arch., Stimm., Verona.

the long months, but even increased.”<sup>857</sup> The Parish Church, the street, the area all around it, as well as that around the Stimmate was jammed with the throng. “They had come,” it was said, “to witness the transport of a Saint’s body.”<sup>858</sup> Fr. Bertoni’s earlier triumph was repeated as if it were an act of popular canonization. This hope was in the hearts of all that one day God might honor him, by those ways and methods that are uniquely His.

“There were no tears nor laments, nor flowers - but only holy affections of joy and exultation,” Fr. Giacobbe stated in his sermon that brought this second function to a close. “Knees would bend reverently on this blessed stone, as an expression, of humility and of faith ... It would not seem too much to hope that God, Who is glorified in His Saints might deign to derive from this very stone the waters of salvation for many: ‘The Lord has hidden me in His tabernacle, He has exalted me in stone.’ ”<sup>859</sup>

### **Inscription over the Tomb**

A large stone was placed over the tomb, with the following inscription,’ that was written in Latin:

“To the peace and memory - of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, Priest, son of Francis, worthy of praise for his genius, and for the riches of his wide learning - Beloved for his singular splendor of virtues and holiness. - He developed the people and the youth - in Religion and in Piety - and Letters. - Oblivious of all earthly rewards, he rejected enormous bequests. - Having purchased, with the permission of the Bishop, a large estate he made an Offer of it to the Church - From the Supreme Pontiff, Gregory XVI - he received it back as a gift. - He was much sought after - by learned man - Bishops and Princes - an illustrious man in his own land and far beyond it. - He was proven by numerous and grave infirmities and illnesses. - He supported them all until the end, with admirable constancy and patience. He died a holy death on June 12, 1853 - at the age of 75 years, 8 months and 3 days.”<sup>860</sup>




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<sup>857</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 451.

<sup>858</sup> Doc. XX, p. 194, f.

<sup>859</sup> Doc. XXVI, PP. 452-456.

<sup>860</sup> I.c., p. 456.



## CHAPTER XXIII

## THE DECREE OF PRAISE FOR THE CONGREGATION

## The Little Family at the Stimmate

By the time of this solemn erection of the Congregation, the little family of Fr. Bertoni in Verona numbered only four priests and three brothers. Fr. Bragato arrived in Verona only the day after the funeral, at which time there were 7 priests and 4 Brothers in the Congregation.

On this occasion, Fr. Bragato expressed his regret that he had not arrived there in time so that he might have paid his respects to Fr. Bertoni even before he died. However, "he went to pay his last respects, praying to heaven, while kneeling before his coffin," where Fr. Giacobbe had arranged to keep it.

"Fr. Bragato had travelled a great distance, and in the task which he fulfilled, he came to know of individuals of a very advanced holiness, and he had assisted some Founders. But, he stated that he never met a man with the same spirit he saw in Fr. Bertoni. He hoped God would glorify him."<sup>861</sup>

He paid homage to the new Superior, and then he left again for his duties.

On July 30, 1853, 48 days after Fr. Gaspar died, there was another death at the Stimmate. It was Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego's turn - he, who had so often written in the Chronicle himself about others: "He departed for the great Eternity."<sup>862</sup> He had been a "Good Master, the Confessor 'par excellence,' (who, however, had never heard a single confession of a woman); he was 'the very kind' Fr. Gramego!"

The Chronicle recorded: "He died the death of the just. Our advocates increase in heaven, while our collaborators decrease on earth. 'Thy will be done!' "<sup>863</sup>

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There was still another death that September 6, 1853 - 'the good Brother John Baptist Bandoria, the lovable and expert infirmarian, and our tailor, died today. May God reward him for his charity, and for the many services rendered to this family. May Mary reward him with those flowers, as he always honored her image.' He was 45 years old.

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The spirits of the little Community, however, did not wane. A characteristic indication of their outlook can be noted on New Year's Day of 1854. The Chronicle

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<sup>861</sup> Doc. XX, p. 187; XXVI, p. 447.

<sup>862</sup> Gramego. "Memorie."

<sup>863</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie," following those of Gramego.

records: "By the grace of God, our Brothers were vested today with the Religious Habit. May this only be the beginning of that which we all desire. 'No one has hoped in the Lord, and been confused.'" <sup>864</sup>

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Fr. Marani had one consuming thought and a preoccupation which was ever on his mind, from the very moment that he took office. As Fr. Bertoni's successor, he yearned to obtain for him the glory of the approbation of his Congregation. He wanted to procure for the Congregation itself the juridical status of a 'Religious Order.'

There was no doubt that since 1816, the Congregation had been constituted 'in the manner of Religious.' Moreover, they had lived as Religious of perfect observance, a most perfect common life. Now, however, he was in darkness and doubt, "as to what should be done, and what decisions to make, in the great uncertainty' in which his future was enveloped. Its juridical status seemed to be the most efficacious means of obtaining a flourishing life for the Congregation once again at least, in such a course of action, there was a ray of hope. In Fr. Marani's mind, he felt that even if he did not succeed, he at least "would have the comfort and the peace of mind that he had done all that he could, and that he had followed along as God had pointed out and marked his path." <sup>865</sup>

Perhaps it was a good thing that Fr. Marani was spared from fully understanding all that would be required of him in seeking this Decree. If he had known beforehand, he might have folded his arms, and Divine Providence would have been spared one prodigy.

Fr. Marani, however, had friends who were encouraging him to act.

Some were men of piety but yet "not very much in favor of Religious Orders, except for the Community at the Stimmat, as they had seen it up to that point. The unanimous encouragement and agreement of all his Community at the Stimmat, as well as Fr. Bragato <sup>866</sup>, were all urging him to make the attempt."

Hence, just six months after Fr. Bertoni's death, with a Community reduced even further, to a meager handful of member, Fr. Marani took the first step. He presented a petition to the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, and sent documents, statements and letters of recommendation asking for approbation. He wrote that he was seeking "in his own name, and in that of his sons, 'Pontifical Approbation of the Constitutions of the Founder, and the erection of the Institute as a Religious Order.'" He also asked that the Community might be honored with the title of the

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<sup>864</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>865</sup> Lenotti, "Atti E Storia della Congregazione," Mss. Arch., Stimm., Verona.

<sup>866</sup> *Ib.*

“Sacred Stigmata, understanding thereby the Stigmata or Five Wounds of our Divine Redeemer.”<sup>867</sup>

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At the same time, he initiated negotiations to obtain civil approbation of the Congregation, which was also required.<sup>868</sup>

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His efforts gave rise to a veritable ‘plebiscite of testimonies’ in behalf of the work of the late Fr. Gaspar. These came from such quarters as from Bishop Peter Aurelius Mutti, former Bishop of Verona, and presently the Patriarch of Venice; from two successive Vicars Capitular of Verona; from the College of Pastors in the city; from the Diocesan Seminary authorities; from the Delegate of the Province; from the city officials and from the nobility.<sup>869</sup>

On December 22, 1853, Fr. Marani sent his double file to Fr. Bragato at Court in Prague. From there, Fr. Bragato sent one immediately to Vienna, and the other one was sent on to Rome, through the Apostolic Nuncio, Monsignor Viale Prelà.<sup>870</sup>

### **The New Bishop, His Excellency Benedict Riccabona**

Meanwhile” on the 7th of that April, the announcement was made of the election of the new Bishop of Verona, in the person of the mitred Provost of Bolzano, Monsignor Benedict Riccabona. Fr. Marani went to see him at Bolzano, before he left for Rome for his consecration. He presented the Congregation to the Bishop-elect, and left with him a copy of the Constitutions of Fr. Bertoni, and asked if he would use his influence in behalf of the Congregation with the Vicar of Christ.<sup>871</sup>

The Monsignor “had already known of the great good done in the Diocese by the Congregation that Fr. Bertoni had instituted, and had known by reputation this venerable ecclesiastic, as being high in the esteem of people from all walks of life.”<sup>872</sup> Bishop-elect Riccabona took a great interest in the course of the Congregation Fr. Marani had described for him. With such dispositions, he left for Rome and for his Episcopal consecration.

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Fr. Marani himself was mulling over the possibility of going to Rome. “On June 12th, the first anniversary of the death of Fr. Gaspar, a letter came from Fr. Bragato: “On June 23rd, Fr. Marani left for Rome, with Br. Ferrari. May God

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<sup>867</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 226.

<sup>868</sup> “Breve Cronaca della Cong ...,” Verona, 1917, p. 85, f., nn. 82,83.

<sup>869</sup> I.c., p. 86, n. 83.

<sup>870</sup> Ib.

<sup>871</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 226.

<sup>872</sup> I.c., nn. II, 2, Intr. & Text, pp. 251, 252.

accompany them, and our Holy Spouses direct them in their arduous undertaking", the Chronicle noted. They were to remain in Rome until the end of October.<sup>873</sup>

So it was, that neither Fr. Marani, nor Br. Ferrari - and not even Fr. Bragato, who was always at the disposition of the Sovereigns - witnessed the burial of their Father in the center of the Church of the Stimmate.

### **Fr. Marani's Roman Negotiations**

In Rome, Fr. Marani "visited many offices, contacted many people and applied himself to his arduous enterprise." These were for him, though extremely hard days.

When the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars saw the petition of Fr. Marani, he is said to have remarked: "They are four cats! Fr. Marani can go home in peace!"<sup>874</sup> This was not said in as sharp a tone as might first be imagined. It is true that the Congregation had painfully few members - there were five priests in Verona, plus Fr. Bragato in Prague and there were three Brothers. This was the total membership of the Congregation seeking approval of its rules, and a canonical erection into a "Religious Order." Fr. Marani was decided to go ahead anyway, and Rome certainly was not accustomed to such a procedure. In the beginning the effort seemed destined to fail, and there was no encouragement to be found anywhere.

To present his case in a somewhat better fashion, even without any hopeful indications from any 'source, Fr. Marani called on his zeal and tenacity. Soon, he won the esteem of many in high places, as when he would later leave Rome, "the holy Cardinal Fransoni (the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith) would very often speak of Fr. Marani as a son would speak of his father, with such veneration and humility. One can see that among the saints, there is an understanding not known to us poor sinners."<sup>875</sup>

The Cardinal spoke thus a year after Fr. Marani had left for Verona. Meanwhile, in Rome, he struggled on in his difficult missions and limited himself to the petition of a "Decree of Praise," which still was a lofty goal, when the condition of the Congregation is taken into Consideration.

### **Testimony of Bishop Riccabona**

The newly consecrated Bishop Riccabona also worked very hard. When he had been informed of the words of the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, he took more definite steps. On July 22nd, he sent a report to the Cardinal Prefect of the same Sacred Congregation. Because of its terminology,

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<sup>873</sup> "Breve Cronaca ...", o.c., p. 86, n. 85; Lenotti, "Memorie," l.c.

<sup>874</sup> Lenotti, "Att e Storia ...", l.c.

<sup>875</sup> Letter: Bertinelli-Marani, Nov. 12, 1855.

and its exposition of the case, that was done in a serious, measured and objective manner, this report seems more like a letter of recommendation.

The real substance of his report lay in this observation: "The usefulness which can be made of this Pious Union of Priests appears to the undersigned as very great. It is much to be desired that this Union be propagated in every Diocese."

As for its few subjects, the Bishop not only made no objection concerning this aspect of the Congregation, but expressed the firm hope "that once the group had received the sanction of Rome, their number would increase. Just on hearing that negotiations were underway for approbation, a few have applied for information, and some candidates have been accepted."

The Bishop had warm words of praise for Fr. Marani: "He is a man of prudence, zeal and special humility. Worn out by fatigue, for his beloved Congregation, he has come to Rome, where, in continuous discomfort and suffering, he works on, in the hope that the Lord might accede to this wish of his."<sup>876</sup>

This letter was certainly used as the foundation stone for the entire case of the petition submitted by Fr. Marani.

#### **Fr. Marani's Audience with the Holy Father**

The Bishop's influence soon had convinced Fr. Marani that "the petition was going along well." All that remained now was to "let matters take their course." Fr. Marani left all further details in the hands of a confidant of his, a Canon, Monsignor Raphael Bertinelli, and got ready to return to Verona.

He arrived back at the Stimmate on the morning of the Feast of All Saints. The Community assembled to greet him, and he delighted them with his account of the audience he had been granted by the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, which had taken place on the 24th of October.

Fr. Marani stated that "he was most kindly received by the Pope, who gave some suggestions on how to proceed, and promised he would personally intervene in behalf of the Congregation. He then called in Br. Ferrari, who had been sitting outside the room that we were in. The Pope asked if the Superior also sent the Brother out on Missions." Fr. Marani responded (in his Veronese dialect): "Yes! Into the garden!" "His Holiness recommended the duty that every Brother should know how to take care of everything pertaining to the house, and that he should master every trade.

"Upon hearing that the Community lived a common life, the Pope said two separate times: 'Then, you must be detached from the world!' He blessed us twice,

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<sup>876</sup> Doc. XXIII, nn. II, 2, p. 251, ff.

and our whole Community, calling it, 'His Little Flock' - and 'May the Little Flock Grow!' ”<sup>877</sup>

### **Bishop Riccabona's efforts: The Decree of Praise**

Notwithstanding all this, the case still was not proceeding well in Rome. “Conditions that had to be immediately fulfilled made difficulties.” Monsignor Bertinelli felt it was better not to refer all this concern to Fr. Marani. Finally, because of the influence of one man, what had been denied to others: “Was granted in its entirety.” That man was Bishop Riccabona.<sup>878</sup>

He had returned to the Holy City for the solemn definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in December of 1854. He spent a number of months thereafter in Rome, conducting various matters for his Diocese. He was a great favorite of the Holy Father, and had access to many offices of the Roman Curia. At long last, the conditions and the difficulties, that were blocking the way for approbation, disappeared.

The petition made steady progress, and then one day Bishop Riccabona wrote to Fr. Marani: “His Holiness has deigned to grant a Decree of Praise to the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata in Verona ... on the very day that the Five Most Sacred Wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ are venerated.” This was March 16, 1855 - the liturgical commemoration of the Feast of the Sacred Stigmata, that used to be celebrated during Lent.

The Decree was signed and officially promulgated exactly one month later, April 16, 1855. This was a Decree of Praise for the Congregation itself, as well as for its scope - which meant that this was the first canonical recognition of its religious qualifications, and elevated the Private Union of Priests to a Congregation of Pontifical Right. All this was accorded to the Congregation that was called “four cats!” Even though the rules were not approved immediately, the Congregation itself was accorded those privileges proper to its new rank. It was inscribed as such by the then Bishop Andrew Bizzari, who would later be a Cardinal, the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

Monsignor Bertinelli was “thunderstruck!” He wrote: “I can tell you that the prudence, the sagacity and the judgment of this holy Bishop has been the means by which God has seen fit to accomplish this prodigy. The Institute of Fr. Bertoni is truly an institution of God, because it progresses on the strength of prodigies. The Lord has made use of that holy Bishop to accomplish them ...”<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> Lenotti. “Memorie,” l.c.

<sup>878</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 227.

<sup>879</sup> l.c.

The civil recognition, as we have seen, had been requested directly from the Imperial Government in Vienna. This was to avoid all the cumbersome bureaucracy and its red tape, that is inherent in such requests. "The Decree of His Majesty" was graciously accorded and signed on July 14, 1855, and word of this reached the Stimate exactly two weeks later. The official document was received "on the Vigil of the Madonna del Popolo," September 7, 1855, which was a great Feast in Verona.

With ever more meaning did the Community this day sing her praises, especially that hymn that concludes: "Praise be to God and to Our Holy Patrons forever!"<sup>880</sup>

### **A Solemn Memorial Service for Fr. Bertoni**

The narrative of this first canonical recognition of the Congregation has had us overlook the memorial service to commemorate Fr. Bertoni's return to the Stimate. As we have seen, when the body was brought back, Fr. Marani was in Rome. Now that he 'was in Verona, the memorial was held. It was another manifestation of the homage and the tribute which had been flowing steadily in Fr. Bertoni's honor, since the day of his death. This would be one further proof of the loyalty of the Veronese to the memory and the veneration of their Father and Master.

The ceremony was set for November 17, 1854. The interior of the Church was tastefully decorated, and a "very beautiful catafalque," with three separate levels, as a pyramid, was set right over the sepulcher of Fr. Gaspar. On top of it, a perpetual flame was lit. The Church was magnificently ornamented by a rich, overhanging drape, with streamers and festoons, hanging from the four columns. The Church seemed like a magnificent temple, enclosed in a still larger temple. Latin inscriptions were placed at the entrance of the Church and on the sides of the catafalque.

Fr. Lenotti recorded that "40 Masses were celebrated at the Stimate that morning. Outside there was a driving rain and wind. This terrible weather raged throughout the entire morning. Nonetheless, the Church was filled with illustrious personages of every level and position."

The Solemn Mass was celebrated by the Very Reverend Vicar General, Monsignor Marchi, a Canon. He was assisted by three Pastors, "who had been most closely associated with the deceased, and with his worthy Community." There were many of the Diocesan Clergy as well as the Camillians and the Priests of the Oratory of St. Philip. The music was under the direction of Fr. Pinali, of the Oratorian Fathers, and the choir was made up of those who had been students and disciples

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<sup>880</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie," I.c.

of Fr. Bertoni, which category included Fr. Pinali himself.” The Music was very well performed.<sup>881</sup>

The tone of the occasion was set in the eulogy preached by the well known Fr. Camillus Caesar Bresciani. He took his theme from the spontaneous reaction of the people on hearing of Fr. Bertoni’s death - “A Saint has died - Fr. Bertoni is a Saint!” Fr. Bresciani stated that he could choose “no other theme than the concept of holiness. The sublime voice of his own land is indeed a great step forward, although it is not yet the definitive word of the successor of St. Peter, nor was it the means to place on the brow of Fr. Bertoni the crown of sainthood. To do this, it will be for you, O Catholic Church, the most wise and the most holy of Mothers, to make this decision. My hope is that that will not be long in coming.”

Fr. Bresciani concluded his oration with this prayer, that summarized his message: “O Thrice Holy God! Grant that this oration of mine may be at least one stone on that altar, which, I hope, the faithful of Verona will see arise in honor of our holy fellow citizen.”<sup>882</sup>

Whatever its merits, this was the greatest praise that Fr. Bresciani ever directed toward a deceased person in the many eulogies he preached. This eulogy has a place apart in such orations that he delivered over the years. There was one that he delivered in Mother Madelina di Canossa’s honor, some 20 years earlier, did approach it to some extent. His flowery oratorical style, so popular in that era, to be evaluated fully, begs interpretation. Each one uses whatever means that are at his disposal. In his tribute to Fr. Bertoni, it seems that Fr. Bresciani pulled out all the stops, in a manner he never did before.

In the introduction he had stated: “Fr. Bertoni has naught else but holiness - this alone, in the language of the Scriptures, comprises all virtue, all wisdom and all glory.”

Fr. Bresciani was an orator who spoke with sincerity. This quality was evident in this eulogy. He did make the effort to understand truthfully Fr. Bertoni’s reputation, and then to express it with equal veracity. Admittedly, his style did betray some extravagances.

The spontaneous acclaim, that for more than 17 months had reverberated throughout Verona, had in no way diminished. This day was, as it were, a mature recapitulation of it all, a sincere manifestation of it and its eloquent, balanced renewal. Fr. Bresciani explained that “With a soul full of reverence and faith, the Cause of Fr. Bertoni was placed at the feet of the Catholic Church. His every extraordinary deed, and the ultimate delineation of his holiness, were submitted to

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<sup>881</sup> Doc. XXVI, 457.

<sup>882</sup> Doc. XXI, n.2, pp. 201, 202, 207, 210.



the infallible authority or the Church's supreme power of the Keys. In like manner, is the entire soul of this insignificant orator subjected".<sup>883</sup>

On this occasion, a card with Fr. Bertoni's image was distributed to the faithful. It was given out to all those who were present, and a brief biography of him was printed on the back of it. It was in the epigraphical Latin style that was in vogue at that time, and had been composed by a Fr. John Baptist Santi, who was well known in his own era. He had also composed the inscription on the tomb, as well as those others that were displayed for that solemn commemoration.<sup>884</sup>

For that November 17th, a Friday that year, Fr. Lenotti jotted in the Chronicle that at the regular weekly devotions in honor of the Five Wounds, a text of the Book of Wisdom was the theme of the sermon: "For I was a candid youth, endowed with a gifted soul ..." In the sermon, references were made to Fr. Bertoni, that shed new light on various facets of his life that made the solemnity of that day even more meaningful. He concluded with: "Blessed be the Name of God - in all things!"<sup>885</sup>



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<sup>883</sup> C. C. Bresciani, "Collezione Orazioni Funebre", o.c. The Oration delivered in honor of Madeline di Canossa is the last of Vol. I. The one in honor of Fr. Bertoni is the 1st of Vol. II. The two citations from the text are from pp. 7 & 9 of Vol. II. The first is also in Doc. XXI, n.2, p. 203.

<sup>884</sup> This epigraphic biography is among the documents of the Ord. proc., and is contained in the "Summar. Super Intr. Causae", (Rome, 1906), "Catalogue Documentorum", pp. 108-111. In it, taking into consideration the ordinary style of such compositions, there is hardly anything with which we can take exception. Fr. Sante was born in 1795, and died in 1862. He was Rector of the Seminary and a well known epigraphist.

<sup>885</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie."

## CHAPTER XXIV

**THE CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED STIGMATA OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

The immediate effect of these recent developments on the work of Fr. Bertoni - that is, the extraordinary Decree of Praise from Rome, and the Imperial Decree of sanction from Vienna, will be discussed now. These two approbations made the public canonical erection of the Congregation a reality. For so long a period, the Congregation had, as it were, a hidden life, which was, at times, in immediate peril of discontinuing. After 39 years, the day had finally arrived, when Fr. Bertoni's Congregation would be brought out of the shadows into the full light of day. This ceremony was conducted, of course, at the Stimate, on November 30, 1855.

The day was preceded by an adequate preparation. The Community at the Stimate, now to be called technically a "Congregation," had made its annual retreat, which concluded on Sunday, September 23rd.<sup>886</sup> In addition to the five priests, whom we have already met, the Congregation had three priest Novices. One was Fr. Richard DaPrato, of noble birth, who had resigned as Monsignor, and as a Canon of the Cathedral. Another one was Fr. Charles Fedelini, who had "returned to his nest two weeks earlier."<sup>887</sup> The third was Fr. Anthony Ruzzenenti, who later left the Congregation.

**Canonical Election of the Superior**

On Sunday, September 23rd, the canonically required election of the Superior General of this Congregation was held. After gathering in the room of the Very Reverend Pounder, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, of venerated memory, the Religious Priests of the Congregation, excluding the Novices, invoked the light of the Holy Spirit with the hymn 'Veni Creator'. They then cast their ballots. Afterwards, these ballots were opened and read publicly, and placed in an urn. The results were the unanimous election of the Very Reverend John Mary Marani, as the Superior General of the Congregation.

"The Community was then assembled in the Domestic Chapel, and the election of the Superior General was announced to all. Each member then filed up to kiss his hand, to their great consolation. The singing of the 'Te Deum' in thanksgiving concluded this brief ceremony. The minutes of this election bore the signatures of those who had voted - John Mary Marani, Cajetan Brugnoli, Francis Benciolini, Innocent Venturini and John Baptist Lenotti."<sup>888</sup> Henceforth, they were to be called the Fathers of the Community.

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<sup>886</sup> Lenotti, "Atti e Storia ..," Mas. Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>887</sup> Lenotti, "Memorie," following Gramego's, Arch. Stimm., Verona.

<sup>888</sup> Lenotti, "Atti ..." o.c.

### The Solemn Canonical Erection

The ceremony, set for Sunday, September 30th, was announced three days previously with the festive tolling of the bells from the Stimate. The Church itself was most elegantly decorated, and an elaborate program of music, in accord with the tastes of that time, was arranged. In truth, these preparations infringed somewhat upon the traditions of the Founder.

The ceremony, which was followed exactly that day, was compiled by the Superior, Fr. Marani. It was read a few days earlier to the Bishop, and was approved by him.

In conformity to this Ceremonial, Bishop Riccabona did not add to the solemnity only with his Mass. From the opening "Veni Creator Spiritus", through the solemn procession to establish the first canonical cloister, to the concluding "Te Deum, he presided over the entire function. There was one notable exception, however, which was part of the service that characterized the entire day. It was Fr. Marani who presided over the public profession of the three simple vows of the members of the Congregation. This established the first nucleus of the Professed Religious of the new Congregation. There were five Priests, and three Coadjutor Brothers.<sup>889</sup>

### The Public Profession of the Vows

Immediately after the Mass, the Bishop left the altar, and stood by the throne that had been set up in the sanctuary. He witnessed the profession of the Superior, Fr. Marani, who knelt before the open Tabernacle, and pronounced his vows. Those who perhaps could not see the ceremony well felt that Fr. Marani was making his profession to the Bishop. In reality, however, it was to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament that he pronounced the formula of profession.

Then the tabernacle door was closed, and Fr. Marani was seated on a chair at the altar, as each member knelt before him.<sup>890</sup> The little Community thus symbolically represented the fact that it had been established to go beyond the confines of any single Diocese, and that it planned that its members would "Go anywhere in the Diocese and the World."

The Bishop himself had given testimony of this fact, and stated that he, too, cherished this dream. He wrote: "All Bishops should have this Institute. It is a body of Reserves, like the Imperial Guard, that Napoleon would send onto the field to decide the battle, by rendering the most telling blow."<sup>891</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>890</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>891</sup> Lenotti, "Memoria" o.c.

### The Bishop's Address

The Bishop's sermon that day presented these thoughts. He applied the words of the psalmist: "The just man shall flourish as a palm tree, and shall be multiplied as a cedar in Lebanon," to Fr. Bertoni. The Bishop lauded his Institute, and exhorted its members "in imitation of their Father, to carry out this commission. It is an Institute much desired by the Bishops, and the Holy Father himself has expressed the desire that this 'Little Flock' would grow. As Apostolic Missionaries, all the members must imitate the Apostles in preaching the word of God, in emulating their charity and their abnegation".

The Bishop, then, imparted his blessing to the newly Professed, and concluded the service with the singing of the "Te Deum", and its oration. Before leaving, he gave one last blessing.

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The whole service was described as "most edifying and moving."

The officials and notables who attended were most pleased with it. The heads of a number of Religious Orders were present, as was the Jesuit Provincial, Fr. Beretta. There were other illustrious priests and members of the nobility who had witnessed the ceremony, as well as a large congregation of the faithful. Verona itself was pleased with this day.<sup>892</sup>

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For this occasion, Fr. Marani had prepared and distributed a printed booklet, entitled "A Brief Account of the Congregation." This was intended to be "an adequate and precise response to many who had asked: 'What is that Union of Priests at the Oratory of the Stimate?'"

This booklet was "much sought after, and was read far and wide, with great pleasure and satisfaction. Its entire text was reprinted in some newspapers and periodicals, and summaries of it appeared as far away as Germany. The events of this September 30<sup>th</sup> at the Stimate were of "great interest throughout Italy, Austria and Germany". The "Civiltà Cattolica", in its "Correspondence" section, contained an article, originating in Venice, which Fr. Lenotti stated, "gave a just and clear idea of our Institute."<sup>893</sup>

Fr. Lenotti's account of the proceedings of this day concluded with his customary motto: "To God alone be honor and glory, forever, Amen. Praise be to our beloved Patrons, Mary and Joseph."<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>892</sup> Lenotti, "Atti ...," I.c.

<sup>893</sup> Doc. XXIII, nn. III, 3, p. 265, Intr. & Text; Lenotti, "Atti ...," I.c.; "Civiltà Cattolica, Series," Vol. 12, pp. 702-704.

<sup>894</sup> Lenotti, "Atti ...," I.c.

### The Congregation of the Stimmate after the Canonical Erection

After the Canonical Erection, the Congregation seemed to have a new life. It was a rebirth, which although modest, was considered by its Religious, as miraculous. On January 31, 1857, Fr. Louis Bragato mentioned this fact to his friend, the Superior General of the Jesuits, Fr. Peter Beckx. The Jesuit General had expressed his love for the Congregation, as he had loved and esteemed its Founder, "of happy memory."

Fr. Bragato wrote: It is little more than a year since this poor Congregation, which once had almost disappeared, had been canonically erected. What do you think has happened since. From that moment, it acquired a new life. It seems that its holy Founder has infused his spirit into his sons. Almost overnight, they became preachers and missionaries, who accomplished wonders in every place they were invited to preach the Word of God. What is even more remarkable, is that several excellent, apostolic young priests have become members of that revived, flourishing plant. I am sure that Your Reverence receives this happy news with joy."<sup>895</sup>

Actually, though the development was never notable. On the other hand, it is a fact that the activity of those early times was in most obvious conformity to the letter and the spirit with the plan of the Founder. In truth, the Congregation was a "flying squad of Apostolic Missionaries," for the assistance of Bishops. When Fr. Bragato wrote, in a little more than a year's time, the Congregation had lent its gratuitous assistance to the Clergy, to various associations and to the laity, not only in the Diocese of Verona, but also and repeatedly in the Dioceses of Cremona, Treviso and Trent. From these endeavors, with equal vigor, the Priests returned to various assignments in their home Diocese. They had also worked in the Dioceses of Milan, Vicenza, Padua, Feltre and Belluno and in Udine. In Verona, a student house and a novitiate had been established, and the Mother House, the Stimmate, had been opened as a Retreat House for Priests.<sup>896</sup>

The secret of all this activity seems to us to lie in the words of Fr. Bragato: "It seems that the Holy Founder had infused his spirit into his sons." From this authoritative testimony of one who was so close to Fr. Bertoni's heart, it is evident that in the activity of those, his first sons, the Holy Founder "would have seen himself, if he could have returned."<sup>897</sup>

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To understand his imposing figure better, we will give here a further delineation of the character of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. After all that has been stated, this summary of him is best placed here.

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<sup>895</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr. p. 229, f.

<sup>896</sup> I.c., p. 230; Lenotti, "Atti ...," I.c.

<sup>897</sup> Doc. XXIII, Intr., p. 231.

In the flower of his years, he gave himself wholeheartedly to a tuition free high school for the sons of the ordinary people. This school veiled the life of the Community that from the beginning was lived “in the manner of Religious,” and those of perfect observance, with a perfect community in all things.

With the passing of time, Fr. Bertoni was then confined to a bed of pain, subjected to the lancing and the probing time and time again of his sensitive flesh. He became a victim of suffering, in the school of God and the Crucified. Several times he had a close brush with death and the supreme sacrifice which, however, was not accepted until his old age.

He was restricted, even at the height of his manhood, and was as a recluse in the house, in his room and most often in bed. All his life, then, was spent in greater or lesser suffering, being entirely forgetful of himself. He poured out unstintingly and tirelessly those gifts of his mind and heart in the service of the Holy Church. He gave of his gifts, as though they were not his own, in every work of the Lord, and to every brother of his in Christ.

This man realized to the fullest extent, as his own secret, the life in God, faithfully hidden with Christ. He was by nature a true Apostolic Missionary, eminently suited for the Apostolic Mission, as the authority of the Church declared. From this Apostolic Mission, he did experience consolations, but only to the extent that he might bear more of its anguish. In brief, his life was a holocaust, but one without regret, to provide the Church with a squadron of Apostolic Missionaries, whose work he would not see. Such was the totality of his sacrifice.

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Let us return now to the Congregation. From the moment of its Canonical Erection, the Priests of the Stimate were said to be that which they had already been in fact for years - “Apostolic Missionaries for the assistance of Bishops.” They adopted as their name what their Founder had determined as their scope. The Superior General, Fr. Marani, prepared a compendium of the rules that he presented to the Consultors of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in Rome, during the negotiations to obtain the Decree of Praise. He stated:

“The members of the Institute are called Apostolic Missionaries.”

It is true that Fr. Marani must have noted in the Decree that he was called the “Moderator of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Neither he, nor any of the officials of the Curia observed that the title “Apostolic Missionary” was an honorary title that could only be awarded by the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith. As such, no one else had the right to confer it. So, the name “Apostolic Missionary” was used with the more common title of the “Priests of the Sacred Stigmata”, or “Stigmatines” for about 35 years. A later observation of a Consultor of the Sacred Congregation in Rome

(Monsignor Albert Battandier, in 1890) brought an end to the title "Apostolic Missionaries" as the name of the Congregation founded at the Stimate.<sup>898</sup>

During the early development of the "Apostolic Missionaries," the congregation weathered severe storms when the Province of Veneto became part of the new Kingdom of Italy. A Law of Suppression was applied in all its vigor to religious corporations, and all their properties were confiscated. The Priests of the Stimate, in August 1867, notwithstanding the protests of the legal owner of the property, saw all their possessions sequestered. As we know, the Congregation as such did not own its property, but it had been left to Fr. Francis Benciolini.

Then followed a long and involved litigation. Through a number of appeals, only after six long years were the rights of the legal owner vindicated. The Congregation was saved, but the Superior General, Fr. Marani, did not live to see this victory. He died on July 1, 1871.

To him the Congregation is indebted, in addition to what we have already seen, for its first expansion outside of the Diocese in which it was born. He arranged for a house not far from Trent, just when the political fury was to erupt in all its violence, for the students and the novices of the Congregation. This house, too, was obtained through Bishop Riccabona, who a few years earlier, was transferred from Verona to that See.<sup>899</sup>

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The spread of the Congregation, limited to the territory of Italy, was somewhat timid and slow. Its work almost always centered around the apostolate of the youth, through the Marian Oratories, and schools and often through Student or Workers' Associations, boarding colleges and schools.

The definitive approbation of the Congregation, as an Institute with simple vows, came through a Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on September 15, 1890. In 1905, the continent of America became the field of its endeavor - first to North America, that is, the United States, where the Congregation cared particularly for Italian immigrants. In 1910, the Congregation went to South America, that is Brazil, where its activity was specifically missionary.

The Constitutions, or Rules, adapted because of the circumstances of the times, according to the modification of Canon Law, were approved. This approval came from the Sacred Congregation of Religious by Decree of June 23, 1925.

Following the approbation of the Constitutions, the Congregation was called to evangelize the infidels in a mission in China, in Yishien, in 1926. In 1935, this

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<sup>898</sup> *l.c.*, pp. 228, 229.

<sup>899</sup> "Breve Cronaca della Cong...", Verona, 1917, pp. 121-124, nn. 117, 118; pp. 125, 130, nn. 120-123; pp. 132-139, nn. 126-131.

mission was erected into an Apostolic Prefecture, where now, while we write these lines, all has been destroyed, as is the case throughout China.

Today the Congregation is divided into three Provinces, by a faculty granted through a Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, dated October 10, 1941. The Italian Province is under the protection of the Sacred Heart; the North American Province, including the United States and Canada, is named for the Holy Spouses; and the South American, or Brazilian Province is dedicated to the Holy Cross.<sup>900</sup>

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The letter of the original Constitutions of the Servant of God has been handed down, through the various adjustments, due to the changing circumstances of the times, the modifications of Church legislation and human prudence.

Solemn Vows were never pronounced, and without this difference in profession, the distinction of the grades of the priests was never a reality. The Superior General is no longer elected for life. The general legislation for modern Congregations has been applied by the Congregation of the Servant of God.

The "Apostolic Mission" of old, in certain aspects has given way to new endeavors. Under certain conditions, the care of parishes is accepted. The ministry does allow retribution through whatever may be spontaneously offered. In general, whatever changes that were introduced over the years, were admitted in obedience to the authority of the Church, which is the pivotal center of the Constitutions.

The general scope of the Congregation remains the same as that of every Religious Institute - the sanctification of the individual members through the observance of the three simple vows and the constitutions.

The special end is to give to Bishops, in so far as this is possible, opportune assistance, for the salvation of souls, according to the Constitutions and the spirit of the Founder.

This spirit remains in vigor today. The approved Constitutions have the custody of it, in that they interpret the ideal of the Founder, even though they do not contain every norm and rule of his life.

Above all, they inculcate the fact that there can be no genuine apostolate that is not founded on the treasures of the interior life. In this, there has been no change.

They inculcate a spirit of zeal for souls - they enjoin on the members of the Congregation the goal of "being prepared for all things," presupposing that only what has been contemplated, may be shared with others."

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<sup>900</sup> From the Acts of the Gen. Curia, Rome.



The Constitutions instill the members with the realization that true zeal starts from a spirit of prayer and faith, and the practice of the religious virtues. Genuine zeal presupposes regular observance - silence, recollection and mortification, and not only passive, but also its active pursuit.

The Constitutions implant firmly the spirit of charity - "by this, will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for the other."

And all of this is impregnated with the spirit of humility, according, to that principle of the Gospel: Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

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## CHAPTER XXV

**TOWARD GLORIFICATION**

If that affection and veneration, which in truth we have for the Founder and Father of our humble Congregation, is not a veil to our eyes, we can state that his reputation for holiness surpassed in his own lifetime, the objective account that we have tried to present in this biography.

We might add that this reputation of his even affected those who were little disposed toward him. There was the case of an avowed “anticlerical,”<sup>901</sup> who had nothing but venom for every ministry undertaken in God’s service. It will suffice to quote his very words, when Fr. Bertoni’s name was mentioned to him.

“Why do you speak to me about Fr. Bertoni?” he asked, “That man is a Saint, and we do not speak of Saints.”<sup>902</sup>

It was the opinion of many of Fr. Bertoni’s contemporaries that his holiness, if that was the word they used, had the charism or the grace of performing cures. There were, however, never any spectacular miracles, nor anything that would substantiate this reputation of his of being a wonder-worker. Neither was there anything that was corroborated by scientific documentation, as the circumstances and the times did not seem to call for it. All the same, as Fr. Giacobbe records, whatever he did accomplish came about with “that language, and in that manner that is so characteristic of the Saints, that is, the humble Servants of God Fr. Bertoni’s merit stood out on such occasions in the faith of those who asked him to intervene in their troubles; and whatever benefit was derived, was due to the Providence of God. It is a fact, though, that he succeeded quite well in remaining in the background, well behind the Blessed Mother of God and the Saints.”<sup>903</sup>

It is also true that such instances are very few, and they are quite modest in nature. We note these incidents here now, “lest they perish,” so to speak. They are, as it were, the last recollections of the Father to be remembered by his sons.

**Power of Intercession**

The first case that has come down to us is one that is fairly well documented. It concerns the wife of one Joseph Ferrari. He had held various responsible positions in the city government; his wife’s name was Rose Storari Ferrari.

She first became ill on February 27, 1827. Her sickness was diagnosed “as one of the most serious cases of ‘miliary fever.’ The three doctors that were in attendance,” Ferrari himself has stated, “were gravely concerned and worried.” By

<sup>901</sup> Summar., p. 275, 31. This is a dialect expression: “Copa Preti - Accoppa Preti.”

<sup>902</sup> I.c.; Doc. XXVI, p. 571, f.

<sup>903</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 575, ff.

March 18th, the patient had failed considerably; and was at death's door. In the morning, she received Viaticum, and she was anointed that even.

Fr. Bertoni at this time was confined to bed himself, as his leg was inflamed, and badly swollen once again. He sent word to Ferrari, that as the next day was the Feast of St. Joseph, he should take courage and place all his trust in the Saint.

Ferrari wrote later, that "a real prodigy occurred. That very night, just before the dawn of the 19th, she suffered a crisis." Soon, all was calm, and immediately thereafter, she seemed much better. Within a few days, she was up and around again, and after a period of convalescence, her previous state of health was completely restored.<sup>904</sup>

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There were several others who attributed their immediate cures from serious and even mortal illnesses, or their unexpected rapid recoveries, to a visit from Fr. Bertoni, and to his blessing. Dr. Francis Vasani, a physician, made this claim, as did the Pro-Vicar, Monsignor Louis Castori. Both of them left recorded statements.<sup>905</sup>

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Monsignor Castori's case, occurred in 1833, and it drew the attention of a Mr. Joseph Tebaldini. In August 1834, after having lost his wife, Tebaldini was gravely concerned about his son, Marino. The young boy had "a rather delicate constitution, and had been sickly most of his life." In his tender age, he was struck down by a serious illness, that was described incurable, and all hope for his recovery was given up. The distraught father asked Fr. Bertoni for the comfort of his visit to his dying son. Fr. Gaspar did go, saw the boy, prayed over him and blessed him. He exhorted the family to have confidence, "and left them all full of hope. Our hope was not in vain, Tebaldini continues, "because the following morning the doctor found that the boy's condition had substantially changed". There was an immediate and continued improvement, and after a few days, the boy was well again, completely recovered.<sup>906</sup>

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There was another case in 1839, involving one Sante Marlotti. This man was in the employ of the Sisters of the Holy Family. For a number of months, he had been subject to recurrences of a violent fever, that withstood all remedies. One day, he felt it coming on, while walking along the street, not far from the Stimate. Before going home, he came to the room of Fr. Bertoni, on an errand for the Sisters.

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<sup>904</sup> I.c., p. 573, f.; Ap. Proc., f. 668, v.

<sup>905</sup> Doc. XX, p.136; XXVI, p. 572.

<sup>906</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 573; Ap. Proc, F. 609.

Seeing him in this condition, Fr. Bertoni said to him: "Step in, my good Sante!" He then took out a container and anointed the man with the blessed oil of the Patron of Verona, St. Zeno. Fr. Bertoni then suggested to Mariotti that he should recite faithfully every day a few "Our Father's," "Hail Mary's," and "Gloria's" in honor of the Saint.

A few years later, Mariotti was recounting this incident: "Do you want to know what happened? From that time onward, the fever abated, and I felt much better - and the fever has never returned."<sup>907</sup>

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We should also recall here another incident involving Monsignor Castori, the Diocesan Pro-Vicar. On November 21, 1839, for a time he nursed the hope that a visit and the prayers of Fr. Bertoni might bring about the recovery of the dying Bishop Grassi. But, as we have already seen, on that occasion, the Servant of God merely wept, and sobbed. "This was a sign to those present that God had willed that this Victim was all ready for heaven."<sup>908</sup>

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With such a reputation, it is no wonder, as Fr. Lenotti has recorded, that "every now and then clothing of children, or the wraps of sick babies, or other such articles, that would be placed over them, were sent to the Stimate, that they might be blessed. The hope was that through the merits of the Servant of God, a cure might be obtained."<sup>909</sup>

"There were even some who had procured articles of Fr. Bertoni's clothing that he had worn as a child", Fr. Giacobbe tells us. "From these, the Lord generously conferred many blessings and special graces."<sup>910</sup>

This confidence in the Servant of God did not stop with his death.

His own sons, in their various needs, both in private and in common, used to pray to the Most Holy Trinity, that through the merits of their Father, they would more easily obtain the graces they desired. Furthermore, they all attributed the granting of the "Decree of Praise," that the Congregation had received, to his intercession. As we have already seen, because of a number of factors, this Decree was considered to be a prodigy.

They also attributed to him the extraordinary success and the graces that were poured down on their first apostolic efforts. The early increase in membership, and the fact that the Congregation weathered those most difficult times, they felt was due to him. Their recovery of the property confiscated by the

<sup>907</sup> Doc. XX, p. 135, f.; XXVI, p. 574, f.

<sup>908</sup> Doc. XVI, p. 91'; Letter: C.C. Bresciani, Nov. 22, 1839.

<sup>909</sup> Doc. XX, pp. 136, 186.

<sup>910</sup> I.c., p. 186; Doc. XXVI, p. 310.

new Italian Government, and many other individual and common favors, all were attributed to his intercession.<sup>911</sup>

Other graces and favors, called extraordinary, were received as well by those outside the Congregation.<sup>912</sup> Perhaps their misguided spirit of the hidden life is the reason why these were neither recorded or substantiated.

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Greater attention, however, should be given to that period when Fr. Bertoni's Cause of Beatification was initiated. Information was requested, and documents were assembled, and then presented to the Informative Process of the Cause, that was conducted during the years 1897-1899.

There was one notable cure recorded in these documents. It was a case of "periostitis", with notable decay of the tarsal joint of the foot, of one Charles Lona, the young son of Fausto Lona, of Cembra, in the Province of Trent.

The boy had spent three months in the Hospital of Trent, from April - July" 1896, to no avail. He was also a patient in the Hospital of Rovereto, from April - July 1897, and the ailment was judged to be incurable, and the doctors decided to amputate the foot.

The boy was sent home again, and the local doctor was consulted. He confirmed the previous diagnosis. All further medical assistance was abandoned, and prayers were said to Fr. Bertoni. A Relic of his was placed on the damaged member - "after 15 or 20 days, to his great surprise, and wonder, the doctor declared that the foot was healed, and in need of no further care." Dr. Boniface Vielmetti signed the above statement on July 31, 1899, two years after the event.<sup>913</sup>

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In the years that followed, recourse to Fr. Bertoni, although perhaps not frequent, still was not rare. There were various incidents that were termed "cures" - there were cases of osseous synovitis, chest hemorrhages, acute nephritis, a serious attack of appendicitis, a case of typhoid, complicated by severe chest hemorrhaging; a very serious form of pleurisy, accompanied by high fever, with apical lung complications; an obstinate liver ailment; a case of double pneumonia, followed by meningitis; a case of endometritis, accompanied by severe hemorrhaging.

However, in all these cases, either the lack of awareness, or the circumstances of the individual cases, no scientific statements were gathered to substantiate these facts for the judgment of the responsible authorities.

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<sup>911</sup> Doc. XXVI, p. 449, ff; J. Fiorio, "Vita del Ven. S.d.Dio ...," Verona, 1922, p. 335, f.

<sup>912</sup> "Summar. Super Intr. Causae," N. XX, p. 86; Ibid., p. 83, ff. Declarations of Fausto Lona and Fr. John Lona, father and brother of the favored Charles Lona.

<sup>913</sup> Summar., p. 309, 9, 10; p. 307, d; p. 311, 11, 12; p. 311, 15, 16; l.c., 19, 29; p. 312, 21, 22.

All of these cases occurred between 1901-1922.

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For the last 20 years or more, it seems that Venerable Gaspar Bertoni has won the confidence of many souls in the Stigmatine Province of the Holy Cross, in Brazil. The reports that have come to us from there concern cases that are most consoling. Facts have come to light that indicate an intervention that cannot be explained by science.

There have been cases of individuals on the very threshold of death as one that occurred in Rio Claro, in 1937. There was an immediate cure of an aggravated ulcer.<sup>914</sup> There was a report of a cure in 1937 from a tetanus infection that was localized in the dorsal area of the spine.<sup>915</sup>

In Casa Branca, San Paolo, in 1950 there was a cure of a severe case of nephritis, with serious complications.<sup>916</sup>

The first of these cases occurred in the Diocese of Campinas, and the local Ecclesiastical Process has been conducted concerning it. The third case took place in the Diocese, of Ribeirao Preto, and the local Process is going on, as we write these lines. We do hope that both of these cases will obtain a favorable definitive judgment of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Other instances of no less interest have trickled in - both bodily cures, and spiritual conversions. If God wills it, they may hasten the day when the Cause of Fr. Bertoni may enter its last lap.

### **The Cause of Beatification**

Fr. Bertoni's Cause, unfortunately, was late in starting - it did not begin until 45 years after his death. During these 45 years, the number of eye witnesses, and their first hand testimony concerning the life and virtue of the candidate for the honors of the altar, were decimated.

The "Diocesan Informative Process," also called the "Ordinary Process," was opened on December 30, 1897, by order of His Eminence, Cardinal Louis di Canossa, Bishop of Verona, who was its first witness. This Process was terminated on August 21, 1899.

On the 13th of March that year, the Ecclesiastical Tribunal proceeded to the official recognition of the body of the Servant of God. The following is a quote from its report:

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<sup>914</sup> "Bertoniano," Periodical Reserved to the Stigmatines, 1937, p.68,f.

<sup>915</sup> Testimony, Prov. Arch., S. Heart prov., Brazil, Rio Claro.

<sup>916</sup> "Ecos Estimatinos," A. VI, n. 61, p. 12.

"The inner casket, of pine wood, had deteriorated to a marked degree. The outer casing of zinc was also in poor condition. The third, a pine covering, was practically totally decayed."

The body seemed mummified from the head down. It was in a state of saponification - the bony areas were well conserved, but "there was a notable deterioration of the muscular tissue. However, the body was rather well preserved, considering the 45 years since death had occurred." We might also add, considering, too, the exceptional humidity of the place where the body had been placed.

Precisely because of this humidity, "it was agreed to leave the body uncovered for a few days," so that it might be perfectly dried. This took, however, two months.<sup>917</sup>

Meanwhile, a more worthy tomb was excavated in the wall of the old Oratory, formerly dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, but at that time, it was named in honor of the "Sacred Face." The body was entombed there on May 18th, and a stone was placed on the wall with the following inscription:

"The Remains of the Servant of God, Priest, Parent and Lawmaker of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata."

The "Diocesan Informative Process," or the 'Ordinary Process,' was examined and discussed in Rome by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, on February 20, 1906. On the following March 2nd, the Holy Father, Pope Pius X, signed the Commission for the "Introduction of the Cause," of the Servant of God. From that moment, according to the existing legislation, Fr. Bertoni acquired the title of "Venerable." Canon Law now reserves this title for that time after the canonical recognition of the heroicity of the virtues.

The so-called "Apostolic Process," in its two-fold phase, "Inchoative" and "Continuative," was declared close on January 15, 1925.

On June 12, 1923, the Ecclesiastical Tribunal then proceeded to a second recognition of the body of the Venerable Servant of God. The following is an account of that day, in part:

"The wooden casket was in excellent condition. The lid was removed with religious deference, and the venerated body appeared. Great emotion was felt in the hearts of all, as they were able to view the beloved countenance. Both death and time had respected the Venerable Father. The body was lying flat, with the head turned somewhat to the left. The arms were along side of the body, that appeared to be that of one sleeping. The face - although it was somewhat blackened was as it had been at death, as were the beard and hair; the mouth was

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<sup>917</sup> "Positio super non Cultu," 1917,, Summar., pp. 48-51, "Report of the Experts."

opened a little, and the eyes were dried out, and the ears were hardened. This face seems to have been very well captured in the official portrait.”<sup>918</sup>

Then the box was closed and sealed again, and placed back in its place, and the inscription was placed over it.<sup>919</sup>

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On December 27, 1929, the Sacred Congregation of Rites validated the Processes conducted by the Ordinary authorities, and also that phase of the Apostolic Process was discussed and approved. On the following day, the Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, deigned to ratify this discussion of the Sacred Congregation.

Pope Plus XI instituted a special “Historical Section” of this same Sacred Congregation, whose competence it would be to study the Causes of Beatification then in process, as well as all future ones. This seemed to call a halt to Fr. Bertoni’s Cause. More solid proofs would have to be provided on the consistency of the documentation of all the Processes. It became necessary, through research, to fill in various voids that were apparent, and to support the Cause with testimony written by contemporaries of the Servant of God. Other documents had to be provided, and other studies had to be conducted that would provide elements useful to his history.

From these studies, developed the voluminous “Summarium Additionale, ex Officio Compilatum”, as well as a so-called “Positio super Virtutibus Servi Dei”. These studies served then as the basis of the normal Process “On the Heroicity of the Virtues,” which in these Causes is the ultimate Process that depends on the special activity of men. Following this, in its own time, the Cause would be ratified by the intervention of heaven, through miracles and graces, leading to the glory of Bernini.

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Meanwhile, permission was sought and obtained to remove the blessed body of the Servant of God, from its place in the Oratory of the Sacred Face, and placed in an alcove off the main area of the Church of the Stimmate. There, simple but decorous, a small Chapel was prepared. The transport of the body was conducted in the presence of Bishop Jerome Cardinale, Bishop of Verona, on September 16, 1937.<sup>920</sup>

How extraordinary it seems that this new tomb of the Founder was to be as the ultimate defense, as though it were a rampart, in the bombardment of that terrible April 6, 1945. The Church was hit, and a bomb tore through the roof, and dug into the floor, where it remained unexploded!

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<sup>918</sup> “Bertoniano,” 1923, p. 42.

<sup>919</sup> In 1925, a bust of Fr. Bertoni was placed in the so-called Pantheon, “Beneficia in Patriam,” of the Cemetery of Verona; “Bertoniano,” 1925, p. 64.

<sup>920</sup> “Bertoniano,” 1937, p. 105.



When will that day dawn when the venerable remains in this humble tomb will be glorified? When “will his brilliant reputation that still endures,” bring to Fr. Bertoni the crown of the Saints?<sup>921</sup>

Soon, the first centenary of his death will be observed, and it is only proper to nourish the hope that his Cause will by then be well along its way.

We, however, are the sons of a Father, whose constant norm in his own life was to remain calm in the most holy abandonment, in the loving arms of Divine Providence. We must all, more than ever, abandon ourselves to the Divine Good Pleasure. We must submit our minds and hearts, as his sons, to the wishes, designs and norms of our Holy Mother, the Church. She is the only and infallible instrument of the glorification of the Servants of God.

To her judgment and to her authority, we subject all that has been written and recounted in these pages - as to the judgment and to the authority of her, “Whom God, through the mouth of the Apostle, has called the ‘Column and the Firmament of Truth!’ ”<sup>922</sup>

THE END

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<sup>921</sup> Stigmatine Necrology, June 12th.

<sup>922</sup> Pusineri, “Rosmini,” Ed., Domodossola, 1929, p. 297.

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#### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

We have not included other publications, which mention the Servant of God, only in passing - or those that offer background material relevant to his life. They will be reported, when needed, directly in the footnotes.

#### MANUSCRIPTS

Together with Fr. Giacobbe’s “Life of the Servant of God,” various manuscripts form the heart of the entire documentation. Above all, we have cited the manuscripts of the Servant of God, which are now in the custody of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. A certain number of them, however, comprise the “Summarium Additionale” - especially Doc. XXXV, which is a thorough synthesis of them all.

There are also numerous “recollections” and other writings of Fr. Bertoni’s first companions, which may, or may not be found in the “Summarium.” Special attention has been given to the so-called “Miscellanea-Lenotti,” which was compiled between 1853-1854. It was gathered with a view to a later complete biography of the Ven. Founder. This rather copious and interesting collection forms Doc. XX of the “Summarium Additionale”.

There are also various other writings of Fr. Bertoni’s contemporaries, some of which are included in the “Summarium”. All further sources are indicated either in the text itself, or in the footnotes.