

A Brief Chronicle

of the



The Stimate in Verona, birth place of the Congregation

Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ

**Rev. Joseph Fiorio – Stigmatine
1876-1958**

Volume I – First Period

**From the Origin of the Congregation
to the Death of the Founder [1816-1853]**

Original Italian Title: *Breve Cronaca*

Printed Edition:

VERONA

Scuola Tipografica 'Casa Buoni Fanciulli'
1917

Translation into English: Rev. Joseph C. Henchey, CSS – 2005
(From the Contemplative Passionist Monastery – Erlanger, KY)

Electronic Edition: Pentecost Sunday, 2005

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FIRST PERIOD

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Chapter 1
YEARS OF PREPARATION
[1800-1816]

1. Fr. John B. Lenotti wrote in his *Life* of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni:

... It is well known that in those calamitous years after 1800, there were in Verona several exemplary priests, who experienced within an inspiration to dedicate themselves to serve God in the Company of Jesus.¹ Without sharing this information among them, almost all of them tended toward this purpose: and with the frequent gatherings that they held among themselves², with their mutual exhortations, and with the continual examples that they gave to one another, all were full of a holy fervor of kicking the world out, and of giving themselves entirely to the Lord, abandoning their families and whatever they owned, for the love of God...

2. Just who these Priests were we can know from the *Life* Fr. Gaspar: they were those inseparable companions of his who helped him in all his works of zeal, particularly in the Marian Oratories: Fr. John Mary Marani, Fr. Matthew Farinati, Fr. Michaelangelo Gramego and the Seminarian, Louis Bragato³.

Fr. Gaspar also makes reference of these in his spiritual dairy, when he wrote on September 15, 1808:

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

Fr. Bertoni was the center around whom their meetings assembled – both because he was the eldest among them, and also because they all held him in great veneration as a holy and learned man.

3. This is the way matters were when St. Gaspar, it seems in the year 1809⁴, had a vision, in which God led him to understand that He has destined him to found a new

¹ The Company of Jesus had been suppressed in 1773, but its dispersed members nourished the hope of obtaining from the Holy See its re-establishment and they obtained this in 1814.

² Fr. Lenotti himself in his *Life* of Fr. Gramego, speaks of these conferences that were held in Fr. Bertoni's own home.

³ Letter of Fr. Bertoni to Fr. Bragato – cf. ahead: **BC I, # 50**.

⁴ It seems that this can be established from a few expressions of his which we find in his Spiritual Diary, under the date of July 23rd of that year. We read:

... To begin the undertaking one ought to have acquired great and heroic virtue.

The necessary initial budget plan is Poverty. After that, all other virtues. One should not overlook the tiniest thing, and not to delay in welcoming inspirations.

Congregation. This news is attested to by Fr. Lenotti in his *Life* of the Saint, and confirmed also by Fr. Marani, who declares that he had this stated by Fr. Gaspar himself:

... It seems that the Spirit of the Lord much time before [he actually withdrew to live at the Stimmate] had placed in his heart the idea of a Religious Institution, and had made him see in anticipation a kind of symbol, a figure, which he confidently confided to me [since Fr. Gaspar was most hesitant in speaking about himself] that it had begun around 1812: i.e., at the very time when there was not only any hope of establishing new Congregations of Religious, but even those existing communities had been from the year 1810 on dispersed everywhere and suppressed.⁵

4. It was natural that he would seek to keep gathered around himself those companions, which seemed to him to be so compatible with this inspiration, and also because they were closely bound to him, and because they were all desirous of embracing the religious life: this had to be the reason that induced him to make known the vision that he had; this seems to be all the more true in that some among them had already been thinking of leaving Verona⁶.

However, the fact that this had been the intention of Fr. Gaspar is confirmed for us by Fr. Louis Bragato, who in that time had been a simple cleric and he frequented each day the Bertoni home for reasons of study:

...Fr. Gaspar Bertoni had fixed in his heart from the time of the French domination, at the very moment when all the religious houses had been destroyed and all their inhabitants dispersed, the idea of gathering around himself some young seminarians and priests, who would live together in the manner of religious as stones already prepared for the construction of a certain Religious Order, at the very moment when the established state of injury and violence against the Church would cease, and the divine goodness would have brought about better and peaceful times⁷.

In this manner, therefore, they all held themselves in readiness around fr. Bertoni, awaiting a propitious occasion in order to begin this endeavor.

5. However, these were very sad times in which it was not even possible to think of a religious foundation. Society was pervaded with a pagan spirit, animated by an

⁵ Fr. John M. Marani, *Reminiscences regarding the Congregation*. Printed in Verona in 1855.

⁶ Fr. Gramego, for example, had already decided to move to Rome. [cf. his *Life*, written by Fr. Lenotti.

⁷ Another circumstance that fits into this context is that which is remembered for us by Fr. Lenotti, in his *Life* of Fr. Gramego. In 1800, as the Church of the Holy Savior [this had belonged to the suppressed Benedictine Nuns] in the Royal Court had to be closed, it was decided to transfer the body of St. Gualfardo from that Church where it was venerated into the Church of St. Firmus. Four priests were chosen to carry this in solemn procession, in vestments, to the Church of St. Firmus. Among those chosen were Fr. Gaspar, Fr. Gramego and probably Fr. Farinati. On that occasion, Fr. Lenotti states, they visibly experience in their hearts a strong impulse to gather together and to dedicate themselves to their neighbor.

authentic anti-religious hatred. There had spread also throughout Italy the tragic principles of the French Revolution, and they had invaded everywhere, even into the Cloisters⁸.

There reigned above all in the upper classes an un-refrained permissiveness, encouraged by the example of the new dominators, of the thoroughly pagan celebrations that they continuously organized and from the scandal that unfortunately so many apostolate and renegade priests gave. Everywhere Clubs had sprung up, Academies and other patriotic societies which aspired to the triumph of new principles and which combated and pursued good under any form that it might take on. Religious Houses were closed, the Religious living in them were dispersed and Churches were profaned. The institutes of charity were closed, even those which housed orphan children and bands of vagabonds wandered through the streets of the city with all boldness and no restraint, begging money, cursing and stealing everywhere and giving sway to all licentiousness.⁹

And anyone who might think of gathering them in order to take care of their necessary care and providing for them an honest education was held back in a thousand ways, and would be summoned to appear before a Committee in the police headquarters and threatened with most serious penalties¹⁰. Even this democratic government was in overt opposition to that work of charity, maintaining that those children [for the most part, orphans] pertained exclusively to the military regime, and that since all Institutes of Charity were now under government legislation, nothing new would be tolerated.¹¹

6. The conditions changed drastically when in 1814, the Austrian Government took over from the French, but the difficulties that surrounded religious foundations had not vanished. The government of Vienna had not forgotten the principles of Joseph II, nor did it look upon Religious Congregations and Orders with a favorable eye.¹² Every gathering was suspect; it was necessary, as a result, to proceed with utmost caution, because a single imprudence could compromise the entire undertaking forever. Fr. Gaspar, therefore, as he had always done even before all this, lived entirely trusting in Divine Providence, awaiting that the Lord might show him some sign in order to begin.

7. In this context, the year 1816 dawned and in the Church of St. Firmus there was held that most renowned **Parish Mission** [which lasted for about a month], in which 'the commotion was so great, and the conversions in such a number, and known even publicly, that all the other Parish Missions that were given here and there by truly capable Missionaries, these could in no way be compared to this one'¹³. In that

⁸ Fr. Bresciani, *Life of Fr. Peter Leonardi*. P. 25.

⁹ *Ib*, p. 44

¹⁰ Fr. Peter Leonardi had founded the Institute of the *Raminghell*. Cf. Bresciani, p. 46. Fr. Gaspar, too, worked through the Oratories, suffered much from the French authorities. [cf. *Sommacompana*].

¹¹ cf. Bresciani, o.c., p. 45.

¹² cf. ahead, **BC I, # 41**, note.

¹³ Fr. Lenotti, *Life of Fr. Gramego*.

Parish Mission, Fr. Gaspar was chosen as the companion for the Canon Pacetti to preach the Meditation to the People: and his companions, together with Monsignor Pacetti, 'and other Veronese priests in good numbers who gave a hand seemed to have been moved by higher strength in the hearing of confessions day and night.'¹⁴

It was then, as Fr. Lenotti notes, that in a very singular way that there was enkindled an extraordinary fervor of an apostolic and religious spirit. Whether or not, on that occasion, Fr. Bertoni was gifted with another sign, manifested to him by Heaven, the fact remains that then he had decided to begin the enterprise¹⁵, perhaps with the idea of forming a union of **Priest-Missionaries**. However, for the present, the Lord was preparing for him a favorable occasion in order to begin.

8. With the suppression of the religious orders, as has already been seen, there came to be lacking throughout Verona many institutions of charity committed to the good formation of the youth: therefore a few good persons, full of zeal for the glory of God and endowed with means of fortune, put themselves to work to bring about some kind of a remedy for this. Among these persons we should in the very first place mention Fr. Nicholas Galvani, born within the Parish confines of St. Ambrose of Valpolicella, on March 23, 1752. He was a priest much venerated, and greatly esteemed by all, for his profound piety and knowledge, who had taught Moral Theology for 40 years in the Seminary of Verona. In the year 1795, he had been named Pastor of St. John's Parish in the Foro.

He was bound by ties of authentic friendship with St. Gaspar, for whom he long had nourished a great affection, from the time that young Bertoni had been his student in the Seminary. In 1812, then, on the 2nd of September, Fr. Nicholas had bought a part of the Monastery, annexed to the Parish Church, dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity. This had been constructed in the 13th century by the Vallambrosian Monks and ultimately taken over by a suppressed Order of Converse Nuns. Fr. Galvani housed there a few poor Nuns, who had been expelled from their convents, because they were committed to the Christian formation of young poor girls of the neighborhood there. Fr. Galvani supported them from his own resources.

9. Also worthy of being mentioned here is a Mr. Joseph Bellotti, who for the same purpose in mind, purchased on October 11, 1813, two other Pious Places situated within the confines of this same Parish of the Most Blessed trinity. The first of these locales set aside for worship was the Church and Convent dedicated to St. Teresa of Avila, which had once belonged to the suppressed Carmelite Nuns. On this property, Mr. Bellotti also gathered in 1814 a few dispersed Nuns, so that they might offer there a tuition-free school for poor young girls of the surrounding area. He did obtain the

¹⁴ Cf. the Manuscripts of the Librarian, Sommacompagna, still conserved in the Communal Library of Verona.

¹⁵ Fr. Lenotti notes in his *Life of Fr. Gramego: From this Parish Mission, the inspiration for the community at the Stimmate took its origin.* To remember this fact, every evening in the prayers, after the *De Profundis*, for many generations, Stigmatines would offer the prayer, *Glory to the Father, ...* two times, with the invocation to the Holy Martyrs, Firmus and Rusticus.

permission of the government on December 18th of that same year, and also re-opened the Church for public worship.

The other locale purchased by him was the Church dedicated to the Stigmata of St. Francis [popularly known as the **Stimmate**], with a few adjoining rooms. This had once belong to the Confraternity of the Stigmata, and after the laws of suppression had emanated, it had come to be used as a smithy's shop for horseshoes. After he had redone the rooms, Mr. Bellotti also opened here in 1815 two tuition-free schools for poor children¹⁶, entrusting the endeavor to two zealous priests whom he supported. He obtained the permission to open there for Feast Days the Church of the Stimmate for the religious instruction of the youth who attended the newly re-opened schools there. In all of these undertakings, Mr. Bellotti worked in harmony with Fr. Nicholas Galvani. This was so true that it was thought, and even said rather commonly, that he had purchased those places in the name of Fr. Galvani, and with his money.

10. Mr. Bellotti also bought a third place, situated in St. Stephen's Parish, called the Pious Place of the 'Derelict' [the **Dereletti**]. It has received this name, because of old it had been used to gather there poor and abandoned orphans. The Deed of Purchase was stipulated for July 1, 1816, and the purchase price was 4,770 Lira, that had to be paid within ten years at 5% interest. However, on the 27th of that same month of July, Mr. Bellotti died, leaving as his heir the three Pious Localities which he had purchased, to the reverend Father Nicholas Galvani.

Already before-hand, he had advised Fr. Galvani that he had made out his last will and testament making Fr. Galvani his heir:

...Already for some time now that I have drawn up my will: I have left the properties of St. Teresa, the Stimmate and the Dereletti: and I ask you not to refuse this inheritance, and through the mercy of Jesus Christ, I beg you to perpetuate and to develop the work already begun there. You know, but I cannot write further.

*Bellotti*¹⁷

11. Fr. Galvani knew well the intentions of the Testator, and it was indeed precisely for this sole reason he did not go forward with his intention of rejecting the inheritance:

*... The enormous burden of the intentions of my friend, the Testator, the carrying out of which as a duty would require a more vigorous age, as well as an annual considerable contribution, and even more this required that the fulfillment of all this be perpetuated. The Archpriest clearly lacked the 'vigorous age' [he was already 64 years old], and there were lacking to him also the means to sustain this burden for life. Even more, there were lacking to him the means to perpetuate this fulfillment.*¹⁸

After having thought over the many expedients without reaching a conclusion about any of them, the ageing priest placed the entire matter into the hands of God. At that moment, Lady Leopoldina Naudet presented herself to him. She was the

¹⁶ The areas used for class rooms were the old monastic Choir and the Church sacristy.

¹⁷ From a Letter of Mr. Bellotti, conserved in the Archives at the Stimmate.

¹⁸ Facts gleaned from a Letter of Fr. Galvani, conserved in the Archives at the Stimmate.

Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family, and she asked Fr. Galvani for the use of St. Teresa's Convent as a residence there her own community¹⁹. Her proposal was for Fr. Galvani a ray of hope, he accepted the agreement and granted the use of St. Teresa's to Mother Naudet. In this way, there was assured the perpetuity of the work going on there. There still remained the properties of the Stimmate and the Dereletti, but a solution was found also for these for Fr. Galvani. 'He then turned to Fr. Bertoni, already close to him, and brought him into his counsel on these matters.'²⁰ Fr. Galvani suggested to St. Gaspar that he and his companions might assume the direction of the tuition-free school already opened at the Stimmate²¹.

12. This was the occasion offered to him by God in order to get his plan underway, and so, Fr. Bertoni willingly acquiesced:

... To bring his enterprise to term [Fr. Bragato wrote], the most prudent Fr. Bertoni knew well that he was involved in a most plausible reason of which he could make use before the government that would justify the gathering of various Priests together, living in one and the same house, as at that very moment in time, all the other such communities that had existed up to that moment had been destroyed. The pious and zealous Fr. Gaspar knew well that there could be no other better reason, according to which even for the public authorities, a favorable view might be extended toward that work of opening the tuition-free schools for the benefit of the youth. Having considered all this and with firm resolution, he committed himself to the endeavor.

¹⁹ From 1808 on, Leopoldina Naudet was associated with the Marquess Madeline di Canossa at St. Joseph's Convent, living there with the intention of assisting her in her foundation: however, as time went on it came to the common agreement of the two women that the purposes for which they were working were not fully identical, and their disagreement was on matters of great importance. Mother Leopoldina intended, different from Mother di Canossa, to give to her Religious a rather refined culture, so that they might attend not only to the poor girls of the area, but also to work for those of a more elevated social status: and furthermore, she wished to apply herself to the active life without, however, neglecting the contemplative. Her idea was to establish the law of Cloister, even though mitigated somewhat due to the apostolic purpose she had in mind. Since the two women could not reach an agreement on these two points, the Marquess proposed to her companion to seek another residence in good peace, so that each of them could attend to that good purpose that God seemed to inspire them to do.

Mother Leopoldina had taken counsel from her Spiritual Director [at that time, it was St. Gaspar], and she accepted the proposal and thought of seeking a place in which she would take up residence with her Sisters who followed her views. From 1814, she had asked Fr. Galvani, through the suggestion of Fr. Bertoni, for St. Teresa's Convent. However, Mr. Bellotti had in mind other religious Sisters. Now that he had deceased, Mother Naudet once more had recourse to the Arch-Priest and she renewed her request.

²⁰ Cf. Fr. Lenotti, *Life* of Fr. Gaspar.

²¹ A plausible reason that further influenced Fr. Galvani, the fact that a great famine plagued the area in those years. Hence, he could not longer afford to pay the two priests who conducted the schools at the Stimmate. In fact, from the beginning it was established that Fr. Bertoni and his companions would have rented from him the properties. [Fr. Marani]. Because of this idea of paying rent, the expenses that Fr. Galvani had to sustain would have been refused.

Fr. Galvani was thinking of leaving also the Dereletti to Fr. Bertoni²². Finally, after clearing the deed, in 1818 he ceded the use of this to the pious Lady, Anna Cavalieri, who had housed there a few poor girls since 1816, and maintained them with the offerings of the faithful.

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²² In fact, he did eventually do so in 1818 with his Last Will and Testament together with the properties of the Stimate and the Most Holy Trinity. He was so convinced that Fr. Bertoni would have established his work there that would be lasting and perpetual.

Chapter 2
The Foundation of the Congregation
[1816-1822]

13. Fr. Gaspar accepted therefore, without further delay the invitation of his friend, Fr. Galvani, and on November 4th of that year, he took possession of the house with his first companions. Fr. Gramego wrote in his early Chronicle:

...On November 4th, the following came to the Stimate: 1. Very Rev. Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, as leader and father; 2. Fr. John M. Marani, his former student from St. Paul's Parish in the Campo Marzio section; 3. Bro. Paul Zanolli, as secretary, economus, cook ... without knowing anything of all of this ...

On the 13th of that same month, classes began, assisted also by Fr. Michael Gramego, who, however, did not actually live at the Stimate. He writes of these days:

... On December 4th, I also came, Fr. Michael Gramego to add one more to the number, and to do what? ... We will see ... thanks be to God!

On January 1, 1817 Fr. Matthew Farinati was also added, who was, as we have already seen, one of Fr. Bertoni's companions, and one of his cooperators in the work of the Marian Oratories. And in the same year [October 11th], Fr. Cajetan Brugnoli entered to form part of the community. He had been a member of Napoleon's Noble Guard, and then entered the Seminary. Once he was ordained a Priest, he had served as a Curate at St. Anastasia's Parish, where he set up and directed that flourishing Oratory.

14. The little Community was growing little by little to the great joy of Fr. Gaspar and his companions. Fr. Marani wrote later:

... For the regime of the house, Fr. Gaspar began from the outset to rule it 'after the manner of religious', but asking for perfect observance and the most perfect common life, as was also the desire of us all...

Above all, they were distinguished for their activity and mortification. Fr. Charles Zara has been quoted in Fr. Gramego's Chronicle:

... How well I remember how many times the remaining sons of Fr. Bertoni had spoken of those times of just how they had withdrawn with him to the Stimate. All they would have for breakfast would be a bit of bread and corn meal – nor was there much more, following the soup [and what soup that was!] that would be placed before them for lunch, and all was like that from the breakfast in the morning and through the evening supper; none of this suffice for satiety, nor was it hardly proportioned to the manly tasks that they sustained with such alacrity and zeal...

15. There were not lacking to them real struggles and persecutions of the world, nor could they stop the whispered rumors concerning them. However, they were desirous

only of promoting the Glory of God, and they did not pay much heed to all these challenges. They trusted in the Lord's help and they went on intrepidly in their undertaking. In 1817, on the occasion of the re-opening of the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception, Fr. Gramego noted:

... O saving Victim, opening wide – The gate of heaven to man below. – Our foes press on from every side, Your aid supply, Your strength bestow...

And a few days later he wrote as the Main Altar of the Church was dedicated :

... between fear and hope, in the midst of consolations and afflictions – but, rejoice! St. Michael has overcome the enemy!...

Among their enemies and detractors there were unfortunately some Priests: nor should this cause much surprise when one thinks that at the beginning of the 19th century there were many Churchmen who had become infatuated with the new principles brought in from France, and were seduced by the dream of false glory, and they aspired to be numbered in that false social re-generation which had been imagined and willed by sheer wickedness. There were in those days some Priests, some Pastors who went about in military guise and preached that *'fraternity, equality and liberty'* and other revolutionary slogans²³, Priests who gave their names to some of those patriotic societies affiliated with the Masonic Lodges of the times²⁴. All of these were enemies because of their choices of the party opposed to all good, persecutors and detractors of anyone who tried to accomplish it. They had already persecuted Fr. Gaspar because of his work in the Oratories, and now they were calumniating him, damaging his good reputation and finding fault even with his intentions. The local Ordinary, Bishop Liruti, however, had already known for sometime about the virtues and the intentions of Fr. Gaspar, and became his defender. However, one day, as the Bishop made his way to the Stimate in the company of some of those detractors, was much moved in admiration seeing close at hand the work of our Fathers and he encouraged them to persevere, assuring them of his paternal benevolence and blessing.²⁵

16. In the meantime, on November 20, 1816, the Marquess Magdeline di Canossa had obtained from Pope Pius VII the Decree of Praise for her Institute and thus preparations were underway for its Canonical Erection. Fr. Bertoni had a considerable role in the foundation of that undertaking: he himself had drawn up a Regulation, or Plan for the new Institute²⁶. More than any other, he had also shared in shouldering the burden of composing its Rules and Constitutions;²⁷ and for long years he had directed those Sisters with the lights of his prudence, and he assisted them with the works of his charity, edifying with the examples of every most beautiful virtuous effort.

²³ cf. Sommacompagna manuscripts.

²⁴ Perini, *History of Verona from 1793-1882*. Vol. II, p. 418.

²⁵ Giacobbe, *Life of Fr. Gaspar*, p. 295.

²⁶ Cf. *The Life of the Venerable Marquess di Canossa*, Milano 1906, p. 124.

²⁷ Sommocompagna documents.

And precisely at this juncture, when the matters were well along their way to completion, he withdrew. The Marquess prevailed upon him with a certain insistence that he might wish to continue for them his spiritual assistance, and he had already been graced with the necessary church authority. Fr. Lenotti noted this in his Life of Fr. Gaspar:

... but the situation would never arise when he would want to return to that work, as his customary sharpness of judgment had been called upon in a variety of endeavors and foundations of both men and women, to continue on assisting them with his collaboration once the purpose had been just about achieved, and he would then withdraw to leave for others the honor and the glory of the foundation...

17. In 1817, the Episcopal Vicar, Monsignor Dionisi, asked Fr. Gaspar that he might wish to assign one of his priests to assist those infected with typhoid in the city prisons. Fr. Bertoni accepted this invitation and to this apostolate, he assigned Fr. Matthew Farinati, from among all who desired to undertake this dangerous mission.

Fr. Farinati went very willingly to undertake that ministry of charity. However, from this commitment of his he contracted an illness that in a very short span of time would lead him to the tomb. To attempt one last cure, in 1819, he thought it best to return home to his family in the hopes of recovering his health. The day of his departure from the Stimate was a day of profound sadness. Fr. Gramego noted in his House Chronicle:

...Alas! Fr. Matthew Farinati left us today to return to his own home, on the 19th day of October, to experience that native air of Alcenago...

Following his departure, Fr. Bertoni commented to Fr. Gramego that their companion, Fr. Farinati would either return, or he would soon be dead. And this is what happened; a year later, he died. On September 17, 1820, Fr. Gaspar was apprised of his very grave state, and went to visit him; and almost as soon as Fr. Gaspar left him, Fr. Matthew gave up his soul to God. On that same day, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Leopoldina Naudet and asked for her prayers for the deceased Fr. Farinati. Fr. Gramego noted:

... On this September 17th, Fr. Matthew Farinati passed to a better life ... May God hold him in peace. Amen...

Even though after his departure he was no longer considered to be a Stigmatine, St. Gaspar always envied him for the destiny he had of sacrificing his life in the exercise of his ministry and of dying as a martyr of charity. He had always been with Fr. Gaspar as **one heart and one soul** - his most affectionate friend and disciple, as can be seen in the letter that Fr. Bertoni sent to Mother Naudet in 1812.

18. In the meantime, another consolation had graced our first Confreres. On October 15, 1818, the young priest, Fr. Louis Bragato joined them. He became Fr. Gaspar's '*Benjamin*', favored one, as from his youngest years he had been the saint's most affectionate and beloved son and disciple. On that occasion, full of enthusiasm, Fr. Gramego noted in the House Chronicle:

... Hurray! Enough glories for Fr. Louis Bragato: finally, at long last, on the feast day of St. Teresa of Jesus, there first came to dowry and then the spouse. Long life St. Aloysius Gonzaga!

However, neither was he able to remain long: on June 14, 1819, for reasons of health, he returned to his own home.

19. So, there remained at the Stimate Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, Fr. Marani, Fr. Gramego and Fr. Brugnoli: furthermore, Fr. Gaspar was from time to time subject to health problems; these were the late consequences of those set-backs suffered by him in the first years of his priesthood, which changed for him in 1813 as a mortal illness. In May 1819, these disturbances of his were aggravated and must have given some real concern which can be garnered from a letter of St. Magdeline di Canossa written to Fr. Louis Trevisani, Prefect of Studies in the Seminary, friend and admirer of Fr. Gaspar:

... From your most esteemed letter, I have come to understand that you are quite upset: do not worry about the wonderful Fr. Gaspar, who never doubted about his being returned to good health ...

He suffered a further relapse at the beginning of the year 1822 as might be seen in a musical piece composed by Monterossi, written on the occasion of the death of Fr. Louis Trevisani [January 14th], where it is noted that Fr. Gaspar, ‘that man of God’, was ill and all good people were praying for his returning to good health.

20. During these years, the principal occupation of our Fathers were **teaching school**. They had begun with the second and third elementary levels, and then gradually they continued adding grades, reaching even the first high school which increased the number of the teachers. For this purpose they had to be endowed with the necessary licenses for teaching as the government regulations demanded. And the men undertook the required studies for this to be a reality. Fathers Marani, Gramego and Brugnoli received their authorization in 1821 and then they took an examination before the Professors of the municipal High School and obtained the license to teach all the classes of Grammar School, and Fr. Gaspar also had one for the Humanities.²⁸

21. Fr. Marani sheds some light on the method followed by them in an Official Report he wrote much later, in 1853:

... What studies were undertaken together, and the method [that Fr. Gaspar] had formed them in from the very first year in order to teach with reasonable order the elementary and high school courses, that writings compiled in those years which we still have, provide a record of it all ; and there is eloquent testimony provided by the most famous and sharp intelligence of Fr. Louis Trevisani, Prefect of Studies in the Seminary.

²⁸ The Fathers who entered through these years also passed the requirements for the License – such as Fr. Cartolari and Fr. Cainer. These permits were granted for a given number of years, after which each teacher had to present himself to the office which granted them so that they could be renewed.

When he had heard of their method of teaching, he wanted to adopt it also in the Diocesan Seminary ...

And he clearly saw the goodness of their method of teaching from the excellent results that they obtained from them: because as their students had to undergo the public examinations, their students came out among the best²⁹. As a result of these fine showings, the classes at the Stimate were frequented by an ever-increasing number of young students who went there from all parts of the city³⁰.

22. However, the early Confreres did not attend solely to the instruction of the youth, but also, and even more so, the men were dedicated to the moral and Christian formation of their students³¹: and the sacred commitment that St. Gaspar and his companions gave to animate ever more those young students to the practice of virtue is very well known from the *Life* of Fr. Bertoni. With this goal in mind, from the very beginning the special Marian Oratory for these students, while they could no longer continue to use the Church because of its disorder, was held in those first years in the little Chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception [later dedicated for long years to the Sacred Face], which they prepared as best they could, and from September 6, 1818, they began to celebrate Holy Mass there³².

23. From this, it should not be believed that teaching school absorbed all their activity. Fr. Marani noted:

*... From the very first year, in addition to **teaching school**, the priests were committed in their free time and on their vacation days and feast days, in explaining **Catechism** in the Parishes where they had been invited. And in a special way there were tirelessly given over to hearing the **Confessions** of the children and those of men, and in this work there was very much to do. The reason is, because of the fact that at that time the Stimate was somewhat set off from the main section of the city, and because there were Confessors there who were always ready both day and night, all those who preferred to unburden their consciences in utmost privacy made their way to the Stimate: and the Pastors also felt free to send over to the Stimate those who had rather involved matters to discuss and those who needed a more General Confession.³³*

²⁹ cf. **BC I, # 52**. The students from the private elementary schools, prior to being admitted to any high school had to undergo examinations of the junior high, in a major, or public elementary school. For this examination of presentation, the principal of the private school would be present. Also for high school students who wanted to pursue their studies in a public school had to undergo examinations. In these examinations the students from Stimate always excelled among the better students.

³⁰ In an almanac dated in 1820, entitled ‘*The Good Spirit returns*’, the classes at the Stimate were qualified as *most numerous and most fruitful*.

³¹ This later was codified as one of the central apostolates of the community – the work of the Apostolic Missionaries: **CF ## 165, ff. – Part IX**.

³² The altar-piece there of the Immaculate Mary was an esteemed work of the artist, G. B. Amigazzi.

³³ **NB: English Translator’s Note:** An even broader commitment to the **Apostolic Mission** was later codified by St. Gaspar in his **Part IX** of his Original Constitutions [**CF ## 158-186**].

24. It was only natural that our early Confreres who were so zealous for the good of souls would yearn to re-open for public worship the Church of the Stigmata. As a result, they began quite early to restore it [with the Arch-priest, Fr. Galvani, supplying the financial resources for this, as he was the owner of the property]. They began with repairing the roof and the windows. They then re-did the floor with living rock, and totally repaired the façade. They also set up the main altar which had been removed³⁴, restoring as well the side altars, the walls and the vaults. The scholar, Sommacompagna noted: *The Church of the Stimate may now be said to be re-built and placed in the most high décor and cleanliness.* On October 25, 1820, St. Catherine's altar was all restored, and the Church then began to be used as the student chapel.

25. On June 15, 1821, the Arch-priest, Fr. Galvani, as Mr. Bellotti had done for St. Teresa's property, with a public act he donated to the Church of the Stimate the sum of 100 Lira, and then petitioned the government for the permission to open it for public worship. The Church was in fact opened on the 3rd day of October of 1822, the Vigil of St. Francis of Assisi, at 3:00 p.m.. Fr. Brugnoli preached on the benefit of God in opening a temple for His worship/ The day after, there was a great abundance of Holy masses celebrated there, and after lunch there was a discourse, with such a large gathering of people that it was indeed a wonder³⁵. Fr. Gramego recording the day's proceedings and has left us the following account:

... Note most extraordinarily well. Oh! Holy Spouses, Joseph and Mary! The blessed and yearned for hour has finally come: today, the 3rd of October, at 3:00 p.m., the Major Church was opened for public worship, and I, wretched sinner, was the first one to have celebrated on the new Major Altar dedicated to the Holy Spouses. Woe to you, Gramego, if you do not do well...

For the service of the Church there was only one bell, baptized on the 25th of May of that same year: *... the Mary and Joseph bell was all under the expenses of our good grand-father, the Arch-Priest, Fr. Galvani ...*³⁶

³⁴ Prior to the forced closing of the Church, over the main altar there had been a canvas representing the Stigmata of St. Francis, the work of the artist, Anthony Balestra. This had been taken down and moved to the communal museum, where it still may be found. In its place there was set up a painting of the Espousals of the Holy Patrons, and on that occasion, the Holy Spouses became co-Patrons of the Church. On the two altars on the side of the Sanctuary there were placed the Crucifix and the Painting of the taking down from the Cross, a copy made of the original of Paul Farinati. In the Chapel half way down there was a painting of the espousals of st. Catherine, the work of the artist Andrew Voltolini, and the Passing of St. Francis, the work of the artist Joseph Leonardi. The depiction of the Passing of St. Catherine had been there in the past.

³⁵ Sommacompagna manuscript.

³⁶ Fr. Gramego's Chronicle. In 1833, this bell was donated to the Capuchins at St. Martha's.

26. Once the Church had been opened, the Pastor of the Most Holy Trinity, Fr. Peter Palmidese insisted pressed Fr. Bertoni that he might also choose to set up the Marian Oratory also for the youth of his parish. St. Gaspar willingly acceded to this request and obtained the Decree of Aggregation of his Marian Congregation to the First Primary of the Roman College [April 4, 1824]. From then on, there were welcomed in the Oratory together with the students of the Stimate also other young men and adults of the Parish. Fr. Lenotti noted:

... This Oratory grew marvelously and flourished so much so that the Church where all had to be accommodated was filled to the brim and both the young men and the adults who were admitted to Communion, and the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception was reserved for those who had not yet been admitted to Communion ...

And it is beautiful to hear Fr. Lenotti himself what poetry and harmony reigned among the youth of that Oratory:

... There were persons in our Oratories from every state and condition, young, old, the unmarried, rich and poor, and almost from every district of our neighborhood. After teaching the Doctrine n every Feast Day, all the aggregates of the Oratory would come to the Stimate and by three or four Fathers they were led together in a long file two by two. The smaller ones up ahead, and followed by the bigger boys and then the older ones. They would be led out to participate in games through the New Gate in one of the broadest excavations there by the wall of Sammicheli. These were made prior to the reconstruction made by the Austrians with the full acquiescence of the citizens. It was a delight here to see so many young people and so many artisans and nobles playing happily together, each at the game he preferred. Some played ball, where there was much running, each one competing for readiness and speed, all struggling forward for the victory. Others would be playing on another side with the wickets of beryllium, and these games were reserved for the smaller boys. Others enjoyed table games, the favorite sport reserved for the adults: simply watching the games! And this picture would be completed for the few older men seated on the grass, or on a stone in animated conversation about their own lives. And the Fathers? They would be here and there, very intent on rooting on both the young and the older ones, to keep the different contests and teams going, and were often called upon to act as referees. When the hour came to end the games, there would be sounded the retreat: each one would pick up his own jacket, his hat, getting in line once again, two by two, and going out from this playing field filing back to the City Gate singing: ‘Sins no more, Mercy on us O Lord!’ – or: ‘O world, for me you are no more! – and other old tunes. And there were those who along the way would recount from some devout examples. And so, quite joyfully, without wondering what others might have thought, they all returned to the Stimate to the great edification of the people who would see them...

27. As our Fathers came to understand the great good that would be accomplished through these Oratories, zealously sought to spread them elsewhere, nor did they let any occasion pass that might present itself to them in order to promote these and establish these everywhere. If some Priest made his way to the Stimate [as Fr. Lenotti writes further], especially if he were a Pastor, our early Confreres would exhort them to set up the Oratory also in their parishes, in their town, and the Stigmatines made clear to them the great good that could be accomplished with these. And the

men from the Stimate did not only do this with the Priests of the Diocese, but the Stigmatines would also persuade those coming from the outside to establish the Marian Oratory, teaching them the practical means to be taken to establish one and the manner to follow in order to succeed in consolidating one. Fr. Lenotti tells us that Fr. Bertoni with Fr. Marani, Fr. Gramego, Fr. Farinati, Brother Paul, would often go personally into other Dioceses in setting up the Oratory, often bringing with them the young men of the Oratory of the Stimate, all organized in the established groups among them.

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Chapter 3 The Further Organization of the Congregation [1823-1833]

28. Three months after the opening of the Church, on January 6, 1823, the Arch-Priest, Fr. Galvani, died at the age of almost 71. He left Fr. Bertoni as his heir the four places: the Stimate, St. Teresa's, the Trinity and the 'Dereletti.' While still alive, he had received from Fr. Gaspar the promise that he would accept this inheritance: Fr. Gaspar would have preferred to accept only the Stimate, but the Arch-Priest insisted that he accept all four³⁷. The last will and testament reads in part as follows:

... Knowing the spirit of Reverend Father Gaspar Bertoni ... that he is inspired to work for the instruction of the youth in religion, in good manners and in other means leading one to be useful to himself and for his fellow-man, and on my part wishing to cooperate in these wise and useful intentions of this same Fr. Bertoni, I therefore have determined to leave to him as I leave him in bond all that follows... etc.

Toward the end, Fr. Galvani states that if Fr. Gaspar should pre-decease him, or that he would not accept the inheritance, then they would all be left to Fr. Matthew Farinati. And if he would not accept them, or if he should pre-decease Fr. Galvani, they would be left to Fr. Michael Gramego; finally, if he, too, should pre-decease Fr. Galvani, he would leave everything to Fr. John Mary Marani.

From this it can be seen that Fr. Galvani wanted to leave these properties not only to the person, but to the work of Fr. Bertoni: his intention, as was that of the deceased Mr. Bellotti was to cooperate in the good education of the youth and to perpetuate this holy endeavor.

28. Furthermore, both in the last will and testament as well as by voice, this same Fr. Galvani who left to Fr. Bertoni these pious places without binding him to any condition. He stated that Fr. Gaspar was absolute owner and that he could dispose of these properties as he saw best: this held true also for St. Teresa's Convent. In this regard, he commented to Fr. Marani a few days before he died: 'Should Fr. Gaspar choose also to send Leopoldina away, he is the most free and absolute owner.'³⁸

However, Fr. Gaspar was content with the Convent of the Stimate: and further, he confirmed for Mother Naudet her use of St. Teresa's, and as for the Dereletti, he invited Lady Cavalieri³⁹, and he placed the Sisters and young girls supported by Fr. Galvani in the property of the Most Holy Trinity. To these latter, Fr. Bertoni made it very clear that once the Arch-Priest's, Fr. Galvani's⁴⁰, estate was executed in their regard, Fr. Bertoni did not feel that he could assume the responsibility of the young girls. He therefore advised the Lady Abbess to send away those young women who had completed their education [unless they wanted to remain

³⁷ From a letter of Fr. Marani. Archives of the Stimate.

³⁸ From a letter of Fr. Marani. Archives of the Stimate.

³⁹ As soon as Fr. Galvani had died, Lady Cavalieri wrote to Fr. Gaspar asking him to leave her that property

⁴⁰ Fr. Galvani left to his own family other aspects of his holdings.

there and become nuns], and that thereafter others should not be accepted unless they were able to pay the tuition.

It also seems that at that time, the Nuns housed at the Trinity had every intention of beginning a new Religious Institute. In this regard, the Lady Abbess had asked Fr. Gaspar if it might be possible for them to accept postulants and young women for formation, he responded: whenever the postulant would have the dowry for her own support both for the present as well as for the future, and was blessed with a fitting spirit for their Institute, Fr. Gaspar would not only be content, but it would please him very much to see some development of their Community. As for the young ladies, Fr. Gaspar would make no exception other than for those who did not have their entire maintenance. However, for those who could support themselves fully, this would please him because he would see them as fit candidates; secondly, because in those times, unless there was some public benefit, no one was able to sustain any kind of a Pious Union, and much less could one think of *founding religious communities*.

30. In the meantime, little by little, new recruits arrived at the Stimate. In 1822, Fr. Gramego noted:

... On July 25th, Fr. Modesto Cainer came to help us in our grave needs. May God conserve him and bless him, since He compelled him to enter...

The number of priests increased, as well as did the number of classes, and in 1825, the full high school course had been covered⁴¹. At the same time, places available for class rooms diminished, since after the Church had been opened to the public, the old choir stall area could no longer be used for classes, as was the case also for the sacristy and the tribunal, as these had previously been deployed. Now, when one keeps in mind that the entire locale of the house of the Stimate was simply five little rooms next to the Church, one might understand what a pits of discomfort were experienced by our first Confreres, who continuously had to move furniture form one room to the next, both day and night. The rooms in which one or two of them would have taken their necessary night's sleep, in the morning would be converted into a class room and furnished with all the equipment necessary for this⁴².

⁴¹ The final two elementary classes were being taught, four classes of grammar and the two of humanities. In order to obtain the license to teach on the elementary level it was necessary to undergo an examination before the Teachers of the Royal High School, and to frequent for one semester a class of Methodology, undergoing also an examination in that material. This elementary license had been obtained by Fr. Cartolari and later by Frs. Benciolini, Venturini, Bragato, Biadego and Fedelini.

⁴² cf. *Reminiscences of our Fathers and Brothers*, p. 2. Alluding to these conditions of life, St. Gaspar wrote on April 30, 1820 that he had to make dispositions for the pots and pans [as for the time being there was no other kitchen], and he had to move the stove into a bed room, and eat in another as best he could. He went on to say that his kitchen and class room were the same place and the students did their work on the kitchen table ... he explained that it would be difficult for him to state fully how difficult all of this was. The numbers were few, and they were all consumed in teaching, and they all had need of some quiet. Nonetheless, they were over-taken by consolation for the fruitful good that resulted, at least as far as their limited

31. There was a very basic need to provide new rooms. This would have provided Fr. Gaspar with a most just motive to ask for St. Teresa's Convent, since he was its owner and had need of it. But, he did not want to do this: he was content in asking Lady Leopoldina for a little piece of the garden, joined to the land of the Stimate, as this would suffice for him to build a fitting dwelling for his men, and to furnish the places for the young students now in eight classes, into which they were divided⁴³:

*... As a result, there began in 1823 to appear on the scene a residence that was well ordered and suitable, a solid and elegant structure, and one that was wholesome. Furthermore, in addition to the advantage that it enjoyed for its location, it was also very airy from the inner court-yard was formed the inner core of the residence, and by a garden that was before it each morning, and on the outside by all the sides of the streets that surrounded it on all sides...*⁴⁴

There rose up the first wing bordering on the court-yard of St. Teresa's, that on the way of the Stimate [later named for Carlo Montanari]. This was put up between the years 1823 and 1826. In 1826, there was constructed the wing on the Path of the Stimate and the bell tower up to its first frame. In the following years, 1827 and 1828, the main body was put up looking out over the garden and the little court-yard, and the bell tower was brought to completion, and by 1829 it reached the cupola.

Here we do not want to pass over in silence that for the hard work of all this construction our Fathers also gave their assistance:

*... How beautiful and edifying it was to see them, upon leaving their classes for the day, having laid aside their books and pens, to put themselves along-side the laborers to assist them to carry the cement and the heavy stones to their great exhaustion! May their sweat shed on this holy earth guard it, sanctify it and fructify it ...*⁴⁵

32. Once the Church of the Stimate had been opened, the father's spiritual work also greatly increased.

To respond to the wishes of the Episcopal Vicar, Monsignor Dionisi, from the very beginning there was instituted in this Church the Prayer Service for a Good Death that was held each Friday evening. This consisted in the old '**Grades of the Passion**', some prayerful reflections on the Five Wounds of Our Lord that were recited before the Altar of the Crucified.

But, above all there increased the work of hearing Confessions. Fr. Lenotti notes:

... To be able to accomplish a greater good, Fr. Gaspar did not want women's confessions heard, so that he might dedicate himself and employ his men for the greater service and advantage of the men: he believed that for the women there would be many

resources were concerned, that the Lord allows to fall upon us to squeeze out of our anguish and tribulation.

⁴³ cf. *Reminiscences of our Fathers and Brothers*, o.c.,

⁴⁴ ib., p. 3.

⁴⁵ ib.

confessors elsewhere. As a result, large numbers of penitents who made their way to the Stimate and the Confessors worked both day and night. Whatever free hours that were left following school hours, there were always some who wanted to go to confession and the Church would actually be filled with penitents. This was especially so during the Jubilee Years when the concourse was most extraordinary ... Of this large number of penitents who consistently came there, some confirmation of this fact has been left behind from the reports that were submitted to the Bishop each year, from the year 1817, where requests were submitted for special faculties. It was stated: '... The Priests of Gaspar Bertoni, finding themselves always with more and more penitents who seek conversion to God from a previously depraved life, has come to the realization that he needs special faculties, so that there will not be the need to disturb so often Your Excellency, implore these special faculties, etc'⁴⁶.

33. Furthermore, to the extent that their little free time allowed to the Priests following their commitment to the School, there were dedicated to preaching Novenas, Octaves, *Triduums* – but **most of all, to giving Retreats to the Priests and Seminarians in the Diocesan Seminary**. In addition to this, many struggling in their vocations were sent, or asked to come, to our dwelling to make their annual retreat.⁴⁷ Fr. Gaspar was the busiest of all. His reputation for virtue and holiness increased and many persons of high social level came to him in order to have spiritual direction and counsel. Fr. Lenotti notes:

... During the time of the Congress of Verona, Fr. Bertoni heard the confessions of many high personages. Among others, General Michaud came to see him. He was one of formed the inner circle of the Emperor of Russia, Alexander. The General arrived on horse back with his adjutant who accompanied him whenever he went about in the city: they both came often to go to confession to Fr. Bertoni and to receive Communion then at the Stimate. In like manner a number of other personalities who were passing through the city would often come to him for counsel and to go to confession. The Ambassador of Spain who was in Verona for some time, always came to go to confession to Fr. Gaspar.

34. At the same time, he taught the course on Rhetoric and each Friday would preach in the Church of the Stimate. Each feast day, and on days of vacation, he would go to preach to the students in the local Seminary. Furthermore, he with Fr. Marani had established at St. Stephen's the Congregation of St. Charles, and he went there each Thursday after lunch and held a few hours of **recollection and conducted exercises of piety for the many priests gathered there**.⁴⁸ He was always ready to

⁴⁶ They petitioned for the faculties to absolve from all reserved cases and censures laid down by the Diocese, to dispense from vows, from oaths, and the like.

⁴⁷ cf. Fr. Marani's Report. Fr. Lenotti also testifies that Fr. Gaspar sought to inspire into his son the zeal to preaching Parish Missions and the Spiritual exercises: as a result, in the long winter nights, they would pretend to be in the pulpit and with the Crucifix, they would give imaginary retreats [cf. *Life of Fr. Gaspar*, 1-21].

⁴⁸ In this connection we recall that around this time the Emperor Francis I came to Verona and he visited the House of the Stimate that was still under construction. In his kindness, he showed supreme satisfaction for the arrangement of the classes and the little residence next to it. [Fr. Marani].

carry out his responsibilities and was tireless in conducting those matters entrusted to him by his Superiors, such as very carefully examining those vocations to the ecclesiastical state.

And as though this were not enough, he had made of the House of the Stimmate a center of study, continuing there those researched Conferences [**for Priests and Seminarians**] which he used to hold in his own home before coming to the Stimmate, for the more careful study of St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Thomas Aquinas. TO these Conferences, many diocesan priests attended. The custom was to read the title of one of the articles of St. Thomas' *Summa*, then without fail one of those present would be invited to respond to the question. Then, St. Thomas' response would be written, and the disputation went on⁴⁹. The same method would also be followed for the study of Moral Theology.

35. Here we need to take a step backward and recall that one reality in these years kept the little Community at the Stimmate in some apprehension. This was the recurring illnesses of St. Gaspar which were now localized in his right leg and these had aggravated a number of times to the extent of placing his life in serious danger. The illness manifested itself during the year 1824 and appeared as a swelling of the whole leg, and then was confined to the lower part of this same leg, and looked like a tumor on the shin and spread little by little spread up to the knee. In the beginning, this was cared for by his maternal uncle, Dr. Joseph Ravelli. But, he soon realized the gravity of the problem, and he counseled his nephew to place himself under the care of specialists surgeons, who subjected the leg to a repeated and most painful lancing.⁵⁰

This problem lasted up until 1829, but in all those years Fr. Gaspar was not always in bed. He had periods of relatively good health, during which he was able to get up and celebrate the Mass, and also to attend to some aspects of his broad ministry. He was able to preach the Friday Devotions in the Church of the Stimmate, to hear confessions, and to give some Retreats. Thus toward the end of 1825 his health returned to some extent, and he was able to be up and around, all through 1826. In this manner, he was able to attend with his companions to the ministry of the Confessional, as these had increased greatly due to the occurrence of the Holy Jubilee Year.⁵¹

As he himself wrote to Mother Naudet on September 14, 1826, the activities were increasing more and more and the care to which he was committed for the conversion of the many types of individuals who had been touched by the grace of God in this Jubilee time. He stated that he had need of much help on so many occasions in order to carry out worthily the duty of being a cooperator in the salvation of those souls that the Lord had placed into his care.

⁴⁹ From a Letter of one Fr. Filippozzi.

⁵⁰ Among the surgeons who operated on him were Drs. Gregori and Manzoni.

⁵¹ The Holy Year lasted in Rome from Christmas of 1824 to Christmas of 1825. The Jubilee was then extended to the whole world and was meant to last for six more months. In Verona, this was promulgated on March 14, 1826.

36. However, on March 19, 1827, he suffered a relapse and was back in bed. His old problem had returned, and once again he had to be subjected to a new series of lancing operations. By the year's end, he was in desperate health. On that occasion, both public and private prayers were offered in all the Churches of Verona. The result was that in February 1828, he began to get up again to celebrate Mass, even though he felt still quite weak.

On March 18th of this year, he was back in bed and was again subjected to continuous improvements and relapses, until December of that year, when he began to celebrate Mass once more. In 1829, he was still subjected to some disturbances and every once in a while he would be back in bed, but these were passing and slight disturbances. Fr. Lenotti notes:

... In the course of this sickness which lasted for more than five years, he underwent very painful interventions, probing, lancing that lacerated his flesh, and each one of them brought about a fever due to the ensuing infections for two or three days following the episode: it is thought that he underwent 300 such cuts, and some of them as long as an extended hand. At long last, all these terrible wounds were healed and he was perfectly cured: however, thereafter he experienced a great weakness in that leg ...

37. In these years he patiently waited until he was able to teach his classes, but in the more serious periods he was in no condition to do so. For these occasions, he was substituted for by Fr. Marani, who as a result taught both his classes. He was often committed to teaching while the others were either eating or catching up on their sleep.⁵² However, in 1829, Fr. Marani, too, became ill and he had to suspend his classes for some time; in fact, his malady soon manifested itself to be quite serious. We can just imagine the struggles and challenges that faced the other men: however, the Lord seemed to want to try them, but not to oppress them. In the meantime, St. Gaspar was gradually getting better and then Fr. Marani improved to the extent that he was able to take up his teaching once more.

38. In this time, the Lord sent other cooperators to increase the ranks. On October 30, 1828, Fr. Louis Bragato returned. Fr. Gramego made note of this happy event in his House Chronicle:

... Note well, and be happy! On the 30th of October, to our great consolation and for the wondrous designs of Divine Providence, my good Fr. Louis Bragato returned with the resolution not to go away again, until death. [On November 11, 1829, Fr. Francis Benciolini came:] ... a frank and open personality; [In the following year, on September 12] ... after so much waiting to the point of not waiting any more, Fr. Innocent Venturini also came. And then Fr. Vincent Raimondi came on March 17, 1831 ...

With the help of these newly arrived our first Confreres were able to dedicate themselves with greater ease to the works of the Priestly Ministry, both at the Stimate and in other Churches where they were invited.

And among the works of the Ministry, there is one we have to recall, to which our Fathers were committed from their very first years, but one which

⁵² Fr. Bertoni's Letter to Mother Naudet [71-17]

they could not conduct with greater exactness. This was a work that was high on Fr. Bertoni's list of priorities, the explanation of Christian Doctrine⁵³. This was taught after lunch on feast days during the summer in the Parish Churches. Since this type of ministry was rather challenging, Fr. Lenotti describes it for us. When the time would arrive for our men to commit themselves to this work, and always gratuitously, there were continuously many requests for their expertise. This would go on in all kinds of weather, with the city divided into sectors, and the men going out to various Churches. Fr. Gaspar wanted his men to be truly experts in this endeavor and that they would all be clear, popular, pleasant and fruitful in their presentations: and they all committed themselves ardently to this work and they accomplished it with genuine dexterity, keeping alive the attention and the interest of the many people who came to hear them.

39. Meanwhile, on August 21, 1827, Bishop Liruti died. He had proved to be a most dear friend to Fr. Gaspar, and on every occasion had provided him with real proof of his esteem and affection by entrusting to him delicate and important charges. He often came to consult him and when he had become old, he was no longer able to move about on foot, was would be carried to the room of Fr. Gaspar, who was also quite ill at the same time, to have from him the consolation of conversing with him , whom he held in the concept of holiness.⁵⁴

In him, our early Confreres lost both a father and a Protector: however, the Lord would provide them with another in the person of Bishop Joseph Grasser. He likewise held:

... for Fr. Bertoni such esteem and such great love that he often came to visit him, consulted him in different matters, most serious problems and would converse at length with him. The love that the Bishop had for Fr. Bertoni he likewise extended to all the members of his Congregation...⁵⁵.

40. In these years Fr. Gaspar was also visited frequently by every quality of person who would come to seek his advice, ask for his counsel in matters of great importance to them.

⁵³ **NB: English Translator's Note:** This aspect of the **Apostolic Mission** holds a major place in Fr. Bertoni's *Original Constitutions*:

CATECHISM/ CATECHETICS [cf. the END of the Congregation]

- matter of Stigmatine study				55
- Bellarmine's to be learned by heart				51
- beginning of Stigmatine life of study				51
- taught by Novices to children				37
- taught in our schools				170
- some c. required in Novitiate				37
- weekly				170
- sublime Stigmatine ministry	72	163	165	182
- recited and studied			37	51 170
- Roman, matter of special study				51

⁵⁴ Fr. Giacobbe, *Life of Fr. Gaspar*, p. 295.

⁵⁵ Fr. Lenotti, *Life of Fr. Gaspar*.

In 1826, Fr. Anthony Rosmini was visiting Verona, and came to visit Fr. Gaspar to whom he exposed the fundamental ideal that he had for a n Institute of Priests, and he stated that he received from St. Gaspar ‘the most efficacious encouragement to begin it, dissipating every doubt’ that the would-be Founder had pondered⁵⁶. He then sent to Fr. Gaspar for his fuller examination in that same year, his *Plan for the Priests of Charity*, the first rough-draft of his planned Institute, and then in 1832 he sent his *Constitutions*, of this same Congregation before sending them on to Rome for their approbation⁵⁷.

At the same time, Fr. Gaspar encouraged Fr. Nicholas Mazza to begin his Institute of Charity, exhorting him to take in the poor young girls whom Providence had sent to him, and assuring him that his was indeed the work of God.⁵⁸

Fr. Gaspar also assisted Mrs. Campostrini in preparing the Rules for her Institute⁵⁹, while at the same time, he was in contact with Count Cavanis who was struggling to obtain from the Government the approval of the Congregation he had founded.

41. But beyond all other comparison, much greater was his commitment to the Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Family, founded by Leopoldina Naudet: he assisted her continuously in preparing her Constitutions and in the challenge of obtaining the approbation of her Institute⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ cf. Epistolario-Rosmini. Vol. 13, p. 248.

⁵⁷ Later, Fr. Rosmini came often to the Stimate, and in the year 1833 he actually wrote ‘a little work’ in the room of Fr. Gramego [cf. *Memorie* of Fr. Cainer].

⁵⁸ Fr. Mazza founded his Institute for Girls in 1828, and within 2 years he had 300 young girls as his responsibility.

⁵⁹ Sommacompagna Manuscripts.

⁶⁰ It would be necessary to read his letters written in this time to grasp the enormous difficulties encountered before obtaining the approbation of a religious institute by the civil authorities. The over-riding concern of the Imperial Government was the dependence of these Institutes on the Holy See. Once again Fr. Gaspar had stated that Mrs. Campostrini had presented her project after having obtained secretly from a person of the government an extract of its decrees and laws of His Majesty, and thus all kinds of bothersome and really difficult questions were posed. Following all this there was asked also further information and it did seem that the matter was proceeding well: the undertaking was not only well received by the Sovereign, but by his personal order it was also promoted by the Tribunals. And from day to day, they were expecting the Decree of Approbation. However, and this part is not clear, there was suddenly imposed a certain silence. The approval of the Emperor himself showed that it was powerless. Count Cavanis of Venice had 5 or 6 decrees of the Emperor for his Congregation and even with all this, the Government over-turned everything.

Mother Naudet for her Congregation already had the Emperor’s support. In 1828, Fr. Gaspar wrote for her a formula of an official Petition which was first signed by the Episcopal Vicar and then presented to the Government, but it was rejected. Once the new Ordinary appeared, he was not accepted by the Government, and the trials returned. With patience, prayer, with the support of influential persons, finally in 1833, the much yearned for approbation finally arrived.

And it is a marvelous thing to see from the letters of Fr. Bertoni just how much at heart he had for the good end result for the negotiations in behalf of that Institute which Mother Naudet stated was also the work of Fr. Bertoni. He was carrying on all this even in the midst of his own strong sufferings and various surgical interventions. He continued to direct her and to hurry the work along so that what had been undertaken might come to completion. And this was so also in the year 1830 when Mother Leopoldina would only have a few more years of life left to her.

As she did not yet have a house of her own and not being able to obtain the government's approval, Fr. Gaspar went a step further in helping her with an official document, dated April 19, 1830, he granted her the perpetual use of St. Teresa's Convent, on the condition that it be used to a boarding school and tuition-free classes⁶¹ for the poor girls and that the Institute might be approved by 1833, by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. If the Institute had not been approved by that time, or if after it, the Community should be suppressed, or would cease operations for any other reason, then the use of the property would cease, which would be con-validated with the ownership, which remained always with Fr. Bertoni and his heirs and successors.

He almost seemed to be prophetic in making such provisions, for this is precisely what happened. Mother Naudet's Institute was approved by the Government on May 5, 1833, and by the Church on October 20th of that same year: she died less than a year later, August 17, 1834.

42. Let us come now to speak of the efforts that Fr. Bertoni brought forward for his own Congregation. On October 24, 1826, Charles Fedelini entered among our Confreres, as a young lad of only 16. He had already been solemnly vested as a cleric by the Episcopal Vicar, Monsignor Dionisi. Two years later, that is, on October 4th, 1828, a little bit too early in the morning, there came with a great and good will, the Cleric Louis Biadego⁶².

These were the first hopes for the future of the Congregation and the saintly Founder took their intellectual and moral formation uppermost in his own heart.

After they had finished the high school courses, he sent them to classes in the seminary for the study of Philosophy and Theology. However, he saw to it that they were assisted also in the house in their studies: he wanted them to go over their lessons that they would cover that day in school before-hand, so that they might be able to understand them better. Each day, before they left for class, he wanted them to recite their lessons for that day to him, or to some other Priest designated for this. He reserved to himself to listen and to go over the lessons in philosophy. For all that assistance and for the advancement that they manifested, they were proposed as

⁶¹ Mother Leopoldina had opened up the Convent of St. Teresa's in 1817. On March 8, 1831 she bought the Monastery of St. Dominic and in that same year she began to live there [cf. Cavattoni Manuscripts: Communal Library of Verona].

⁶² Fr. Gramego's Chronicle: young Biadego had entered the Stimmate without saying anything to his family, leaving home about 4:00 a.m. His father on that very day wrote him a very beautiful letter which began with this words: 'My most beloved son, you have done as the Gospel wishes, and therefore, I pardon you that!'

models to the other students, and even on very rare occasions, they were exonerated from under-going the exams⁶³.

For the advantage of his own young students and also for the Priests of the community, as well as for his future disciples and sons, Fr. Gaspar thought of completing the construction, and also of setting up a Library. He therefore chose the two largest and most comfortable places in the center of the House and without sparing expenses, he provided for these thousands of volumes of the better works and the more accredited authors and rare editions⁶⁴. For this purpose he made use of the good talents in this regard of Fr. Modesto Cainer. Under the direction of Fr. Bertoni, Fr. Modesto was made to trudge about in quest through the libraries and book-stores and book-stalls, and by writing and searching out even in distant cities he had the great merit of having put together an excellent library at the Stimmate⁶⁵.

43. In the meantime, on April 20, 1834 there entered the young man, **John Baptist Lenotti**, who was almost 17 years of age. He had been a former student at the Stimmate: and on May 8th, he had been vested by the Episcopal Vicar, Monsignor Louis Castori. On July 24th of that same year, there came to join them as well the young lad, Louis Ferrari, who was not yet 14 years, a genuine 'little dove', as Fr. Gramego called him in his House Chronicle: he, too, would be vested in the clerical garb on the 18th of January of the following year. St. Gaspar himself took great care in the formation of these two tender sons of his, as he had with the earlier two. And having by now almost completed the Library, and in the time that remained over and above all this, he would have them read some work which would serve them to complete the studies they were following in School. He had them read and re-read Sacred Scripture with the commentaries of various authors, such as Petavius' *Dogma*, Baronius' *Annals*, St. Alphonsus; *Moral* and his *Apostolic Man*, the Decree of Gratianus, and the *Decretals* and the *Canonical Institutions* of Devoti. He assigned other particular studies of Gregorian Chant, Liturgy, Sacred Eloquence, or of other matters in conformity with the harmony of each one.⁶⁶

And he wanted, in so far as this would be possible, that such studies also be continued by the Priests, in those bits of time that had been conceded to them, in order to prepare themselves even better to accomplish as great a good as would be possible in their service of the Church.

⁶³ Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life of Fr. Gaspar*, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Fr. Bertoni wrote to Fr. Lenotti: **I spent a great deal of money in order to set up this library which makes the value of the books increase in the book stores of Verona; and one could believe this to be true of other cities as well** – as in Padua where he made substantial acquisitions. For example, for the edition of Baronius [Mansi edition] he spent 400 Lira: and for the books ordered at Padua, on two accounts alone, he paid 534 Lira.

⁶⁵ Fr. Gramego's Chronicle. These books came from the Libraries of suppressed Religious Orders: hence, in 1833, St. Gaspar asked the Holy See for the permission to keep them, and to obtain others whenever the occasion would present itself. This permission was granted.

⁶⁶ This is all from Fr. Lenotti's Official Report on the Studies. Furthermore, St. Gaspar wanted each day that the young students would commit at least 10 minutes every day to the exercises in Greek, Hebrew and French, as well as an exercise in the pure Italian Tuscan. They would be thus formed in the classical authors of the golden age of our literature.

Speaking of **the importance of study in a Religious Institute that is dedicated to teaching**, he used to say that **after charity and the virtues, one's studies are the principal support**⁶⁷ of this building, and **that ignorance is the first germ of its corruption ...**⁶⁸

Above all he sought to instill into his sons the sentiments of sincere attachment to the Holy Church and to her august Head, the Roman Pontiff, and to keep far from them every doctrine that would smack of novelty. This was the ultimate reason that induced him to break off the close friendship that he had conserved for so many years with the celebrated philosopher, Fr. Anthony Rosmini. Since Fr. Anthony one day had manifested to St. Gaspar certain new ideas of his regarding the Holy Church, and the election of her Shepherds by popular ballot⁶⁹, and showing himself decided to publish

⁶⁷ cf. **Part IV**, of his *Original Constitutions*. The ideal permeates throughout: KNOWLEDGE [cf. LEARNING; TECHNICAL; THEOLOGICAL; WISDOM; STUDY]

- to know how to administer to the dying		291	
- know the practice of the Early Church		252	
- MORE THAN ORDINARY	49	50	159
- acquired with alacrity		62	125
- acquired by the Lord	65	127	
- regarding faith, customs		49	
- where to find it		54	
- two-fold theological	50		
- Christ Crucified		51	
- moral purpose		167	
- lack of learning ability, an impediment		18	
- not to precede piety	127		
- PROGRESS	49, f.		
- required of teachers	175		
- required by Postulants		31	
- in Postulants	31		
- sign of Jesus' disciples		187	
- of the affections of the soul	220		
- criteria for the apostolate		288	
- how one should respond		276	
- of the End, to avoid scandal		286	
- of the perfection of the Apostles		272	
- of one's own responsibility	309		
- of the superior's will	142		
- decree of moderating it		122,f.	
- of necessary matters		124	
- of defects outside of Confession		47	111
- of one's thinking to leave		308	
- to communicate edifying matters	258		
- to know good that is good	259		
- passive, of candidates		29	
- to know how to treat guests	245		
- practices known to the Early Church		252	

⁶⁸ Letter to Mother Naudet [69-11].

⁶⁹ Fr. Paul Gradinati's testimony in the Diocesan Process of Beatification.

his ideas ⁷⁰, the saint manifested to his penitent his desire of not wanting to see him any more among his sons. When the philosopher eventually departed, St. Gaspar gathered his companions in his room, and gave them an exhortation on their **obsequious** and perfect submission, repeating his well known saying in his own Veronese dialect: *Be humble, be humble: like the little creatures that seek their own nooks and crannies!*

44. In these years there also came to the Stimate also two Coadjutor Brother candidates to assist Brother Paul. Without mentioning also those who only stayed for a few months, we ought to speak here of Brother Louis DalForno, who remained in the Congregation for two full years, from 1827 until 1829. He proved to be of great assistance in the time of the saintly Founder's illness.

On June 9th, one month after Brother DalForno's departure, Francis Solari entered. In 1831, Louis Zocca came – then, on November 11th, Angelo Casella, and finally, in 1834, Paul Solari, the brother of Francis already mentioned.

By this time, the Community of the Stimate presented itself under the aspect of a regular and stable Religious Institute, with its head, Fr. Gaspar, with its obedient and hard-working members, with the young hopefuls destined one day to continue the work begun by their elders. 'The bond of the Congregation [as Fr. Bragato later described those days] was charity, that every occupation and fatigue was shouldered with a kind of spiritual sweetness, and its foundation rock was a life perfectly in common, which was regulated by a perfect obedience in everything.' They did not yet pronounce the public religious vows because they did not form a recognized Community, but each one made his vows privately and renewed them from time to time with the consent of Fr. Gaspar⁷¹.

45. They did not yet have a written constitution, but their rule of life was the Founder's example. Fr. Zara would write in his Chronicle:

... As for the virtue and the perfection that there were there, this is still on the lips of all who knew them, and the sweet odor of their holy life still exudes strongly and remains most pleasing. The example of the Founder and the observance of his every word and counsel served for them for their every rule and constitution. And so, even though they did not have the name, they lived nonetheless the regular discipline in so strict a manner, that the world, which is so curious and sagacious in spying and in finding defects in such persons, could do nothing more than point out that at least in their mortifications, they were somewhat excessive and that the scraps they would eat were very poor fare indeed, and they were rather coarse and neglected even in their manner of dressing. And yet, who would believe it? In such discomfort and voluntary poverty they were so joyful and content that it was like an Easter morning just to see them: they

⁷⁰ From the oral tradition circulating in the Congregation, it results that St. Gaspar broke off the friendship with Fr. Rosmini because the latter wished to publish his little work, *The Five Wounds of the Church*. This presumably was composed in a little village in the Province of Padova. This decision of St. Gaspar made such an impression on Fr. Rosmini that he delayed its publication for many years. It was later rejected by the official Church.

⁷¹ This is what has been garnered from some of the notes in the private spiritual diary of Fr. Bragato. He, for example, renewed his vows each month.

showed themselves ready to sustain as though it were nothing or that they suffered nothing, any heavy duty and fatigue, and in handling every matter even the most arduous and displeasing and against what would seem to be their own inner wishes, that would be imposed on them by their Superior ...

And speaking of the austerity of the life of our first Confreres in that time, Fr. Zara continues:

... Such indeed was the opinion of them, as being so abstemious and mortified. This was then on the lips of all so that this abstinence of theirs became proverbial. Let what Brother Zanolli narrated to me suffice: that they had a bit of stale bread, some cheese that was somewhat gone by and rancid that could never be found in the market, cut for each one by such portions that they seemed to be about the size of dice, and they thought of this as a great meal. Let it suffice to say that they looked on this as a delicacy [as Fr. Marani told me one time]. A bit of salad that was given to him while he was ill and without appetite – was more or less the portion that each received...

There were many who would say that Fr. Bertoni was exaggerated in his rigor. But how would he respond? ***'This can never be excessive at the beginnings of an Institute, that which will be mitigated over time and the changing needs.'***

And we do know that later he himself mitigated this excessive rigor, and ordered that each one should have a treatment that would be more in accord with a just median position between abundance and real need. Even Fr. Giacobbe stated in the Diocesan Process that even from these years Bishop Joseph Grasser gave to St. Gaspar the obedience of tempering somewhat that earlier rigor, and he immediately obeyed.

46. The 'delight of the nascent Congregation' was Fr. Gramego with his good humor, as he consoled the confreres in the midst of the restrictions of their penitential life. And when, for example, he was at table with those small pieces of cheese noted just above, he with a facetious air about him, would roll the pieces of cheese as though he were playing dice, while saying as the old game required: *Two! Six!* He would thus season their modest fare with his innocent joy as that austere scene not much given to hilarity!

So, all were content and willingly submitted themselves to that tenor of life; indeed, they found in it their delight in mortifying themselves even more than which their life in common together brought them. It was the example of their father Founder, the love, the veneration that they had for him that so animated them. They were obedient to him [as one writer of that time stated]:

... 'in everything, even the smallest matter, much like children, in a life that was among the more laborious and mortified, even in the midst of abundance, they lived so much like a family. How well known was the mortified way of life of the Priests of the Stimmate, with indeed its long and unforced persistence – and it is equally well known that in their perpetual Superior, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, and in the manner of their regimen they found broad agreement in their hearts, in consenting to their experiencing their discomfort, which could not have been faked for such a long time: and they thus give visible and vivid testimony of themselves in those truths that are read of those ancient Religious Communities in the Ecclesiastical Writers ...

47. During this time, Fr. Gaspar completed also the work on the bell tower, and he had the bells fused for it: they were set up on June 20, 1833, and then a second time on September 20th, because they were not in perfect harmony. They were blessed on September 24th and put into place the last days of the same month. For the Vigil of St. Francis they were used for the first time, resounding with their solemn toll. Fr. Gramego wrote this in his House Chronicle:

*... October 3^d. Note, and one that is beautiful, and a most beautiful one at that. For the First Vespers, i.e., at 3:00 p.m., of St. Francis of Assisi, we have rung the bells for the first time. They provided an excellent concert of 6 bells, with a lafa tone, composed of the finest metals, i.e, with strains of rosetta, all with the soldering of St. mark and purged in a second instance, and most fine English materials ... Long live Joseph, and long live Mary! The cost from the metals, the lumber for the casing, and for the supports, the metal works and the tongues, and the labor, was 1050... **For the one fearing God there is nothing to fear!***

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Chapter 4

The Beginning of the Works

[1834-1842]

48. Meanwhile, in 1832, Fr. Biadego was ordained a priest, and in 1834 so was Charles Fedelini. The number of workers increased and great was the work accomplished by them. After school hours, they were dedicated to the Confessional, to preaching: however, Fr. Gaspar still was not content with all this. As he personally from the early years of his priesthood was applied ardently to the study of the sacred and profane branches of knowledge, so that he would one day be an even more worthy instrument in the hands of God and of Superiors, being ready to assist the Church **in every sort of ministry entrusted to him**⁷², he thus wanted that his sons would do the same. However, he also kept in mind their ability and nature, serving himself as their teacher and guide, he would apply to each that type of study to which each felt himself the more greatly inclined, and in which each succeeded better. His intention was that the Institute founded by him might always have men ready to exercise **any kind of ministries compatible** with the duties of religious life, of which the Bishops, the Shepherds of the Church might have need.

And there was no delay in the occasion arising that permitted him to give an initial realization of this project of his. Bishop Joseph Grasser a teacher for the seminary and he asked Fr. Gaspar for help: and the saint sent Fr. Raimondi who for many years had taught Church History and Dogmatic Theology there.

49. And he offered another one of his men around this time to the Bishop for a ministry that was totally extraordinary: we are referring to Fr. Bragato. There had come to Fr. Grasser an order in 1835 to choose a Confessor for Her Majesty the Empress: the Bishop cast his glance toward Fr. Bragato and he asked his services of Fr. Bertoni, who did not know how to day 'no' to his Bishop. Fr. Gramego noted the fact:

... July 6th, the Octave of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Today there departed from Verona, but not from us, my old and dear friend, Fr. Louis Bragato. He has gone to the city of Vienna, being called there to be the Confessor and the Spiritual Director of the Empress and also to assist in some other spiritual endeavor. But... What is this? That poor little priest of the Stimate being assigned to the Royal Court of Vienna? What is this? Let us bow down our heads and adore the imperscrutable judgments of God. May this God Who has been so good to us, give us the grace of sending us also others, but good, healthy and worthy, otherwise what will we do with this society of poor men which remains to us?

Surely it was a displeasure also for Fr. Gaspar to separate himself from this beloved son, and he sacrificed him only on the insistence of His Excellency, the Bishop. Perhaps he also could foresee the great advantages that would come to the Congregation as a result. Whenever we think of the moral support that Fr. Bragato offered to our Congregation in 1855 in order to obtain for it the Imperial Government's approval and the Decree of Praise from the Church. And again, later, he brought moral support that he obtained for it in the time of struggle with the Royal Government we

⁷² Fr. Bertoni codified this opening to *any ministry of the Word of God whatsoever*: **CF # 163.**

have to conclude that his going to Vienna proved to be a benevolent disposition of the Divine Providence.

Furthermore, also for Fr. Bragato himself this proved to be a sorrowful detachment because at the Stimate he left his heart behind. Even though he was far away bodily, he always retained a great attachment for his old confreres and for the little Congregation. And it was for him a festival whenever he would pass through Verona he would be able also for a brief time put on with them their habit and to sit down at the poor meals they shared. And for their part, his former companions loved him always with a great affection, and always looked on him as one of their Confreres. And in 1871, the IIIrd General Chapter, unanimously decided to confer upon him the Grade of ***Apostolic Missionary***.

50. Even after Fr. Bragato's departure, eleven Priests remained at the Stimate, and Fr. Gaspar was thinking of extending their field of activity. As a result, in 1836, in response to the invitation of Father Martinelli, the Pastor of St. Stephen's, he thought of sending someone to work in that Parish, making more use of the House of the Dereletti, already left to him in Fr. Galvani's will. We have already seen that at Fr. Galvani's death, that House had been occupied by a pious Institute of young orphan girls that had begun in 1816, by a Mrs. Anna Cavaliere: following this, the group had received many means of support with which they were able to purchase the Monastery of the Magdelines. Therefore, in 1836, Fr. Bertoni began to send Fr. Marani there to conduct the Oratory and to hear Confessions. He would bring with him each evening Brother Paul and he would spend the night there, and having celebrated Mass each morning in the Parish Church, he would return in the morning to the Stimate in order to attend to school. The Oratory in those first years was held in the Parish Church, but in 1839 as this had been threatened with some danger, it was closed for a period of time: on that occasion, there was restored the little Church dedicated to St. Mary of the Lily, and the Oratory was transported there, where from then on, it remained.

Fr. Marani's very varied activity at the Dereletti was described by St. Gaspar in a letter he wrote to Fr. Bragato, on December 1, 1837:

... During the day, Fr. Marani is at the Stimate, while evenings and days free from school he is at the Dereletti. At the Stimate, he teaches school and studies a while in the library for his preaching. At the Dereletti, on Saturday evenings and on Sundays, he hears many confessions and with great fruit resulting in that district. On the other evenings, he conducts a Moral Conference with 10, or 12 Priests, in the style of our conferences in days gone by with Fr. Guerrieri at St. Firmus'. He explains and defines, as the occasion demands [and this is every day], the most intricate cases, and the Lord has given him the light, prudence and openness that are not common. On Thursdays, he examines, as is the custom, the Seminarians, and after this, he receives penitents of every type and at any hour, even interrupting his dinner and supper, putting off his own repose. In like manner, on feast days he hears Confessions in the choir area of St. Stephens's. even to the time of being able to come and to give the Instruction at St. Sebastian's, which continues as long as the Lord might see fit ...

And the work would increase ever more, since a year later, it was judged necessary to give him a helper in the person of Fr. Benciolini: but, of this we will speak below.

51. Profiting here of the occasion provided by mentioning what was going on at St. Sebastian's, we will speak of a fact that took place in Verona around this time, that proved to be of great interest to our Congregation.

The Municipal authorities of Verona in the year 1836 invited the Jesuit Fathers to return to the City [after having previously obtained the permission of the Government]: two of their Fathers were sent by their Superiors, Fathers Ferrari and Stoeger, with the intention of establishing there the Novitiate and a College. Fr. Bertoni was most happy at this. Indeed, as the two Fathers encountered at the beginning some resistance and difficulties of every kind. The fear was that they would withdraw without ever having concluded anything.

So, Fr. Bertoni presented himself to them and he offered to them for their needs his House of the Stimate, beseeching them to accept it and to continue on with the schools he had opened, promising to provide even for their support.⁷³ And if this offer did not suffice for them to open their Novitiate, he also offered for this purpose his other two locales of his property, from which they could choose which might prove to be the more suitable for their purposes: one of these places [the Dereletti], could hold also immediately in some comfort in one part only, about 40 persons, which he had already set up with other purposes in mind. The other place [the ancient Monastery of the Benedictines], was large, quite beautiful, set up in the style of religious, capable of being adapted with discreet expenditure for our own use. It had a most ample garden the rent from which Fr. Bertoni received 100 tallers annually, and it was in an excellent position.⁷⁴ Fr. Stoeger also went to visit these two localities and he was most content with them.

The Jesuit Fathers therefore responded to Fr. Gaspar stating that he should continue the school which he and his companions had maintained for so many years to the great advantage of the youth and to the great satisfaction of the citizenry: as far as their Novitiate was concerned, if they could not have in some other manner found a solution for their needs, they would have willingly accepted one of the three houses that he had offered to them. However, in the time that followed, they obtained for their Novitiate St. Anthony's Convent. For their College, they returned to St. Sebastian's Church and School. They remained forever most grateful to Fr. Bertoni for his kind gesture, and they preserved the memory of his generosity in their regard, in their Annals of the Company, and in their History of the House of Novitiate of Verona.

52. In this last source mentioned here, we can find a most precious testimony of the good that our Fathers accomplished, especially among the youth with their schools:

... These Priests instruct, tuition-free, the youth in letters, taking occasion of their presence to form them in the practice of virtue. And they achieve all this with such success that all those who frequent their House and Church are ordinarily considered to be the best among their peers, and they are this in reality; and the young who graduate

⁷³ From the Annals of the Comp[any of Jesus: 1837.

⁷⁴ A Letter of Fr. Ferrari to his Father General. March 21, 1837.

from their school so well educated are by far superior to others in their piety and knowledge ... 75

The testimonies of other authoritative individuals that have come down to us, regarding our school at the Stimmate, is not much different from the above. For example, Fr. Bartholomew Sorio, Oratorian of Verona has left in writing:

... Fr. Gaspar taught there in such a manner as to compete with the most sublime teachers: and every other matter was taught there by his colleagues in an excellent manner, as though the school were an authentic academy of learned men. And this is difficult to accomplish in a city where Fr. Gaspar did this at his own expense with an excellent result. There is maintained there a scholastic discipline to the level that it might serve as a perfect model for any institution of education ... 76

53. Despite all the good that he accomplished there, did not spare him the contradiction, censure, calumnies of those of ill will. Already in the previous years it was said that Fr. Gaspar sought to damage, to suffocate others' schools. He wrote about this to Mother Naudet:

*... We can only reject the criticism, as we know that all the classes of the area are full. and yet it is necessary to pray and always to use a certain dexterity, with much patience and humility, because it will always be **true that those who live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution** ...*

These contradictions did not cease with the passing of the years. In 1837, Fr. Gaspar wrote to Fr. Bragato saying:

*...I will not speak to you about our other tribulations, which are not few in number, and in my keeping silent about them, I do this so that I will not overly sadden our spirit: **We even boast of our afflictions! We know that affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us ...** [Rm 5:3, ff.] 77.*

54. However, all those of good heart and had zeal for the glory of God and for the good of Religion, esteemed our first Confreres, venerated and loved them We have a proof of this in the splendid witness that right at this time a foreign priest rendered. His name was Fr. Louis Schlor, and he was passing through Verona. He stated:

...Even though they have clearly chosen as the principal characteristic of their life and activities, their retired way of life and remaining hidden before the eyes of others, yet, nonetheless the clarity of their virtues and the efficacy of their Zeal is such and so manifest that the entire city, both laity and clergy, holds them in such love and

⁷⁵ *History of the House of Novitiate of Verona, 1837.* Fr. Anthony Bresciani, SJ, noted the same in writing to Fr. Marani in 1835: *... their students stand out in the opinion of learned men in the competitive examinations ...*

⁷⁶ Official Sheet of Verona. June 1853.

⁷⁷ Letter 77-2.

... veneration as holy priests. Their Superior, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, is a lovable and most honored old man, quite versed in theological matters and especially in the government of souls. He is, so to speak, an oracle for the local citizenry as well as toward visitors. Many come even from distant dioceses in order to have his counsel in theological matters, or in matters of their consciences. Now, this man of such intelligence and piety knows with such gentleness of manner and with such firmness to lead his community that one single spirit animates all of them, one single life is diffused in all, so to speak. If you engage them in conversation on what each one of them thinks, what are the sentiments of his heart, in their exterior conduct, one is a faithful portrait of the other. If you wish to know that it is that makes them outstanding it is their humility, charity, their most affable manner of dealing with people. They live rather poor and mortified lives: their rooms are very simple as is their entire set-up: but, throughout the entire house you will notice such an effort at tidiness that it is a delight to see it. The little Church is a marvel, all restored and always outstanding for its cleanliness: they preach their every weak, and their hear many confessions, but only of men. They do not accept gifts of any sort, or of any type whatsoever. There is a detachment that is so evident that it places them in great reverence before all. And truly, I would not know by what more name to give them other than they are the hidden pearl of the Veronese clergy ... 78

55. But, the time had already arrived for Fr. Gaspar to think of assuring the future of the Congregation. It was for this purpose that he had built the House, had accepted the first students, established the library: it was necessary that there should be set aside a principal capital now for the future support of the Institute. And the occasion presented itself in 1838, when the government put up for sale a few properties that had once belonged to religious communities, and they were situated in the Valpantena near Verona. Fr. Gaspar, before taking any step, wished to be sure that he was indeed following the will of God, was still somewhat hesitant: this time, what moved him to decide the matter came from the one he considered his superior, Bishop Grassi. As Fr. Gaspar himself would relate knew better perhaps than anyone else his over-all plan and his intentions to found a Congregation.⁷⁹ The Bishop then ordered Fr. Gaspar to purchase those lands, assuring the saint that he had himself thought of obtaining from the Holy See the necessary permissions. And the saintly Founder saw in that order the manifestation of the divine will, in August of that year 1838. So, he purchased the lands for 160,000 Lira. And then fearing that he might have been lacking in the confidence due to the Divine Providence, with a noble letter he offered this property to the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Gregory XVI. This is his letter to the Pope:

56.

Most Blessed Holy Father:

The least of Your servants, the under-signed Priest, with a few companions has been living a clerical life in common with a few companions for 22 years, and gratuitously serves the Spouse of Jesus Christ, in order to honor in her our common Creator and Savior.

And having found two successive Bishops of this Diocese who did not think this endeavor was useless, took heart after having restored and embellished a

⁷⁸ L. Schlor, *The Life of the Veronese Church*, p. 38. This testimony was reported by the scholar, Moroni, in his *Dictionary of Historical and Ecclesiastical Education* - Venice 1839.

⁷⁹ Fr. Lenotti, *Life of Fr. Gaspar*.

Church, and built a suitable Residence. As his age is now declining, he decided to set aside a certain sum of acquisition as a means of support, so that this service might last, and not be interrupted at his death.

Now, the most zealous Bishop exhorted him enthusiastically to purchase a religious property which the treasury put up for sale: with this spirit in mind, therefore, he acquired it for the price of 160,000 Austrian Lira. This purchase is now complete, and he presents this at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ and the successor of Peter and of the Apostles. Now if it should appear to the Holy Spirit and to You, Most Blessed Holy Father, that this land might return to the obsequious service of Christ our Lord, and to the usefulness of His Church, to designate this profane investment which is yours, for that purpose which I have had in mind, I would receive it from Your hands as a gift from Heaven. If the Spirit, and your Prudence should dispose differently, I would also be very happy and blessed in the fact that the Lord and You might render me worthy to accept from my hands a gift, even though somewhat meager, of a bit of financial support that with all confidence I have placed at Your Most Holy Feet: nor would I cease for the service I have undertaken, as this would be for me an argument to trust, even to be able to better and with greater perfection, proceed. The fact that this is my own will, and that of my companions, to spend ourselves all in the service of Our Lord, and of His Church, if He considers me worthy of this.

With this end in mind, I have, with other means also furnished an ecclesiastical Library, in so far as the circumstances of the times demand, and I was able to find some books which because of the dispersion of ecclesiastical goods was ordered, and these were placed at a public sale. I therefore, beseech Your Holiness, to give me permission to keep these with this end in view, or to indicate to me that which in the Lord might be pleasing to You that I make of them for His greater glory. And with all the strength of my faith and devotion, humbly prostrate before Your Beatitude, I kiss your most Holy Feet.

From Verona, on the 9th day of August 1838.
Your most humble, devoted and obedient son,
Gaspar Bertoni

It is said that the Holy Father on reading this letter broke into tears out of the tenderness he felt: and from the Sacred Penitentiary, on December 7th of that year, it was granted to Fr. Bertoni to retain those goods and to use them for the purposes for which he had originally acquired them.

57. In this same year of 1838, some zealous priests in Verona conceived the idea of re-launching the languishing devotion toward the Diocesan Patron, St. Zeno, with re-discovering his body and exposing it to public veneration. After having worked at excavating many nights in a row, they arrived in the month of March to the ancient urn which contained the sacred deposit. This was opened on April 20th in the presence of an appointed Commission chosen by Bishop Grasseri.

The Bishop himself made the announcement of this in his Pastoral Letter which he addressed to the faithful for the Lent of the following year, 1839, and added:

... The deliberation has already been taken to place the body in an honored sepulcher, wishing to celebrate a solemnity in his honor ... that the memory of this great saint might long be maintained. The great Festival is assigned for the 25th of this coming August. The ten days preceding will be beautiful and full of holy joy expressed through

the decorations which will be put in the Basilica of St. Zeno, for the devotions to be held in his honor and in the Pontifical Masses that the Bishops will celebrate ...

And indeed, the festive celebrations were both solemn and at the same time devout, which got underway on August 16th.

For the Novena, in addition to the moral discourses preached in the morning by a Capuchin Father, and in the evening by a Jesuit, each day there was a solemn Pontifical Mass, with an extended sermon in honor of the Saint, delivered by the more illustrious Orators of the City. There took part in this the Bishop of Mantua, Bishop G. B. DiBelle'; the Ordinary of Treviso, Bishop Sebastian Soldati; and the Patriarch of Venice, His Eminence, Cardinal Jacopo Monico. Together with Bishop Grasser they pontificated and offered the panegyric honoring the Saint on the four last days of the celebrations. They all also came on that day to the Stimate, to visit Fr. Gaspar.

Fr. Bertoni himself had been invited among the other well known orators to offer his Discourse in praise of St. Zeno, but he could not excuse himself from this honor. This is how he expressed himself in the Introduction to his sermon:

...Nor could I, as the least, excuse myself, from this honored charge which was imposed upon me by You ... For if in my entire life lived using my tongue to render to you the fruit of my sparse knowledge, exhorting you to good and perfect actions, in accord with the office to which God has called me, so it is now sweet for me to close my career in serving and in pleasing you in such holy affection and with the praises of our Saint on my lips ... 80

58. St. Gaspar at this time was in very poor health, and he suffered repeated disturbances, to the extent that it was believed he was nearing the end of his life. Because of these difficulties with his health, it was feared that he would be unable to present himself all the way to St. Zeno's basilica for that occasion. In this regard, we can recall that pleasant anecdote that has been handed on to us by our elders. Fr. Lenotti records the incident:

... Since Fr. Gaspar was supposed to go to St. Zeno's to deliver his Panegyric of this Saint on the occasion of the solemnity of the re-discovery of his body, but finding himself so often in bed, he would say to Brother Paul, who was taking care of him:

- *'Paul, who will go to St. Zeno's?'*
 - *'We will see,' the Brother would reply.*
 - *'Paul'..., Fr. Gaspar would reply.*
- My lord... , the other would reply.*
- *The Founder would ask: 'Am I going to the cemetery?'*
 - *'Surely you will go there on day like everybody else!', was Brother's retort.*

⁸⁰ The discourse was delivered on August 19th, and was later printed by order of Bishop Joseph Grasser. Fr. Bertoni's efforts proved to be pleasing and praised by his contemporaries, who called it a magisterial discourse, worthy of the holy Fathers of the Church. [cf. the Poet, Joseph Spandri]. **[NB:** as came to be known later, Fr. Bertoni was unable to deliver his discourse on his assigned day due to illness. Fr. Marani delivered it in his place].

- *Look here at how he responds to me, always honest! – the holy old man would respond, much amused.*

Fr. Lenotti observed that the Founder would repeat this exchange with Brother Paul endless times, also in the presence of all those in the house who enjoyed the story no end. And he repeated it again just a short while before dying, as though he had foreseen the lot which would come to his body. But let us not go ahead of events.

59. In the year 1839, Bishop Grasser also died. As we have already noted, he held Fr. Bertoni in supreme veneration, and often came to visit him.⁸¹ As he was dying, he wished to see him one more time. An old account of these events has come down to us:

... Having received the sacraments with his customary peace and serenity, he welcomed the visits of the two distinct personalities that he most especially wanted to see: Fr. Odescalchi of the Company of Jesus, and Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. Oh! What a great grace, he said to them, looking at them, God has let me see them before dying...

He died on November 22.

60. On the 18th of June that year there came to the Stimmate two young men from Lughezzano to become coadjutor brothers, both at age 27. They were Louis Ferrari and Francis Stevanoni. They came to fill the void left by Louis Zocca, who left in 1834, and that left by Angelo Casella, who had passed to a better life on April 3, 1835. He was the first of our Community to go to the great eternity ⁸².

Our early Confreres continued to occupy themselves in teaching school and in the other ministries which we have remembered above without losing heart in the many tribulations with which the Lord wished to try them. about this time, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Fr. Bragato, in 1840:

... Pray much for us as we are always in a sea of tasks, litigations, problems; nonetheless one goes ahead, as always in the dark, we hope to be conducted, by the good Lord, Who guides us into clarity when He chooses..

61. We have a proof that we want to record here of the great good they were accomplishing especially among the youth. The number of those who had enrolled in the Marian Oratory had so increased that it no longer sufficed to gather them in the Church of the Stimmate, and the adjoining Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. As a result, Fr. Gaspar thought of petitioning Rome the faculty to set up another Chapel

⁸¹ Fr. Lenotti writes: During the year 1838, on the occasion of Pastoral Visit, conducted at the Church of the Stimmate, left this attestation: *'We declare that every thing corresponds perfectly to our desire and expectation, and so there only remains for us to praise the zeal of the priests living here for the glory of the Lord and for the advantage of souls, especially for the youth, and to find comfort and advancing every more in the way of the Lord. April 3, 1838.'*

⁸² Fr. Gramego's Chronicle.

within the House, precisely in the room above the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception. By his Rescript of June 15, 1841, His Holiness, Pope Gregory XVI remitted to the Bishop of Verona the concession of the requested grace, after having verified the circumstances that had been presented to him.

The new Ordinary who had succeeded Bishop Grasser, was His Excellency Bishop Aurelio Mutti, former Abbot of the Benedictine Order, who had taken possession of the Diocese the year before, 1840: he also, as did his predecessors, was animated with sentiments of benevolence and love toward Fr. Gaspar and his Congregation. Therefore, he very willingly gave the faculty of opening another Chapel with his Decree of September 20th of that same year, 1841. Thus, there was inaugurated a third Oratory above the Domestic Chapel of the Transfiguration, where 30 of the most chosen and fervent among the young men and adult members, who came to constitute the Oratory of the so-called, Elite, or Perfect members. They stood out because of their prayerful demeanor and in their frequenting the Sacraments, in their devotion and piety, and for whom there were instructions and sermons adapted to them and inspiring them to further perfection. ⁸³

62. That Domestic Chapel proved to be very opportune also for another reason. The poor health of the saintly Fr. Bertoni was always getting worse, and the weakness in his legs gradually increased, so much so that it was getting very hard from him to go downstairs to the Church in order to celebrate the Mass. And since this new Chapel was right next to his room, every now and then he was able to celebrate Holy Mass in it. And when he had to remain in bed altogether, he would have the Holy Sacrifice offered there by one of his Priests, and he could hear Mass from his bed, and received there Holy Communion, in which he always found 'his sweet comfort in the midst of his travails and most painful sufferings.' ⁸⁴

63. Here, however, we should not be silent about another commitment to which Fr. Gaspar dedicated himself in those years, i.e., the compilation of his Constitutions and Rules which he wrote for his beloved Congregation. From the beginning he was totally given over to have the rule written on the hearts of his companions, to show us in their conduct a living and speaking rule: but it was also necessary that he might fix these rules in a permanent code that would serve as the norm for his future sons: to this enterprise he applied himself around this time. He attended to this undertaking with the greatest care, as one who realized that he was not writing the dispositions of men, but the will of God.

It is necessary to read the letters that he wrote to Mother Naudet years earlier in order to know what high idea he nurtured for the Rules and Constitutions of a Religious Institute: study, reflection, meditation, seeking out the counsel of others, he wanted all this to be committed in compiling these⁸⁵, but above all prayer. In the end, he maintained, the works of this type are the most principal fruit of prayer.

⁸³ Fr. Lenotti

⁸⁴ Fr. Lenotti

⁸⁵ He recommended to Mother Naudet to study well not only the concept, but also the expression in order to avoid the necessity of frequent changes which never succeed very well,

With these sentiments, he put himself to writing our Constitutions, above all by praying, and by recommending himself to the prayers of others. He wrote to Fr. Bragato on November 5, 1841: ... **Pray for us all and for that which I am writing bit by bit, if the Lord should want it, that it might turn to His honor...**

Fr. Marco Bassi noted:

... Upon these Constitutions, he poured out his every loving care, and severe studies, and long meditations, and assiduous prayer: and with the help of that God before Whom he compiled them, wrote them out, and so worked over them, he ordered them, perfected them, that he might have for them the approval of the most serious theologians and the Decree of Supreme Praise of the reigning Supreme Pontiff. And these make up the most precious heredity that his paternal heart has left us ...

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but rather produce a diminution of esteem for the law and a certain diffidence in carrying them out. [Letter 73-6].

Chapter 5 Further Severe Trials [1842-1853]

64. We have already hinted several times at the very poor state of the saintly Fr. Gaspar's health. A life-long debility in his legs resulted from the illnesses he so painfully endured in his first years at the Stimate. Therefore, in these years, only rarely was he seen to leave the House, supported always on his cane, since he was also almost continually dedicated to his study, and in receiving persons who flocked to him in considerable numbers to have counsel and comfort from him. All of this contributed even further to render his members more inert. From the year 1842 onward, he was no longer able to leave the house: and even during some years, he did not even leave his room if he was not literally carried. He was condemned to pass his life between the arm chair and his bed.

However, this was not the only trial with which the Lord wished to purify his virtue: the contradictions and struggles that he had encountered in the previous years did not give the slightest hint of diminishing. Indeed, in these latter years of his life these increased due to the evils of the times, and they would increase even more as we will shortly see. And as though all this were not enough, even other more painful trials were unfolding for the saintly Founder and his companions: after having labored so hard and suffered so much for their beloved Congregation, now they saw it little by little becoming less and less and almost entirely disappearing.

On March 12, 1842, after so many years of waiting, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti celebrated his First Mass. However, this was an occurrence that was a two-fold sadness. A few days before this happy event, his beloved study companion, Louis Ferrari died, without ever being able to reach his agonized desire for the Priesthood. In the previous month, Fr. Louis Biadego passed to another life. While their deaths were both holy and edifying, their departures had left a real emptiness in the Community which was already so small. Fr. Gramego records these events:

... On February 17th, my beloved Fr. Biadego died in the kiss of the Lord, at just 34 years of age, repeating with his last breaths 'Jesus and Mary'. Yet, he was full of days, whose memory is held in benediction, leaving us all edified with his holy life and so also with his blessed death...

... On March 6th, the most patient Angel, Louis Ferrari died, after very long sufferings of so many years; he was with us for eight years, and lived a good and exemplary life, and he left us consoled with a very holy death ...

65. And this deep sadness was only the beginning of the trials. In 1843, after 12 years of living with the community at the Stimate, Fr. Vincent Raimondi left the Congregation. The reason for his leaving, he said, was to spend two or three months at home to restore his health.⁸⁶ During that same year, the two blood brothers, and our Coadjutor Brothers Francis and Paul Solari left, after the former spent 12 years in the Congregation, and the latter had spent nine years. In January of the following year

⁸⁶ A little later, Fr. Raimondi entered the Company of Jesus. He had taught Church History, and then Dogma for many years in the Seminary.

1844, Fr. Modest Cainer died, after four long periods of illnesses, supported with great patience. The little Community tried to cope with all this; and on the other hand:

... no one else felt the call to give his own name to this Congregation, even though some might have felt so inclined, because Fr. Bertoni's penance, as they said, put fear into their hearts. Some Fathers of the Oratory who were very friendly toward him, had many times jokingly said to him that if he really wanted to see an increase in his Congregation, he would have a place over the door of his house, this slogan and capital letters: 'Here we eat, drink and sleep! And with all this, there would still be more who would not believe it.⁸⁷

But, Fr. Gaspar did not lose his spirit, nor did he slow down any in his efforts in behalf of the Congregation. Tirelessly, he went on gathering books everywhere he could, ordered from books merchants, dictated rules and discipline, and ruled all things in a manner as though his Institute were teeming with recruits:

...Such was his hope that he nurtured to succeed in a work which he believed God Himself had inspired him to undertake, that he even came to state that if he knew that for certain that the end of the world would take place tomorrow, he would still today have continued his undertaking. And in order to animate this same confidence in his sons. He would say: Courage! Let us trust in God and let us leave it all up to Him, as He can do all things. In other words, of Fr. Gaspar it can truly be said in truth, that he hoped against hope...⁸⁸

66. It was natural, however, that as the number of Confreres diminished, those remaining were simply unable to sustain all those activities that their zeal had dictated they had thus far maintained. So, in 1843, out of their harsh necessity, they had to come to the conclusion of the closure of the school. Already in these last years, Fr. Gaspar had reached the decision to lessen the class number, because of his own illnesses and those of his companions. For the scholastic year 1842-1843, only five of the usual eight classes were offered, and at the end of that year, also seizing upon the occasion that the Jesuits had opened their own high school at St. Sebastian's, our men withdrew from the teaching mission. This decision was felt with real regret throughout the entire city, because the school at the Stimmate had been held in such very high regard by all. The good that our early Confreres achieved through all these years among the youth, and were still accomplishing. Fr. Lenotti noted:

...From Fr. Bertoni's school, many students came forward, excellent in their life of piety and learning. Many went on to an ecclesiastical vocation, and not a few among them became Pastors of souls. Many went on to religious life, and some of them had even

⁸⁷ Fr. Zara's Chronicle, with annotations from Fr. Gramego's Chronicle.

⁸⁸ In 1840, Fr. Benciolini also suffered a serious illness, following which he had to be exonerated from teaching school: also Fr. Biadego in these years was almost always sick. And this is how the distribution of personnel was laid out in 1840: IInd Elementary Classes, Fr. Benciolini; IIIrd Elementary, Fr. Venturini; Ist Grammar, Fr. Cartolari; IInd Grammar, Fr. Gramego; IIIrd Grammar, Fr. Brugnoli; IVth Grammar, Fr. Marani; Ist Humanities, Fr. Gaspar. Fr. Raimondi taught in the Seminary. Fr. Fedelini substituted for Fr. Bertoni during his illnesses.

ventured forward to the America, some to Chile, as missionaries: many other young men became excellent fathers of families and remained distinguished in their Christian piety and in the good government of their own homes ... ⁸⁹

67. With the closing of the school, more time remained available for our first Confreres, and they achieved the opportunity to commit themselves to other aspects of the priestly ministry. First of all, during this time, some began to live permanently at the House of the *Dereletti*, in order to attend to the spiritual assistance of that population. Already from the year 1840, their work there had much increased, especially for Saturday evenings. There was assigned there as the companion of Fr. Marani, Fr. Francis Benciolini, who assisted him in the hearing of Confessions and in conducting the Marian Oratory. Once the school was closed,, they remained in that dwelling together with Brother Paul Zanolì. Immediately, Fr. Benciolini dedicated himself to the good of the youth through the Sunday and Feast Day Oratory and by teaching Catechism, which he did each night for those children preparing themselves for Confirmation or for their First Holy Communion.

67. The other Fathers who remained at the Stimate were able to apply themselves with greater commitment to the exercise of the sacred Ministry, both in their own Church, and in others to which they were invited.

In the Church of the Stimate, in addition to the ordinary care of offering the morning Mass, and being available for confessions every evening [and especially on the vigils of the Feasts], each Friday they continued the Devotion for a Good Death, in honor of the Passion of Our Lord. For this evening service, whenever it was possible for him to manage on his feet to come to the Church. Many of the faithful came to hear him, and even persons of high social status. Bishop Mutti came sometimes, as did the Marquis di Canossa, Fr. Bresciani, Fr. Nicholas Mazza, and others⁹⁰. He had also petitioned for, and had received, the Rescript for a Plenary Indulgence to be gained on four Friday's of the year, and 300 days indulgence on the other Fridays for those of the faithful who attended this devout service.

On Sundays, the Oratory was conducted for the youth, and the large numbers were distributed [as we have already noted] in the Church, in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception and in that Domestic Chapel of the transfiguration: furthermore, in a special place the most young among them would be gathered. To these the lessons were on learning their prayers, and those matters necessary for eternal salvation.⁹¹

In the course of the year, there would be celebrated with particular devotion the Feasts of the Holy Espousals [January 23rd], the Feast of the Stigmata [September

⁸⁹ These comments were confirmed by other authoritative testimonies, contained now in the Diocesan Process for the Introduction of the Cause of Beatification of Fr. Bertoni. The words of Cardinal di Canossa [once a student there] are particularly noteworthy. cf. the *Positio super Introductione Causae* - the Catalogue of Documents, pp. 31, 39.

⁹⁰ This testimony is found in the Diocesan Process of Fr. Bertoni's Beatification – from the witness of Biondani Fortunato.

⁹¹ In the afternoons, once Catechism was over, the young men of the Oratory would go outside the city to participate in sports and games.

17th] and the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi [October 4th]. On these days, a Plenary Indulgence could be obtained for those faithful who visited the Church.⁹²

There was also celebrated the Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga for the youth. For this also, a Plenary Indulgence could be obtained for all the faithful who would visit the Church.⁹³ And around this time there began to be celebrated with some solemnity the Feast of the Five Wounds of Our Lord in Lent. Fr. Fedelini notes in his Chronicle:

...In the year 1845, the Feast of the Five Wounds was observed a bit more solemnly than usual, with the hope of doing even more, with the restored Church. The sermon was dedicated for the most part, on the Five Wounds. Let God's Will be done, Let God's will be done!...

Also, with regard to the devotion to the Passion, we know that in 1844, Fr. Bertoni had petitioned the Holy See for a Plenary Indulgence for all the Fridays of the year: this, however, was not granted, but there was only confirmed for him the indulgences he had previously requested.

69. Our Fathers continued to occupy themselves in **preaching** everywhere they were invited. They were especially involved in the teaching of **Catechism**, all the Sundays' especially in the summer months. Fr. Bertoni remained available to any who would come to consult him, and there was a continuous pilgrimage to the House to receive light and counsel from him: and these pilgrims were not only from the city and the diocese, but also visitors passing through Verona who would ask for the grace to speak with him. Among others, there is recalled at this time the Emperor Ferdinand, and in addition to receiving his homage, he also recommended himself to the saint's prayers.

Every once in a while he would **preach still a few Retreats to Priests and Seminarians, who would come to the Stimate for a few days**. Fr. Lenotti records this:

... It was beautiful to hear him also in the midst of his many sufferings and in great discomfort, so sick that he was sometimes unable even to move about. It was also beautiful and edifying to hear him in giving Retreats to Seminarians who at times would sit around him and making around him a kind of crown – or, he would be seated at his desk, or even stretched out on his bed, while he gave them a commitment and a spirit that was always alive, always strong ...

It was also on the occasion of the closing of the School that Fr. Bertoni sent another teacher to the Seminary, to take Fr. Raimondi's place who had left the Congregation. This was Fr. Fedelini who taught Moral Theology there for many years, acquiring in the process in good reputation as a learned man in Verona, and also beyond, as we will see later. And there was also need from time to time to send a

⁹² These indulgences and the other noted above, were generally granted for a seven year period, that could then be renewed at the end of this period.

⁹³ On the feast of St. Aloysius, in addition to the panegyric that would be delivered, there would be an 'academy' [a kind of talent show] held after lunch, made up of original poems and songs, delivered by the gifted young members of the Oratory, honoring the Saint [Fr. Lenotti].

teacher to the Seminary as a temporary substitute, or where it would be occasionally necessary to send a priest to fill in for a Pastor. Fr. Bertoni was always ready to send men even when this would prove physically quite taxing.⁹⁴

70. In these years, the Founder's companions exerted gentle pressure on him so that he might seek the Approbation of the Congregation, for which he had already written the Constitutions. However, for his own reasons, Fr. Bertoni never went along with the suggestion. To think that he would refuse their request solely because of the immense difficulties that he would have to undergo in so doing, we do hold this to be the reason for his refusal. He always manifested this great fortitude of spirit in all other works that he took up for the glory of God. Nor can we believe that his reason was that he did not care to have Approbation, especially that from the ecclesiastical authorities, as he was deeply convinced that an 'Apostolic Benediction that establish the works of God and makes them experience increase and perpetuate them in the Church.'⁹⁵

Furthermore it is known that Fr. Gaspar did indeed desire the Approbation of his Institute, as Fr. Marani informs us. For this latter, Fr. Bertoni never initiated the petition *because of his sublime humility*. And Fr. Fedelini, too, remembered that the holy Founder when he would be exhorted to seek the approbation, he would respond with his customary humility and gentles that *he was not of the stature to found a religious community*.

However, it might also be that he could foresee the real danger to which the Community would be exposed if indeed it had been approved, and so he would await seeking approval for a better time. As facts would prove, the fact that he had not advanced the thorny negotiations for approval, within a few years would prove providential. In 1867, if the Community had been canonically approved and recognized, it would have been despoiled of whatever it owned. And since the group would still be in a rather precarious situation, its total existence would have been threatened.

71. On June 12, 1846, Bishop Mutti conducted the Pastoral Visit to the Church of the Stimmate⁹⁶. At the completion of this, His Excellency left an attestation which showed not only his full satisfaction, but also his personal sentiments of benevolence that inspired him towards Fr. Gaspar and his companions. His document reads in part:

... We have experienced the contentment of finding everything even superior to our expectations ... and this is the merit of the Proprietor, Reverend Fr. Gaspar Bertoni,, and of those who with him, offer themselves for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of souls...

⁹⁴ This is Fr. Marani's comment. Fr. Marani himself during this time continued as Scrutineer, the examiner of the vocations at the Seminary – and Fr. Bertoni was given the special task by the Bishop to review books that might be suspect.

⁹⁵ Letter to Naudet, 72-12.

⁹⁶ In preparation for this, On June 9th there were erected the stations of the Cross – and for this ceremony, Fr. Marani was delegated.

As Fr. Lenotti records, Bishop Mutti, like his predecessors, often came to the Stimate, to visit and consult with Fr. Gaspar. In fact, on Friday evenings, when he could, he would come to listen to his sermons in the Church of the Stimate, as we have already recorded.

Let us come now, though, to further trials with which the Lord in these years chose to purify the virtues of Fr. Gaspar and of his companions.

72. Once more, in 1846, we learn of another death from Fr. Gramego's moving Chronicle:

... July 3^d. After five days of a very difficult and dangerous illness, that is, cephalitis, Reverend Father Francis Cartolari died in the embrace of the Lord, like an angel. Our sorrow is so great, that I do not know how to express it. He has left behind the odor of holiness and virtue that I would need a notebook to include it all. He was only 51, almost 52. May Your will be done... this is all I can say ...

We have already recalled what happened at the death of this loved and gentle Confrere, one who was so zealous for the good of this Congregation, as Fr. Lenotti described him. Out of the affection that he had for the Institute, he left his considerable inheritance that was coming to him to Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. In his fear that the saintly Founder would not accept it, he subordinately left it all to the other three Priests who were his companions, i.e., Fr. Gramego, Fr. Brugnoli and Fr. Benciolini. The reaction in community to all of this is noted by Fr. Lenotti:

... As soon as Fr. Bertoni heard the will read, he responded immediately with these words: Personally, I do not want a red cent. His other companions generously followed the example of their beloved Father, and they renounced their inheritance in behalf of their deceased confrere's brother, Anthony Cartolari ...

On this occasion, the early confreres drew up an official document of heir renunciation of the inheritance:

... July 5, 1846. We the under-signed, of our own free and deliberate will, renounce all the legal rights that accrue to us and which can pertain to us in the strength of the last will and testament of the late Reverend Father Francis, of the noble family, Cartolari: we renounce this in favor of his noble brother, Sir Anthony Cartolari. In faith whereof, and in the presence of witness, we affix our names here...

After this formal assembly, Fr. Lenotti tells us, Fr. Gaspar:

*... gathered all his sons into the Domestic Chapel, and there he had the candles lit, and after a very brief but very profound sermon, in which he encouraged them all to thank the Lord that he given them the courage and the grace, and inspired them to the love of poverty to follow the poor Jesus Christ the more closely. The **Te, Deum** was then intoned in thanksgiving to the Lord ...⁹⁷*

⁹⁷ **NB: English Translator's Note:** nearly 40 years earlier, Fr. Bertoni noted this spirit in his Spiritual Diary [cf. **MP – September 25, 1808**]

Fr. Lenotti continues:

... It cannot be said just how much the world, which does not understand at all this spirit of disdain for riches and the Gospel maxims, would remain astonished and stupefied, this raising up to Heaven that magnanimous and heroic act of Christian freedom, while remaining nonetheless greatly edified ...

A number of newspapers spoke of it in Verona, and also elsewhere. We might recall the review which has as its title, **What to do?** - that was published by Count G. B. Montanari. Another publication in Milan came out with the title: 'Two facts in honor of the Veronese Church.' Fr. Bertoni, for his part, wrote to Fr. Bragato and was content simply to say that the Lord has bestowed on them the grace of getting rid of the financial remnants of Fr. Cartolari's will, and that they would cherish the *inheritance of his virtues*.

73. Another real loss was reserved for our men which must have afflicted more than anything: In 1847, Fr. Charles Fedelini left their company. Whether it was because of the very severe way of life among them, or for his excessive study or for his rather poor health – or for all three of these reasons: in August of that year he found himself in such a poor way and his energies totally sapped that he made the decision to leave the Congregation. Fr. Gramago took note of it in his Chronicle:

... August 25th. Alas! What do I have to write! That a young priest, only 37, of which 21 were spent among us as an intern and brother, eight or nine as a student, one who was much loved and most attached. He had been the 'Benjamin' of Fr. Gaspar, for whom we have spent, done so much, ... suffered... that a young man... and so on. Fr. Charles Fedelini who even came to be the Lector in Moral Theology in the public Seminary ... from one moment to the next ,has gone home. Oh, my God, my God... I say nothing more ...

It is true that he left only bodily, and with his heart, he remained always at the Stimate, where he often would come to visit Fr. Gaspar, and brought him little gifts of sweets that the saint accepted and also enjoyed. Nonetheless, his departure at this time was a terrible blow for the little Community. Four days prior to his departure, when it was not yet even thought of [he himself has left in writing], Fr. Gaspar predicted it to him, and strongly recommended to him not to give up his Chair of Moral Theology in the Seminary. In fact, he did maintain this position always despite all the obstacles that he had to encounter. After the death of Fr. Gaspar, as we will see, feeling himself attracted toward his nest of long ago, he multiplied his requests to Fr. Marani so that he might once more be accepted.

There remained now at the Stimate with Fr. Bertoni only six Priests, but full of courage, animated with that confidence that the Lord would ultimately bless this work of his hands, resolved to want at every cost to persevere in the House of God. In the course of the year 1847, there came to join them a Coadjutor Brother, G. B. Bandoria, and there was truly a need of him. Brother Paul, in the meantime, had returned to the Stimate to assist Fr. Gaspar in his continuing infirmity: and he was substituted for at the *Dereletti* by Louis Ferrari. At the Stimate with Brother Paul, there was Francis Stevanoni, and there arrived now a third in the person of G. B. Bandoria.

74. In this situation, we come to the year 1848, a year that was all the more critical and turbulent when those spirits intoxicated with the spirit of freedom and dreaming of vague reforms trembled under the yoke of authority. By now, almost all the Italian Princes had made real concessions to their citizens: but this only excited the Venetian and Lombard people the more. They were yearning to throw off the Austrian yoke and to pursue that brand of freedom that their brothers had. Nor were there lacking those who tried to arouse in people's hearts a certain hatred for all foreigners: indeed, many were only interested very little, or none at all in the wellbeing of the populations, and were inspired more by hatred against religion. And they profited by the legitimate aspirations of peoples to obtain the triumph of the anti-religious principles of which they were imbued. These formed the principal part of the sects which then flourished in Italy. They accepted the theories of the French Jacobins, and in the shadows of secrecy they ordered the carrying out, and the preparing the assassins, of the rebellion against authority and the civil revolution⁹⁸.

The times were most difficult, and they required much prudence: in this light, Fr. Gaspar governed his sons. But, he never forget even in this climate the principles taught by the faith- he looked on the revolution as a great evil, as he always showed himself to be very faithful to the constituted authorities, blaming and censuring the goals of the secret societies. And he sought to impart these principles also in the hearts of others. Fr. Lenotti noted:

... In his preaching, he and his companions fearlessly, even in 1848, had the heart to preach the Catholic maxims of subjection that is due to authority...

There is little wonder, then, that the men of the Stimmate were in the sights of the sectarians, considered to be enemies of the fatherland and of liberty. We also know from Fr. Lenotti that Fr. Gaspar's enemies had laid plots against him, and had their eyes on his properties.

75. In that same year, our first Confreres had much to suffer also on the part of the Austrian Government because of the zeal of two of the Priests:

...Many soldiers before exposing themselves to hostile fire, would seek to be reconciled with God: in the Church, especially that of St. Nicholas, there was a great number of them, and Fr. Bertoni had been requested to send two of his priests to help out. So, he sent Fr. Francis Benciolini and Fr. Innocent Venturini, that they might go and hear the confessions of these unfortunate young men. When the rumors got out and circulated through the city that these Priests, rather than hearing confessions, tried to corrupt the young soldiers with money, trying to bribe them to leave the service of their own flag. Not much more than these rumors was needed: the police immediately set out to arrest

⁹⁸ Massimo d'Azeglio wrote a book, 'My Recollections', condemning the secret societies and particular the *Young Italy*, which was a bad example and a bad school for Italy with the absurdity of its political principles, the silliness of its proposals, the perversity of its means. Those who believed in the present liberty and independence were indebted to these ... sects of life-carriers and murderers. He responded that those revolution mongers have not hastened, but held back our liberation... [Chapter 29].

*the two priests, and without delay our two Confreres, and other priests, were locked up. These men with the overcoats and military caps were then conducted by an armed band to St. Thomas' jail. To his great misfortune, Fr. Benciolini happened to have some money in his pocket that had been given to him that very day by Fr. Bertoni for support of his own lodging, for the House of the Dereletti. And that money on his person increased the suspicion and gave substance, transforming mere conjecture into apparent fact. He and his two companions were judged to be enemies of the Germans, and they were men who were subversive toward the militia. For many days, therefore, they were harshly imprisoned, and separated from the others, without comfort of any sort, except that God in Whom alone they placed their trust. Humanly speaking, the entire city was in a state of siege and they could hope for nothing better than from one moment to the next, to be executed...*⁹⁹

We can just imagine Fr. Gaspar's sufferings, too, and the desolation of his other sons, in seeing the lives of two of their zealous Confreres so coarsely threatened, and of whom the Community had such need. However, God protected His servants: in the meantime, the news of their forced imprisonment circulated, and very shortly persons of great influence and situated in high positions gave a hand in the matter attesting to their innocence, their fidelity to the constituted authorities. About this time, Marshall Radetski had returned from the capture of Mount Berico, and he ordered their release. And so, after nine days of harsh confinement, they were liberated. Or, to put it more precisely, they were handed over to the Bishop so that he might supervise them in the Seminary. And finally, on June 13th, the act of grace was communicated to all by the Bishop.

76. We will mention briefly here in passing another fact that has some tie with our Congregation. In that same year, 1848, there had been offered to Fr. Bragato, as a reward for his services the Episcopal dignity: however, he had been formed in the School of Fr. Bertoni, and he renounced it, preferring to remain in his office, and after the abdication of the Emperor Ferdinand, he chose to remain with their Majesties at the Court of Prague, where he spent the rest of his life. On April 11th, Fr. Bertoni wrote to him:

...I had forgotten to share my consolation with you on your renunciation of the miter, even though much recognition is owed to those who offered you this honor. You have followed the voice of the late Arch-Priest, Fr. Galvani: Lowly, lowly, seek out the nooks and crannies...! And the humble in spirit He will save...!

77. Following 1848, the state of siege remained in Verona, and consequently, martial law. The military command wished to provide Italian confessions for those who had been condemned to death, and at the same time desiring to have priests that

⁹⁹ cf. the Chronicles of Fr. Gramego and Fr. Zara. It is impossible to imagine the discomforts that they experienced in this days during which the two Priests were herded into humid and dark cells, with five sacks to rest on that were meant for 12 persons, and without almost anything to eat: furthermore, they were also exposed to the insults of the soldiers and of some officials who would taunt them with the terrifying antiphon: 'Priests for a few more days, then the firing squad...!' [cf. Thomas Netti, *Castelnuovo and the Austrians*. C. 16].

could be trusted in all, Bishop Mutti was addressed, and he chose two companions of Fr. Bertoni who immediately sent them to him. For many years thereafter, our men attended to this office of mercy, trying to bring comfort to those unfortunates, condemned to death, accompanying them even to the point of execution, as Fr. Lenotti informs us in his *Life* of Fr. Gaspar. God blessed their endeavors with happy results and both the Bishop and the Government were most appreciative.¹⁰⁰

In this regard, we recall here that these two Confreres of ours for much time also preached to those confined in the prisons and heard their confessions, garnering from this ministry much fruit to their own supreme satisfaction. And they would have willingly continued in this ministry if the lack of subjects had not impeded them.

The turbulence and agitation had not yet entirely come to a halt as 1848 drew towards its end, and the Imperial Government of Vienna concentrated in Verona many soldiers, for the purpose of suffocating entirely the fires of rebellion. However, in the city there were not sufficient barracks to lodge all those troops. As a result there were occupied by the military many buildings, both public and private, and among these was also the House of the Stimate, as it was rather spacious and at the moment, without many inhabitants.

Of no avail was the end-result of the repeated appeals directed to the military authorities. It was pointed out that in the dwelling, there were four sick men, and that Fr. Gaspar's illness was indeed serious. Not even the appeals made by Monsignor Bragato at the Royal Court of Prague, availed in this regard. The soldiers confiscated the Stimate on March 6th, 1850, and they would remain there for four years. It is true that God made use of this event also to draw good. Fr. Gramego notes what Fr. Zara records:

... With these soldiers, the few Priests of the Stimate were provided with a new field for their zeal: since the priests exchanged the word of god with the young soldiers, and they were able to convince many of them to go to confession, ad to live from then on in a more Christian manner. In this apostolate, Brother Paul Zanoli had special talents and due to his efforts very soon on each Saturday, in our old Church choir area there would be these soldiers in good numbers who then on the following Sunday, they would also approach the Eucharistic table...

78. Meanwhile the saintly Founder's illness was going from bad to worse, so that as the year 1850 ended, he no longer get up out of bed: indeed, as Fr. Lenotti records, he had to remain almost always in the same position, i.e., on his left side, without being able to move, other than with the help of others. What discomfort he must have experienced in this situation can well be imagined: he, however, supported it all with admirable patience. There were many who still would come to visit him in order to seek his counsel and to enjoy a little bit his company: and he never showed that he tired of all this, but always seemed in good humor and content. There was so often that gentle smile on his lips, even though at times he was suffering very much, being forgetful of himself and of his pain.¹⁰¹

His sweet comfort through all this was to assist every morning at the Holy Sacrifice from the bed of his suffering and to receive Holy Communion: as a result,

¹⁰⁰ The two were Fr. Marani and Fr. Lenotti.

¹⁰¹ The testimony of Cardinal Louis di Canossa, in his letter to Fr. Peter Vignola.

he would try very hard each night to use every diligence not to drink anything form mid-night on, in order to be still fasting, even though there were times this would have cost him much effort. It might be that one of the Fathers once in a while could offer him a gentle hint that due to the small number of priests, asking him to allow them to celebrate that Mass that was celebrated each day for him in the Domestic Chapel, on feast days be celebrated in the public Church for the ease of the faithful, he would responded with some emotion: 'I beg you, do not let me be deprived from this, my only consolation: others have healthy legs and they can seek a Mass elsewhere, but I cannot do that if you do not provide me with the Mass.

From then on, in order not to upset him, they never brought the matter up again, but right up; until his very last day, one of them [usually Fr. Venturini] continued to celebrate in the near-by chapel. And he always received Communion fasting right up to the morning on which he died.

79. In the year 1852, Fr. Gaspar had to experience one more displeasure in the departure of his friend, Bishop Mutti. He had been named the Patriarch of Venice. For both of them, who esteemed and loved each other, this must have been a real difficult detachment: they parted ways, recommending each other to the Lord, knowing all too well that they would not see each other ever again on this earth. This is the way it was: Fr. Bertoni was like a lamp that was winding down, with his breath becoming weaker and weaker, until that 12th day of June of the following yer, 1853, when he rendered his beautiful soul back to God.

Their sorrow and the grief were truly profound when he left his remaining sons: but their sorrow was sweetened somewhat in the thought that in Heaven they had ac quired a powerful protector. It was also sweetened in the solemn demonstrations of genuine affection that the entire city poured forth for the beloved deceased, on the occasion of his funeral, which was a genuine triumph.

Fr. Marani was elected to succeed him in the government of the Congregation. In a report that he wrote in December of that same year, after making reference to the grave losses suffered by the Congregation in cycle of only a few years, he then went on:

... In this year, God had reserved for the afflicted Congregation the greatest of its misfortunes in the irreparable loss of its Founder and Head, Fr. Bertoni. On the 12th of last June, after immense sufferings and very serious illnesses, he flew up to heaven, full of merits. It is not our role here to develop the praise of this extraordinary Servant of God: it will suffice for us to say only that he was considered and honored by all as a saint, that the Prelates of the Church held in high esteem and venerated him, as among all the people of regard, he was consulted as an Oracle. The entire city, at the announcement of his death, was so very much moved. In utmost spontaneity, they rendered him the most sublime funeral honors in solemn testimony of their grief in which they found themselves. In him, they believed that they had lost such a precious treasure, that they realized they possessed in Fr. Bertoni, to his great glory ...

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