

PART TWO

Towards a Theology of Fr. Bertoni's Hope

The Hope of the Apostolic Missionary

Introduction: Hope and the *Kenosis* : Christian Hope is born in Emptiness.

[1] The two authors that Fr. Bertoni quoted perhaps more than anyone else, after Sacred Scripture, would be St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Ignatius of Loyola. It seems that Fr. Bertoni's spirituality of Holy Abandonment and his broad concept of Apostolic Mission flow from St. Ignatius. So much else in the Stigmatine Charism was inspired by St. Thomas Aquinas.

[2] One specific contribution of St. Thomas is the Stigmatine Founder's idea of the Apostolic Missionary as an "instrument" in the hands of Jesus Himself. The more united we are to Christ, the more effective is our Apostolic Mission.

[3] A further contribution lies in the spirituality of Hope. St. Thomas brought together Theological **Hope**, the Gift of **Fear** of the Holy Spirit and the Beatitude of **Poverty**. One of the clearer commentaries on this would be the Carmelite Doctor, St. John of the Cross, who was trained under the great theologians of Salamanca. The "Doctor of *Nada*" wrote: "...all possession is contrary to hope ... the more the soul hopes in aught else, the less will it hope in God ... This virtue, then, produces an emptiness, for it has to do with that which is not possessed..." [cf. *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book II, c.21, n. 7; *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, c.6, n. 3; c. 14, n. 2].

[4] In our own time, "nothingness" as the spring-board for hope, has been the theme also of Catholic philosophers. Gabriel Marcel, for example, vigorously denounced any social system that forever emphasizes "having" over "being" - and whatever offers a program of always corresponding to the ever-increasing demands of human beings. In such a system, humanity becomes completely absorbed in the sphere of "having" which will always be divisive. In such a system, one loses consciousness of the sphere of "being" - and "being" is the only area that can unite humanity, as all share in the same human "being", "**Being**" is the only legitimate sphere of hope - "**having**" is the enemy of hope.

[5] The Thomist, the late Josef Pieper, makes a clear distinction between the "fundamental", the absolute, the genuine, unique hope on the one hand - and then, on the other hand, the "common", "every-day", "particular", "ordinary" hopes. These "common-place" hopes have as their object something determined, precise, that pertains to the sphere of this world. The "fundamental" hope has for its object that which cannot be limited, found in this world. There is a proportion existing between the common, every-day hopes and **THE** fundamental Hope: the more that these lesser hopes are realized, the fundamental hope grows weaker and weaker. It is precisely in the

delusion of all the secondary hopes that there comes about the powerful appeal to enter the bast, vital sphere of **genuine Hope**.

[6] Among the "Liberation Theologians", some saw the connection between the Poor and Hope. A Brazilian Protestant thinker, Rubem Alves, noted that for the prophet, even the time of captivity is a time when it is possible to remain "human" -provided one is neither dominated by the bitterness of despair - nor, overcome, "domesticated" by the flesh pots of captivity, that create the contradiction of the "happy slave". The erotic enjoyment of life makes hope impossible. The living of the evangelical counsels are presented as leading one to union with God, the ultimate hope.

[7] In his social teaching Pope John Paul II expresses his challenge repeatedly. This is one example: "...This general analysis [of today's situation], which is religious in nature, can be supplemented by a number of particular considerations to demonstrate that among the actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God, the good of neighbor and the 'structures' created by them, two are very typical:

- on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for **profit**;
- and, on the other, the thirst for **power**, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others.

In order to characterize better each of these attitudes, one can add the expression: 'at any price'. In other words, we are faced with the absolutizing of human attitudes with all its possible consequences. Since these attitudes can exist independently of each other, they can be separated; however, in today's world both are indissolubly united, with one or the other predominating.

Obviously, not only individuals fall victim to this double attitude of sin; nations and blocks of nations can do so too. And this favors even more the introduction of the '**structures of sin**' of which I have spoken. If certain forms of **modern 'imperialism'** were considered in the light of these moral criteria, we would see that hidden behind certain decisions, apparently inspired only by economics or politics, are **real forms of idolatry**: of money, ideology, class, technology..." [cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Encyclical Letter, December 30, 1987, # 37].

[8] In his time, Fr. Bertoni noted:

"... Today I was at St. Joseph's - [it dawned on me that] at the basis [*fondo*] of one's own nothingness, one finds God. experiencing many sublime things concerning God came

over me. This evening, upon seeing an image of the Most Holy Trinity, I experienced

much reverence and love for the three Persons. The eternal Father was standing with

open arms, and this explained to me something about His Mercy, and the easy communi-

cation of His goods..." [cf. MP, July 24, 1808].

In this text, there seems implied a foundation for his ideal of Apostolic Mission. What is interesting, too, is his expression: *at the basis of one's own nothingness, one finds God...[in fondo del proprio niente, si trova Dio...]*. What this means for St.

Gaspar Bertoni might be gleaned from what follows. It is an idea that has known development in the mystical tradition:

[a.] John Tauler, OP

This disciple of Meister Eckhart, distinguished two aspects in the human soul:

- the “exterior” part, wherein are exercised the three potencies, or faculties: intellect, memory and will;
- the “interior” part, the deepest part of one’s being - in this view, this would mean the highest aspect of one’s humanity, the core of one’s being. While by no means are the following to be considered “proof” texts, they may indicate how easy it was to think of there being a “deep” part of each human being:

“... That is why there is no weakening on our part, and instead, though this outer man of ours may be falling into decay, the inner man is renewed day by day ... [cf. 2 Co 4:16].
“...Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong...” [cf. Ep 3:16].

St. Francis de Sales refers to this part of a human being as the most delicate part of the spirit - the supreme aspect of the human spirit. St. John of the Cross would later think of this as the “deepest center” of the soul, its “substance”. In popular language one may speak of “way down, deep inside!”

The German mystic, Tauler, speaks of this *fondo* in many of his sermons to religious. He describes it differently: on two occasions he seems to translate the *fondo* as the high point of the human spirit. Other times, he thinks of the “deep inside” as the core of the human spirit itself - specifying that when he uses this term “spirit”, what he really means is “the most interior aspect, the most sublime part of the soul”. There is, he says, a more “exterior” aspect, where the potencies of the soul function.

Tauler explains that he received this concept from Denys the Areopagite, who spoke of the *fundus animae*. St. Augustine described this aspect of a human being as “the occult abyss”, or “the secret abyss”, deep within a human being. In Tauler’s theology, this deep interior “base” is the very center of a human being, and it is here that one finds the image of the Most Holy Trinity.

Later, St. Paul of the Cross, deeply influenced by Tauler, would use this terminology of the mystical doctors. The Founder of the Passionists called this part the “base” [*fondo*] of the spirit, and distinguishes it from the “exterior” part. This *fondo* was looked at, in the psychology of the times, as the “high point”, the “peak”, “the interior cabinet” of the spirit, the very core of a spiritual being. This “part” is looked on by the mystics as the true “sanctuary” of the human soul, where faith, hope and charity exercise their principal functions.

Some understanding of this “compartmentalizing” of the human spirit seems to be somewhat necessary so that one might have some insight into the language form of the writers of another age. As for this “most noble, most intimate” part of the human

being, this *fondo* of the soul, is variously described by mystical writers in enthusiastic terms. Tauler spoke of it in a most outstanding manner, and deeply influenced those who came after him. Heir to the Dionysian tradition, his writings served as a stepping stone for those of later generations, clarifying to extraordinary depths this innermost aspect of human beings.

He reasoned that the Indwelling of the Most Blessed Trinity would be understood as pertaining to the deepest aspect of a human being: he wrote that this was indeed the special dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of God. The nobility and true greatness of this “part” of the human person was so great, sublime and mysterious that there are not adequate terms to describe it. Tauler stated that just as there are no adequate terms to describe God, neither will the human person every fully be understood, made as it is to the image and likeness of the Triune God. If one could ever “see” how God lives and dwells deep within the mind and heart of the believer, this would already be something of a “beatific vision”.

The affinity and proximity of this *fondo* of the human person, imbued with the theological life, and God Himself - is so great, and so “ineffable” that no one can ever really fathom the mystery of the human person. In this whole area of mysticism, not much can be said with precision = explaining, perhaps, the need for symbolism to describe the deepest spiritual realities: e.g., the “Dark Night of the Soul”, the “Spiritual Winter”, the “Desert”, the “Living Flame of Love”. Tauler may be of special interest to the Stigmatine because of the deep tie to be noted between emptiness and hope, the Stigmata and Holy Abandonment. Here are some of Tauler’s statements:

“... His loving and bleeding wounds can lead us to our eternal vocation. Have mercy, O Lord, on those ungrateful persons who may say: ‘What are we supposed to do about something which happened so many years ago?’ - understanding this ‘something’ to mean the Passion of our Lord! And yet, His wounds are really a living book and a pure mirror. Whoever penetrates them with St. Paul, will find in them all that the divinity can offer, the perfect seal of the Book of Life. In this book there is found all perfection in time and in eternity, as Eternal Wisdom Himself says: ‘I am the way, the Truth and the Life’ [cf. Jn 14:6]. [cf. Tauler’s Sermon, entitled: Concerning the Abandonment in Poverty and in the Wounds of Jesus. *Opere*, Italian edition, Paoline pp. 825, ff.].

In his Sermon on the Assumption [cf. *Opere*, pp. 438, ff.] Tauler preached:

“... Here below, these Five Doors ought to be our inheritance, and through them we ought to pass through to our eternal inheritance, in our true fatherland. The Holy Spirit is the Porter of these Five Doors. His sweet love is always ready whenever we knock at them, and to inspire us to enter through them, and to inspire us to pass through them into our eternal inheritance from the Father. For, most surely - anyone who enters here in orderly manner, can never be lost From these lovable wounds, we should learn five lessons that will make us enter them without further delay. These lessons are: to flee, to suffer, to be silent, to disdain, to deny oneself, in a true abandonment ...”

Tauler also spoke once on a theme very close to the spirituality of Fr. Bertoni. The German Dominican's sermon was entitled: "An Exercise by which to be united to the Divinity through the Five Wounds: [cf. *Opere*, pp. 844, ff.]:

"...In Christ Jesus, I wish for you His five essential virtues, and in His Wounds, **an illumined and perfect voyage into the Eternal Jubilee Year**, in the divine Rome, which is love in divine unity ...

"... The way through the wound in the heart is that of being consumed and of burning generously with actual love, through the Holy Sacraments, in accord with obedience of the Holy Church, in all the good exterior and interior good works, with burning desires and exercises devoid of show - this is a call to become one in an essential love..."

"...Each one ought to ponder the Five Holy Wounds, and with ardent desire and love, really penetrate into God, and with all one's faculties: heart, soul and spirit, through the heavenly doors of the radiant wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Whoever wants to obtain something of great price, has to be willing to surrender something of great price ..."

Tauler also described a way by which one would achieve "True Love through the Wounds of Jesus" [cf. *Opere*, pp. 838, ff.]:

"... The comprehension and knowledge of the soul consists in enjoying eternally, with all the saints, that one thing necessary...O Spouses of Christ, learn to enjoy this, your Spouse, and nothing else - and do not ever compare Him to anything else... and whatever has to be surrendered by you each day, offer it all in accord with the Rules of your Order, and bring it all to the Five Wounds of Jesus, according to the exercise of the Five Virtues of Jesus, which I have taught you - namely, how, through them, you should reach even God ..."

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[b.] St. John of the Cross

The Carmelite mystic speaks in a very similar manner: the Word, the Son of God, dwells essentially with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the most profound **fondo** of the human soul, where He is hidden. The mystics of this tradition [Tauler, John of the Cross, Paul of the Cross] understand the **fondo** of the soul to be that "point" where a "New Birth" through Grace is achieved within the believer, the "point" of mystical union [cf. P. Gaetan, CP, *Doctrine de la Croix sur l'oraison et la mystique*, Louvain 1932, pp. 56, ff.].

This "part" of the human soul is described with a multitude of poetic and metaphoric examples. All of these, in the last analysis, refer to that which the mystics [particularly the so-called "Rhine Mystics"] ordinarily call the **fondo** of the soul. This "point" does have some foundation in Scripture and is not merely the result of Platonic speculation. There are biblical references that would allow one to think of the "interior" person, a kind of "Interior Temple". The mystical tradition often would cite St. Paul's idea of the "Temple of the Most High":

“...Didn’t you realize that you were God’s Temple, and that the Spirit of God was living among you? ‘cf. 1 Co 3:16].

“... Your body, you know, is the Temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you since you have received him from God ...” [cf. 1 Co 6:19].

“... we are the Temple of the Living God... We have God’s word for it : I will make my home among them ...” [cf. 2 Co 6:16].

While the texts do not “prove” the “interior person”, they do in some way indicate the Indwelling of God within the individual as well as in the ecclesial community. St. Paul asked for the adoration of God in spirit and in truth “deep within” oneself. The metaphor of the “Temple”, even though quite removed from philosophical terms, has long served in the mystical tradition as a valid aid in coming to grips with what the mystics mean when they speak of the *fondo* of the human soul. A Temple is not merely a place where human beings are sanctified by God. The Temple is also a place where a human soul responds with his/her better effort, to be united to the Divinity, to the God Who sanctifies. In order that the metaphor be understood, it is necessary that the believer respond through the theological life, through faith, hope and charity - all of which flow from the interior participation, “consortium” with the Trinity.

The *fondo* of the human soul is indeed a mystery in itself - even the senses do not have access to it, and the operations that make it known to us are of themselves, purely spiritual. The divine presence is achieved there in a most sublime mystery, and the “curtain” is never penetrated through curiosity. When one is not even able to meditate, St. Paul’s teaching helps [cf. Rm 8]: the Holy Spirit comes to us in our weakness and makes it up for us. In the mystical tradition, this is interpreted as one striving to be “content” with God in the supreme “part” of his/her being.

St. John of the Cross sees this “sublime part” of the soul being reached and developed only through the theological virtues. All else must be “emptied” and become as “naught” - *nada* - he develops in this way his great asceticism of Spiritual Poverty, as the sole means of developing theological hope, which flows from faith, and leads to charity. He wrote:

“... All possession is contrary to hope - which, as St. Paul says, is from that which is not possessed: ‘For we must be content to hope that we shall be saved - our salvation is not in sight yet, we should not have to be hoping for it if it were - but, as I say, we most hope to be saved since we are not saved yet, it is something we must wait for in patience’ [cf. Rm 8:24]’. Therefore, the more the memory despoils itself, the more will it have hope - and the more hope it has, the more will one share in union with God. Since in regard to God, the more the soul hopes, the more does it obtain and, therefore, one hopes the more, the more does one become dispossessed of all else. When one becomes perfectly deprived of all possession, one will then enjoy the perfect possession of God in divine union ... whoever does not renounce all that he/she possesses, cannot be a disciple of Christ [cf. Lk 14:33]. [cf. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book III, c. 7, n. 3].

St. John of the Cross refers to this teaching rather frequently:

“... we have already proven that the soul must renounce all possession of memory, so that it might become united with God in hope: in order for hope to be perfect, it is necessary that memory can have nothing other which is not God ...” [ib., c. 11, n. 1].

Like a good teacher, deeply intent on communicating this basic lesson of his doctrine, St. John of the Cross returns to this still again:

“... Re-capitulating, therefore, I say above all, that the scope toward which we are tending is that the soul be united with God, according to the memory, **in hope**. With this as our premise, there should be noted that that which is hoped is that which is **not yet possession**, and that the less that other things are possessed, then all the greater is the capacity and the potency to hope in that which is hoped - only in this way, is hope the more perfect. On the contrary, the more things that are possessed, then all the less is the ability and the capacity to hope, and thus hope is all the more imperfect...” [cf. l.c., c.15, n. 1].

In his classic *Dark Night*, St. John of the Cross offers a rather intense instruction on the theological life toward which each human being is called. He writes:

“...On the white tunic of faith, the soul immediately places over it the second garment, green in color, which signifies the virtue of hope. It is with this virtue with which principally the soul defends itself, and liberates itself from its second enemy, that is, the world. This green of lively hope in God gives to the soul such vitality, courage and elevation, to those things which pertain to eternal life. By means of hope, all the things of the world which indeed are really empty, arid, dead, seem to be of no value. Here the soul despoils itself of all the decoration and costumes of this world. By means of this despoilment, the believer does not place his/her heart in any thing, hoping in nothing of that which is found here on earth. One comes to life vested solely in the hope of eternal life...” [cf. *Dark Night*, Book II, chapter 21, n. 6].

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[c.] St. Gaspar Bertoni

He was profoundly inspired by the Thomistic doctrine which would unite the Beatitude of Poverty with the Theological Virtue of Hope [cf. Mt 5; St. Thomas: I I - I I, q. 19, a. 12; 3 Sent., 3, d. 34, q. 1, a. 5; In Mt c. 5]. Deeply imbued with his biblical spirituality, Fr. Bertoni radicated his own hope in two realities profoundly familiar to him: the omnipotent **Mercy of God** and the abysmal **misery of humanity**. Whether or not the Germane Dominican, Tauler, had any profound effect on the Stigmatine Founder could be studied further. Tauler is mentioned By Fr. Lenotti in one of his Domestic Exhortations:

“...Tauler narrates that Christ appeared to a certain great servant of His, and He lamented with heart-felt sorrow that there are six ways in which He was dishonored by His followers. The second of these six ways was that in their meetings and conferences they treated empty and useless things that only rarely, or not at all, had anything to do

with Him...” [cf. “Domestic Exhortations”. On Recreations - IInd Exhortation, in: CS III, p. 530].

It is possible that Tauler came to the Stigmatine Founder also from his effect on St. Paul of the Cross, with whom St. Gaspar Bertoni was familiar:

“... One should not be preoccupied with his own good example ... This is a common error, understood by the Venerable Paul, Founder of the Passionists, from our Lord Himself. What is most important is to work well and perfectly - good example will then follow by itself [cf. MP, July 17, 1809].

Fr. Bertoni worded the principle in a variety of ways, such as:

“... the less that we think of, find support in, or take our rest in creatures, all the more will those [theological] virtues assume strength and increase...” [cf. Letter 6, December 11, 1816 - in Ep, p. 35].



[A] The Primary Motive of Christian Hope:

Schooled in the classical Thomistic mold, Fr. Bertoni developed a Spirituality of Hope that was eminently “theological”, “Trinitarian”:

1. A Hope based on God, the Father

a. While St. John of the Cross spoke of the “Dark Night”, describing the intensity of spiritual tribulation, Tauler called it a “Spiritual Winter” to describe its longevity, exasperating duration - implying what seems often to be its endless duration. Fr. Bertoni has alluded to this experience of “winter”:

“... Precisely this life of glory, experienced now solely as hope, is much less known and considered by the world; in like manner, the world does not see the glorious life to which Christ has risen, and in which He now lives in God, with the Father. This is why, as St. Paul said, our life is hidden with Christ in God: ‘But when Christ is revealed, and he is your life, you, too, will be revealed in all your glory in Him...’ [cf. Col 3:4].

“It is like the pearl, as St. John Chrysostom explains, remains hidden for as long as it is in its shell. Even less inviting is the similitude which St. Augustine employs to explain this passage. In the harsh winter, the green tree seems dry to the sight. When the summer approaches and the living root sends out its branches, they are endowed with fruit. Such is our life that may be compared to the winter: our sun is Christ, Who seems far from us and hidden from view, obscured in the dark clouds. Outside we may give the appearance of being without life, without honor, without beauty or luster. But deep inside, we maintain the root - charity in God - very much alive. It is as though planted in a vital land, firm and alive. The summer will come with the appearance of the glory of Christ. We will be seen to flourish again, by coming again to life, by showing our

branches and fresh fruit - these are the characteristics of the beatitude more in the spirit than in the flesh..." [cf. Sermon 38, 'The Spiritual Life' - Easter, April 5, 1807 - in: PVC, P. 296.].

b. The Stigmatine Founder looked on the omnipotence of God under the image of a broad sea and its counter-part was the yearning of the human heart, similarly vast and which would find repose solely in God:

"...Would we really want such misery, such limited goods to satisfy our hearts? If our hearts are really almost as vast as another sea, how can such insignificant twigs fill the immensity of our yearnings? Only in heaven will we find anything that will be suited to the longings of our hearts - a God, an infinite good. My God, only then would I really be fulfilled, when Your glory will appear. Yes, You alone with the flood of your delights can satisfy my yearning [cf. Ps 17:15]. And this is why You have given me such a restless heart: so that I might come to understand that for You alone has my heart been prepared, and that it will be restless until it rests in You ... (cf. the *Confessions* of St. Augustine)..." [Sermon 5, 'The Ascension', May 14, 1801, in: PVC pp. 11, ff.].

c. like most mystics, Fr. Bertoni was deeply impressed with the wonders of nature, and often used them as an example to express his thought. He often thought of the love of God as an immense sea:

"...O admirable abyss of Divine Love! And profound abyss of His charity! When will it be that we will indeed be so ship-wrecked and abandoned in this immense sea, that we will no longer look toward the shores of this wretched earth of ours? 'Blessed - (and really blessed) - is the one who takes shelter in Him! (cf. Ps 34:9). [cf. Letter 3, November 26, 1812 - in Ep, pp. 28, ff.].

d. Being ship-wrecked in the sea of divine love served Fr. Bertoni as an apt image to express his total trust in God:

"...Blessed is anyone who lose himself in this abyss! Blessed is the one who throws himself into it, fully alive and totally ship-wrecked into this Ocean! The little child is never more secure than when sleeping in the embrace of its Mother, he abandons all thought and concern for himself. The infant does not see, hear, or speak. But, the Mother sees for him, listens for him, speaks and works for him. And when she wants, she can and knows how to awaken him, as she remains always so close to him [cf. Letter 36 - cf. Ep pp. 96, f.]

e. This "feminine" image of God reflects the ancient Psalmist:

"Yahweh, my heart has no lofty ambitions, my eyes do not look too high. I am not concerned with great affairs, or marvels beyond my scope. Enough for me to keep my soul tranquil and quiet, like a child in its mother's arms, as content as a child that has been weaned. Rely, Israel, on Yahweh, now and for always! [cf. Ps 131].

f. One of his repeated principles [cf. CE # 185] appears in his Letters with a Trinitarian dimension, and also in his sermons. This is a principle inspired through St. Paul [cf. Ph 1:6]:

“...The One Who has begun this good work in you, that of your sanctification, by giving you the grace to be converted, this same One will carry it through by assisting you with efficacious aids, right through to the end[cf. Sermon 17, 'Perseverance', April 11, 1803 - in: PVC p. 118].

g. Fr. Bertoni depended on this principle in his own Letters of spiritual direction, and often suggested it for reflection:

“... Nonetheless, you cannot allow discouragement because the Lord, Who has already given an outline for the entire edifice, will also offer a design for each part, corresponding to the magnificence and greatness of so worthy a palace. Even if at the present moment, you do not see clearly before the eyes of your mind the blue-print, you can rest assured that you will see it all in His own good time, and that will be the best possible of times ...

“The Lord will enlighten you and also me, further - but, this present time is to prepare you from afar to receive these lights. Once they are received, for even greater assurance and strength, they must be seen in the light of the Divine Scriptures, the Holy Catholic Church, and her saints and Doctors. You will see completed in you what He has already begun: ‘I am quite certain that the One Who has begun this good work in you will see that it is finished when the day of Christ comes’ (cf. Ph 1:6)” - [cf. Letter 28, in: Ep, pp. 80, ff.].

h. The Stigmatine Founder's hope was based in his faith-inspired vision of an eternally active God:

“... ‘I am the Lord, your God, Who brought you...’ (cf. Ex 20:2). This is an expression of the love of the active God, committed to so dominating our hearts that only He could remain in them as a free Master - and does not stay in them merely as a respectful guest who would never dare to make a move. ‘I am the Lord, your God ...’” [cf. Letter 5 - in: Ep, pp. 33].

i. In the difficulties of vocation, Fr. Bertoni was totally hopeful in the assistance of God. In his Constitutions, he described the Stigmatine vocation as one that was both 'arduous and difficult' - but, can be undertaken because of God's help [cf. CE 185]. He writes:

“... in my view, we have only to praise, admire and thank God, Who gives the necessary talents according to the purpose of the vocation. We have no reason ever to entertain any doubt about this - nor, should we for the future, even in greater difficulties. For Him to help us in the great things, as in the lesser ones, is all the same. In a certain way, the greater challenges are more worthy of Him, even though when compared to an infinite Being, complete in all perfection, everything is slight and small.

Furthermore, every slight and small thing that is done for Him, is supremely and most sublimely great..." [cf. Letter 12, January 9, 1813, in: Ep p. 48].

j. As is noted by St. Paul, there is a close tie between patience, perseverance and hope [cf. Rm 5:5, ff.]. Fr. Bertoni noted the need for patience in the exercise of hope:

"... The Lord will supply the means and, in time, will see it through ..." [cf. Letter 13, in: Ep p. 52].

k. The Stigmatine Founder's trust in Divine Providence began early in his life, and seems to be one of the strong points of his spirituality:

"...Blessed are they indeed who trust in Divine Providence! They have nothing to fear that anything could ever really stand in their way, and that would frustrate Its designs. Divine Providence sweetly but strongly at one and the same time, disposes all things for Its own purposes. All things, both pleasant and adverse, as well as the good and evil of human beings, serve It in equal manner: 'In the heavens, on the earth, in the ocean, in the depths, Yahweh's will is sovereign' (cf. Ps 135:5, f.). - (Mordechai's Prayer): 'And there is no one who can with stand You in Your will to save Israel' (cf. Est 13:9 - Vulgate; 4:17, in JB) - 'We know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love Him, with all those He has called according to His purposes (cf. Rm 8:28).

"And we still have another most serious commandment to hope that our misery will one day be changed into such glory, and that we will indeed be similar to Him. May He be thanked, blessed and loved for ever! " [cf. Letter 13, in: Ep p. 52]

l. Fr. Bertoni made his own a great many Ignatian principles of spirituality - but there is one that he repeated very often. It is not unlike the idea from John of the Cross that one obtains from God just as much as one dares to hope from Him. From St. Ignatius, the Stigmatine Founder was deeply convinced that God would do great things in the lives of believers if only they would not place obstacles in His way. he wrote:

"... There are very few who understand what it is that God would do in them, if one He was not impeded by them in His designs. We cannot even think what God would do with us, and how much He would achieve in us and for us - since we are the pupils of His eye - if only we would not place obstacles in the way of His grace, but would simply, freely and totally hand our lives over to him [cf. Mss B # 5480].

m. This grand idea is echoed by a modern Protestant theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, who holds that original sin is not so much the titanic desire to be as God is, but rather the refusal to be all that God wants. Fr. Bertoni repeated the idea very often: it has been called 'one of the corner-stones of his spirituality' [cf. CS IV, p. 181]. It is found in his own Spiritual Diary [cf. MP, December 2, 1808; May 18th, 1811]. He preached it to the priests who made his Retreat [cf. Mss # 2180] - it is found in his Letters of spiritual direction [cf. Letters 19; 21] - and he wrote it in a letter to a Monsignor Biraghi [February 19, 1832]. The principle seems to have come to Fr. Bertoni

from his repeated readings of a biography of St. Ignatius, written by the Jesuit, Fr. Mariani:

“... Very few are they who even know what it is that God would do with them if only He were not impeded by them in His designs for them. It is a pity that the Reign of God is not accepted by all! Whoever really wants to enter there is called upon to break his stride, even when going full speed ahead, with the denials of certain appetites that prove to slow one down in the long run: ‘Try your best to enter by the narrow door...’ (cf. Lk 13:24). Put aside friendships, clothes, reputation and even life itself, should this be necessary...” [cf. Mss B # 4047].

n. The principle is found in two letters of spiritual direction, in close proximity to one another, written to Mother Leopoldina Naudet:

“...How few are they who ever understand what God would do with them if only He was not impeded by them in His designs! This is to be noted not only in individual persons, but also in the totality of Society. We should exercise extraordinary diligence to do all in our power whatever is necessary and not to impede what God can and wishes to do on His part: ‘I considered Your works and was overwhelmed’ (Old Liturgy of Good Friday). In fact, if we would only proceed with diligence, bringing others to walk along in harmony, we would see such magnificent works accomplished by the Almighty hand of God. We would not only be happily surprised, but even amazed, simply overwhelmed with admiration: ‘Blessed be Yahweh who performs marvels of love for me!’ (cf. Ps 31:20)” [cf. Letter 19, in: Ep, pp. 61, ff.].

o. The principle, then, as Fr. Bertoni saw it, did not apply merely to individuals, but also to communities: what wonders can still be accomplished with God’s help! He synthesized it all in a vivid faith, and continuing prayer:

“... How very few are they who even know what God might do with them, and what they could never achieve by their own efforts - if only He was not impeded by them in His plans. Ultimately, everything - in the last analysis - is reduced to an act of faith, and to incessant prayer. Let us allow Him to enter freely and to take full possession of this soul, that He loves so much, and really desires to unite to Himself...” [cf. Letter 21, in: Ep, p. 66].

p. Fr. Bertoni’s hope in the omnipotent power of God was somewhat paradoxical in the traditional sense, based on St. Ignatius of Loyola’s principle: ‘Pray as though all depended on God, and struggle as though it all depended on you.’ His hope was not passive, but active, firmly based on thoughts such as this one:

“... Let us leave it all up to God: He knows how to bring it to a happy conclusion, and He will surely do His part...” [cf. Letter 22, in: Ep, p. 68].

2. A Hope based on God, the Son

a. Almost in lyrical language, the Stigmatine Founder presents a kind of Canticle in honor of Jesus Christ, the Priest of the Most High - Who has offered through His life, the perfect sacrifice for sinners:

“... The Name of Jesus means a Savior, not in some particular manner of just a few - but, the universal savior of all, as St. Paul writes, ‘Christ has died for all’ (cf. 2 Co 14:15). His offering is in no way limited by time, since Jesus has an eternal priesthood, and therefore, perpetually He is able to save anyone who through Him draws close to God. Jesus is ever alive to intercede on our behalf (cf. Ep 7:24, ff.)

“He is not limited to any number of faults, since there can be found in Him a mercy without any restriction that would determine or limit Him: ‘with the Lord, there is mercy’. His is a super-abundant redemption, without measure: ‘copious redemption is to be found in Him’ (cf. Vulgate, Ps 109: 7). Therefore, in Him it will always be true that where iniquity has abounded, grace abounds even more (cf. Rm 5:20)...

“If my pleading here today has gained nothing, I turn to Christ, crucified love ... by Your infinite clemency, pour out the oil of Your Name into the hearts of the most obstinate, that they might be softened that they might be rendered able to strengthened to trust in You in all things so that they might never despair of rising up again and that once risen up, they might be illuminated, nourished and preserved. Let them experience all the other effects of this love, as an oil spread throughout the world. To Your Name, O Jesus, may there be honor, praise, blessing, and thanksgiving for ever...” [cf. Sermon 9, ‘The Name of Jesus’, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 1802 - in: PVC, pp. 244,250].

b. Fr. Bertoni often preached about the infinite Mercy of God, as revealed through Jesus Christ:

“... Why wait longer to throw yourselves into the arms of this divine Mercy, while there is still time before this Mercy gives way to Justice which we have much offended and irritated? Now is the proper time for our penance to be accepted [cf. Sermon 10, ‘Universal Judgment’, November 28, 1802, in: PVC, pp. 92, ff.].

c. An ardent hope in Christ the Savior permeates so much of the writings of the Stigmatine Founder which have come down to us:

“...the Supreme King of Heaven wishes to liberate us with His grace, and to enrich us with His gifts. Therefore, we ought to feel with ever greater joy the approach of that most fortunate day, that most joyful moment, that surpasses all imagination in happiness and joy for us...” [cf. Sermon 25, ‘The Advent of the Lord’, December 9, 1804, in: PVC, p. 227].

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There are many texts of Fr. Bertoni in which he clearly places his hope in the Paschal Mystery. The aspect of Fr. Bertoni’s devotion to the Crucified has already been studied. The Lord Jesus, with His Stigmata preserved in His resurrected body,

invites the Apostles to continue that Mission that He received from His Father [cf. Jn 20:21], all the way to a share in the glory that is now His. Fr. Bertoni in his ardent preaching, following the Patristic tradition, “hides” himself, takes refuge in the open side of Jesus Christ: the Stigmatine Devotions to the Sacred Stigmata and to the Espousals of Mary and Joseph, also express his hope. Thus, the Hope of the Stigmatine Founder might be considered in the way that follows:

1.] The Glorious Christ

a.] Fr. Bertoni looked upon Jesus Christ as the “Victor” in the terrible “ordeal” which all the baptized must endure, offering to all now a share in His own hard-won glory:

“... The glorious Conqueror, Jesus Christ, has already risen after having conquered sin and the demon by death. You increase the glory of His triumph when you see to it that He also conquers sin, the devil, in each one of you in particular...” [cf. Sermon 23, 1804, in: PVC, p.99].

b.] In a dramatic sermon for Easter, one year early in his priesthood, Fr. Bertoni invited a contemplation of the Sorrowful Wounds of the Passion as a means of conversion:

“...Look at the Man! Just look at this Body, how lacerated it is with so many wounds that have not only taken from Him all beauty, all grace, but have even taken from Him the aspect of being a man! Just reflect on His head, pierced by so many thorns, these hands and feet, how wounded they are. Look at it all, and the sorrow this conjures up will respond to the deepest yearnings of your hearts. Yet, even the deepest sorrow possible would never arrive at what is merited.

“On Your part, O Jesus, see the compassion that these good people tend toward You. Now, it is up to You to speak to them, and to tell them what it is that can console Your pierced Heart... When they come now to venerate Your wounds, and to mix their tears with Your Blood... they might come to understand and to fulfill what it is that You now ask of their hearts

“As for me, if you wish to find me, look for me in the Wound of the side of Christ. There I will remain, and it will be easy to find me. Anywhere else, you will seek in vain (cf. Cornelius a’ Lapide). Christ awaits you now, and prepares for you - rather, a throne! [cf. Sermon 38, in: PVC, pp. 289; 299].

c.] This Sermon on Easter does offer us some deep insights into his own classical faith in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. The Paschal Mystery is the ultimate source of Fr. Bertoni’s charism and, of course, of his hope:

“... You have completed during these recent days the lamentations of penance, and have achieved in this, your justification, celebrated today - as I am deeply convinced - by all of you on this Easter. I can almost see you all now, resurrected in

Christ, walking joyfully in the newness of life, hurrying on ahead with the anxious disciples, to see Christ in Galilee.

“I am speaking now with believers, who from fear and contrition ascend securely to confidence in Divine Mercy. I see you ascending from the joys of time and the consolation of the world, going through compunction and that grief which are of God. You have now passed over into a holy and devout exultation, into a lively spiritual joy in the Holy Spirit. I see you all rejoicing the more in the memory which inflames within you the desire for eternal rewards than previously the recollection of past faults had weighed you down...

“You have resurrected with Christ... in proposing the future resurrection, St. Paul demands of us all another resurrection: i.e., a new direction of life at this present moment, by a change in our attitudes...” [cf. *ib.*, pp. 289, ff.].

d.] Fr. Bertoni manifested some fascination with the wound in Christ’s side, inflicted according to John’s Gospel, even after Jesus’ death had already been ascertained. Fr. Bertoni writes:

“... The side of Christ, opened after His death, shows us that Heart, the Heart wounded with the lance. This wound was retained in His glorious body, and renders the Heart a symbol that is so moving, evident, divine, that it is impossible to venerate His Wound without remembering and worshipping His immense love...” [cf. *Mss B # 1771*; cf. *Nello*, Part 2, p. 388].

e.] A few years after these Homilies were delivered, Fr. Bertoni preached the Spiritual Exercises to the Priests and Seminarians of Verona. Following St. Ignatius, the Stigmatine Founder offers a vision of the Wounds of Christ preserved in His Risen Body:

“... Just imagine that you see Him, just as He appeared to them, alive and luminous, and with the scars of His Wounds. He is also inviting you to go with Him to heaven, and He explicitly states the purpose of His leaving: ‘I go to prepare a place for you!’ (cf. *Jn 14:2*)... We began these ‘Spiritual Exercises’ with a Meditation on the goal of humanity and now we return to this same theme. We have stated, with St. Paul, that the proximate end is our own sanctification (cf. *1 Th 4:2*). The resurrection of Christ is precisely our model in this.

“The ultimate end is eternal life and in the Ascension of Christ there is brought home to us that eternal life is the goal toward which we should always tend...” [cf. *CS I*, pp. 230, ff.].

f.] Fr. Bertoni personally was very convinced of the presence of the Merciful Christ in his own life and it is this that he shared particularly in his preaching”

“... Christ is simply the necessary principle for all of this - by the Lord’s Mercy I can make of Him the foundation of my life so much so that in these days, rather than denying me this, He makes me feel His merciful presence all the more strongly in His inspirations. Hence, it is so certain that I ought to operate with this principle in mind. In this sense, the carrying out of the work of my resurrection and sanctification depends on me..” [l.c.].

2.] Union with Christ in Glory, the Spouse of the Soul

a.] The very real, lived and “experienced” foundation of Fr. Bertoni’s Hope was his vivid faith in the Presence of the Suffering and Glorious Christ in his own life. He deeply believed in this union with Christ, Who comes to the soul under the form of Mercy, the Ultimate Motive of Christian Hope:

“... The time is short and the appearance of this world soon has its end. On the contrary, each of us, every day, with giant steps forward, are approaching a lasting eternity. Therefore, whatever we have to do, it is fitting that we should do it now, in great haste. Are we, perhaps, waiting for the night to settle in, to begin to work? Will we wait, by chance, for the Spouse, for Him to supply oil for our lamps that have already gone out? Will we wait for Him to invite us to the nuptials, to begin only then to weave the cloth for our wedding garments?

“Behold, I come soon!’ and I am bringing with me your reward...!’ [cf. Sermon 11, April 20, 1801, “Devotion”, in: PVC p. 206].

b.] Fr. Bertoni personally, perhaps through the trying events of his early life, was deeply impressed with the passing nature of this world. Therefore, much of his preaching centered upon “being ready”. He did preach the demands of God, but also with evident insistence on the fact that He would come in great love. The following is one indication of his deep faith and love:

“...’if anyone will open to Me, I will come to him’. Here He speaks as a guest who comes in the night. It means simply this: that He will forget all past injuries and all rejections, and He is expressing His will to live with you with a great familiarity of friendship, and is disposed to receive your obsequious response.

“He does not merely say: ‘I will enter’ - but, He also adds: ‘And I will sup with him, and he with Me’ (cf. Apoc. 3:20) - i.e., I will really make Myself at home with him, and I will spread around great joy, as is customary among friends. And the host will do likewise with Me. This cell is made so pleasant by the sharing of My Sacraments and in the generous communication of My most moving secrets: ‘I’, says the Lord, ‘will have no difficulty in receiving My host at My own table’.

“It may be noted that Christ still speaks here as a Guest, but One Who is very rich and grateful. On entering another’s house, He blesses the host for more than He receives ... St. John Chrysostom would say that He is like a King who has fallen in love with a lowly shepherd girl. He has already decided to take her from her hut, and bring her

to His royal apartments and make her His wife. He is not content with sending important emissaries to win her hand, but comes Himself ...

“In reality, our loving King was so carried away by His love, so to speak, that He even gave up His life for us...” [cf. Sermon 8, ‘The House of Loreto’, December 13, 1801, in: PVC pp. 306,f.].

c.] The Stigmatine Founder uses the Nuptial Theme often as a motive for hope in his Letters of spiritual direction:

“... Can you not hear the Gospel that cries out with such power: ‘Set your hearts on His kingdom first, and on His righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well’ (cf. Mt 6:33).’So, do not worry about tomorrow ...’ (v. 34). And also: ‘Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or land for the sake of My Name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life’ (cf. Mt 19:29).

“Common sense itself states that it is the task of the spouse to be ready to please her Husband, and that it pertains to Him to find a home and to lead His spouse to it...” [cf. Letter 32, June 28, 1813, in: Ep p. 86].

Summary: Holy Abandonment is not merely allowing the lord to work when we are not able to do so. Abandonment is far more present when we are still able to do something, but nevertheless commit ourselves to Him. Abandonment is not merely waiting that the Will of God be known, but it is a positive searching, a choosing of God’s Will, and surrendering all else in total dependence. Fr. Bertoni believed that this is how the Church herself operates. The exercise of Holy Abandonment became for him his most sublime expression of veneration for the Spouse of Christ, looked upon, as he did, as a perfect model of abandonment into the hands of God [cf. Nello dalle Vedove, Part II, p. 520].

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3.] Union with the Mission of the Glorious Christ, Spouse of the Church:

a.] This is a Hope that finds strength in the Principle of “Instrumentality”, or “**The Espousals Principle**”. The more intimately one is united with Jesus Christ and the Church, the more effective does his Apostolic Mission become. In this sense, even ordinary talent becomes “extraordinary” through prayerful union with Jesus Christ. Jesus is espoused to the Church, and His Power is channeled through her by loyalty to her Bishops.

b.] This ideal flows from the Thomistic teaching on “Instrumental Causality”. St. Ignatius expressed this in a number of his letters. He stated that ordinary talent, and even that which might not even merit being called ‘ordinary’, often becomes an instrument of very notable apostolic effectiveness for the simple reason that one strives to act from the supernatural motivation of intimate union with the Principal Agent, Jesus Christ. On the contrary, other talents, even extraordinary

ones, produce an inferior apostolic efficacy for the simple reason that they are separated from the Principal Agent, or only remotely joined to Him in the Apostolic Mission.

c.] Fr. Bertoni has a series of insights that could easily be understood in this light:

“...God saves His elect with determined instruments, and in a determined manner [cf. Mss B 6874] ... Good and wise preachers who with well prepared sermons defend the people from hidden enemies - by their good lives, in imitation of Christ, are powerful with their example. They are thus able to give support to those who may be wavering. By their good lives in following our Lord they bring light to those struggling in the darkness ...” [cf. Mss B 6892; 6936; cf. also Nello, o.c., pp. 358. ff.].

d.] Fr. Bertoni saw this divine effectiveness in his theology of grace and the religious life, flowing to the Apostolic Missionary:

“... The graces that come to the instruments who are chosen and converted to God, flow from the Shepherd, Who is the Head. They are diffused to the flock and to the members. This comes first to the priestly preachers and doctors, then through the different Orders of active and contemplative life...” [cf. Mss B 7077; Nello, p. 368].

e.] There is a grace, and also a power received by loyalty to the Church. This kind of spirituality is clearly reflected in the life of Leopoldina Naudet, for many years directed by Fr. Bertoni. She wrote once:

“... Since I was deprived of all human assistance and support with the death of the Arch-Duchess, I exercised even greater confidence in God. In His works He often chooses the most humble of instruments and lowly individuals, so that His glory might shine out the more...” [cf. Nello, p. 614].

3. **A Hope based on God, the Holy Spirit [cf. + Jose Alberto Moura, CSS, *The Holy Spirit in the Charism of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni*. Rome: 1988].**

a. The Stigmatine Founder nurtured a “devotion” to the Holy Spirit in the fullest meaning of that word. As he once explained in a sermon, taken from the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, as understood by St. Francis de Sales:

“... True devotion essentially consists in a will that is ready **to give of itself for service** (cf. 2-2, q. 82, a. 1)” [cf. Sermon II, “Devotion”, April 20, 1801, in: PVC, p. 203].

b. In this sense, one can discern a lived, an “experienced” presence of the Holy Spirit in his life, precisely as the Giver of Hope:

“...In order to shed greater light on the matter, it would perhaps not be out of place here to introduce a teaching of great brilliance of the Angelic Doctor, a teaching

which was taught before him by St. Augustine. In the Law of the Gospel, two things should be considered:

“- the principal matter of celebration is the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who gives of Himself by means of faith in Christ;

“- the second is the reading, i.e., the scriptures of the Holy Gospel in which are contained only those things which pertain to Grace - either as disposing one to receive it, or matters that pertain to the manner of using this grace (cf. St. Thomas, 1-2, q. 106, a.1).

“As for that which disposes the intellect for the faith, by which means grace is received, there are contained in the Gospel those principles which pertain manifesting the Divinity, or the humanity of Christ; as far as the effect is concerned, there are contained in the Gospel those directions which pertain to the disdain of the world, by which a person is rendered capable of receiving the Holy Spirit. The reason is that the “world”, i.e., those who love this world, cannot receive the Holy Spirit, as St. John states (cf. 1 Jn 14:17].

“The use of this spiritual grace is manifest in the works of virtue and it is to these that the Scripture of the New testament exhorts the faithful in many ways.

“ And since everything else seems to be defined by that which is principal in it, e.g., a human being by reason - so principally the New Law is that grace given by the Holy Spirit to the faithful. Hence, the Apostle calls it: ‘the Law of Faith, the Law of the Spirit and the Life in Jesus Christ (cf. Rm 3:27; 8:2)’.

“And St. Augustine asks: ‘What are these Laws, if not the very presence of the Holy Spirit?’ (cf. *De Spiritu et Lettera*, c. 21). It is to this level that the glory of our situation is raised...” [cf. Sermon 20, ‘The Law of the Gospel’, June 2, 1803, in: PVC, pp. 26, ff.].

c. Fr. Bertoni speaks of a kind of Espousals, or nuptials, between the Faithful and the Holy Spirit:

“... By grace, you have been raised up to the divine nature, in which you have participated. You are the children of God. Christ is our Brother. You have been declared the heirs of God. Your souls are indeed the Spouses of the Holy Spirit. Has He not bestowed on them a most rich pledge of precious gifts? Were not the most august Princes of Heaven destined to bring them here to earth? Did not the very Son of God descend from heaven, putting on your nature, just to converse with you? Could I, then, ever watch with indifference, tranquillity, the masters of this earth, the princes of heaven, the children of God, the spouses of God - humiliated under shameful slavery, being made into slaves of the lowest type, subjected to tyranny...? “ [cf. Sermon 23, April 2, 1804 - in: PVC, p. 33].

d. This special, intimate union with God is the dignity of the Christian in this faith-view of Fr. Bertoni. Through the Holy Spirit, the believer becomes one and the same’ with the Lord, through a kind of sponsal union:

“... You should keep in mind those two sayings of the Lord. The first one is: ‘Without Me, you can do nothing’ (cf. Jn 15:5). The second is: ‘There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One Who gives me strength’ (cf. Ph 4:13).

“Therefore, always be ready and waiting. This will all be revealed one day, and we have His word for it...” [cf. Letter 32, in: Ep, p. 87].

e. The Stigmatine Congregation, at least in the mind and heart of its Founder, is a work of the Holy Spirit. Its Rule and its “obsequious” service of the Church are inspired by the presence of the Holy Spirit in it. Fr. Bertoni wrote these thoughts, not so much concerning his own Constitutions, even though he did think they were the work of God. He described the work of Leopoldina Naudet, struggling with the writing of her Rule, in these words:

“... As far as the Rules are concerned: you ought to keep them before your heart with the utmost - even exquisite - diligence to prepare them so that you might follow the gentle Providence of our Lord, Who asks this of you. It is already evident that His prime intention is to inspire into your mind the Living Rule, which is the Spirit, and to write deep within your heart the entire Law, or Constitution of His charity and His love. Therefore, in all that has to do with the Divine Glory of your Most Holy Spouse, Christ our Lord, you should not let yourself be impeded by anyone of this world. Furthermore, you should not place even the slightest impediment yourself in the way of that which He indeed really wants to write. He will perform all the more, and with the greater necessity for His own glory, and out of love for you, and of all those who are to receive this Rule from you...” [cf. Letter 21, in: Ep, p. 67].

f. In the compilation of his own Constitutions, Fr. Bertoni used as his principal source the work of Fr. Francis Suarez, SJ, and his classical Commentary on the theology behind St. Ignatius’ idea for what it means to be in the “Society”, in the “Company” of Jesus [cf. *De Religione Societatis Iesu*]. In this work, Fr. Suarez spoke of the variety of ‘founders’ in working out the plan for the Society of Jesus:

“... In the work of founding the Society, three causes might be taken into consideration:

- “- the primary and principal cause, which is God;
- “- the proximate and ministerial cause, which is the human being whom God has illuminated and inspired in thinking up this wonderful work;
- “- the third is the Apostolic See, which, in the Name of God, as taking the place of Christ on earth, has accepted and confirmed this religious institute by its authority [cf. Suarez, *De Religione Societatis Iesu*, lib. I, c. 4, n. 1, pp. 575, ff.].

g. The Stigmatine Founder was most convinced that the Congregation he founded was the work of the Holy Spirit [cf. CE # 185], and that all Stigmatines are called to serve the Church, through their assistance of the Bishops. In his mind, these Bishops, following the Acts of the Apostles, were chosen by the Holy Spirit [cf. Ac 20:28]. Fr. Bertoni’s “devotion” to the Holy Spirit is evident in this key, and necessarily oft-quoted consideration of the very core, the central ideal of his charism:

“Since the scope of our Congregation is to serve the Church with the various and proper ministries of its vocation, under the direction of the Bishops, it is to be noted that this, at times, is a most arduous and difficult undertaking. This is particularly so when one considers the fragility of men, and it might seem that it is a call that is exposed to dangers.

“Nonetheless, this program of our particular dedication to the Church still, even with this in mind, cannot be called imprudent, or rash. The reasons are:

“In the first place, because we believe that the carrying out of this vocation does not depend on human strength alone, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit: ‘since the One Who has inspired and begun this good work, He Himself will lead it to fulfillment’ (cf. Ph 1:6) - whenever it is a question of keeping it on its feet and our human resources do not suffice. This is, in fact, the special grace of our vocation, a grace which is more powerful than any danger or difficulty.

“ Secondly, with this program, we do not propose for ourselves any exposure to dangers, nor do we go to this, rather than to some other place; nor do we perform this, or that action, of our own whim. In all, we choose to follow the direction of the orthodox Bishop placed by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church of God. This is a means that is sure enough to keep one from erring in the ways of the Lord.

“Finally, the Congregation itself is to exercise care both in the approval of its members, as well as in the choice of them, and in sustaining them and strengthening them with every means.” [CE # 185].

h. As does all theology, Fr. Bertoni also attributes to the Holy Spirit a special role in maintaining charity in the community. It was originally conceived as one made up of a variety of members, each assigned with special competence, to a particular area of the ministry. Thus, it would so happen that charity would really be tried on the community level. With this in mind, the majority of his Constitutions pertain to charity among the members. The following insight came to him from the tradition of the Church:

“... Since it is true that nothing helps to have genuine charity toward another person than to notice in him the singular traits of virtue that are in him through the Holy Spirit. One great means for this is to contemplate the other person as the image of God, painted with the most beautiful colors of grace. If, therefore, all would strive to increase in these virtues, and to consider them often in others, if they would only really believe in their hearts that others are truly superior to them and that they enjoy spiritual gifts which can be discerned in them, and come to thank God for them, then mutual charity would increase among them in a marvelous manner [cf. CE # 223 - a direct quote from Suarez].

i. This Constitution 223 has come to Fr. Bertoni from Suarez - who may have received it directly from St. Paul. With such sentiments, the Apostle to the Gentiles

introduced his Christological Hymn celebrating the *kenosis* of the Divine Son. As St. Paul tried to inculcate in this "Letter from Captivity" the virtue of fraternal humility, as it has been called, he offers this principle:

"... Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interest first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds, you must be as Christ Jesus... Who emptied Himself..." [cf. Ph 2: 5. ff.]

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[B] The Secondary Motive of Christian Hope: Human Misery, Weakness

1. Throughout his long life Fr. Bertoni had ample contact with human weakness: in his years as Confessor, in his own personal life through the experience of so much intense human physical suffering, through his early experiences with the deaths of his loved ones in his home. All of these factors forcefully shaped his deep sense of compassion and feeling for others and enabled him to look at God as coming to meet humanity with His omnipotent mercy, in its abysmal misery [cf. Ps 103]. From the experiences of his early life, and for as long as he lived thereafter, he had a highly developed sense of the fragility of human life, the rapid passing of time [cf. Ps 90, and the Wisdom Tradition]. He had a marked sense of his own "creaturality", seeing his own life as a free gift from God and as the substrate of all the many additional gifts that came to him: grace and vocation. With this deep sense of the gratuity of God's gift of life, Fr. Bertoni understood the infinite distance between God and man already to a profound extent and then his faith-vision of sin that even distanced humanity from God even further.

2. All of these factors developed in him a fervent hope in the Father as the Creator of heaven and earth, and the God of life. He saw the Son as the Redeemer and Savior of all humanity, and the Holy Spirit as the tireless Sanctifier, the Lord and Giver of Life - for all those who would strive to be docile to Him. All of this convinced Fr. Bertoni more and more, in his own physical and spiritual weakness, to trust implicitly, and to abandon himself totally into the arms of the merciful God. He once preached as a Deacon:

"...Should there be here the most sinful human being, I would not be dissuaded from the horror of his sins, nor from the strength of his chains. I would simply say to him: rise up, go up on this carriage of humility, and you will see its benefit in comparison to any Pharisee who might reject you. Offer to God the most humble prayer, and He will extend His hand for you to ascend. The Lord will know how to lift you on high from the mud in order to situate you among the princes of His realm (cf. Ps 113:7, ff.)..." [This is an excerpt from his first public parochial sermon, delivered as a Deacon on June 8, 1800, entitled "Humility". cf. PVC, p. 148. The entire series of the Stigmatine Founder's parochial expression of preaching in this aspect of his Apostolic Mission begins here, with "Humility"].

3. The "Sweet Name of Jesus" offers itself as Medicine - is one of his thoughts from another Sermon. He would apply a similar theme to the Eucharist, as a God-given remedy for human weakness. He said:

“...Our task is to suggest a clear light against the darkness of the human mind and the interior confusion that comes. My task is to offer food, authentic pasturage, for the well-being of the flock, that has been led so often to weeds. These words should provide a health-restoring medicine against the disorders of the senses.

“All of these results can be seen being effected by this Most Holy Name. The Holy Name is like an oil that is poured out, and that serves for light, for nourishment, for medicine. These are precisely the properties of oil, as St. Bernard has so eloquently noted...” [cf. Sermon 15, the “Canticles”].

“This oil is furthermore medicine against disordered passion. In fact, just in pronouncing this Name, there is immediately presented to our mind the most perfect human being Who is also God. He is, therefore, the mirror of every virtue and the font of all grace. He does not only invite with His gentle example, but far more He inspires efficacious assistance with which to repress them, to moderate them...” [cf. Sermon 9, “The Holy Name of Jesus”, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 1801, in: PVC, pp. 246, ff.].

4. It is interesting to note in the Gospel [cf. ~~John~~ John] that in the commissioning of His disciple for the Apostolic Mission, that Jesus showed them His Sacred Stigmata. Immediately thereafter, He communicated to them the power of the Holy Spirit by “breathing” upon them, to forgive sins: John’s special rendition of the “Apostolic Mission.”

a. The Stigmatine Founder spoke often about “Confession”, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in his Constitutions. He presents this aspect of the Apostolic Mission for the Stigmatines as one of the principal duties of the Apostolic Missionary, the “Professed”, the few men admitted to the Fourth Vow [cf. also CE ## 44; 47; 72; 73; 118; 162; 168; 183; 291; 292; 296].

b. It is also an historical fact that in the long years of his involuntary confinement due to his illnesses, that this was about the only ministry that was left open to him. However, even in his preaching he showed a great interest in this important form of the Apostolic Mission in his charism, and he offers this compassionate description of the ideal Stigmatine Confessor:

“... The goodness and the mercy of Christ have been communicated to the Confessor. In fact, when the priest sits in the sacred tribunal of penance, he represents the Person of Christ Himself, and takes His place. Scripture teaches that Christ was always very far from rejecting in harsh disdain even the most wretched of sinners, provided they showed genuine signs of repentance and had recourse to Him. He always treated the Publicans with great affability. He accepted lovingly the tears of the lost Magdalenes. He sent away in full freedom the adulteresses already condemned to death. He promised to lead back with Him that very day into Paradise a thief who turned toward Him on the Cross, after previously having blasphemed Him.

“With such a witness how could His minister not treat with the same spirit of leniency and gentleness, the most timid of sinners who present themselves to him? How

could the Confessor ever show horror at the wounds which the Divine Doctor reaches out to heal with equal gentleness and effectiveness. He does not heal with pouring out merely oil and wine, but, a kind of heavenly balm, His most precious Blood, totally poured out..." [cf. Sermon 10, "On Confession", in: PVC, pp. 59, ff.]

6. It was most fitting that on the day of his Beatification, Pope Paul VI eulogized Fr. Bertoni in his homily at the Eucharistic Celebration on All saints' Day in 1985, with these words:

"... Gaspar Bertoni, a priest of the Diocese of Verona, and Founder of the Stigmatine Congregation... as a young priest, He was formed in the Ignatian school, and poured himself out for the well being of his neighbor. He did what he could to heal the wounds left by the French Austrian War ... An expert confessor, he gave the best he had to the development of vocations, encouraging other religious communities which were just forming... His life was indeed a continuous immolation..."

7. Following a long tradition, the Stigmatine Founder considered sins already confessed as elements of a most sublime holiness:

"... God assures you of this whenever you resolve to place with vivid sorrow and deep sincerity your failings at the feet of one of His ministers - not only does this remove from you all confusion, but this also changes these into a glory as sublime as the previous shame was degrading ..." [cf. Sermon 10, ib., in: PVC, p. 57].

8. Fr. Bertoni was most realistic in the spiritual direction that he offered. He realized that failures were always possible in the spiritual life, but he saw them all as "wounds" that could be healed by the Mercy of God:

"... and if, in the struggle there should happen because of our weakness, that some wounds might be inflicted, we cannot lose heart. We have to keep in mind that the medicine is ready and is effective. Let us restore ourselves immediately with greater courage than previously and trust ever more in God, and let us take up once more our course. And when we least think of it, we will see all our difficulties overcome, our every enemy weakened. And there is thus assured for us that crown which is promised to all who struggle (cf. 2 Co 2:5) - i.e., with perseverance unto the end ..." [cf. Sermon 17, "On Perseverance", April 11, 1803, n: PVC, p. 120].

9. One of Fr. Bertoni's principles was that the greater is one's misery, the greater "right" does one have for God's mercy:

:... Should it be that the soil of our hearts is desert, arid and abandoned, then it is all the more worthy than ever to be inhabited by you. While we do lack the knowledge and the capacity to bring such terrain to cultivation, yet You, Lord, might shower upon it those gratuitous blessings, that would indicate that You have set such soil aside for Your inheritance (cf. Ps 68:9, ff.). And when Your inheritance is filled with such goods, it will then form an eternal object of Your praise..." [cf. Sermon 21, "Divine Benefits", December 31, 1803, in PVC, pp. 137, f.].

10. Some modern theologians speak of a possible derivation of the word “future” as coming from the Greek word, *phusis*, meaning “nature”. In this sense, the future shall be like the present essentially, but it is just projected to “later on”. These theologians point out that authentic Christianity is based on “**Advent**”, which means the “totally new” which derives from the Incarnation, as Christ is to come ever anew into human life. Fr. Bertoni was the faithful interpreter of the standing tradition, sees “Advent” as a motive of great hope in the Infinite Mercy of God:

“... In fact, the Son of God descends from heaven to save that which was lost (cf. Mt 18:11)... It is up to us who are sinners, oppressed by the misery of our own failings, and detained shamefully in the slavery of our vices, that there is directed the announcement of an imminent, most blessed visit of the Supreme Regent of the Havens. He wishes to free us with his grace and to enrich us with His precious gifts. Therefore, we ought to feel with great pleasure the closeness of that blessed day, of that most joyful moment, one that is so happy and promising for us, that surpasses all imagination.

“ So, each one of us should say: ‘Courage, my poor heart, rejoice in the mercy of your Lord, and He will fulfill all your desires’: ‘Make Yahweh your only joy and He will give you what your heart desires (cf. Ps 37:4). To You, o Lord, I have lifted up my soul. I trust in You, and I will never be ashamed for having hoped in you. But as You accomplish what You will, and which I hope from You, my enemies will cease from ridiculing me, and in deriding my vows ... The reason is that no one who awaits You will ever remain confused or ashamed.

“‘To You, o Lord, I lift up my soul, o my God. I rely upon You, do not let me be shamed, do not let my enemies gloat over me! No, those who hope in You are never shamed, shame awaits only disappointed traitors...’” (cf. Ps 25:1-3)” [Sermon 25, “The Advent of Our Lord”, December 9, 1804, in: PVC, pp. 227, f].

11. While he clearly saw its real difficulties, the Stigmatine Founder never lowered his ideals concerning the authentic living of the Christian vocation, and the Apostolic Mission. As is true of all genuine hope, its object remains a future good, difficult, but **possible**:

“... God will never reject a sincere penitent even if a person might fall into the pit of all evils. Rather, the Lord always receives such a one, embraces him, assists him to get up again, and to recover his pristine dignity.

“Furthermore, and this is an indication of His even greater kindness, the very first steps that one makes on the way to repentance, even though these might be meager and imperfect, and even though these are the only indications of a change of heart - the Lord will never reject these simple indications of a change of heart. The Lord will never reject these but responds to them by putting on them the rich garlands [of victory]... In bodily sickness we should never lose hope. Why, then should we ever lose it in those weaknesses of soul? These are never terminal illnesses, while those of the body often are. If it were so that any one who might have sinned seriously could never recuperate, I stand here to say that no one, perhaps only the very, very few would ever put foot in Paradise.

“It is the exact opposite that is noted: even the most illustrious Saints have been chosen from among those who first were among the fallen. Just think of St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Paul. The explanation for this lies in the fact that the very same ardor with which they first accomplished evil, they then turned around to doing good. And for this reason, the Evil One makes every effort to impede their conversion - for he knows that if they even begin the way of conversion and repentance, they will no longer be able to help themselves, for they will come to commit themselves with such fervor to serve Christ, knowing that from their debts they will become innocent and immaculate: ‘And the last will be first!’ (cf. Mt 19:30)” [cf. Sermon 27, “Desperation”, January 27, 1805, in: PVC, pp. 41, f.].

12. God has revealed Himself also as a loving Mother [cf. Ps 131; Is 66:12, f], full of love and care for His children:

“... How wonderful are the piety and goodness of the Lord! Should He see one of us through our human weakness wavering in our exalted position, and on the verge of falling into our native baseness - He, as a loving Mother, stretches out His hand to keep us from falling - just as Scripture notes: ‘He may fall, but never fatally, as Yahweh supports Him by the hand!’ (cf. Ps 37:24). Even should one do evil, He both sweetly, but powerfully, can lift him up again. Let us then, cry out with the Psalmist: ‘In God alone is rest for my soul, from Him comes my safety; with Him alone for my Rock, my Safety, my Fortress, I can never fail... (cf. Ps 62: 1, ff.): *‘Mihi autem adhaerere Deo...’*” [cf. Letter 6, December 11, 1812, in: Ep, pp. 35, ff.].

13. The theme of God as “A Loving Mother” recurs rather often in the writings of the Stigmatine Founder:

“... More than all else, prayer, diligence, hope and humility are needed: because, in the last analysis, the humble, the meek of heart, are the ones whom God picks up in His arms as a Mother would, and takes them out of the mud...” [cf. Letter 89, in: Ep, pp. 179, f.].

“What tongue could ever praise God enough, as He indeed merits, and to give back to Him the love with which He loves us, and return in any way the most loving care that He has for us - a care that is even grater than that a Mother would have for her children...? [cf. Letter 7 to Fr. Bragato, August 1840, in: Ep, pp. 321].

“Let us reflect well in this day of light with which God consoles us, revealing to us His loving face, and entrust ourselves totally to Him - even if those moments when He seems to hide Himself. In this He acts as a loving Mother, Who plays with her children, finding great delight in being sought, desired, and called with earnestness and even with tears by her needy children. What more could He give us in heaven after having surpassed such proofs of His love, in showing us such loving and tender care now? ‘He is at play everywhere in the world, delighting to be with the sons of men...’ (cf. Pr 8:31)” [cf. Letter 31, l.c.].

14. The Stigmatine Founder uses this image of God as “Mother” in his teaching of being abandoned to God:

“... In fact, it is evident that the Lord wills that we should remember Him, and that we direct toward Him all our desires and affections, all our lives in a firm and recollected way. And should it be that for this reason we should ever forget other things, He will either remind us of them, or, through His Providence will resolve our concerns even better than we could be capable of doing, even with all our remembering and planning. We are always truly ‘diligent’ when we indeed chose to love Him - diligimus Deum - for the play on words].

“Blessed is anyone who loses himself in this abyss! Blessed is the one who throws himself trusting and as though ship-wrecked into this Ocean! An infant is never more secure than when it sleeps in its Mother’s arms, and abandons all thought and care of itself to her. In this position, the infant does not look out for itself, does not hear, or speak. And whenever she wants, the Mother may wake the infant, as he is so close to her...” [cf. Letter 36, in: Ep, p. 96].

15. Following the teachings of St. Paul, the Stigmatine Founder sees in human weakness a very strong reason for Christian hope:

“...I really know what the Apostle means when he says that strength is perfected in weakness. I also know that when I am weak, then it is that I am strong by the grace of Him Who comforts me (cf. 2 Co 12:9). In death I will remain immovable in the fulfillment of the Law of God, from Whose love then nothing else may ever separate me again. However, I do feel within myself another law, which battles against the law of my mind (cf. Ph 4:3). The spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh is weak, so I am forced to cry out: ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death?’ (cf. Rm 7:23, ff.).

“This is the situation even of the most pure among the just, as long as they live on earth, and their spirit is renewed day by day (cf. 2 Co 4:16), and this by the grace of our Savior, Jesus. Nonetheless, the flesh groans while waiting for the revelation of the children of God, until Christ will appear, our glory and resurrection, delivered from corruption, and death will be taken up in victory.

“There are some I know in whom the grace of Christ has already begun this final victory after long struggles and terrible agony. They enjoy in an anticipated manner some of the preliminary goods of that peace, even while they are still on the terrible battle-field, that is formidable for every one...” [cf. Sermon 29, “The Name of Mary”, September 15, 1805 - in: PVC, pp. 326, ff.].

16. Very clearly, then, for the Stigmatine Founder, human misery, weakness and wretchedness provides a most convincing motive for Christian Hope:

“... To such immense Mercy one has every right to entrust such immense misery ... O what a sweet thought and what comfort should this be for us! The very same misery of ours which first so confuses us and almost leads us to despair, now we see it all changed into a motive of such rich hope.

“O surely, if You, o Lord, should choose most graciously to enrich us with Your most precious gifts - should You choose to raise us up even to the honor of Your most privileged and most intimate friends, we would have no reason to take glory in our own merits and good dispositions. We are all simply too cognizant of the dust and misery of our past iniquities.

“If we are seeking for any reason to glory, then we really cannot, and even do not care to - anywhere, except in You. All those who may have known and still remember our former wretchedness, all of them can only admire Your Wisdom and Power, Who alone is able to call out those things which were non-existent, into something that exists (cf. 2 Co 10:17) - Who chooses the most abject and miserable of this world to confound the more strong! (cf. 1 Co 1:27)..” [cf. Sermon 25, “The Advent of the Lord”, December 9, 1804, in: PVC, pp. 228, ff.].

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[C] The Principal Means offered to support Christian Hope in St. Gaspar Bertoni's Thought

In the meeting of the infinite Mercy of God with the abysmal misery of humanity, Fr. Bertoni's faith nurtured his hope, principally in the employment of the following sources of spirituality. Of a wide variety of fonts, the following seem to peak in so many of his expressions:

1. The Eucharist

a. To open the New Year of 1803, Fr. Bertoni offered these thoughts on "The Beauty of Grace":

"... Make of yourselves new creatures - and may each of you be sustained by that rectitude with which the Lord first created you, raising you up to new hopes in Him. Each one of us has the task to prove how good You are to the pure of heart (cf. Ps 73:1). And then one day, no longer under the veils and in the obscure shadow of faith - as we adore You now under the Sacred Species - we will at long last be able to contemplate You, to love You, to possess You, face to face, as You have promised to the clean of heart - for all eternity, true Center, sole Purpose and last End of our hearts: 'God, create in me a clean heart,, put into me a new and constant sprit' (cf. Ps 51:10)..." [cf. Sermon 15, January 1, 1803, in: PVC, p. 129].

b. St. Gaspar Bertoni looked on the Eucharist as a means of handling even the ordinary, every-day tasks of this world:

"... By being united to true Wisdom, Who is Christ, one's mind becomes well illumined to take direction prudently in one's interests. By going to the very font of Strength, one comes to have a share in it, to be able to sustain the burden of those cares which weigh upon one, without experiencing oppression. One is truly helped and one's burdens are lessened, as Christ Himself has said: 'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest!' (cf. Mt 11:28).

"This is so true in that our loving Lord not only takes pleasure in giving grace to souls, but takes even special care of the interests of those who lovingly turn toward Him..." [Sermon 17, "Frequent Communion", March 20, 1803, in: PVC, pp. 105, ff.].

c. The Stigmatine Founder considered the Eucharist as a great help for the Apostolic Mission:

"... For the grand effort needed to divine service, the Eucharist is most surely a help. And we can work with what seems to be four hands, rather than with just two! Neither throughout, nor the study of this secret part of the glory of God - no one has ever taken it from me, nor, I hope, will I ever be impeded from working for it, from promoting it, with all the weak powers whatever of these may be at my disposal.

"So, Sister, with the offering of Masses in which more trust is to be placed than in all the efforts of my own hands and than in my studies and words, and with whatever I

might be able to do in the Lord, I offer myself now and always to your service, and to that of your compassion..." [cf. Letter 2, November 25, 1812, n: Ep, p. 27].

1.] This offering of Masses for the interests of the Apostolic Mission was an habitual manner of procedure of our Founder:

"... On Saturday, I will, with God's help, ask His divine Majesty for assistance. However, you, too, should pray that I might be made worthy and that I might myself offer this prayer at the Altar, as I really want to do. I offer this with an even greater confidence that my prayers will not be rejected by reason of my personal unworthiness..." [cf. Letter 18, in: Ep, pp., 114, f.].

2.] So many times, this idea is found in his writings, his praying for the success of some aspect of the Apostolic Mission:

"... On Thursday, I will begin the Masses, and when I am not impeded by some other reason, I will offer them at the Altar of St. Francis Xavier..." [cf. Letter 4, December 1, 1812, in: Ep, p.32].

3.] Many times he offered his Mass for the Apostolic Mission of his penitents, always presupposing that the interested parties were giving their vest to the effort:

"... When you begin this endeavor, I will once again begin the Masses, since this is all so important. It is most necessary to prepare and order things with utmost diligence, and to remember those words of St. Paul: 'The love of Christ overwhelms us!' (cf. 2 Co 5:14). [cf. Letter 6, December 11, 1812, in: Ep, pp. 34].

4.] This series of Letters all written a few days of each other, shows Fr. Bertoni accompanying the efforts of Mother Naudet with his Mass:

"... In the meantime, I will immediately begin the Masses. You, too, should begin a series of petitions. And the Lord, in His goodness, will not be lacking in His light for a matter that is so important for His interests..." [cf. Letter 7, December 14, 1812, in Ep, p. 37].

5.] This intense Eucharistic prayer carried over well into the new year:

"... I will not fail to pray to the Lord in my weakness for this new undertaking of yours. And if the Lord thinks me worthy, I will begin to apply the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. 'Prepare the way of the Lord!' (cf. is 40:3; Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4)..." [cf. Letter 18, February 3, 1813, in: Ep, pp. 60, ff.].

6.] This thought occurs so often, namely, that of offering the Mass for the Apostolic Mission, that it has to be considered as his usual manner of responding to the needs of the Church:

“... Nor, have I failed, in my own weakness, to recommend this whole matter to the Lord. I have offered Mass yesterday and this morning for this intention. I have such great confidence in this, and while my pride does not merit to be heard, nonetheless, the humble reverence of His Son will be graciously heard by the heavenly Father for His own greater honor and glory...” [cf. Letter 39, in: Ep, p. 101].

d. It pained him sorely when he was not able to further some Apostolic Mission with his own offering of the Eucharist:

“... I am really sorry that I cannot accompany this endeavor with the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. Only on Thursday, will the doctor allow me even to go to hear Mass. [Most likely “Thursday” that week of that year was the “Corpus Christi” celebration]. Perhaps you could have your companions, who may be free from study, help with a certain number of your prayers more than those called by the daily schedule. In the last analysis, endeavors of this type depend most principally on prayer...” [cf. Letter 46, June 4, 1814, in: Ep, p. 110].

1.] When he was not able to do much else, he followed the efforts of others with his daily Mass;

“... I have followed this same intention in my daily Mass, since I am unable to do any more than this...” [cf. Letter 57, October 13, 1815 - just about three weeks prior to coming to the Stimate to begin his community of priests, “according to the mind of St. Ignatius”].

2.] The Eucharist allowed him to share in the Apostolic Mission of others:

“... I have not failed with my own prayer that has been asked for, and I have also given the order for other Masses for this intention. Now I ask also for a remembrance in your prayers...” [cf. Letter 106, in: Ep, p. 199].

e. When he was able to celebrate the Eucharist, his heart was filled with great joy, and he included the intentions of Sister Naudet’s community in his offering:

“... And I immediately, and still persevere, in giving thanks to His divine Majesty in so far as I can. And as long as my strength will permit, I celebrate the Mass every day, offering to our Heavenly Father His Most Beloved Son, in Whom He is well pleased. I also pray continuously that the Lord might assist you and all your sage companions and daughters, with His Spirit. This is how He acts with those who are chosen to undertake such tasks, so that the Divine Glory might be realized. This is what He waits for, that the fruit in behalf of souls might be abundant...” [cf. Letter 186, in: Ep, p. 288].

1.] This offering of the Eucharist for the success of the Apostolic Mission is also codified in Fr. Bertoni's Original Constitutions:

"... The following are the means with which our Congregation promotes the salvation of our neighbors:

"The administration of the Sacraments, especially that of Penance and the Eucharist, imploring from God, also with the celebration of Holy Masses, the fruit of the Missions and the preaching..." # 162].

2.] In union with the consistent tradition of the Church, the Stigmatine Founder considered the Eucharist also as a powerful means to heal the wounds of life:

"... The Eucharist is an excellent medicine of the soul. St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and St. Bernard are all in accord in this saying that the Eucharist is an excellent medicine against sin. St. Cyprian wrote that the Chalice of the Lord inebriates, in that it leads the mind to spiritual wisdom and that whoever partakes of it, finds that his intelligence is geared away from the taste for this world and toward a desire for God. And just as anyone who drinks earthly and common wine might find that his mind experiences some enjoyment, and that one's spirit is built up anew and chases away all sadness. In like manner, whoever tastes the salutary drink of the Blood of the Lord, simply loses the memory of the 'old man', forgets the earlier worldly conversations. Such a one sees that while he might first have experienced the oppressions of sins that crushed him, now through the joy of the gift made to him by God, sees his anguish resolved, and that his worries become less... (cf. St. Cyprian, Letter 72, p. 11)..." [cf. Sermon 17, "Frequent Communion", March 20, 1803, in: PVC, pp. 108, ff.].

f. Based on this Patristic teaching, Fr. Bertoni saw the Eucharist as a privileged means of trusting more in the divine mercy, and increasing one's fervor:

"... And even though at times one will experience total aridity and a lack of fervor, if he will only trust in divine mercy, he will receive it confidently. The reason is that the more one thinks that he is unworthy, he will come to the realization that he needs the doctor. This is the situation of those who find themselves ill. (A thought from St. Bonaventure)..." [cf. l.c., p. 110].

g. Throughout his life, Fr. Bertoni experienced a deep familiarity with the Eucharist, and had tremendous confidence in this unique source of Divine Grace:

"... This is the invitation of the Divine Lover of souls: I am your Father, Master, Friend, Brother. If you ever fall ill, I am also your Doctor, I am your Health. And one day, I will be your Beatitude, your Glory..." [cf. l.c., p. 111].

h. The daily participation in the Eucharist was for the Stigmatine Founder a great motive for Hope:

"... Not even death, whatever kind it may be, can remove love, even though love, in the words of the Wise Man (cf. Ct 8:6), is as strong as death is. So, this Lover does

not pay the price for His beloved with incorruptible gold or silver, but rather with all His Precious Blood (cf. 1 P 1:18).

“And should the beloved ever again fall into the hands of the infernal enemy by lowering himself with sin, Jesus will return each day in the suffering of this same Victim on the altars. He will was His beloved with His Blood, of which He has opened a perennial source of it in the bosom of the Church [cf. Sermon 3, “The Name of Jesus”, the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 1801, in: PVC, pp. 238, ff.].

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2. Sacred Scripture [cf. Giuseppe FURLANI, CSS, *Parola di Dio, regola del pensiero e dell'azione del Beato Bertoni*, in: *Saggi sullo spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni*. Roma 1983.

a. Throughout his long life, Sacred Scripture was the daily companion of the Stigmatine Founder. It has been remarked that perhaps no other spiritual personality of his time used Scripture more, even on an informal basis, as in his letters. It would be of no small interest to red his letters of spiritual direction and to note the number of times that he quoted Scripture [often in Latin] in his letters, not to speak of the more extended citations found in his sermons. He saw Scripture as a valid spiritual ally, and surely was one of the privileged sources of his hope:

“... The Word of God is more worthy of faith than is any demonstration. Rather, in these matters (of faith) it is the only demonstration. Now God has spoken: ‘God has spoken once’ (cf. Ps 62:11). He has also spoken in many ways in the Prophets to the ancient Fathers - and finally, He has spoken in His Son to the Apostles, and even more fully, the Holy Spirit has spoken to them instructing them in all truth pertaining to salvation: ‘I still have many things to say to you, but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will lead you to the complete truth’ (cf. Jn 16:12, 13).

“We have the books of the Prophets, we have the Book of the Gospels from the Apostles. This is the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures ... We do have the Scriptures in which God speaks. Therefore, what do we have to do with the books of this world? In the Holy Scriptures we have not only what is necessary, but also what is good to know, in order to be able to discern what is evil and to correct our ways, to lift up our spirits. What else is needed? Only to become saints and well instructed in every good work: ‘All Scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives and teaching them to be holy’ (cf. 2 Tm 3:16). This is what the Apostle teaches. The Word of God in the Scriptures ought to be the rule of our thinking, of our working, if we really do want to know the trust, to arrive at salvation and not the different systems which vary so often, as these are presented by the pernicious books of our world. Do not let yourselves be carried away... by different and strange doctrines. Paul himself warns us: ‘Do not let yourselves be led astray by all sorts of strange doctrines’ (cf. Heb 13:9)...” [cf. Sermon 35, Epiphany 1806, in: PVC, pp. 254, ff.].

b. This “biblical spirituality”, shared also with the laity by Fr. Bertoni, is certainly much in the spirit of Vatican II. As would be expected, he also preached this

spirituality with special fervor to priests and seminarians, in the years that he was the Spiritual Director of the Diocesan Seminary of Verona:

“... Scripture, therefore, is a Ladder to arrive at the knowledge of God, by means of faith. One should not stop at the letter, but ascend upwards towards the Spirit. The letter is the foundation of the faith. It is necessary to build on this, with hope in God, and charity through works. How many priests bring the material of the letter to build the houses of others! While the people often build in the spirit on the letter, the priest remains sometimes with the letter, leaving the spirit a desert. The priests often carry the ladder, while others climb. They often remain below, as happened to the Spiritual Directors of St. Teresa...” [cf. Mss B # 4859].

c. Fr. Bertoni brought a sense of urgency to his preaching to priests:

“... Therefore, it is necessary to approach the sacred book: ‘and work for your salvation in fear and trembling’... work all the harder! (cf. Ph 2:12; 1 P 1:10)...” [cf. Mss B # 4858].

d. Fr. Bertoni saw Sacred Scripture as a basic means for any development in the spiritual life:

“...’All Scripture is inspired by God’ (cf. 2 Tm 3:16). St. Gregory comments on this: Sacred Scripture so surpasses the illustrious geniuses even as so many illustrious individuals are inferior to God. They see nothing in that spiritual sublimity except that which is unveiled for them by divine condescension. No one is so far advanced in knowledge that he cannot progress even further. All human progress remains inferior to the height of the divinity which has inspired the Scriptures...” [cf. Mss B # 4860].

e. Once Fr. Bertoni described his own biblical experience as though he were standing looking at a vast forest on a most high mountain. At first sight, he writes, all seems equal, but as one enters it, he is able to see the plains and valleys, that are hidden therein, and how much more there is to see than that which appeared at first sight. This forest is Sacred Scripture [cf. Mss B # 4855]. In order to make any progress, there is needed much humility in investigating the “sacred papers”. All that can be expressed is admiration for this divine sublimity [cf. Mss B # 4860; cf. also Nello II, pp. 175, ff.]:

“... ‘You study the Scriptures believing that in them you have eternal life. Now these Scriptures testify to Me ... If you really believed Moses, you would believe Me, too, since it was I he was writing about!’ (cf. Jn 5:39, 46).

“Grant, o Lord, that we might be reformed and conformed to Your teaching and example, while making good use of the holy Sacraments, through which we obtain the strength to do this...” [cf. Mss B # 4895].

f. In this spirituality, Scripture is seen as an aid to a deeper sacramental life. Fr. Bertoni saw the Scriptures as a necessary means to come into familiarity with God:

“... The study of the Scripts is necessary for the priest, both for his own life, as well as that of others. It is here that one comes to know God and Jesus Christ ...” [cf. Mss B # 4890; cf. also Nello, o.c., p. 185].

g. With the serious crisis in the priesthood in the time of the Stigmatine Founder, there was a very real danger that a number of authentic vocations might have been ruined because of the faulty spiritual direction given. Fr. Bertoni presented a thought that is often heard still today:

“... A Spiritual Director is a great help, and the Scriptures, too, are a great help: ‘And indeed everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God’ (cf. Rm 15:4)...” [cf. Mss B # 5198; cf. also Nello, o.c., p. 209].

h. In a period in which it was not uncommon to find “unworthy pastors”, Fr. Bertoni offers a practical suggestion:

“... A mirror and measurement to discern the Good Shepherd are the Sacred Scriptures. The people know this: ‘... the Good Shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep, and runs away ...’ (cf. Jn 10:11, ff.)...” [cf. Mss B # 6846; Nello, o.c., p. 289].

i. In his many letters of spiritual direction, Fr. Bertoni often sought to offer solutions to difficulties that would arise in the light of Sacred Scripture. This has been described as his customary manner of acting to dissipate doubts and uncertainties in the minds and hearts of those seeking to make some progress in the spiritual life [cf. Nello, o.c., p. 419].

j. Fr. Bertoni deeply believed in the rich spiritual wealth that the Sacred Scriptures afford. He offers his own “Litany of Praises”:

“... The Sacred Scriptures, well meditated, impart not only good ideas, but also suggest some order in accord with the way Divine Wisdom might suggest. The Scriptures form one’s spirit, develop it, educate it, multiply and put order into one’s ideas, perfect reason, rectify judgment, orientate reflection. Through Sacred Scripture, one first learns to know God, His greatness and omnipotence. One also learns to come to grips with the prime duty of the creature, which is obedience to the Creator...” [cf. Mss B # 4650].

k. He saw that one of the prime lessons of wisdom is that the creature really came to know his place, a basic wisdom is that of self-acceptance:

“... A person who knows his dependence and his limitations, on being taught, educated, formed by God, knows that the truth of our intellect is conformity with the order of divine wisdom, made known to us in Its works and words...” [cf. Mss B # 4654].

l. The Scriptures are the grand Teacher of the greatness of God:

“.. Sacred Scripture leads one to true humility in its very principle, which is to revere the majesty and the greatness of God. It teaches us to submit our wills to it, and it reminds us to employ diligence in all things...” [cf. Mss B # 4658; cf. also Nello, .c., pp. 607, ff.].

m. For the Apostolic Mission, Fr. Bertoni believed that the study of the Scriptures is a prime duty:

“... The lesson of sacred and spiritual books: ‘Love the study of Scripture, and you will not love the vices of the flesh!’ (cf. St. Jerome, Epist. 125 ad Rusticum, 11)...” [cf. Mss B, # 3603; Nello , o.c., p. 714].

n. The Stigmatine Founder “codified” this biblical spirituality in his Original Constitutions:

“...Sacred Scripture should be studied in its entirety, first in the text itself, and then in the Catholic commentaries” [# 52].

o. He felt that the study of the Scriptures was most necessary for all the members, no matter what their specialization might be:

“... The competence of the Congregation refers in the first place to the study of Theology. To the knowledge of Theology and of sacred Scripture, the members of the Congregation are to tend principally, even when some of the members might be occupied for more time in the inferior disciplines, so that the members might be specialized and distinguished in theology and the Scriptures, in order to achieve the purposes of the Congregation” [cf. # 58].

3. Mary: Virgin, Mother AND Spouse

a. While his basic charism would be termed more “Trinitarian-Christological”, Fr. Bertoni was deeply and sincerely devoted to Mary, perhaps more in her relationship to God: Daughter of the Father, Virgin-Mother of the Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit. From the beginning, the Stigmatine community treasured the Founder’s Devotion to the Holy Espousals of Mary and Joseph, seeing in their portrait over the Main Altar of the Church of the Stimate a providential sign of the Patrons of the new community. It is remarkable, however, that nowhere in Fr. Bertoni’s own writings, does Mary appear formally as the “Spouse of St. Joseph”, even though this is more “lived” than to be traced in the existing writings of Fr. Bertoni [cf. CS I, fasc. III, pp. 247, ff.].

b. Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, the first biographer of the Stigmatine Founder, wrote his work a relatively short time following his death. Among his testimonies, might be noted the following:

“... To say how much Fr. Bertoni was a loving devotee of Mary, how much he achieved for her, and how he tried to excite in all hearts the love and obeisance [*ossequio*] towards her, many pages would not be sufficient even to present the least part of this .

“His filial devotion towards her was most outstanding. He invoked her often and prayed to her that she might be the merciful mother and powerful advocate to him always. He offered his every day to her most pure heart...”

c. In Fr. Bertoni’s Sermon “On the House of Loreto”, as a young priest, he spoke to the personified dwelling in these terms:

“... You, o walls of Loreto, more splendid than royal palaces, have housed the Queen of Heaven, the Spouse of God...” [cf. PVC, p. 302].

d. Later, preaching on purity, Fr. Bertoni offers his praises of Mary as follows:

“... This Virgin is the Mother of God...Come, devout lovers of Mary and faithful imitators of her purity. Sit in the most pleasant shade of this Plant of Paradise, and its fruit will be sweet to your palate. She spreads broadly and lowers so courteously the branches of her protection over all her servants, even those who are infirm. Whoever you may be, o brother, or sister, who may be walking across the arid desert of this world, beaten down by the raging fires of your concupiscence, go with confidence to the gentle shade of this beneficent plant, and you will find refreshment, repose, health, for your worn down, exhausted and discouraged heart...” [cf. Sermon 30, October 21, 1805, in: PVC, p. 329].

e. Most characteristic of Fr. Bertoni’s devotion toward Mary is a Prayer he copied from some unknown source. It is found in his Spiritual Diary, under the date of May 24, 1810, and is quite similar in spirit to that of St. Grignon de Montfort. During the life-time of Fr. Bertoni, he knew that the bishops of the world were already in full accord in petitioning the Holy Father for the formal definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Fr. Giacobbe wrote:

“... He invoked her and revered her and honored her, as conceived without original sin - the Blessed Mother of God...”

f. This is the Prayer, as it appears in his Spiritual Diary:

“I greet you, o my Mother, give me your blessing. Bless me and all who are dear to me. Vouchsafe to offer to God all I have to do and suffer today, in union with your merits, as well as those of your beloved Son. I offer you and consecrate to your service, all my being and whatever belongs to me, placing everything under your protection. Obtain for me, my dear Lady, purity of soul and body, and grant that I may not do anything today displeasing to God. I entreat you through your Immaculate Conception and your perfect virginity.”

As is most evident, this is a Prayer totally permeated with the spirit of Abandonment and Confidence in Mary, not unlike the *Suscipe* of St. Ignatius.

4. Personal Prayer

a. Prayer is always an expression of some hope, and hope extends as broadly as do the intentions of prayer. To have some idea of the hopes of the Church, it would be rewarding to review her prayers: those of the Missal, as well as the Prayers of the Faithful, also in the Liturgy of Hours. St. John of the Cross had as a principle that “we obtain as much from God as we dare to hope from Him!” The Stigmatine Founder does not offer an ordered treatise on Prayer, but by reading his many writings, there are offered some precious insights for our reflection. Prayer was often the subject of his letters of Spiritual Direction:

“...As for prayer, and for that biblical saying: ‘I open my mouth, panting eagerly for Your commandments!’ (cf. Ps 119:131), and how one should respond to this, the Holy Spirit Himself offers a reply: ‘Let nothing prevent your discharging [prayer] in good time’ (cf. Si 18:22); ‘... pray continually and never lose heart...’ (cf. Lk 18:1): ‘Pray constantly!’ (cf. 1 Th 5:17).

“It seems to me that prayer will help prayer. Diligence in prayer will draw even a greater abundance of the Spirit, ‘And the Spirit, too, come to help us in our weakness’ (cf. Rm 8:26). So are we able, even here on earth, to offer the perpetual and perennial sacrifice, and the holocaust which the Blessed Spirits and the Saints in heaven offer of themselves before God: ‘The fire that consumes the holocaust on the altar must not be allowed to go out!’ (cf. Lv 6:12).

“All the servants of God, exiles and pilgrims on this earth, have always done this. With those strengths and aids which they could call upon, we can, too. And since this is pleasing to God and redounds to His glory, and He commands this, it is enough. If it can be done, it should be done.

“‘If there is any one of you who needs wisdom, he must ask God, He gives it all freely, and ungrudgingly; it will be given to him...’ (cf. Jm 1:5...” [cf. Letter 5, in: *Ep*, pp. 33, ff.].

b. Fr. Bertoni was certainly not passive in his trust in prayer. He fully realized that there was always need to give one’s best in any undertaking. It is after presupposing a total effort that the Founder speaks of “abandoned prayer”:

“... My dear Sister, ‘Man’s heart makes the plans, Yahweh gives the answer’ (cf. Pr 16:1). This is what our Lord says and He has made this known to you. However, with divine assistance, I would not just say that you should be diligent, but rather that you should use supreme and even exquisite diligence, by always having your soul prepared

for the visits of His Divine Majesty. 'Let nothing prevent your discharging (prayer) in good time' (cf. Si 18:22) is what the Holy Spirit goes on to say. The caution of silence, of breaking off useless speech, of avoiding wasting time; all of this is what is entailed in speaking to our most gentle Creator..." [cf. Letter 22, in: Ep, p. 68].

c. In his praises of prayer, as in all his letters of spiritual direction, as has already been noted, Fr. Bertoni is most remarkable in his informal use of Scripture to establish his point. While he is at times 'free' in his application of texts, it is most unusual to see his most frequent citations of God's Word. Bertoni sees a decided unity between an increase in charity and a developing prayer:

"... The Holy Spirit will descend upon you, and you will be inspired with fervor. 'Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with power from on high!' (cf. Lk 24:49).

"St. Gregory the Great notes that an abundance and an increase of Charity would be the decisive and definitive sign of the moment in which these endeavors should get under way, which might have been pondered over for a long time, and conceived in the secret light and hidden inspirations of the Holy Spirit. These have to be mulled over in the warmth of prayer and nourished and matured with many meditations. The language, then, of the Lord is peace. It is with this that He answers and assures us what it is that is pleasing to Him: 'I am listening. What is Yahweh saying? What God is saying means peace for His people, for His friends..' (cf. Ps 85: 8, ff.).

"So, may the care you are taking for the spiritual well-being of your companions be pleasing to His Majesty. And how I wish I could explain how this is pleasing to Him! However, the Lord in His goodness, He himself will explain it to you as you go along. It seems that everything is inviting and moving forward to hasten the preparation for what the Lord inspires for His glory. Surely, it is our task to wait, prepared as we will be, because the Master is closer to us than we imagine. He is so close that He is already at the door, and He is only waiting for our preparedness: 'Know that He is near, at the very gates' (cf. Mt 24:33)..." [cf. Letter 43, in: Ep, pp. 105, ff.].

d. The confidence the Stigmatine Founder had in Eucharistic prayer, in particular - his own, as well as that of others - seems to have been unshakable. He often mentions it in his letters of spiritual direction, declaring that he is offering his own, and very often asking this of others, for his spiritual undertakings and trials, as well as for his many long years of physical suffering and cruel torment:

"...Just remember, Sister, that our defects, imperfections and failings which render us more worthy of rejection in our own eyes, all go to show how little we know ourselves, and how we appear in the eyes of God, Who sees all. These failings offer still another motive, and a most efficacious one, to move the heart of God, so that He might extend to us His grace, or mercy: 'We are indeed unworthy!' This is a prayer of a truly generous soul, who conquers and almost forces the heart of God. This is truly to elevate God all the more in our esteem, in proportion to the level which the knowledge of our misery lowers us. So, this prayer is worthy of one who has a heart made according to the heart of God, as was that of David... Let us leave it all up to the Lord, Who has

always disposed things well ... Man proposes and God disposes..." [cf. Letter 11, in: Ep, pp. 45, ff.].

e. When he was overwhelmed with concerns, Fr. Bertoni often asked for prayer, as he struggled to reach some kind of a solution in his concerns. He deeply believed in the efficacy of prayer:

"... I thank you, Sister, for the charity of your prayers for me. I have such a need of them, because of a real problem. But, to the Lord, all is as nothing, if only we pray and have great confidence..." [cf. Letter 19, in: Ep, p. 62].

f. He was appalled at times with the lack of prayer he encountered in some cases in his Apostolic Mission among priests:

"... Very rare are they who meditate in our times ... those who do dedicate themselves to it, do act in a spiritual way: 'I reflect on all that you did ...' (cf. Ps 77:12). I considered your works, and trembled' (From the Liturgy)..." [cf. Mss B # 2550].

g. Fr. Bertoni never failed to be deeply moved at the lack of prayer among priests. Perhaps the contrast was felt all the more in that he gave such care to it in his effort to live uninterruptedly in the presence of God. He truly sought to conserve himself in loving union with God and it seems that in his life, he did share in some mystical experiences, generally reserved to those who have made genuine progress. In his own annual retreat on year, he describes in his Spiritual Diary something of what happened to him:

“...today I experienced much tenderness and the desire for self-offering. There was the sentiment as though Christ was drawing our hearts... all good, every bit of knowledge, gentleness, that may be found in creatures, implies that He alone should be praised and loved ...” [cf. MP, March 16, 1809; cf. Nello, p. 129].

h. In a letter of Fr. Bragato to Fr. Marani, some years after the death of the Stigmatine Founder, they remembered his “assiduous prayer”. They recalled the nights when he used to come to the Seminary to preach the early morning meditations on Sunday’s, to all those at the Seminary. Fr. Bragato has left this testimony::

“...he used to take his candle and go to the alcove of the Chapel to meditate first before the Most Blessed Sacrament. He would first pray over what he would preach to the seminarians. He used to leave his room about 10:00 p.m., and I do not now if he ever went back to it again. In those years, the subject of his Meditation was Samuel. We would enjoy a good sleep and coming down in the morning, we would find Fr. Gaspar already in Church. I believe this was the usual way he would spend Saturday night [cf. *Summ. Add.* , p. 279; cf. also Nello II, pp. 177, ff.].

i. In the interests of something like a survey of his writings, Fr. Bertoni left a kind of “program” for the spiritual life concerning union with God:

“... The time for prayer should be established [cf. Mss B # 3402]:

- before working [cf. Mss B # 3404];
- alternating prayer and work [cf. Mss B # 3407];
- between tasks [cf. Mss B # 3408];
- after work [cf. Mss B 3410].

“And prayer should be:

- continuous [cf. Mss B #3412];
- familiar with God [cf. Mss B # 3412];
- practical [cf. Mss B # 3416].

j. He once wrote, quoting perhaps Pseudo-Gregory’s Commentary on Samuel:

“... Prayer is a certain life of our lives, and the soul of our souls. It is our very breath: ‘I open my mouth, panting eagerly for Your commandments’ (cf. Ps 119:131)... prayer is most fitting for priests in anything they try to do...” [cf. Mss B # 3413

...

5. Real Poverty

a. As has already been noted, poverty is a fundamental element for Christian hope. The Stigmatine Founder stressed it repeatedly in his plan for the Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops:

“...A minister of the Gospel has an inexhaustible capital of riches and every sort of good for serving God and piety. According to the promises of Christ, such a minister will never be lacking in his temporal needs, as these will be controlled by a moderate spirit desiring only that which is necessary to sustain life: ‘Set your hearts on His kingdom first, and on His righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well’ (cf. Mt 6:33). Do not be afraid that the necessities of this life will ever be lacking for those who are engaged in the struggle for the interests of the Reign of God and even (as this is required for the glory of God and for charity), sell even what you own in order to give alms...” [cf. Mss B 3470; cf. also Nello, o.c., p. 720].

b. Poverty is a privileged means employed in the Church’s spiritual tradition to follow Christ more closely:

“... Today I experienced a very strong inspiration to follow our Lord more closely, and even at the cost of my life, especially through His poverty and shame...” [cf. MP, September 25, 1808].

“...Today I experienced the desire to imitate Christ in His poverty and in those hardships brought about by poverty...” [cf. MP, October 22, 1808].

c. These texts are rather fundamental for the understanding of the Christology of Fr. Bertoni. For him, Jesus Christ was indeed a lived, daily “experience”:

“... Jesus Christ, from His birth, has us see in His life a supreme poverty, suffering and disdain. Therefore, these are the only true goods...” [cf. MP, March 13, 1809].



**[D.] The Missionary Hope of Fr. Bertoni:
Hope for the Apostolic Mission for the Assistance of Bishops -
The Increase of the Church**

Presentation

[1] In a number of very difficult assignments, as well as being held back from his world-wide apostolic missionary dream by sickness and the events of his times, Fr. Bertoni maintained an unshakable hope until the end of his life. After 25 years of community life, he set to write the Constitutions of a community which was always small, but at the time of his writing was in “a state of decline.” Throughout, he kept alive his unquestioning trust in the Power of God’s Mercy:

“... When the time does come for the chosen minister to begin his work, he will use a strong charity, without weakness. He will no longer look to the effects of his efforts, whether his words are well or badly received. Rather, he will rivet his concentration on the order of God and to carry out his task, leaving the effect to God, he will speak strongly to hardened sinners and ministers of a merely human spirit, without any human fear to wake them up...” [cf. Mss B # 5533; Nello, II, p.242].

[2] There is some indication that he may have experienced some fear, or lack of self-confidence in his work, as we read:

“... I should not listen to the fears and excuses which nature might inspire to me. For it is in these that the enemies of my salvation and of my perfection would like to hold me back. I may have lost the right to be Your son, but You have not given up Your role as Father...” [cf. Mss B, # 2444; Nello II, pp. 629, ff.].

[3] Fr. Bertoni was deeply convinced that God would meet anyone more than half way, once He was assured of at least the effort to respond to His grace:

“... Instead of a severe, implacable God, I will find Him full of goodness and tenderness for me. I can make use of His own promises that He Himself will come to meet me, to assist me in the return that I am proposing to make to Him. He will grant to me a ready remission of sins and will cede infinitely above the satisfaction that is due. He will assist me with His ever new graces in all the efforts that I have to engage in to review my life, to sustain me to persevere. He will not be content merely to see me to return to a priestly way of life, but will dedicate Himself to lead me to perfection, so that it really does not depend on me to regain all alone what I have lost, but He will see to it that I join company with the more perfect...” [cf. Mss B # 2445; Nello, II, pp. 629, ff.].

[4] Something of Fr. Bertoni’s method of persuasion might be noted - he identifies himself with the priests sent to the seminary by the Bishop for a disciplinary renewal, in the hopes they might one day return to full ministry. Fr. Bertoni’s message was a firm one, but always full of hope:

“... In responding to His election of us, we have to count on His strength and not on our own...” [cf. Mss B # 3238; Nello, II, p. 707].

[5] Fr. Bertoni’s hope may be traced particularly in those areas in which he was inspired to manifest particular apostolic interest. The hope of the Apostolic Missionary may be seen in those “various and proper ministries” [cf. CE # 185] of the “arduous and difficult vocation” of “any ministry of the Word of God whatsoever”:

1. Hope for the Apostolic Missionary in the Preaching Ministry:

a. Preaching is indeed one of the basic and principal ministries toward which the Stigmatine Founder directed his community:

“... God will raise up individuals in the Church, illustrated by His Spirit. He will call preachers to correct, repair and eliminate the scandals, the disorders, the weaknesses in prelates...” [cf. Mss B # 5310].

b. He dreamed of a community whose abiding purpose [along with being founded to offer competent service to the bishops] - was that of serving as a witness to the Church. So, he thought of a community that could offer the example of the Apostolic Mission:

“... Through the Magisterium of the Church there is made known the divine will of sign, in all that pertains to the reprobation and destruction of a merely human spirit and also for that which pertains to the renewal or restoration of the divine spirit in His ministers...” [cf. MSS B # 5302].

c. The most convincing witness of all for the dedication of the Congregation to the Apostolic Mission of Preaching is the example of the Founder himself and the early community gathered around him. From his earliest years in the priesthood, and throughout the better part of his life, Fr. Bertoni excelled in his dedication to “the Ministry of the Word of God”, also under the form of preaching.

2. Hope for the Apostolic Missionary in the Assistance to the Clergy and those of Consecrated Life:

once again, it is the life that the Stigmatine Founder and his first followers lived personally - far more than their words - that shed the greater insight into this aspect of their Apostolic Mission

a. The Apostolic Missionary to the Clergy and Seminarians:

1.] Once he found himself at the head of a small community at the Stimmate, the charism progressively developed in dialogue. The group through the spirit alive among them, was dedicated, at the beck and call of the bishops, to the spiritual renewal of the diocesan clergy of Verona [cf. G. Ceresatto, CSS, Biography, p. 266].

2.] The early Stigmatines were invited by a line of bishops of Verona to assist them in diocesan renewal. Fr. Bertoni worked out a rather bold plan for helping priests in this direction. His idea for the reform of his priestly ministry was as

providential as it was daring. His ideas were thoroughly agreed to by those who had chosen to follow him, a lived expression of his saying that a united force is always stronger! [*virtus unita fortior* !]. These first followers of his: priests, brothers and seminarians - had also joined him to share in his challenging life of holiness [cf. Nello II, pp. 228, ff.].

3.] The bishop entrusted to Fr. Bertoni's spiritual direction those priests who had been assigned to the local seminary for their spiritual renewal, in the difficult times after the fall of Napoleon. From his sermons of those days that have come down to us, we see him still as a relatively young priest preaching to men many years his senior in age and experience in the priesthood. There is at times evident a nervousness, yet with all - a forthrightness and courage. His apostolic heart and hours of prayer inspired him with the more suitable expressions to shake his listeners from their apathy and lethargy, but not to discourage them. His plan of procedure seemed to have been a very frank review of the situation of their priesthood, in the hopes of moving them to seek the healing power of God's grace and a return to the priestly way of life. [cf. Nello, II, p. 626].

4.] For the Diocese of Verona, long the "buffer zone" between the two great powers of the time, France and Austria, these were particularly difficult times for its spiritual life. A good number of religious orders had been suppressed and its members either exiled or sent out of their communities. The state of the diocesan clergy left much to be desired at the time, and the general situation of the diocese was rather disheartening.

5.] A series of Benedictine Bishops was sent to the Diocese, with the express mandate of healing old wounds, repairing the damage, and renewing the Diocese. It is in this context that Fr. Bertoni was called by the Bishop to take over the spiritual care of the seminary. This included the few seminarians studying there, as well as those priests who were sent there by their new Bishop in accord with the canonical discipline in vogue at the time. [cf. Nello 1975, pp. 122, ff.].

6.] Some reflection of these times has found its way also into the personal spiritual diary of Fr. Bertoni. He wrote under the date of May 24, 1810:

... [A text from St. Thomas of Villanova, then these words:] ...Let us pray for our civil leaders so that the Lord might inspire them with words of peace for His people (cf. Ps 85), and may He inspire peace among them. May He also inspire our Shepherds who are working for the reform of the Church - because, as you see, all is now in ruins. And if there is not a reform forthcoming, then there is no hope for a better state..."

[Thus, Fr. Bertoni became the "bishop's right hand man" in this effort of renewal of the diocesan clergy, at the age of 33 [cf. Nello, 1975, p. 126].

7.] It is quite possible that the attention of the Bishop was drawn to Fr. Bertoni also for the fact that even while he was still an assistant at his home parish of San Paolo in Campo Marzio, he already began organizing meetings with priests in his own home. They would gather evenings for theological discussions, prayer and

friendship. This little group, perhaps not uncommon in the troubled Europe of the times, had as its purpose a deepening of spiritual and cultural values. We have this testimony from an erudite scholar of the Church of Verona, Sommacompagna. It is also from these gatherings that initial steps toward the formation of a community of priests and religious may be noted. From the outset, it was clear that they would share common life together, in the hopes of serving both the local and the universal Church for its renewal and increase, through a truly competent, docile group of Apostolic Missionaries.

b. The Apostolic Missionary for those of the Consecrated Life

1.] In more recent times, Pope Paul VI [in: *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 1975] has stated that the first ministry of religious is their “**witness**.” Fr. Bertoni’s own life has been described as his being “An Angel of Counsel” especially for those engaged informing new religious communities as part of the Church renewal. Also because of the thrust given by the Bishops, a number of new religious communities came into being with the express purpose of keeping alive, of institutionalizing the reforms that were so sorely needed. The interest that Fr. Bertoni showed in other communities was so great that this even became a question in his own process of Beatification: how is it that he gave so much attention to other communities, and apparently so little to his own? The response is that his ideal was clear, evident in his own daily life in the community and in the Constitutions he wrote for it in the last years of life. In his early sermons, he offered the Sacred Stigmata as an object of contemplation for “faithful souls”.

2.] In his early sermons, he also meant this ideal for the laity of his home parish listening to his sermons. In some way, however, these sermons do offer much insight into his interests for the whole Church and also for those who follow the consecrated way of life:

“... Christ has entered into His Reign with the scars of His Wounds. ‘This is the price that I have paid for this Kingdom’, He tells us, ‘and it cannot be had for any less!’ [cf. his Sermon on “The Passion”, already cited under the section of Fr. Bertoni’s Christology. In: PVC, p. 272].

3.] Fr. Bertoni personally had a sublime idea of people consecrated to God. In the common symbolism of the times [as well as our own [cf. Can. 607, § 1] he thought of religious in nuptial terms, using a text from St. Paul, a kind of “test” of union with God:

“... To what beauty could I ever compare a soul whom God has endowed to make of it, His Spouse? I simply do not have the colors to paint such a portrait. I will only say this, filled with the same wonder of the Apostle himself, that whoever is united to God with such an intimate adherence, becomes through a loving transformation, one and the same spirit with Him (cf. 1 Co 6:17)”.

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3. **The Apostolic Missionary to the Youth**

a. In the aftermath of what might be thought of as a “world war”, as is usual, those who suffered the most were the poor, the innocent and the defenseless. Already in his early years as a priest, Fr. Bertoni was assigned by his superior, in this case, his first Pastor - Fr. Louis Girardi - to be the Apostle of Youth. This added still another facet to his gradually developing charism as a Founder of a religious community. We are told the specific incident: it was a First Communion day in the Parish and the Pastor gave him the responsibility of its youth. Fr. Bertoni began gathering them in the confines of the parish grounds, but gradually shifted the meetings also to his own home. The little group was placed under the protection of Mary, the most Holy Virgin. This initial foundation eventually came to be the Marian Oratories, and the Stigmatine Founder was the first to bring the idea into the Diocese [cf. *Memorie intorno ai Padri e Fratelli* , p. 18]. Even these would be suppressed in the hard days following the war. It is to Fr. Giacobbe that we owe this information from the early years of Fr. Bertoni’s priesthood.

b. One of the characteristics of the Stigmatine Founder’s Original Constitutions is the fact that while there is very little codification of the other central apostolates of the Congregation, such as: retreats, or parish missions; any specifics regarding these, or concerning the care of religious and seminarians - there are relatively abundant references to the care of youth. The following are a few of the Original Constitutions composed by the Stigmatine Founder, dedicated to the care of the youth:

“Each confrere will be committed, according to his capacity, and keeping in mind the circumstances of places and times, to the explanation of Christian Doctrine to the youth, and the uneducated.” [CF # 37].

”Without omitting any particular studies of those matters which the confreres might excel the more, or which are the more - gradually the young confreres will be exercised in preaching in our Churches, in catechizing the young and the other uneducated individuals, in hearing the confessions of the young men and children” [CF # 72].

”The Christian education of children and young men, and of other uneducated persons, is to be promoted with every effort through the Oratories, with the teaching of Catechism, and also even with private instructions” [CF # 164].

“The special occupations of the Professed Fathers are the following: it is their duty not only to teach the truths necessary, or useful for the obtaining of eternal life with preaching, retreats, lectures - but also by explaining the first elements of faith and morals, especially to the young, and uneducated persons, through the Oratories and in public and private catechism lessons. This, too, is of supreme use to the Church; therefore, it is to be supremely recommended” [CF # 182]

“To hear confessions of all classes of people, but especially of the poor and the youth, and to encourage the due frequency of the Sacraments...” [CF # 183].

c. There is much insistence here even on private conversations and lessons to the poor, to the uneducated, to the youth. These 'lowly' tasks are presented by the Founder as pertaining to the very heart of his charism.

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CONCLUSION

[1] Hope and Growth

a. Here we might apply Fr. Bertoni's principle of the possibility of limitless development, provided no obstacle is placed in God's way:

"... Jesus once said to a Saint: if only I could find individuals who would give themselves to Me without reserve, all that you read in the lives of saints as having been accomplished in them by Me, I would do the same with these and I would furthermore contribute to miracles being accomplished. My hand in no way has been shortened! (cf. Is 59:1). I am still the Same...!" [cf. Mss B # 2463].

This idea is in full harmony with the Ignatian principle that God would do great things in the lives of believers, if only they would not put obstacles in His way in what He would really want to accomplish [cf. Nello, II, p. 144].

b. As has already been noted above, this Ignatian principle is a fundamental point in Fr. Bertoni's personal life and in his preaching:

"... How very few are they who really understand what God would do with them if He were not impeded by them in His plan ..."

[Another variation:]

"... We cannot even think what God would do with us, and how much He would accomplish in us, who are the pupils of His eyes, if we did not place obstacles in the way of His grace, but if only we would commit ourselves freely and totally into His hands..." [cf. Mss B # 5480; Nello, 1975, p.232].

c. This principle is found on the lips of Fr. Bertoni in all kinds of situations: in his words to others, as well as in his own examination of conscience:

- in his own Spiritual Diary [cf. Dec. 2, 1808; May 18, 1811];
- in his Retreat to priests [cf. Mss B ## 2180; 2463; 4047];
- in his Letters of Spiritual Direction [cf. Ep, pp. 61; 66; 68];
- in a letter to Fr. Briaghi [Feb. 19, 1832].

[2] Hope and Joy

a. Despite all his afflictions and personal defeats, it can be said that Fr. Bertoni was a very hope-filled and even joyful person. The theme of joy is a frequent one, flowing as it does from his hope and charity:

"... This is true happiness, true joy, in recognizing God as one's Master, in serving Him with fidelity, in living together with God. This sentence is found in the Scriptures...

And if those who hope to be the heirs of much money, of a rich inheritance, or to come into the possession of a principdom - are so happy in the prospects of their inheritance: how much greater should not the real joy be of a believer who waits with a firmly founded confidence, for the inheritance of an eternal realm, a heavenly reign! If, in the meantime, such an individual should raise his eyes to heaven, and if Faith should show him the other honors, the extraordinary wealth, the most pure delights of that happy homeland, then Hope would immediately respond deep within his heart: and these goods are all for me, indeed they are mine! What comfort this brings! What exultation!..." [cf. Sermon 22, 1804, in "PVC, pp. 17; 19].

[3] Hope and Perseverance

a. The connection between these two Christian values is found explicitly in St. Paul:

"... These sufferings bring patience, as we know, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive because of the love of God that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us..." [cf. Rm 5:5, ff.].

b. For Fr. Bertoni, the theme of perseverance was an important one, a key means for the Imitation of Christ:

"... The lack of perseverance is that of never bringing to a conclusion the good that has been begun. Each one should flee such a vice even more than death, for the simple reason that even though death does deprive a man of the present life, nonetheless, for the just, it is merely the end of tribulation: 'The virtuous man, though he die before his time, will find rest!' (cf. Ws 4:7).

"But, the lack of perseverance deprives a man of the crown of eternal life, because only to those who persevere in the good they have undertaken until death, is eternal life due ...: 'the man who stands firm to the end, will be saved!' (cf. Mt 10:22)..."

c. As throughout his own entire spiritual journey, the figure of Jesus Christ in Fr. Bertoni's daily 'experience' of Him, remains the ultimate motive for it all:

"... For this reason, Christ our Teacher by disregarding all offered honor, accepted instead all confusion... (cf. Heb 12:1-3)..." [cf. Mss B # 4488].

d. The example of Jesus on His cross is the real model for the believer struggling with perseverance:

"... He never chose to come down off the Cross, but willed to die there, rather than failing in any way in the work of our redemption which He had undertaken (cf. Mt 27:42, ff.). This was also to show us how displeasing is the lack of perseverance, the ruin of all good work..." [cf. Mss B 4489].

e. Fr. Bertoni saw God as the promised “Emmanuel”, our true Companion on the Pilgrimage of Life:

“...Along the pathway of virtue, God is always with us. God not only is content in showing you the route, but He also offers Himself to lead you by it: ‘I will lead you by the path of justice!’. Reflect well on this, because in such a way I respond to those fears that disturb you deeply. Nonetheless, the sheer number of them may even have you fail in your resolutions.

“No matter how long is the journey that you still have to go, and even though the struggle to stay on it will never end, and the fact that all along this way, real dangers have to be met, and powerful enemies rise up in one’s way, and the fact that real traps are set in one’s path - yet, with all this, if the Lord is with you, of whom can you be afraid? If the Lord is right there, along-side you at all times, how can you be discouraged? How can you be afraid of failing? (cf. Ps 16:8). And if it is true that He is in your midst, and if He Himself takes up arms to struggle against your adversaries, how can they ever make you afraid? (cf. Dt 7:21). And finally, if it is true that He watches over you and guides your every step, and will free your feet from any trap they may wander into, how can you not make progress? (cf. Pr 3:26).

“The Psalmist prays: ‘May Your good Spirit guide me to level ground!’ (cf. Ps 143:10). What greater security can you have?...” [cf. Sermon 17, “Perseverance”, April 11, 1803, in: PVC, pp. 116, ff.].

As in his Christology, so also in his Hope, St. Gaspar Bertoni’s deep inspiration was the Cross, the Glorious Stigmata, the “source” of the Apostolic Mission [cf. J 20:21, ff.] and the Resurrection of the Lord. Before anyone can be found worthy of this, he reasoned, all are called to prior “resurrections” in God’s grace. The following, to conclude this section on the Stigmatine Founder’s Hope, is one of his early sermons as a young priest, on an Easter Sunday morning:

“... Now, though, that we are once more in this Easter risen in grace and dead to sin, how could we ever want to abuse such mercy? How could we not want to employ every possible means to persevere? ... It is just right, my listeners, that you should use all manner of means to persevere with every diligence in your holy resolutions, and to strive in a lively manner towards Heaven, without returning your gaze toward this earth. If you have indeed risen with Christ, then seek those things which are above earth, where Christ is indeed sitting at the right hand of God. Seek out the heavenly things, and not those of this earth (cf. Col 3:1)...” [cf. Sermon 38, “Holy Easter: The Spiritual Life”, in: PVC, pp. 294-297].

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