

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION TO THE YEAR 1808

Father Gaspar Bertoni, during the year 1808, was living with his mother at his family home in Verona. She was in failing health. His father, Francis Louis Bertoni, was separated from his mother following an out of court agreement drawn up eight years earlier.

In February of this year Fr Bertoni lost his aunt, Paula Bertoni, who was living in his mother's house. His uncle, Anthony Bertoni, a notary, had died in November 1802.

Early in May, the new bishop, Innocent Liruti - who had only been installed as Ordinary two months earlier - entrusted Father Bertoni with the spiritual direction of the Convent where Blessed Magdalene Di Canossa's congregation was being formed. Mother di Canossa had established her community in the old convent of the Augustinian Nuns, next to the church of Saints Joseph and Fidentius, near St. Zeno Major. In that convent there were actually two separate congregations of women. In addition to that of Mother di Canossa, Leopoldina Naudet was forming her own. Both women were awaiting more favorable circumstances to establish separate communities. Meanwhile, they collaborated in educating young girls who had been invited in off the streets by Mother di Canossa. In general, they ministered to the girls and young women of that densely populated district. Leopoldina was the local superior.

In July, Father Bertoni began a personal diary, his spiritual Journal.

1808

1st JULY 1808

[1.]⁸ Some people obey, not for love of the virtue of obedience, but solely to calm their fears. As a consequence: when they want to do something to their liking, they show much resistance to the will of their superiors.

For Fr Bertoni, obedience spoiled by selfishness was seriously lacking in purity of intention and supernatural spirit, which were seen as necessary elements of true virtue. This was not how he had obeyed his own mother. Father Cajetan Giacobbe stated that Gaspar's mother used to say of her son, with so much genuine contentment, that "if children were to obey one thousandth of how her little Gaspar obeyed, all mothers would be happy and lucky"⁹. Fr Giacobbe added that "since his boyhood, Fr Bertoni let no unworthy intention motivate nor

⁸ These are marginal numbers added by the translator, perhaps for a more ready reference to the material contained in the various entries.

⁹ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p. 555.

dominate his life. He was solely moved to elevate his soul towards God as the centre of his thoughts and actions.¹⁰

Fr Bertoni learned the doctrine and practice of obedience from the holy Patron of his youth, St. Aloysius Gonzaga. In the biography of this Saint, young Bertoni found two texts of Saint Paul which served him as the synthesis of Aloysius' spirit of obedience:

*Obey as you would obey Christ, as servants of Christ, doing God's will from the heart; and whatever you do, do it from your heart as if you obey the Lord and not people.*¹¹

Without prejudice to the patron Saint of his youth, Fr Bertoni, for some years had been drawing on the treasures of the life and doctrine of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who gradually became the model for his priesthood. Here is an extract which he wrote from a book he found in his uncle Anthony Mary Bertoni's library entitled ***The life of St Ignatius***, by Anthony Francis Mariani, SJ.¹² The ideal of the obedience of Ignatius' followers is thus described:

...He had entrusted himself into the hands of God with full resignation of spirit and indifference. He strongly desired that the men of his Company should surrender themselves with similar resignation and indifference into the hands of their Superiors". He went on to say: "He, however, willingly took into consideration the desires of his subjects; because he used to say that in this way the direction of the subjects proceeds better and much easier".¹³

In the spirit of his teaching, we would add that the principle of obedience should always be upheld that he had nurtured from the very beginning of the nascent community of Canossian Sisters at Sts. Joseph and Fidentius. This was in May 1808. The entry upon which we are presently commenting seems to bear this out. We understand this from what he wrote in 1810, when he summarized the doctrine of Saint Teresa of Avila with her motto: *A life of obedience is the way of perfection*, during the Spiritual Exercises to the Clergy of Verona¹⁴. At the age of 33, he received this obedience for such a ministry from his Bishop. On 21 September 1808 he wrote in his *Journal*: **Now it is no longer time for me to read, but to act**. He was influenced by the writings of Saint John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

We can refer here to St. Teresa's ***Book of Foundations***, c. 10 where she wrote:

There is no quicker way to lead a person to ultimate perfection, than by the way of obedience." And she added: "This perfection does not consist in interior inclinations,

¹⁰ *ib.*, p. 312.

¹¹ **Cepari, *Life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga*, Chapter 14.**

¹² **Published in Bologna 1741. This volume may now be found in the Library at the Stimmatine in Verona. The printed inscription in the book is: 'From the Library of Anthony M. Bertoni. St. Paul's in Campo Marzio.'**

¹³ *Ibi*, pp. 435, 436.

¹⁴ **cf. *Collectanea Stigmatina*, I, p. 182.**

nor in great ecstasies and raptures, nor in visions and revelations, nor in having the spirit of prophecy. It does consist in conforming and uniting our will with that of God, in such a way that as soon as we understand what he wants, we too want that too, with all our will. We then accept with equal joy the bitter as well as the sweet and tasty, knowing that this is what His Divine Majesty likes. It would seem most difficult not just to do it but to be happy and feel the taste of it, because it is completely disgusting and contrary to our nature. This is the power of love (perfect love!): to let go our personal pleasure for love of the other. What I want to demonstrate is the reason why obedience is the quickest way – in my judgment - to get to this happy state about which I am talking. Namely that we are in no way masters of our own will other than in using it completely and purely for God, to Whom we have to subject it to our reason. In order to do this there is no other better nor shorter way than obedience."

This last phrase became for Fr Bertoni another motto in the Introduction to his *Spiritual Exercises* of 1810: **Obedience is a sure shortcut on the way to perfection**¹⁵.

St. John of the Cross¹⁶ beats the same drum in his *Dark Night* stating that subjection and obedience is the penance of the reason and of discretion [i.e., one's own judgment]. As a result, this is the more pleasing and acceptable to God than is corporal penance. When this latter is not accompanied by the former, it is the most imperfect.

With this maxim Father Bertoni aimed at putting into practice the second part of the Ignatian quotation and to guide on the way to perfection those who were subject to a Superior. The teaching of the first part will one day be helpful for **one who has no Superior, but is Superior**. In this last situation there is need of a total submission to God in everything (20 December 1808). Thus **a more strict discipline of obedience** (16 November 1808) will be seen as imperative in order to re-orientate an apparently fervent spiritual life which is completely off the track. Thus the threefold exhortation: **Pray, act and obey** (28 February 1809) will be a sure direction for the sinner reconciled with God.

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2nd JULY 1808

[2.] ***Feast of the Sacred Heart. During Mass, at Consecration, at Communion and throughout the whole thanksgiving time, many tears of compunction and affection. In particular during Communion I felt for a moment as if my spirit was snatched away from all creatures, at the service***¹⁷ ***of its Creator.***

¹⁵ cf. *Collectanea Stigmatina*, I, p. 112. St. Teresa's text is from the *Foundations*. c. 10. Medina. *Spiritual Works*. Venice 1723. Tome 2, p. 41. [Web-site Note: It would be interesting also to note St. Ignatius' Letter on Obedience: cf. M. Espinosa Polit, SJ, *Perfect Obedience. A Commentary on the Letter of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Westminster MD: Newman 1947.]

¹⁶ *Spiritual Works*, Venice 1729, p. 223. *Dark Night*, Book I, c. 6, n. 2.

¹⁷ **Web-site Note:** For the first time in this document, St. Gaspar uses the word *ossequio* [cf. *obsequium*, in: Rm 12:1, ff.] – one of Fr. Bertoni's favorite words. Cf. 'Published Studies' under St. Gaspar Bertoni's *Trinitarian Charism of Hope*, on this Web-site.

The Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was introduced in 1765 and quickly adopted in Venice and in the Venetian Republic. In 1808 it was celebrated on the 2nd of July because on its established day, namely Friday 24th of June, the liturgical calendar required the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. On this July 2nd, the Church was within the Octave of the Holy Apostles Sts. Peter and Paul. On July 2nd, there was also observed the Feast of the Visitation of Mary Most Holy to St. Elizabeth.

All of this in no way lessens our interest in the fact that In his entry on this Feast of the Sacred Heart, we have the first indication of some characteristic mystical gifts which God was going to grant to Fr Bertoni¹⁸. If we may say, here one sees what theologians call **Piety as a gift of the Spirit**¹⁹. Hence, the many tears of compunction and affection. Compunction is intended here as a blend of *spiritual illumination* and a consequent feeling of one's own inadequacy in front of the divine. What stands out here is that gift of **the spirit snatched away from all creatures, at the service [*obsequium*] of its Creator**. To this experience Fr Gaspar had contributed also by his own spiritual attitude²⁰.

St. John of the Cross teaches that "the soul cannot receive the light of divine union unless it first rejects affection for creatures". He also teaches that "every soul who wishes to climb the mountain of the Lord in order to make of himself an altar for the offering of pure love, of praise and service [*ossequio*], should have already fulfilled three conditions. The first is that it rejects from itself all affections and desires which are foreign to God. The second is that it should purify itself from the consequences of those affections which still remain by continually denying them and doing penance. The third condition is that it should change *habits* : only then the Lord himself will clothe it anew.

¹⁸ **Web-site Note:** Fr. Stofella notes that the Sacred Heart is also near Fr. Bertoni's final entry in his Journal [cf. June 26, 1813 he also noted a mystical grace, his ecstasy regarding the Sacred Heart on May 30, 1812]. For Fr. Bertoni, his devotion to the Sacred Heart often served as his vehicle for the presentation of his integral understanding of the Paschal Mystery – both its sorrowful aspects as well as its glorious dimensions. A few days after his May 30th, 1812 ecstasy, he spoke on the Sacred Heart – emphasizing the wound in the side retained in Christ's Risen Body [cf. MssB 1755-1778] [cf. J. Henchey, 'Una Speranza Missionaria formata ed expressa nelle sue divozioni e nel suo servizio ecclesiale', in: *Symposium Bertonianum*. Verona: Edizioni Stimmgraf 1990, pp.143-160. This idea is found in his parish sermons [cf. MssB ## 464; 475; 490;494; 517; 1300; 1305; 1308; 1312; 1314; 1315; 1317; 1318; 1322; 1759; 1771, , ff. In his Letters: MssB 9510; 9689; 9707. In his preaching to preists and seminarians: MssB ## 2632; 2635; 2637; 2647. It is found often in Fr. Gaspar's Meditations on Primum Regum, based on St. Gregory the Great: MssB ## 4899; 4957; 4984; 4991; 4999; 5094 and 9707 – among other texts. The integral theme of the Paschal is found from his earliest written documents: his parish sermons up through his last letters to Fr. Bragato [cf. Web-site. *Stimmate Integre*].

¹⁹ Cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un Modello di S. Abbandono*, pp. 53, 186.

²⁰ **Web-site Note:** there is offered a reflection on the Ignatian spirituality contained in the word *obsequium* - cf. this web-site, Studies on St. Gaspar's *Compendium Rude*.

Through such divine favor the soul will finally be free from the old tastes and desires of the earthly man and will receive a new knowledge of God²¹.

Fr. Bertoni had admired the **detachment from all created things** in the patron Saint of his priesthood, namely Saint Ignatius of Loyola – and certainly for the reason of imitating him. He had copied the following extract from his *Life*: "Ignatius' heart was entirely detached from all created things which he loved only in God, while loving God in them. He used to say that:

*...these are the true attitudes of those who leave the world for Christ: to forget as much as possible the things of the earth in order to better keep in mind those of heaven...*²²

Fr. Bertoni's entire *Journal* is permeated by this spirit of total detachment.

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5th JULY 1808

[3.] During the repetition of the Meditation on Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, I observed that the disciples were asleep while Jesus was agonizing and sweating blood for them. Even John who had previously slept on His breast, and the others who had eaten the Eucharist. Watch and Pray!²³

This *repetition* of a meditation is a method recommended in the Spiritual Exercises [n. 62] of Saint Ignatius: *the third exercise is the repetition of the first and second exercise*. The first and second exercise are two meditations: the first meditation is divided into three points: on the sin of the Angels, on the sin of Adam, and on a particular sin of one, who for a single mortal sin went to hell, and of the many other sins beyond number, that led one there for fewer sins that I have committed. The second meditation is then to be made on all the sins that one has committed in his own life. Fr. Gaspar has used this format in his reflections on 'the Prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane' which he presents with one particular only, examined in the light of contemplation: this particular is necessary in order to give full importance to His warning: ***watch and pray!*** [cf. **Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38**]. Jesus saw His enjoinder fall unheeded on the Apostles who fell asleep.

We think that the thoughts of this meditation were the same as those contained in a reflection and prayer of the Jesuit, Fr Ludovicus Da Ponte whose celebrated book was used very much by Fr Bertoni as one of his favorites, entitled ***Meditations***. It is evident that at least from 1806 onward, this book often appears to have been and particular in his ***Journal***, was much utilized by Fr. Bertoni. Fr. Da Ponte wrote:

... Seeing these three apostles who sleep I shall feel humiliated because I too sleep and because I am slow in my own spiritual growth. I shall imagine that Jesus Christ will

²¹ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. C. 4, 1; c. 5, 7. Roma 1940: Ed. Opere, pp.17, 24, f.

²² Mariani, *Life...* Book 4, c. 2, pp. 337.

²³ Cf. St. Gaspar's Good Friday Sermon [#4], 1801 & 1809, MssB 439, ff.

*reproach me with these same words: **Could you not watch with Me one hour?** O Lord, how just it is for me to be reprimanded, because I sleep while you keep vigil. I not only cannot watch for one hour but in my worthlessness even the established half an hour of prayer does not do. Since you see my weak flesh, come, please, to the help of my weakness, so that I may not get tired to watch with you...*²⁴

It is this same Gospel scene that Fr Bertoni will put in front of the Clergy during the Spiritual Exercises of 1810:

...Meanwhile the Apostles were asleep. To sleep while Christ suffers in his body: this is how we behave, [my brother] priests! Lack of Prayer gives the Devil the opportunity to tempt the Apostles. That is why they flee when the soldiers approach to apprehend Jesus. Hence, the necessity of divine Grace - and therefore also of Prayer - against all fears.²⁵

This warning of Jesus will be developed again in another meditation on 28 April 1811, in this *Journal*.

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9th JULY 1808

[4.] We should never disregard nor go against any virtue so as not to cause harm to an enterprise. Many are deceived in this respect. Experience teaches that, [if we do that], the enterprise is damaged and sometimes destroyed. On the other hand, when one always takes care to safeguard virtue, God gives his protection, the enterprise is strengthened and it increases too.

This seems to be at the same time a reflection and a development of a thought which Fr Bertoni must have met in the *Exercise of Perfection* by Father Alphonsus Rodriguez SJ. Fr Gaspar had read and studied that work together with two other priests who were his close friends. We gather this from a number of extracts of the first five treatises of the Jesuit's famous work. The handwriting in that manuscript alternates, but Fr Bertoni's dominates. They are mostly texts from Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, together with sentences and passages which follow strictly Rodriguez' line of thought. The three priests seem to have been very much engaged in pursuing a life of perfection. When Rodriguez refers to the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas i.e. that **Religious are in the State of Perfection...** and states that the Religious who **do not strive to be perfect, nor bother about this, are false Religious**, Fr Bertoni extends this doctrine to include the Clergy. This is the only substantial change brought in the original texts. It reads : **The diocesan priest is in the state of perfection: he who does not strive to be perfect is a false priest.** This certainly is said without calling into question the permanence of the priestly character.

²⁴ DaPonte, *Meditations*. Part IV, Med. 21, mid-way through the 3rd point.

²⁵ Collectanea Stigmatina, I, p. 224.

The quotation registered by the three friends reads as follows:

...We have to keep an eye above all on our own progress. Other businesses and occupations, though for the advantage of the neighbor, must be assumed without neglecting and forgetting ourselves, nor should we lose a single aspect of our perfection... ²⁶

In 1811 Fr Gaspar will teach the same doctrine to the seminarians:

...There are many who deceive themselves, because in order not to damage their works and enterprises, neglect some duty. But by this very fact they ruin them all the more. Never neglect a single point of perfection, as little as it can be, for fear of damaging our enterprises... ²⁷

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11th JULY 1808

[5.] After Mass, during Thanksgiving: a more lively feeling of faith in the presence of Our Lord and much confidence: and furthermore a desire of offering myself to suffer some harassment with Him and for Him.

We refer here to what Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove writes in his Book: ***A Model of Holy Abandonment***²⁸ He quotes a number of mystical phenomena in the life of Fr Bertoni which he interprets as manifestations of the Gift of the **Presence of God**. He states:

...It is evident that in these cases there is no question of union with God obtained by personal effort. (We would like to add "only".) "This is the first Gift which God gives to a soul whom He leads to a very high level in one's Prayer life... [And then he quotes a master in the Spiritual Life, i.e. Fr Louis Lallement S.J].: "After a long practice of purification of the heart of a person, God enters into that soul and reveals himself through the Gift of his Presence which is the beginning of the supernatural gifts (passive gifts, that is, of mystical nature). Thus the soul feels so happy in this state that it seems to it that it had never known nor loved the Lord as yet..." ²⁹

With regard to the second feeling, i.e. **to offer myself to suffer some vexation with Him and for Him**, Fr Bertoni presents it not as a move which comes from his own power, but as a God-given grace. On a different occasion, he will say of this: **This spirit is the best of gifts, of which I consider myself most unworthy.** (22 October 1808).

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12th JULY 1808

²⁶ Cf. Rodriguez, *Exercise of Perfection*. I, c. 1.

²⁷ **16th Meditation** based on St. Gregory the Great's *Primum Regum*.

²⁸ **Website Note**: a translation of this work is found on the Web-site.

²⁹ Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Model of Holy Abandonment*. [Italian edition, pp. 183, 186].

[6.] Those who are too much inclined to action should be directed to prayer: those who are much attached to prayer should be pushed to action.

This is clearly a principle of St Ignatius. We note that in the first part of the sentence that **too much** means "disorder". In the second that **much** is similar to the first **too much**. What should be done to restore order? By applying to the two cases above the known principle "opposites are corrected by opposites" (*contraria contrariis curantur*), as Fr Bertoni does here. This is merely the application of the principle which Jesus Christ placed as the foundation of all Christian perfection: **Let him deny himself and take up his cross**. St Ignatius accepted this demand of Jesus from the very beginning of his conversion. Fr Bertoni had noted this quote from the biography of Mariani:

*...He made this principle his unquestionable law, namely to break and tread underfoot any desire which does not come from right reason; to seek, as far as it is lawful, what nature shuns and to flee from what nature looks for...*³⁰

This practice produced in St Ignatius the fruit which Fr Bertoni admired. He wrote down from the book of Mariani:

*...Ignatius had that marvelous hold over his passions, without which human judgments gets dreadfully thwarted and even the most expert and prudent people get confused...*³¹

To illustrate further the subject permit us to take again from the same biography of St Ignatius, a book so dear to Fr. Bertoni:

*...St Ignatius was so much intent on acquiring control over his passions, that there was no other thing that he recommended to other people more than this. It was the subject which he preferred for his public exhortations. It was the topic of his private discussions: 'Conquer yourself'...*³²

...Although he prized prayer very much, he however did not measure the perfection of people from this, but rather from the capacity of their own appetites and passions. So much so that when he heard some saintly person praised as "a man of great prayer", he retorted "He is a man of great mortification". To those who, in the Company of Jesus, insisted that he should extend the allotted time for prayer, he answered: "Long time dedicated to prayer is necessary to master one's own passions; but while somebody can reach intimate union with God with a quarter of an hour of prayer, somebody else, who is not keen in mortifying himself, would not reach that same union even after two hours of prayer..."

...Several times he said that he feared that the Company of Jesus could get deceived in the pursuit of perfection by putting more effort in prayer rather than in self-denial." .."He used to say also that one should turn inwards and give more importance to repress one's own will rather than to restore life to a dead man."..."St Ignatius, in his

³⁰ Mariani, SJ, *Life*, Book 1, c. 5, p.22.

³¹ *ib.*, Book 3, c. 3, p. 205.

³² *ib.* Book 4, c. 9, p 401.

Spiritual Exercises, (this title is self explanatory), aimed exactly at this when he said: "These Spiritual Exercises whereby one is directed to conquer oneself..."³³

A similar theme will be treated on 16 Nov 1808. Fr Bertoni will then draw also on the teaching of St John of the Cross who, together with St Teresa of Avila, seems to have conspicuous agreement with St Ignatius.³⁴

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[7.] In the Mass and during Thanksgiving: reverential fear.

This is another instance of a gift of prayer. It is characterized by the spirit of filial fear, of which the main fruit is submission to God³⁵.

We can read another extract from the biography of St Ignatius which provides a good comment of this note:

...In dealing with God he kept great exterior composure and reverence. Of this he had utmost care. He was convinced that this was something one should seek for oneself, rather than looking for heavenly favors. He used to pray often: "Give me humility and loving reverence!..."³⁶

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13th JULY 1808

[8.] We must never abandon our friends, no matter how far and off the path they have wandered: especially when they are abandoned by other good people. This is for them a great encouragement to conversion.

It is clear that Fr Bertoni saw always the strayed friend:

...as somebody belonging entirely to God, because created by God according to His image, redeemed by His blood and made capable like us of eternal happiness...³⁷

These are words which he preached from the pulpit of St Paul's towards the end of his first year of priesthood, on 21 June 1801.

[9.] God makes use of very gentle means and of very thin threads to hold a soul from the precipice, where it had strayed, and to win it back to His service. The ways of God are admirable. When we consider them, we are filled with most intense joy.

³³ **ib.**

³⁴ **A certain balance and subordination may be found in the *Original Constitutions* [cf. CF ## 127; 284]. A central ideal remains: *Contemplata tradere...* [cf. CF # 49]. cf. *Jesuit Constitutions: CSJ 340.***

³⁵ **Cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *A Model ... o.c.*, p. 63.**

³⁶ **Mariani, *Life... o.c.*, Book 4, c. 1, p. 328.**

³⁷ **Sermon 6, on St. Aloysius Gonzaga. PVC, pp. 175, f. [MssB ## 526, ff].**

The background of this statement seems to come from Fr Bertoni's often quoted extracts of the biography of St Ignatius. Here is one:

*... Many troubles and mistakes happened to Ignatius while searching for meaning in his life. All this worked as a personal experience in view of the formation of his Company. When we walk in front of the Lord with honest heart, though faced with adversities which hamper our good desires, we understand that we have to rely completely on the fatherly Providence of God. We are sure that, according to the words of the Apostle Paul **for those who love God all things work for good** (Rom 8,28)...³⁸*

Fr Bertoni could also have been inspired by this other quotation:

...It is sometimes pleasing to God that the plans and good intentions of his servants do not produce the desired effects. This is meant to refine their patience, give them submission and trust in Him...³⁹

We believe that he had also in mind another extract which he took from Fr John Peter Maffei's book in which St Ignatius is said to have been on the point of carrying out a violent revenge against the argument of a Moor denying Our Lady's Virginity.

... Ignatius avoided the danger of great harm by not following his own judgment but by surrendering to the provident favor of God. Namely, he let his horse follow its own instinct. The animal did not choose to run straight against the blasphemer on the easier path but suddenly took for the steep ascent up the mountain...⁴⁰

Certainly the hand of God was there.

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[10.] When the road becomes much longer than we were prepared to walk, our longing cools off, unless we resume immediately the journey on the same road.

Such is the condition of human nature! Our longing spurs us on, drawn by the prospect of some great goal. We set out on our journey. The difficulties we meet are hardly felt. Not long after the effort makes its wear and tear felt. The original drive becomes weaker and weaker. The goal appears very distant. ***How narrow the way that leads to life!*** (Mt 7,13) No compromise: it is narrow, but it is the only way that leads to life.

Fr Bertoni, already in 1803 had sounded a warning for the souls which are reconciled with God and are tempted by the Devil to slack off. The Devil is envious of

³⁸ Mariani, *Life... o.c.*, Book I, c. 15, pp. 98, ff.

³⁹ *Ib.*, p. 94.

⁴⁰ John Peter Maffei, *De Vita et moribus Divi Ignatii Lojolaie. Patavii 1727: J. Cominum. Book I, I, c. 3, pp. 18-19.*

those souls which take to the right way and start anew with much enthusiasm. He uses all means to make them turn back. He makes them get entangled on the way so that they become bored and lose heart. He then whispers: "**How can you endure this for the remaining thirty, fifty, sixty years of your life?**"⁴¹

This is the temptation of Ignatius at Manresa, when he retorted the Devil saying: "And can you, wretched one, promise me life for even one hour?"⁴²

Fr Bertoni's answer is not different. The remedy he suggests is from the Gospel:

...do not worry for tomorrow! and he adds: **Live each day as though no more time remained for you... Who can say how far is death from you? What would then become of you if, after having done the most - which is to have set out on your journey - you would stop from running. If you do this you judge the goal too far away, and yet perhaps a few more steps are needed to reach it!... If the time is short, the labor is even shorter. If God comes to our help, let us strengthen our will and confirm our determination. Let us run without stopping until we can grasp that for which our heart has been longing all the way ...**⁴³

This principle will find its completion in the note of 30 July 1808.

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18th JULY 1808

[11.] **Discretion is the queen of all virtues.**

- In order to direct properly one's own subjects, we have to discern the conditions of each one.
- Some good [Religious] are rid of their temptations [against their vocation] by dissimulating or even by pretending to yield to them. On the other hand a good and fervent [Religious] who is tempted to enter into a stricter Order, is to be helped by giving him the permission to leave.

These three sentences are closely interrelated. As for the first, one thinks of St Benedict who considered **discretion** the *mother of all virtues* ; he wanted it to be the supreme norm of conduct of the Abbot. But we think that this principle, may also come from St Thomas Aquinas.

*...I answer by saying that prudence is the first among the other cardinal virtues, and that all the others are referred to it as to their cause. Hence, St Anthony of the Desert [in the Lives of the Fathers, Book 4, c. 13] says that **discretion** which belongs to prudence is the mother, the guardian and the moderator of virtues...*⁴⁴

⁴¹ PVC, p. 112 – Sermon 17, April 11, 1803: MssB ## 776, f.

⁴² Mariani, *Life... o.c.*, Book I, c. 6, pp. 18-19.

⁴³ PVC, pp. 113, 114, 118, 119 – MssB ## 776, ff.

⁴⁴ III Sent., d. 33, q. 2, a. 5.

Fr. Gaspar will refer another time to St. Benedict on 19 January 1809. This is therefore the doctrine of the Fathers of the Desert, and as such we find it in Cassian. Those Fathers used to teach the following:

...No virtue can develop perfectly and stand on its own without the grace of **discretion**. And thus, on the authority of St Anthony and in the opinion of the majority, it has been well demonstrated that **discretion** is that virtue which can lead the monk steadily to God while keeping all the other virtues in good condition. With it one can climb more easily the heights of perfection, while without it many who use all their efforts will not manage to reach the summit. This is because **discretion** is the mother, the guardian, the moderator of all virtues...⁴⁵

As for the other two principles noted by Fr Bertoni, they are practical examples which clearly manifest the necessity of the virtue of discretion.

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22nd JULY 1808

[12.] In both fervent and lax Religious Orders there are defects. While in the former they are corrected and are considered as abuses, in the latter they are concealed and are accepted as usages and customs.

This theory finds a concrete application and completion in another which Fr Bertoni will write on 11th October 1808 and also in a text of St Anselm (24 May 1810).

Fr Bertoni here summarizes a text of St Bonaventure found in Rodriguez⁴⁶, summarized here:

*...The difference between observant and reformed Religious Orders, and those which are lax does not consist in the fact that in the latter there are sins while in the former there are no sins. This is just impossible because **we all sin in many ways** (Jas 3,2). The difference is that in the observant and reformed Orders those who break and trespass the laws are reprimanded and punished, while this is not the case in the others...*

Here is the text of St Bonaventure⁴⁷:

... This is the difference between the Orders which deserve praise and those already decaying: not that in the former one could not find anybody making mistakes, but rather that in them it is not permitted to make mistakes and to remain unpunished. In these Orders the avenues to defects are barred by all means. Those persons who are incorrigible and corrupted are excluded. The good are encouraged and loved so that they persevere and progress from good to better. Wickedness could be found among Angels, before their confirmation in grace, and among the Apostles companions of

⁴⁵ John Cassian, *Conferences* II, 4. [cf. *Classics of Western Spirituality*. Paulist Press 1985, p. 64.

⁴⁶ Rodriguez, Part II, Treatise 6, c. 9, n. 3.

⁴⁷ St. Bonaventure, *On the Six Wings of the Angels*, Wing I.

Christ. What association of good people could ever claim for itself not to be guilty of sin? Even if the majority, by God's grace, were free from sin... not all are, as St John says [Jn 13:10]: **You are clean, but not all...**

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24th JULY 1808

[13.] "Making the most of your time" (Ep 5,16). Time never comes back. We have therefore to use it with great diligence.

In this note there are three separate parts that seem to be closely connected to a warning of the *Imitation of Christ*.⁴⁸ This is also in three parts:

...Keep always in your mind the end. The last time never comes back. You will never acquire virtue without care and diligence...

The second and third part of this warning are openly related to each other. In the second there is an identity of concept and almost the same words are used. The third seems to be a development and a fulfillment. The Pauline **making the most of your time** finds in the quotation of the *Imitation of Christ* the stimulus to pass to action. If we understand the phrase as **remember your last end**, which is not so far from us, this is the glory of God and our own sanctification; our final end is the beginning of eternal life.

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[14.] Do not conform to this world, but be reformed in the spirit of your mind.

This is a combination of Rom 12,2 and Eph 4,23. In his great command of the Scripture, Fr Bertoni blends these texts in a kind of memory exchange, yielding a happy result. To the Romans he wrote **Do not conform to this world but reform yourselves with the renewal of your senses**. To the Ephesians who, in Christ, had already been instructed to **put off the old man**, he wrote **be renewed therefore in the spirit of your mind**. As anybody can see these two texts are similar in meaning. The **be reformed** of the first contains already the **renewal** which follows it, and the **be renewed** of the second. There is no reform which is not in the same time a renewal too.

As regards the opening vibrant warning, Fr. Bertoni was certainly familiar with the expression contained in the book of Fr. P. Segneri, *The Manna of the Soul*, as well as his *Instructed Christian*, the *Lent* of the same author. We shall find the first book mentioned here in his hands during the early months of his *Spiritual Journal*. Fr Segneri wrote:

... Do not be conformed to this world, do not conform to its teachings, do not conform to its affections, do not conform to its actions... In a word, never take as the

⁴⁸ Book I, c. 25, 11.

rule of action what the world is accustomed to do: take your rule only from the law of God...⁴⁹

Fr. Bertoni had already preached from the pulpit of St Paul's on the Epiphany in 1806:

... Not the human mind, not the opinions of men, not the principles of the present world, not the dogmas of modern experience...but the WORD OF GOD IS THE UNIQUE AND INFALLIBLE RULE OF OUR THINKING, OF OUR OPERATING, in order to reach our supernatural and divine goal to which we are called...⁵⁰

As far as he personally was concerned, Fr. Bertoni had already for a long time practiced what he will exhort the Clergy to do after the words of Christ:

... *I have chosen you from the world* - therefore: You do not belong to the world... (Jn 15,19). It is necessary that we be separated... detached from the world... crucified... dead to the world. These are four degrees on which I must judge myself and be ashamed to have so badly corresponded to my vocation, so far...!⁵¹

As for the reform which a new life implies, Fr Bertoni preached in 1803 saying:

... A New Year, a new life, my dear people. Let us walk in newness of life! This is nothing else but the life of grace, which is so desirable. Do you possess such a lovable beauty? If the grace of God is in you, what effort will you make today not to lose it for ever? You will do your utmost, sure, to find the most necessary and useful means to keep it. In all sincerity you will take the holy initiative of removing immediately those occasions which could damage it even slightly. How much more effort will you make, with God's help, to increase it and develop it all the more...!⁵²

Similarly on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1807, he said:

... As Christ has risen from the dead for the glory of the Father, we too walk in newness of life. We are called to Heaven, yes, to Heaven and to eternal life. You are already on the way..., carry on until the heavenly homeland. You have been recruited by God for all eternity to become citizens of Heaven, members of his household and heirs of God...⁵³

⁴⁹ Meditation 2 of March, 5th Point.

⁵⁰ cf. PVC, p. 252. Sermon 35, MssB ## 1213, ff.

⁵¹ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, I, p.127.

⁵² PVC, pp. 126, ff. - Sermon 15., January 1, 1803. MssB ## 714, ff.

⁵³ PVC, pp, 293, 299 - Sermon 38, The Spiritual Life, MssB ## 1297, ff.

As director of the Seminarians, Fr Gaspar saw in this reformation and newness of life the necessary sign of a true disposition for the ecclesiastical vocation. Thus he blended again the two parts of St Paul's exhortation:

... The world loves what pleases the flesh, what makes rich and above all what gives the height of glory. But the person who is visited by the Holy Spirit is renewed in the knowledgeable manner of looking at things. Reality is seen not for its own value but just as means to the end, which is the glory of God and the salvation of souls: appreciating only what Christ appreciated. Such a person not only abhors the things which the world loves and throws them away as rancid, old and moldy... he will loath even the thought of them. Especially if it comes from those people who have been deceived in placing in them their happiness, as their status and their glory. This attitude is a good proof of genuineness. And if this is lacking, it is a bad sign which almost infallibly reveals ill disposition. This is the "old man" who loves "old things". *Let old things go away !* [1 S 2:3] The Lord loves youth: *I will go unto the altar of God, to the God who gives joy to my youth*" (Ps 43,4)...⁵⁴

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[15.] During Mass I received from God the gift of a spontaneous and constant self-offering in union with the Sacrifice, with much contentment.

This grace or gift of prayer recalls that disposition to suffer pain which Fr Gaspar earlier felt infused into his heart on 11 July. Here, however, it is intimately connected with **the self-offering of Christ in the Eucharist**⁵⁵ and in union with it, as the capital "s" indicates. This is the realization of: ***Imitate what you handle*** (from the Rite of Priestly Ordination), at the altar and beyond the altar.

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[16.] ***He who contemns small things shall fall little by little.***

This half-verse from **Sirach 19,1** can be read in a transcription in the very handwriting of Fr Bertoni at the head of several texts which develop the idea until the conclusion of **Qohelet 7,19: *He who fears the Lord neglects nothing.*** These are selected extracts from the book of Fr A. Rodriguez ***Exercise of Perfection***⁵⁶, where the author develops the theme of *Taking into account the small things and not to despise them.* After the quoted verse from Sirach, the text of St Bernard follows: *Those who fall into big mistakes have started with small trespasses.* Cassian then is quoted saying: *Houses do not fall all of a sudden: they start from small drops of water which filter through their foundations.* And then St John Chrysostom:

⁵⁴ Meditation 9, on *Primum Regum* of St. Gregory the Great – MssB ## 5099-5141.

⁵⁵ Web-site Note this is the *obsequium* so often noted by Fr. Bertoni [cf. Rm 12:1, ff.]

⁵⁶ Part I, Tract I, cc. 9, 10.

*...I dare say something new and unheard of. Sometimes it seems to me that we should make not so much more effort in avoiding big sins rather than small ones. The former by their own nature carry with themselves certain repulsion. The latter by the reason of their pettiness make us relaxed and lazy. And while we take little notice of them we do not make any big effort to get rid of them. As a result these little sins become big because of our negligence...*⁵⁷

Also St Augustine is quoted:

*...What does it matter in a shipwreck, whether the boat had been overturned by one large wave or whether the water seeping through the hold by a leakage, which had not been taken into consideration by negligence, submerged the boat? ...*⁵⁸

Faithfulness in little things assures us of God's help. We have a text of St Basil to support this:

... He who desires to be helped by God, should never cease from doing what is proper to him, namely his duty. If he does this, he will never be deprived of the divine help. Therefore we have to do our utmost to see to it that we should never be accused by our conscience of anything...

And we come to the text which was so often quoted by Fr Bertoni and his two first companions at the Stimmat: ***He who fears the Lord neglects nothing!***

†

30th JULY 1808

[17.] For the examination of conscience one should choose a Saint of the same vocation as a mirror. In this way one finds matter for confession every day. Whatever falls short of that Saint's perfection is faulty.

It is worthwhile to consider the method of Fr Bertoni in his daily Examination of Conscience. It is not surprising that during these examinations he sometimes was given remarkable gifts and graces. We have an example on 27 October 1808 when he wrote:

...In the first point of the Midday Examen, i.e. the thanksgiving, while prostrated on the floor in the sight of Heaven, I felt a deep sense of the divine presence with love and self-offering...

This maxim of Fr. Gaspar provides an insight into what should be every examen of conscience for one called to perfection.

Fr Bertoni had chosen St Ignatius of Loyola as model for his priestly vocation. He will tell us expressly in this JOURNAL on 15 Sept. The first biographer, Fr Giacobbe,

⁵⁷ St. John Chrysostom, Homily 37 in Mt. St. Gaspar offers a number of Meditations from St. John Chrysostom *On Matthew* – cf. MssB ## 7341, ff.

⁵⁸ Letter 106 to Seleuc.

wrote that Fr Bertoni *admired and studied much the works and virtues of St Ignatius, and had reproduced them very faithfully.*⁵⁹ In fact Fr Gaspar studied the Life of St Ignatius directly of at least four authors, i.e. Fr John Peter Maffei, Fr Peter Ribadeneira, Fr Daniel Bartoli and Fr Francis Mariani. Of the hand written extracts from the four authors which we possess, several could be part of this *Journal*. They reveal not only admiration for the Saint, but also his endeavor to imitate him.

The original idea of modeling his life on that of a Saint could have come to Fr Bertoni (after his boyhood practice of imitating Saint Aloysius Gonzaga), from the ***Imitation of Christ*** where he read: *Look at the living examples of the Holy Fathers*⁶⁰. He found inspiration also in Fr L. Scupoli's ***Spiritual Combat*** :

*... Compare your works with those of the Saints and other servants of God. In comparison with theirs you will know that your best and greatest works are of very low quality and worth. If you then compare them with those of Christ...(I am not talking on the side of his divinity, but purely as they have been humanly performed with sincerity and pure love)... you will see that yours are insignificant...*⁶¹

The ***Imitation of Christ*** and the classic of Scupoli appear as the first teachers of Fr Bertoni. We shall have a further proof in this *Journal*.

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[18.] To seek God alone. To see God in all things. This is to make oneself superior to all human things.

This seems to be a development of the mystical gift that Fr. Gaspar received during the Mass of the Sacred Heart (on 2 July) : **I felt my spirit detached from all creatures.** This is also what he admired (with his author Fr Mariani) in Saint Ignatius in whom he mirrored himself. Describing Saint Ignatius' magnanimity he noted 4 points:

*1. Tolerance in hardships 2. Confidence in God while despising human helps 3. Fortitude in embarking in hard enterprises 4. Constancy in bringing them to an end.*⁶²

The sign of signs which shines forth in the life of St Ignatius is **a total abandonment of self in God.**⁶³ Is this not **making oneself superior to all things?** And he wanted the same attitude from his sons.

Long before this date Dom Scupoli had taught Fr. Gaspar that if we truly seek God alone and do his will, and if we submit all judgment to that of our spiritual fathers, by praying the Holy Spirit, we shall always be granted the knowledge of the truth, inspired into our hearts by his light. A constant exercise of serious and honest reflection carried out in the right way, will make us understand clearly the following truths. That we

⁵⁹ ***Summarium Additionale*, Document 36, p. 456.**

⁶⁰ ***Imitation of Christ*, Book I, c. 18.**

⁶¹ ***Spiritual Combat*, c. 32.**

⁶² **Mariani, Book 4, c. 10, p. 403.**

⁶³ ***Ibid.* Book 3, p. 204.**

retain as empty, useless and deceitful all those things that the blind and corrupted world loves and longs for, because they are induced by it. That the honors and pleasures of the world are nothing else but emptiness and moral suffering. That the insults and humiliations which the world heaps upon us brings about true glory and contentment. That to pardon our enemies and to do good to them is magnanimity. This makes us more similar to God. It is better to despise the evil world than to be its master. That to obey willingly to poor creatures for the sake of God is more generous than to rule over many princes. That to know ourselves in all humility is a more precious thing than the highest science. That to conquer our appetites and to keep them in check, even the smallest ones, is a greater achievement than to conquer many cities or to win over powerful armies by wielding weapons or to work miracles and to raise the dead⁶⁴.

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[19.] All depends on the resolution of wanting to serve God at any cost. It is necessary to guard against velleity [wishful thinking]. We can distinguish velleity from the will by their consequences. In front of difficulties the former shrinks back and gives up, while the latter persists, gains stability and is strengthened.

It is clear that these three maxims are intimately connected to one another, and they condition the preceding note. On the part of man ***all depends on strengthening, that is to make firm and stable, the resolution of wanting to serve God at any cost.*** this is an Ignatian expression⁶⁵. Here is what Fr Bertoni proposed to the Clergy of Verona in 1810, during the Spiritual Exercises:

Whoever undertakes these Exercises will find much advantage if he comes with an open spirit and generosity towards his Creator and Lord. In all free will he should make an effort to offer himself to God so that he might decide of his person and his possessions according to His good pleasure⁶⁶.

He developed this theme more abundantly in the dialogue with the Lord which concluded the Introduction to the *Spiritual Exercises* :

... Lord, what do you want me to do? It is up to You to decide what should I work on during these days of Retreat, which are days of salvation. It depends on me, whatever the cost, to remove all obstacles which prevent me from complying with Your orders, and to carry out Your divine designs, when I come to understand them...⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Spiritual Combat*, c. 7.

⁶⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, 5th Annotation.

⁶⁶ *Collectanea Stigmatina* I, p. 110.

⁶⁷ *Collectanea Stigmatina* I, p. 114.

It is clear that such attitude of spirit conceived during the *Exercises* was not intended to limit this work to the retreat experience but had to continue as a steady disposition of will all during all his life.

A Genuine will: Fr. Bertoni warns that one should be on guard against *velleity* [wishful thinking]. As far as he himself was concerned, he had already copied from Rodriguez⁶⁸ a useful teaching: St Bonaventure says that there are some who take good resolutions, but they never do the work of controlling themselves and making the effort of putting them into practice, as the saying goes: ***For to will, is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not...***(Rom 7,18). These, often-times are not authentic resolutions, nor genuine desires. They are just some *velleities* according to which some express their wishful thinking, but they do not genuinely will to act: **The sluggard wills and wills not..** (Prov 13,4). On this point, let the above suffice: the rest of the transcription will find its application later on.

Fr Gaspar concludes that *velleity* lacks firmness of resolution, so that ***in the face of difficulties it shrinks back and gives up***, while **the authentic will** profits from difficulties. It knows how to persevere, to acquire stability and get established. St Teresa taught him that *the Devil fears much people who are determined*⁶⁹.

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[20.] We should imagine heaven as at the end of an avenue strewn and obstructed with thorns, scrubs and thickets. We have to look steadily to the end. Not to the thorns! And to walk on while removing this and that thorn bush. We should never rest until we reach the end.

It seems a paraphrasing of the evangelical ***How narrow the way that leads to life***, already quoted. Would it be that it is only "narrow"! Here, the classic motto ***look to the end***, the goal which is Heaven, is of urgent necessity. Otherwise who would endure the journey?

It is unusual to compare this image of Fr Gaspar with a dream or vision which Don Bosco had almost 40 years later (in 1847). Guided by Our Lady, the Saint states that he saw the road of his apostolate and life in anticipation, as it were. He saw a beautiful rustic portico with roses in full bloom which covered also the ground. Don Bosco took off his shoes with the intention not to crush the roses. Soon, however, his feet started bleeding as the roses were hiding the thorns. "I need shoes", said Don Bosco to himself. "You need good shoes" added Our Lady. Don Bosco put on his shoes. As he made his way through the bower, which remained attractive, it became narrower and lower. Don Bosco was pricked repeatedly from above and from the sides. He was bleeding from his whole body. Finally an enchanting garden opened up in front of him in which a gentle breeze healed his wounds and strengthened him. And suddenly he saw an enormous building and a magnificent hall scented with the fragrance of fresh roses without thorns.

⁶⁸ Part I, Tract I, c. 3.

⁶⁹ St. Teresa of Avila, *Path of Perfection*, c.23.

We have offered something a summary here by bringing together a few points of comparison. It was Our Lady who gave the explanation: "You must walk with the shoes of mortification" Then she addressed herself to everybody and said: "You will overcome all things with love and mortification and you will reach the thorn-less roses."

This is at least a coincidence! Fr Gaspar wrote his note when he was thirty. Don Bosco had his beautiful dream at thirty years of age.

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9th AUGUST 1808

[21.] He who does not follow the inspiration of God when He warns him to run away and to protect himself against some danger, deserves to fall into it.

This is certainly so. And this is the inspired Word: **Sirach 3,27: *He that loves danger shall perish in it.*** It is a danger in the meanings which Cornelius a' Lapide described in his *Commentary on Ecclesiasticus: Danger of damnation*. This is made clear by the first part of the verse of Sirach: ***A hard heart shall fear evil at the last ... Danger of mortal sin.*** Considering that the very fact of exposing oneself to sin with full consciousness is already a sin.

Fr. Bertoni will later make reference to the *danger of damnation*. He will also give us further personal reflection on the value of the *inspirations* which the heavenly Father is kind enough to send us.

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[22.] Self-love often disguises back-biting as zeal, charity or as a means of protecting oneself or others. Its true face is passion. One has to pay the penalty for it to God and shed many tears over it.

Fr. Bertoni had noticed in the life of St Ignatius, whom he had chosen as his mirror, that "he was very moderate in praising people, but much more moderate in blaming others." And that "back-biting was not heard from him nor did he listen to it. He wanted his companions to do the same". "When somebody would start talking in that way, he would begin either to justify the deed or, if that was difficult, the intention behind it. When even that avenue would become evidently untenable, he would refer to Holy Scripture saying: ***It is God who sees the heart.*** When, finally, he had to disapprove something, he would simply say: Truly I would not like to do that."

Another quotation: "He would not reveal the faults of his confreres except to those who had the power to correct them. In this he was restrained and cautious in such a way that whenever it was sufficient to disclose somebody else's fault to one person for correction, he would not disclose it to a second one."

Fr Gaspar had also taken down this quotation: "These were the reasons for which his governance was appreciated: 1. The regard that the subjects had for his prudence. 2. The appreciation that each one felt he had for them... or rather: 3....the love he had for them." All of these are extracts taken from the *Life of the Saint* by Fr. Mariani, SJ⁷⁰.

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[23.] St Teresa judged favorably somebody's objection against her methods. She changed and she found subsequently that it was the right course of action. This was because she had much diffidence regarding herself, and much confidence in God.

⁷⁰ Mariani, Book 4, c. 19, pp. 399, f.; Book 3, c. 6, p. 227.

One understands that St Teresa saw immediately that such a person was genuinely sincere, according to the principle she described in the 13th chapter of her **Life**. We give it here in the edition which must have been familiar to Fr Gaspar: *God likes generous souls and is friendly with them, provided they live in humility and are much diffident of themselves. I never saw any of these souls remaining behind in the journey of perfection.* In her **Path of Perfection** she said: *We must not rely on ourselves. The more we take the decision of not offending God, the less we have to rely on our own strength. All our confidence has to come from God and to rest on Him.*⁷¹ Fr. Gaspar must have found this doctrine much in accordance with his Master St. Ignatius and with the Spirit of Holy Abandonment in which he saw his vocation. The **Spiritual Combat** of Fr. Scupoli is clear: *distrust in ourselves, trust in God: we combat and pray.*⁷²

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[24.] If one's own faults were revealed and all people of the district were talking about them, as it happens with those of others, one could see how much more dreadful they are. Especially after so many graces and inspirations that we received. If these graces had been given to those people, they would be saints.

In this text Fr Gaspar seems to apply to himself what Fr Rodriguez reported as having been said by St Francis Xavier:

*...Whoever considers his own sins and defects and what he really is in the sight of God, when hearing others praising him, he would think that they were pulling his leg. He would even take those praises as insult and shame...*⁷³

It seems also that Fr Gaspar could apply to himself the answer St. Francis of Assisi gave to the one who asked him how could he say that he was the greatest sinner in the world:

*...If God had bestowed on a thief and on the greatest of all sinners the mercies and the blessings which he has bestowed on me, that man would have been better than I am. He would also have been much more grateful than what I have been to Him. And if God would withdraw His hand from me and no longer protect me, I would commit greater evils than all other men and I would be worse than they are...*⁷⁴

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17th AUGUST 1808

[25.] When charity enters into a soul, lust flees from it.

⁷¹ St. Teresa of Avila, *Path of Perfection*. c. 41.

⁷² From the Letter of Dedication of the Book: *To the Supreme Captain and Most Glorious Victor, Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary.*

⁷³ Rodriguez, Part I, Tract 6, c. 3.

⁷⁴ Rodriguez, Part II, Tract 3, c.34.

This is the specific case of Mary Magdalene at the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee (**Lk 7: 36-50**). Fr Bertoni's statement is perhaps a specification of the more general expression of St Augustine⁷⁵ which Cornelius a' Lapse quotes in the commentary to that evangelical passage: *charity gives death to sins and life to virtues* .

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[26.] When we want to pray we ought to begin with Christ and his Passion. Then we have to leave the spirit free to be attracted by God.

This is precisely the suggestion which St Teresa received from St Francis Borgia during one of the most crucial moments of her life, when her very friends judged her mystical phenomena as diabolical. She called a Jesuit Father to whom she made her general confession. That priest told her that "it was evident that that was the spirit of God". He cautioned her that in the meantime she should refrain from yielding to those interior calls which took away the use of her senses. When she met providentially with St Francis Borgia she received a new direction. *After listening to me - she wrote - St. Borgia confirmed that it was God's spirit and said that I should no longer resist Him and that what I had done before was good. He asked me that I should start my Prayer with a verse from the Passion of Christ*. He added that if the Lord should uplift my spirit (without my own procuring this), I should not put any resistance. I should let God operate. To do otherwise would be surely a mistake.⁷⁶ Hence the Saint herself teaches:

...This thinking and discussing about the events of the Passion, is the manner of Prayer in which all people have to begin, to continue and to complete. This is a most excellent and sure journey until God might uplift the soul and lead it into more supernatural experiences...⁷⁷

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[27.] In matter of Vocations, rather than urging people, it is good to leave the care to God.

Is Fr. Bertoni talking about vocations to the priesthood? To the Religious life? We believe he means both. He had wide opportunity to be faithful to this principle both as Clerical Vocation Examiner by mandate of the bishops, and as **Counselor of the Clergy** and *other people of all classes and status who referred themselves to him for light and direction in their search for religious vocation. He would examine them, comfort them and give them direction. How many did he send to almost all Religious Orders and to the foreign Missions!*⁷⁸ From this principle Fr Marani, his "first-born" and successor, drew his own formula: *Do not give anybody a Vocation!*⁷⁹

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⁷⁵ St. Augustine, *In Praise of Charity*.

⁷⁶ *Life*, cc. 23, 24. Ed. Cit. 1723. Tome I, pp. 88. 89.

⁷⁷ *Opere Spirituali*, o.c. Tome 2: *Counsels St. Teresa gave for Prayer*, n. 7, p.235.

⁷⁸ *Summariu Addtionale*, Document 20, p. 156.

⁷⁹ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. 2, p. 246.

[28.] Once we confess our sin and we feel sorry for it, God is so good that He forgets completely about it. He treats us with the same kind considerations as before.

A priest who had given scandal presented himself to his bishop, St Francis de Sales, who had summoned him. He protested his own innocence: *They are all calumnies!* His bishop blushed on account of him. That blushing disarmed the priest. He gave in and said: *Your Excellency, please hear my confession!*

After confession a dialogue ensued:

- *Your Excellency, what do you think of the greatest sinner in the world?*
- *I think that God has showered on you his most generous mercy. In my eyes you are just a shining grace.*
- *But you too know what I am...*
- *You are just what I said. - I mean "what I had been. -That is exactly what I do no longer recollect. Why should I keep in my memory what God has already forgotten? Would you perhaps take me as that Pharisee who treated Mary Magdalene for what she had been, and not for what she was when she washed the feet of the Saviour with her tears?* ⁸⁰

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19th AUGUST 1808

[29.] ‘Let him who stands see to it that he should not fall’. Humility, but not without great confidence.

We think we can interpret Fr Bertoni's thought by referring to his Master Fr. Da Ponte on the threefold denial of Peter. "I should draw a lesson, (from this denial), for my own spiritual progress: i.e. not to be vain or presumptuous, nor to trust in myself, calling to mind what St Paul said : ***You stand by Faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. Let him who thinks himself to stand, let him take heed lest he falls.*** Fr. Bertoni seems to have quoted the text from memory The phrase he added to the biblical quotation, seems to be the practical result of the reflection on it and, perhaps, also the result of a special gift of Prayer. **(Rom 11:20; I Co 10:12)**⁸¹.

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20th AUGUST 1808

[30.] We have to enter into someone else's house in his own way, to be able to come out in our own way.

This is an Ignatian motto, recorded also by Rodriguez. We should like to present it in the context in which it is found in Fr. Bartoli's biography of Ignatius⁸²:

⁸⁰ **Monsignor G. P. Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales.* Part 14, c. 13. [We believe that this is the source of the above note of Fr Gaspar].**

⁸¹ **Fr. DaPonte, *Life...*, o.c. Part 4, Meditation 28, Point 1,n. 2.**

⁸² **Bartoli, Book 4, n. 20.**

... One of Ignatius' successful skills by which he used to attract his fellow-people to God was to talk about spiritual matters in his home conversation. He used to call this the manner most proper to his Company. It should however be used with caution. If not so, we would have the result that the Religious will be influenced by the Profane rather than the Profane be influenced by the Religious. The Religious should not start off immediately to talk with worldly people about spiritual matters. This would be like showing the bare hook, without the bait, nor any interesting attraction. With wisdom he should rather let himself be accompanied by the people to talk initially about what is of interest to them, i.e. about business with merchants, about war with soldiers, about leadership with people of government and so on. Then, once well established, he would give the conversation an upturn. He would talk about goods and wars and kingdoms: i.e. to conquer heaven, to conquer their vices, to control their passions. Ignatius used to call such manner entering by their way and getting out by our way... or enter by the way of God".⁸³

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24th AUGUST 1808

[31.] At St Joseph's. At the bottom of one's own nothingness God is found. On hearing very sublime things about God: a profound awareness of myself.

St Joseph's was the Convent of Saints Joseph and Fidentius, which was also called "The Canossa Retreat". Fr Bertoni used to visit this "Retreat" as Spiritual Director of the women and girls who lived there, under the leadership of the Foundress Magdalene di Canossa.

The first sentence seems to be the leading thought of a mystical experience which followed: unless it is itself the content of that experience. In the original manuscript there is no separation. As a principle it sounds Carmelite. It makes one thing of the *nothingness [nada]* of St John of the Cross. Here one would say that it is the result of the Ignatian *detachment from all creatures* (cf. above 2 July) and the **seek God alone and see God in all creatures** (cf. 30 July) which is also suggested by Ignatius. With regard to the sources of *humility* Fr Gaspar saw here a confirmation of Da Ponte's doctrine: *Humility springs from the knowledge of one's own nothingness... and from the knowledge of the infinite majesty of God and of our dependence on Him.*⁸⁴

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[32.] In the evening, while looking at the image of the Blessed Trinity: much reverence and love for the three Persons. The Eternal Father who had his arms open was displaying to me His mercy and communicating with easiness his gifts etc...

⁸³ **Web site Note** : cf. *Conversational Word of God*. Institute of Jesuit Sources

⁸⁴ **DaPonte, Meditations**. Index: Third point, *Humility*.

This is another mystical experience. The **etc.**, which ends the note implies that what is said of the Father may also be said of the other two Persons. Fr Dalle Vedove accompanies this text with a quotation from the *Summa* of St Thomas: *To render worship to God as Father is still more excellent than to render worship to God as Creator and Master*. Then he states that it would be *a distortion of the character of Fr Bertoni if he were to be judged only as an respectful keeper of the Lord's precepts*⁸⁵.

†

[33.] The Divine Office was recited with much devotion and for the glory of God.

Evidently, this too was an extraordinary grace. It should be pointed out that Fr Bertoni - as his first biographer stated- was habitually very highly prepared for the recitation of his Breviary, by observing these eight norms:

1. **Look at the *Ordo*.**⁸⁶
2. **Place all the book marks in order also for the Psalms.**
3. **Recollect your person with all your feelings and gestures.**
4. **Recite it standing or kneeling or, when necessary, sitting, but without any leaning or twisting of the body.**
5. **Recite it with the proper pauses.**
6. **Pronounce distinctly the words, making a note when this was not done.**
7. **Read with such attention that there will be no need of repetition.**
8. **Do not stop to grasp the meaning: this could be done afterwards.**⁸⁷

†

31st AUGUST 1808

[34.] In the matter of mortification, "I CANNOT", said by religious persons, sounds very bad: because we can do anything in God. Some do not want to mortify themselves with the excuse that certain difficulties are "crosses" sent by Heaven. So, under a false pretext, they are complacent with their defects as if they were Heaven's will.

I cannot, an inability which is hemmed in by the word **cross**, indeed **a cross from Heaven**. A person, then, without attempting any further step, accommodates himself to that situation with all those defects which will never disappear without the exercise of mortification. He will eventually become comfortable with the Cross as *the*

⁸⁵ Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono*. Part I, c. 5, [English translation may be found on the Web-site]. . St. Thomas teaches that the supernatural virtue of *Religion* reaches its perfection in the Gift of *Piety*, by which the Holy Spirit reveals the *Father* in God. In his *Journal*, Fr. Bertoni shows that together with the deep reverence and adoration towards God as infinite Majesty he was given the gift of experiencing tender affection and confidence in God the Father. [This is the foundation of his spirituality of Total Abandonment.

⁸⁶ **Translator's Note:** (the Liturgical Calendar)

⁸⁷ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p.332.

will of Heaven. I cannot ?... But: I can do all things in Him who strengthens me ! (Phil 4,13), says Fr Bertoni. He then added with Saint Paul Not I, though, but God's grace with me! (I Cor 15,10).

*In the matter of mortification. By the standard of St Ignatius and Fr Bertoni ⁸⁸ holiness itself is measured by the degree of mortification. It is the standard of the Gospel: **If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself** : this is *active* mortification. **And take up his cross...**(Mt 16:24). This is *passive* mortification. An authentic cross, not some naive deception fabricated by lack of mortification.*

†

[35.] Great temptations are matter and means of great holiness: provided one has courage and fortitude.

This is a lesson which Fr Bertoni had read and learned from St Ignatius himself. At the beginning of his conversion "Ignatius", as Fr Mariani, SJ, wrote:

... for the space of four months enjoyed a sweet tranquility of conscience together with that peace of God, which, according to St Paul, by far surpasses any sensual delight. When the Lord (who uses to test his chosen ones as the gold is tested in the furnace) intended to make of Ignatius an excellent Master experienced in things spiritual, allowed that the Devil engaged him in fierce battles... ⁸⁹

Fr Bertoni had taken the initiative of recording from a letter of St Francis Xavier, "what are the weapons to be used to blunt the attacks of the Enemy":

... The greatest of all remedies, and the most certain, is to have great constancy of soul against the Devil" (the courage and fortitude of Fr Gaspar's note), with diffidence toward oneself and confidence in God alone, entrusting all your powers and hopes in Him. Be sure that under such a "defender" you should not appear fearful and doubtful about victory. The Devil can only bring harm in so far as God allows him to. Therefore in such situations one has to fear more the lack of trust in the Lord than the efforts of the Devil... ⁹⁰

Fr Bertoni will use these teachings for the formation of the young clergy to which his bishop will call him:

... What does one know, who has not been tempted? – [he will respond to his own question]: ... Now, such knowledge is utterly necessary as a preparation for Vocation ...Ah, Lord! since the life of man on earth is a warfare, please protect us with Your armor. Put into our minds the ability

⁸⁸ cf. Fr. Bertoni's entry above for July 12th.

⁸⁹ Mariani, *Life...* o.c., Book I, c. 6, p. 25.

⁹⁰ Mss. n. 34.

to wield them, and our victory will redound to Your glory. For us it will be a crown, the assurance and sign of Your approval...⁹¹

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⁹¹ Fr. Bertoni's transcription of St. Gregory the Great's work on *Primum Regum*. Meditation 12. [Fr. Gaspar also used the military imagery in his letters to Mother Naudet: studies as a weapon for the spiritual combat [*Epistolario*, p. 91] - to *find oneself well-armed...* [l.c. p. 179].

5th SEPTEMBER 1808

[36.] Humble yourself in all things.

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

*... a true, deep knowledge that you are nothing, you know nothing, you can nothing and you have nothing else except defects and poverty, and that you are only worthy of eternal damnation... Oh! would it be that we come to understand this **nothingness** which makes us masters of everything! Humble yourself in front of everybody and beneath everybody, if you want to exalt God in you and you in Him. If you long to find Him, do not exalt yourself, because He will run away. Lower yourself, and lower yourself as much as you can, because He will come to find you out and he will embrace you! He will all the more dearly welcome you and hug you in love, the more you lower yourself in your own eyes...⁹²*

There is no characteristic trait in the life of Fr Bertoni, than what is surely a fidelity to the motto of the Franciscan Brother Giles, as St. Gaspar preached it from the pulpit of St Paul's: **I have seen many people who because they wanted to climb too high, have fallen. For my part I cling well close to the ground, not to fall!**⁹³

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

†

11th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

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

†

13th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

⁹² Scpoli, *Spiritual Combat*, c. 32.

⁹³ Cf. St. Gaspar's Sermon 7, On Pride, July 26, 1801, in: PVC, pp. 144, ff. [MssB ## 572, ff.].

Rodriguez⁹⁴ states that "Our Holy Father, Ignatius, in his Constitutions⁹⁵ puts in front of us as a mark to be targeted *to struggle to imitate the purity of angels*. We must note that Latin verb **enitendo**, which does not simply mean *to make an effort* but rather *to do violence to oneself* while making an effort.

Fr Bertoni took the following notes from Da Ponte's **Meditation on the Annunciation**⁹⁶:

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

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

... that perfection of Chastity - to be acquired with all effort - which befits persons whose office is similar to angels'. They are to be the *paranymphs* of Our Lord Jesus Christ... by which they have to present to Him their souls as a chaste virgin, holy in mind and body...⁹⁷

†

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

This reflection is connected with the note of 31 August, **Great temptations...** It seems that here too Fr Bertoni thought of the teaching of Da Ponte⁹⁸:

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

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

⁹⁴ Rodriguez, Part III, Trace 4, c. 1

⁹⁵ CSJ, n. 547

⁹⁶ DaPonte, *Meditations*, Part II, Meditation 6, Point 2, n. 92.

⁹⁷ CF # 109. **Translator's Note: (The "paranymph" was the "procurator of the wedding [the Best Man??]". This biblical image was very dear to Fr Bertoni. He saw his Apostolic Missionaries as "mediators" between God and men in the mystical Wedding of the Kingdom of God.)**

⁹⁸ DaPonte, o.c., Part VI, Meditation 32, Point 2.

... Temptation does not take hold of you except as much as human nature can bear. God is faithful: he cannot tempt you beyond your strength...⁹⁹

†

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

Dom Scupoli wrote:

*...Exercise prudence and discretion in those good activities which can cause harm to the body - like using self-scourging, hair-shirts, fasting and similar things. What is questioned is not the use but the abuse. He warned the soul against the Devil who urges to chastise severely the body with scourging, abstinence, hair-shirt and similar cruelties with the aim that we should become proud of the good we do... or so that the consequent infirmities make us unable to do good works... or even so that, under excessive labor and pain, we begin to loathe the spiritual exercises.*¹⁰⁰

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

... Chastisement of the body should not be exaggerated, nor inconvenient, with wakes, abstinences and other external penances which normally cause harm and hamper greater good ...¹⁰¹ He must have been happy to hear this from "his" Ignatius!

†

15th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

It was at the time of the annual Spiritual Exercises of the Clergy and the Candidates for Ordination, on the autumn Ember Saturday, which that year fell on 24 September. The *Exercises* began on Thursday evening, the 15th. The collegial visit to the altar of St

⁹⁹ Cf. St. Gaspar's Meditation 12, transcribed from St. Gregory the Great, on *Primum Regum* [cf. MssB ## 5240-5295, Epiphany 1811 (??)]

¹⁰⁰ Scupoli, *Spiritual Combat*, 33 & 42.

¹⁰¹ St. Ignatius did not prescribe any particular penances [cf. CSJ nn. 8; 296; 580. [Fr. Bertoni followed suit: cf. CF ## 43; 44; 112].

Ignatius in the church of the Jesuits (whose Order was still suppressed), showed that for those ecclesiastics Saint Ignatius remained always the "Master".

We do not know what the others had experienced during that "short visit". Surely, in the life of Fr Bertoni that was a land mark! If it is true that *the creature is called to pursue the glory of God* and that *the zeal for the glory of God must follow the plans which Divine Providence established for the destinies of the Elect*¹⁰², that day must have appeared to Fr Bertoni as the day of his effective insertion into those divine plans. As a matter of fact the Lord eased the experience by such a gift of Prayer, accompanied by **some tears** and with **much cheerfulness**, that to the humble priest it should have felt as really extraordinary. The fact also that he wrote this accurate note shows that he intended to remain grateful for it. He wanted to stimulate himself to correspond to it adequately. We should read again this note, therefore, with the same respectful devotion with which it was written.

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

†

[42.] I fear Jesus passing by.

It sounds like the motto of the Introduction to the Annual Retreat. Its meaning is obvious. In a sermon at the beginning of his apostolic ministry, Fr J.B. Lenotti, forty years later but still under the direct guidance of Fr Bertoni, will express the same thought. He started off by saying that *God gives us his help today, and we do not know whether tomorrow it will be the same... Those effective inspirations which He bestows unto the souls are like sudden lightning or fleeting lights, which made St Augustine say **timeo Jesum transeuntem** (I fear Jesus passing by). Woe to us if we do not correspond quickly to the grace which he offers us while walking by. Perhaps we shall never have it again!*¹⁰³

More than the meaning which St Augustine¹⁰⁴ offers, this is the obvious meaning from the Gospel incident which the Saint commented upon, i.e. **Mt 20,30-34**: **And behold two blind men sitting by the way-side heard that Jesus passed by, and they cried out saying: O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us! And the multitude rebuked that they should keep their peace. But they cried the more, saying: O Lord, son of David, have pity on us! And Jesus stood having compassion on them, touched their eyes. And immediately they saw, and followed Him...**

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

¹⁰² Fr. Dalle Vedove, *CSS, Modello ...* o.c., pp.22 & 27.

¹⁰³ Fr. J.B. Lenotti, Sermon 'On the Mercy of God', for the Holy Year of 1852 – extended from 1850.

¹⁰⁴ Sermon 88, on the Words of the Gospel of Mt 20 [Maurina edition]

†

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

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

†

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

This sentence is a deeper reflection on the text of St Augustine¹⁰⁵, already quoted:

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

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

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

†

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

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

†

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

This, too, is a Retreat text. It might have been quoted by the Retreat Master. Or it could come from Fr. Bertoni's personal reading of St Bernard's *Considerations for Pope Eugene*. It was an exhortation to St Bernard's former disciple who became Pope¹⁰⁶. Here is the text:

...Eugene, should I praise you if you give all your life and knowledge to external action and no time to reflecting ? No, I do not praise you, certainly! Action must be prepared

¹⁰⁵ St. Augustine, 'Discourse on the Two Blind Men'. Translation of G. Sandri. Brescia: Morcelliana, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Letter to Pope Eugene, c. 5, 14.

by reflection. Therefore, remember: **give yourself back to yourself!** ...I don't mean always, nor often but at least some time. Is this too much of a favor? I ask for this as a favor not as pretending to judge...

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

†

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

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

†

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

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

... If we priests are superior to you, on account of our dignity, we remain in the condition of human beings like you. We are pressed by the same tribulations from every side. We are assaulted by the same enemies. We are threatened by the same dangers if not even greater... As far as I am concerned, at least, I do not hesitate to declare that I fear much, under such overwhelming burden, that my negligence and luke-warmness could ruin me in front of God as judge. He declared that he will be very harsh in judging those same people whom He had chosen to be above others in dignity. I hope that the prayers of many people will make Him more favorable and appeased with me... ¹⁰⁷

He will preach to the young Seminarians of Verona:

... God presents to his chosen one the Ministry to which He called him as very formidable (*fearfully heavy even for the angels' shoulders*). He has to give an account to such a strict Judge also of the souls of others. Not only of his own faults but of his omissions too. This is so, even if the priest is a man of great prayer and knowledgeable and virtuous: *elevated above others in contemplation and outstanding in action...* ¹⁰⁸

Fr. Bertoni told this same audience that:

¹⁰⁷ PVC, p. 189. Sermon 13 *On respect for Priests*, September 26, 1802 [The week of his 2nd Anniversary of his own Ordination as a Priest. [MssB ## 67694].

¹⁰⁸ Meditation 16-b, on St. Gregory the Great's *Primum Regum*.

... the just idea of how lofty and all-embracing the priestly power is, together with great respect for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is a very good sign of priestly vocation. But he added that He who understands on one hand the loftiness of the priestly status and on the other the abuse that many make of it, will develop a great trepidation. He will understand the gravity of the fall when he sees a priest sin. *Great is the dignity of priests, but great also is their ruin!* ¹⁰⁹

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

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

†

17th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

This is a reflection on the Meditation of the day during this course of Retreat which lasted 8 days. The previous day he had meditated on the **Foundation** (the Purpose of Human Life) and on Sin. On the 17th he meditated on the **Last Things** and first: on Death. After the text which he heard from the Retreat Master and ended with: *only the present is here - it is in my hands!* He then added his personal resolution. This resolution has its source in a reading of Rodriguez':

... Do not take into account anything except TODAY. It is the usual temptation of the Devil to frighten us with the prospect of having to persevere for the whole stretch of a long life. This happened to St. Ignatius at Manresa. But who is not able to make an effort only for one day? To this he adds a charming text from Genesis, about Jacob trying to win Rachel to himself. This could become a norm of life and it is chosen as a

¹⁰⁹ **Ib., Meditation 13 – MssB ## 5296, ff.**

conclusion of the whole chapter. This is the text [***These seven years were***] **seemed to him but a few days, because of the greatness of his love!** (Gen 29,20)...¹¹⁰

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

*... This is what is called time. The past is not ours, nor can it be recalled. The future is not yet and will perhaps never be. Only the present belongs to us. But, alas! We scarcely have it, because it runs away even though we can keep it for ourselves. In fact in the same time that it starts to be it passes or rather it has passed away...*¹¹¹

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

†

21st SEPTEMBER 1808

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

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

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

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

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

†

25th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

¹¹⁰ Rodriguez, Part I, Tract 2, c. 6.

¹¹¹ Fr. Stofella found this text of Augustine's *Confessions* 11, in: Fr. Vincent Houdry, SJ, *Preacher's Library*. Remondini: Venice - a book much used by our early Confreres.

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

...Those Religious who imitate the Apostles have as their aim to get concerned not only about their own salvation and perfection, but also about the salvation and perfection of their neighbor...and...profess to be companions of Jesus in this enterprise. They offer themselves with enthusiasm for any labor whatsoever...until the shedding of blood...for the glory of God and the salvation of souls...¹¹²

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

†

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

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

†

27th SEPTEMBER 1808

¹¹² DaPonte, Part II, 'Fundamental Meditation', Point 3, n. 4. [This ideal of the imitation of the Apostles in the service of Jesus Christ under-lies St. Gaspar's central dream: Apostolic Missionaries for the Service of Bishops. [CF ## 1; 259; 272; 273].

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

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

*...O most blessed Trinity, how could I ever thank You for having disclosed Your hidden infinite greatness, with the Incarnation? Whatever I'll give You for such a gift will always be too small. Should I not love You and serve You because of that? Here I am, Lord, completely dedicated to Your service. I desire to love You as You loved me and to imitate Your same virtues which You have disclosed to me. Having given me what is more, please give me what is less. Grant me to love You because of this infinite gift You have given me. Amen...*¹¹³

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

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

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

It seems that Fr Gaspar spent this whole day in reflecting upon the Incarnation, as if he was still on Retreat. The content of his second note refers clearly to a second meditation on this subject as in Da Ponte's and his own manuscript: *The charity of God in the Incarnation* : **God so love the world (Jo 3,16)**. That meditation had a most proper conclusion during the evening visit in the Church Blessed Sacrament. This service was known in Verona as *perdonanza* (a spiritual exercise of reconciliation), which we have transliterated as the word appears.

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

And he prayed:

*... Oh only-begotten Son of the Father, how much could I thank You for having come to the world to free us from so many evils and to fill us with so many gifts?*¹¹⁴

¹¹³ DaPonte, Part II, Mweditation I, Point 2,, n. 8.

¹¹⁴ ib., Meditation 2, Point 3, nn. 2, 3.

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



28th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

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



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

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

*...What is of utmost importance is the mortification of passions and the exercise of true and strong virtues"... What we have to exercise ourselves in, mostly, is this interior mortification: while the exterior mortification, which is also necessary, should be used as a means to reach the interior one.*¹¹⁵



29th SEPTEMBER 1808

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

This text does not allow us to interpret the nature of that **understanding**. We think that after the intense experiences of the previous days, it should have been of the same

¹¹⁵ Rodriguez, Part 2, Tract I, c. 7, 4. [The author presents this as a peculiar teaching of St Francis Xavier.]

nature as those graces. It was also a tasty penetration of the spirit of the Beatitudes. In this case too we leave it as "*the secret of the King*" [Mt 5:10; Lk 6:23].

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

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

Here are some extracts from that *panegyric*.

... To talk about this most holy Hero is to talk about the most perfect spirit of Penance, and the most sublime spirit of the Cross and the most fervent spirit of love towards Christ crucified. Hence we can easily apply to him those words of Christ: "If one wants to come after me, let him deny himself!" This is the spirit of penitence. "Let him take his cross". This is the spirit of the cross. "Let him follow after me" (Mt 16,24). This is the spirit of love. These are the principles, these are the steps and this is the perfection of his holiness.

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

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

... This is, therefore, the way along which Francis walked and reached heaven. Let us follow him courageously by living the evangelical

perfection through the commandments, or through the evangelical counsels, if God has called us to that. We too shall manage to imitate Christ on earth and to possess Him for all eternity. Let us set out immediately on this path, because the journey is long. The time allotted to us is perhaps very short. Eternity that awaits us is without end...!¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ St. Gaspar Bertoni emphasized the integral aspects of the Paschal Mystery in his 'Franciscan Panegyrics' – this one of 1808 – as well as the other one honoring St. Veronica Giuliani, the Capuchin mystic remembered in 1839. Here are some excerpts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8th OCTOBER 1808

[58.] Inner movement to fight against small defects as I did, on other occasions, against big ones. [Determination] to rise towards virtue with all diligence. The time in which I can serve God and promote His glory and sanctify myself is running short more and more.

Time is running short more and more. Fr Bertoni told himself this, after having preached it from the pulpit. **Let us set out on the path, because the journey is long, and the time very short.** (One does not preach to others without prodding himself too!) This very thought was worrying him particularly since 17 Sept. Spiritual Exercises. Meditation on Death: **Only the present is here and it is in my hands. Let me live day after day...perhaps I will have no more time to glorify God.**

Therefore one has to quicken the tempo, not to slow down the fight. On the opposite: **fight against small defects, as I did against big ones.** Are the latter ones no longer on the schedule?...**Oh, not because of my own power but by the mercy of God...**

To rise towards virtue with all diligence: this is today's inspiration ...**one of the many-** he said with Da Ponte's- **which God sends me every day as many envoys and invisible messengers. Through those inspirations He talks to me and discloses His will and He urges me to let Him enter into my soul..** These are extracts from a Meditation on *The Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary*. The subtitle reads: "The inspirations are like messages of God to the soul". Da Ponte presented this as a teaching of St Bonaventure. He quoted from the treatise ***The Seven Gifts of the Spirit***. [c. 6]:

*... Inspirations are like many invisible envoys and messengers of God. Through them God talks to me, discloses His will to me or urges me to let him enter into my soul and to occupy myself in things which regard His service. So, when I hear within myself these inspirations I have to receive them as ambassadors of God. I must thank Him very much because He is kind enough to talk to me through them. I must accept immediately what He asks me to do and beg Him to talk often to me like this...*¹¹⁷

Fr. Bertoni often made use of this figure of speech. On 28 February 1813 he wrote to Mother Leopoldina Naudet:

... You did well to follow the inspiration, but we have to follow it through to its fulfillment. These inspirations are like messengers which walk before the great lords of this world. Therefore the messengers of His Divine Majesty want to be welcome and listened to. We have to do what they order us to. Because after they have made their preparation and we, following their counseling, ours, the Lord of heaven and earth Himself will come to visit us. Prepare, Reverend Mother, prepare the lodging for such a Guest! (84). Just before this he had written]: ***It is the task of man to***

¹¹⁷ Cf. DaPonte, o.c., Point 1, n. 5.

prepare his soul (Prov.16,1). I will not just say "be diligent" in preparing your soul for the visits of His Divine Majesty but rather "have, with the help of God, the utmost and most exquisite and finest diligence in keeping your soul prepared for those visits. *Do not hinder yourself from praying always (Sir.18: 22).* Being cautious to keep silent, keeping conversations short and avoiding funny behavior is helpful in letting the ears open to the gentle whispering of our Creator...¹¹⁸

Now - that the time is short- let us resume the planned struggle and the urgent exercise of virtue **with all diligence**. We cannot spend a single minute except in **serving God and promoting His glory and sanctifying ourselves**.

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9th OCTOBER 1808

[59.] **Feast of St Denis and the Maternity of the Virgin Mary.**
During the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass near the time of the *memento*, it seemed that my mind opened up to know with Whom was I speaking. I felt great affection and an enthusiasm of love in prayer. Then some outbursts of my heart for God and some impulses of my spirit towards God. I seemed to be like a person overwhelmed by the appearance of a great friend who had not been seen for a long time and on seeing him suddenly, he wants to throw himself at him and embrace him. Then I felt a desire that the vision could increase and an impulse to be able to reach the Supreme Good. Since I was in public I feared [the feeling of] some vanity and I [made an effort to] think of my most serious sins. As a consequence [I felt] an increase of knowledge of goodness and love which dissolved in most soothing tears which lasted until after Holy Communion. In the meantime faith and confidence increased very much together with humility and loving reverence. Lastly, at Communion, a very intense devotion and sentiment similar to that of my First Holy Communion: an experience that I am not aware of having felt since. The recollection lasted for another hour and it remained for the rest of the evening.

It was the second Sunday of October, the 18th after Pentecost, and Fr. Bertoni's birthday. He was 31 year old. It was also his name-day because Denis was the third name given him on his Baptism day. That day the commemoration of St. Denis had to give liturgical precedence to the celebration of the feast of the Maternity of the Virgin Mary. That feast was commemorated in the regions under the Venetian Dominions on the second Sunday of October. Could not all this have had some bearing in preparing the soul of Fr Bertoni **for the visits of His Divine Majesty?**

It seems that one should read this day's entry on one's knees! What can we say? Fr. Gaspar found himself taken over by a very special state of grace. Let us note first that **opening** of his mind and heart. This prompted these **outbursts** of his spirit toward God. Such a desire and impulse reached Him. Then, on the apparent threshold of

¹¹⁸ *Epistolario*, p. 68 – Letter 22.

ecstasy, in order not to fall into vanity in front of the public, he made an effort to **think of his very serious sins**. This reminds us of what St Teresa of Avila used to say to her nuns :

... Let us be on guard when we are taken by these great impulses of such desires, not to add anything nor to increase them. We have to cut the thread gently with some other consideration... ¹¹⁹

However, it seems as though Grace took firm hold of Fr Gaspar even after the ecstasy. He was given a certain consciousness of the Divine Goodness. He experienced gentle tears, and an increase in virtues. He was being granted literally what he prayed for in that familiar Ignatian prayer written for his own private use: **Give me humility and loving reverence** (cf. 12 July). What can be said about his remembrance of his First Holy Communion day? ... The sway of grace in his soul seems to go back a long time in his life.

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10th OCTOBER 1808

[60.] Tears during Mass, followed by recollection. And silence.

A very short note. It is however sufficient to make us aware that Fr Gaspar was still enveloped in the same atmosphere of the day before. He experienced those same sweet tears during Mass. The same recollection after Mass. And then: **silence!** Is this not his **keeping an ear open to the most gentle whispering of our Creator**¹²⁰. Or is this not a certain **whispering** that is already in progress? On this day, this, too, is *the secret of the King*.

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11th OCTOBER 1808

[61.] Clarity of mind during study. Affection in praying the Rosary.

Here he mentions what seems to be the usual study required of a priest and the daily recitation of the third part of the Holy Rosary. These activities, however, must have been made so precious by God with some spiritual gifts that Fr Gaspar wanted to record them with a special remembrance in his Journal as a sign of gratefulness. These too could be presumed to be gifts of extraordinary nature.

Our hope is that God would grant us such dispositions of spirit to be worthy of receiving similar enlightenment in our studies and similar increase in affection towards the Mother of God during our daily Rosary! And surely Fr. Gaspar would share with us some of his deeply humble spirit of gratitude!

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[62.] When in a Religious Community each member does not apply himself deliberately to his specific perfection, that Community cannot

¹¹⁹ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, c. 19.

¹²⁰ *Epistolario*, I.c., p. 68.

make progress. And even if it does go on, it will be without spirit and only as languishing.

A Community is nothing more than the sum total of all its members. If the members lack **zeal and are languishing** and if *operari sequitur esse* (action follows from being), what other result could a Community expect? And how can this Community progress if not **languishing**?

This thought seems to have been derived from St Teresa of Avila:

...Believe me: the point is not to wear the religious habit or not, but rather in seeing to it that we exercise ourselves in virtues and in subjecting all our will to the will of God. The harmony and order of our lives should be that which His Divine Majesty will order and decide upon. We do not want that our will be done, but his... ¹²¹

Whether he was aware of it or not, this principle in Fr. Bertoni was a decisive step towards his role as **Founder**. This entry can be connected with the visit to the altar of St Ignatius, together with earlier reflections and some which will follow.

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12th OCTOBER 1808

[63.] Whoever is drawn by the Spirit to a way of greater perfection - as it is that of being totally abandoned to God, - should not resent others who are of lower virtue and use lesser means [for their perfection], which are also good.

For Fr. Bertoni **abandonment in God** could have been a loving exercise of virtue, even before it appeared to him as **a peculiar method of life** initiated by a particular vocation. It seems that such *calling* dawned on him gradually during the first years of his Priesthood. Together with Fr Matthew Farinati, he read the life of St Cajetan Thiene¹²², the saint of Divine Providence. It became confirmed more and more decisively as St. Gaspar studied personally St. Ignatius of Loyola in the often quoted book of Fr. Anton Francis Mariani.

Fr. Bertoni was deeply impressed when he read that Ignatius, after getting rid of everything, "found that he still had 5 or 6 coins. He then left them on the shore, before boarding the ship to Jerusalem. Ignatius' only provision for the journey was his confidence in God"¹²³.

As the biography goes on, Ignatius found himself in prison. But *because the saints find their God everywhere, they accept any place where He puts them. There were people who offered their powerful influence to free Ignatius from prison. But he neither*

¹²¹ **St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, Third Mansion.**

¹²² **Fr. Stofella notes here that there remains a manuscript with comments on the Saint Cajetan, almost all in the hand-writing of Fr. Farinati.**

¹²³ **Fr. A.F. Mariani, SJ, *Life of St. Ignatius*, Book I, c. 9, p. 51**

accepted their service nor the work of Procurator. It was God's cause, and he left it to God to defend it...¹²⁴

Later Fr. Bertoni accepted, on the authority of Ignatius, the following teaching:

... While we are walking before the Lord with loyal heart, we can happen to experience something opposite to what we have desired with all our good intention. It is in situations like these that we must understand to rely on the fatherly Providence of God. We are sure that, as St Paul said, **for those who love God all things work for good...**¹²⁵

He found also in this same source that

...Ignatius could admirably harmonise the finest prudence and accurate diligence with a total abandonment of himself to God. After having organized everything accurately, he considered himself as a useless servant. In his total abandonment to God he expected the happy outcome of the endeavor from Him alone... In all that he did, he never lost sight of God...¹²⁶

In our commentary above, regarding St. Gaspar's first entry in his diary, dated 1 July, we saw a confession of Ignatius. He deeply hoped that *the men of the Company (of Jesus) entrust themselves to their Superiors,...as he himself relied on the hands of God with full **resignation** of heart and **indifference**.*¹²⁷ In the text **resignation** means **entire abandonment**. We see a similar expression in **Imitation of Christ**: ... *about pure and entire resignation of self... Son, let yourself go, and you will find Myself...*¹²⁸

We have not yet quoted the Ignatian text from which flows easily all the logic of **Holy Abandonment**. Fr Bertoni transcribed it *verbatim* from the 4th book of Mariani, not in this body of extracts which we have been presenting here, but in many other circumstances. It flowed from his pen naturally, as it were! In this *Journal* he first noted it on 18 May 1811. He must have had it on his lips, since the beginning of his work as a counselor of souls. This is the cornerstone of his own Spirituality (if we may use this term). Here it is:

Very few are those persons who understand what God would like to do of them, if He were not hindered by them in His designs.¹²⁹

The only modification introduced by Fr Bertoni was a plural instead of a singular, i.e. **His designs** instead of **His design**. We shall examine this later on, in comparison with the entire text from Bartoli.

¹²⁴ **ib, c. 13,p. 83.**

¹²⁵ **ib., c. 15, p. 99.**

¹²⁶ **ib., Book 3, c. 3, p. 204.**

¹²⁷ **ib, Book 6, c. 12, p. 435**

¹²⁸ **Imitation of Christ, Book 3, c. 37.**

¹²⁹ **Mariani, o.c., c.11, p. 417.**

As regards that ***should not resent...if others use lesser means, which are also good***, this thought comes from the spirit which filtered through the meditation on the *Kingdom of Christ*. The point is that there is a wide variety of Vocations of the many called to militate under His Banner. Hence the conclusion: *Each one is striving to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ most perfectly, according to the state chosen by each one*.¹³⁰

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13th OCTOBER 1808

[64.] I read about the inner presence of God. It is not necessary for us to go and look for Him outside because He is within us. This is what St Thomas Aquinas said, i.e. that having food at home, one makes a mistake if he goes outside to search for it. He will constantly have to fast. I was deeply touched by this and I felt much recollection which lasted for some time, even though I got distracted as usual. A great desire to please His Divine Majesty in everything.

This thought came to Fr Bertoni not from a meditation but from a book of spiritual reading. The book he read was not St Thomas', but was the work of an author who, talking about the interior presence of God, liked to base his points on the authority of St Thomas.

We believe we have found the book. It is the ***Life of Fr Baldasar Alvarez of the Company of Jesus*** written by his famous disciple Fr. L. Da Ponte, the author of the frequently quoted *Meditations* and a favorite of Fr Gaspar. Fr Bertoni - an enthusiastic student of St Teresa of Avila - was surely interested in that book because Fr Alvarez was the confessor of St Teresa. Indeed, St Teresa herself said of him that *he helped (me) more than others... he was very holy...a great servant of God, who, for love of Him, would have faced anything...*¹³¹

The author of that *Life* reported faithfully N accurate account which Fr Alvarez had to give to his Superior General about his progress in his prayer life and the experiences therein. Fr Alvarez noted certain extraordinary favors which he received.

Among many other insights, there is recorded the capacity of entering into the innermost part of his soul over these years. He said that since then his prayer consisted in just placing himself there, in the presence of Our Lord. It was the Lord himself who was disclosing His Humanity to him, in *permanently, in the manner of habit*, as it were. At this point Fr Alvarez explains this inner prayer firstly with a good text of St Thomas' *Summa* and subsequently with a second text from a treatise ***On Beatitude*** which was also attributed to St Thomas.

The author then explains:

... Knowing that in Heaven we shall enjoy Our Lord, we should begin in this life to enjoy God without interruption. The reason is that He is our personal Good more than

¹³⁰ DaPonte, Paart 2, Fundamental Meditation. Following Point 11.

¹³¹ *Life of the Saint*, in her Works, Vol II. Rome, re-printed in 1949. c. 36, 3; c. 38, 14, 15.

any other good and that He is supremely worthy of our enjoyment through the gifts of His Grace. This shows why some people are greatly blinded and maddened in searching for God anxiously sighing to reach Him. In their Prayer they cry towards Him to come and give them a hearing. These people do not pay attention to the fact that -as St Paul said- they themselves are His living temples. That the Supreme Good does dwell in us. That the God of Majesty finds His rest in us. This is the reason why they never think of enjoying Him (in themselves). What would we say of a person who goes outside in search of something that he possesses inside himself? ...Or of a person who pretends to nourish himself with food that he looks for or that he sees,...but does not eat it? This is precisely the (manner of) life of those who are always in search of God, and yet they never enjoy God...

Fr. Da Ponte knew well the doctrine of his Teacher, and as Alvarez he too quoted from ch 3 of the treatise **On Beatitude**. In the note with which he introduced the Meditation he wrote:

... This is a very important Meditation because it is the foundation of Prayer and Contemplation. It is moreover the foundation of the Union with God, which is the purpose of these meditations on the Unitive Way... [He added]: ...I have also to see to it that I should look for God within myself. If He is within myself, to what purpose will I tire myself to search for Him anxiously outside of myself?" [Subsequently he quoted St Thomas]: ...I will strive to take delight in this presence of God... as a friend enjoys his friend's presence...and like a craftsman uses the instrument which he has at home, without going outside to look for it...and like the hungry man, the food he has in his own store-room...¹³²

Fr Bertoni was certainly impressed and taken up by these readings, and perhaps even granted through them an extraordinary mystical insight. When we compare this with some other more explicit texts in his *Journal* and with the practical impacts noted therein (cf. **9 and 10 October**), we are encouraged to think so.

We should finally note also the confession and regret of Fr Gaspar for having got **distracted as usual**. Similar regret was noted on **11 September: I got distracted in external exercises of charity**. On the manuscript of the *Journal*, in the margin of both these places and in a third one, we see a small cross marked after the original writing of the document in ink. They are the crosses written by the first biographer of Fr Bertoni, i.e. Fr Cajetan Giacobbe. Fr Giacobbe, apropos of this *Journal*, wrote in his **Life** :

*... As for [Fr Bertoni's] defects -if that is what they can be called- I cannot find but these ones only, which I include in this number" ...They are the two already quoted and a third one which is faintly surmised from his expression: **Tomorrow I will be more diligent...**¹³³*

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16th OCTOBER 1808

¹³² DaPonte, *Meditations*, Point 3, n. 4.

¹³³ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p. 478.

[65.] Catechism with much zeal and eloquence.

This very brief note contains reference to Sunday Catechetical Instruction. But Fr. Bertoni wanted to remind himself of the grace received, because **Yet, not I, but the grace of God with me! (I Cor 15,10)**. There was a similar experience on Sunday 25 September.

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21st OCTOBER 1808

[66.] God has deigned to reveal to a person that the soul of a young and very good clergyman, who died some years ago and who was retained as a person of great virtue, remained in Purgatory for the space of three Masses only. This was: 1. because he did some penances without the permission of his Confessor and 2. because he did not take Indulgences into much account. He used to say - while he was alive - that it takes more than that to acquire an Indulgence.

To a person! There is no adjective provided. Was this some *good* person? *Very good?* *A holy person?* Normally revelations of this kind are given to special persons. Could it not be Fr Gaspar himself? The fact that this happened **some years ago** could militate against this last possibility.

However, some contemporaries of Fr. Gaspar attributed to him, too, some connection with the *life hereafter*. We report the note contained in the **Miscellanea Lenotti**¹³⁴:

... The wife of Mr. Zamboni told me, Fr. Lenotti, and also Fr. Benciolini, that after the sudden death of her mother, due to sickness, she felt much distressed and anxious because her mother had died without the comfort of the Last Sacraments. Fr. Gaspar told her that she should be consoled because her mother was in Purgatory and that she would stay there for a specific number of months and days - which he told her. Nevertheless the memory of her mother and the sorrow because of her death remained in her heart. One day, while praying in a church, she felt as though the heavy burden was lifted from her heart which was suddenly filled with contentment. She was not thinking at all of the words of Fr Bertoni. Only some time afterwards it dawned on her that that was the very day in which Fr Bertoni had predicted that her mother would be freed from Purgatory...

This, however, is the only such testimony...

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[67.] Desires kill the slothful (Prov 21,25). Because he does not put them into practice, and therefore they tear his soul with remorse and condemnation.

This text of **Proverbs** should be introduced with some texts which Fr Bertoni used both in his writings and in his sermons since his first apostolic service to the young

¹³⁴ **ib. Document 20, pp.134, ff., note n. 31.**

clergy. To the Acolytes in Nov 1810 he said: **We are not to rely on good intentions! Works, works! Labor the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election.** (2 Pet 1,10).

As for the text in the entry of this day, Fr Bertoni had already copied it from Rodriguez¹³⁵ together with his two friends in his first official apostolate with the young Clergy. In November 1810, he spoke to the young Acolytes. But his diary entry provides him with central message for his own reflection, i.e. **...for his hands have refused to work at all; he longed and desired all the day long.** (Pr 21:25b-26). Hence: **remorse and condemnation.**

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22nd OCTOBER 1808

[68.] Cheerfulness in adversities, and the consequences of real poverty, with thanksgiving to the Lord. Self-offering for the greater experience of humiliations and suffering if He chooses to grant these to me. This attitude is the best gift I received. I consider myself utterly unworthy of it. May God be praised always!

In the Bertoni home there was real poverty, effective poverty, that is! What were its causes? No profits from the family farm! Several set-backs during that year and the previous years had taken place. Since the first French invasion of 1796 the Bertoni farm was subjected to raids, taxation and harassments as it was in a war zone. The other permanent cause, unfortunately, was Mr, Francis Louis Bertoni, Fr Gaspar's father. After a voluntary separation from his wife, he kept for himself alone the administration of the common goods. He lived in the country family estate, while the wife with their son lived in the city, thus nullifying even the appearance of peace.

In July of 1808 he received an injunction from the State Property Office to pay a debt of a taxation on some personal properties. He was threatened to have his property sold by auction in case of inability to pay. He could not meet that levy. It was then that his son Fr Gaspar intervened and paid the debt, together with the extra tax to remove the real threat of an auction of the family properties. In doing so Fr Gaspar had to cut very deeply into the funds of the city property.

The text, therefore, is quite clear: **real poverty** in the Bertoni home. Well then, "Welcome, Lady Poverty!" Furthermore, the adversities which accompany *Lady Poverty* and the consequences, Fr. Bertoni accepted all with cheerfulness and thanksgiving to the Lord. He saw it all as a real gift of God! **What shall I return to the Lord? ...self-offering for the greater experience of humiliation and suffering, if the Lord chooses to grant these to me.** This is the *third degree of humility* in the Ignatian ideal of perfection. But this, too, is from God. Then, with a disarming simplicity and cheerfulness, the conclusion: **This attitude is the best gift, which I consider myself utterly unworthy of.** Fr Bertoni finds himself overwhelmed from all sides and explodes: **May God be praised always!**

¹³⁵ Rodriguez, Tract I, c. 3.

We cannot help; but think of his aged mother Brunora too, as a soul worthy of the *fruit of her womb*.

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[69.] I experienced a desire of imitating Christ in poverty and in the distresses of poverty.

This note, though separated from the previous one, seems to have been written on the same day. It is both the fruit and the practical resolution of the latter, even if expressed with that term of **desire**. Resulting, as it did, from an actual experience and one that was blessed by God, this is surely not the **desires of the lazy man** considered above, against which Fr Gaspar had long since trained himself.

It is perhaps a reflection of the characteristic perfection of the humble Patriarch of the poor, Francis, the most perfect imitator and lover of Christ, who cries to us: "**Be my imitators as I am of Christ**".¹³⁶

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23rd OCTOBER 1808

[70.] During Mass: much recollection and reverence. The recollection lasted also afterwards, even while hearing Confessions.

This recollection was once again of a supernatural order and a gift of God. It was noted as a debt of grateful memory - **Be grateful!** (Col 3,15) -and so that its influence should last. It seems that this month of October was particularly outstanding for such experiences. **And reverence**: this too was a gift from above. We should pay attention to the fact that even if the human expressions of the vocabulary do not vary much, the divine gift can have infinite variations every time. God does not like to repeat himself!

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24th OCTOBER 1808

[71.] While making the "Way of the Cross" I heard during the first Station: "If I let Myself be condemned, innocent as I am, ...why not you, guilty of a thousand faults, wish so quickly to be justified in everything by men?"

[We know that Fr Gaspar used to make the *Way of the Cross* with a group of youth of the Oratory, on Sunday, in the afternoon, before the Catechetical Instruction. He used to do this spiritual exercise, privately, also during the week. This exercise was opposed very much by the Jansenists. The Parish Priest of St Paul's, Fr. Francis Girardi, just that year had furnished his parishioners with a very practical booklet which was surely used by Fr. Bertoni. As a commentary to the first Station he read: *Consider here, my soul, the admirable submission and the remarkable humility of the Divine Redeemer in*

¹³⁶ This seems to be a thought noted in St. Gaspar's notes for a second Panegyric honoring St. Francis of Assisi: MssB ## 1844-1874.

accepting willingly, though innocent and betrayed, the most unjust sentence of a thoughtless and unfaithful judge...] ¹³⁷

Fr. Gaspar too was the target of malicious gossiping. He found refuge in the Lord by the pious practice of *The Way of the Cross*. Perhaps he felt he had to confess himself **guilty of a thousand faults!** This note seems to show that the Lord took him at his own word. Certainly, at the first Station, the Lord spoke to his heart in a clear and distinctive voice: **If I let Myself be condemned, innocent as I am, ...why not you, guilty of a thousand faults..?** On the afternoon of each Good Friday, he used to sing with the people a hymn at the end of a prayer to the First of the Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross, which stated ***Guilty of a thousand faults - I know, o Lord, that I am. - I do not merit pardon - nor could I hope for it!...*** He could rely on Jesus' own words: ***Father, forgive them...***

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25th OCTOBER 1808

[72.] During Mass: short but vivid enlightenments. Intense feeling of the presence of God. Trust, love, desire to transform myself into Him. That Jesus may live in me, no longer myself. After Mass this grace of Union would pass, but it came back while [walking] along the street, on family business, just as when I was in Church.

Fr. Bertoni himself had synthesized the experience of this day as a **grace of Union**. This is a grace which can come from above and solely from on high. The grace was withdrawn after Mass in Church, but it took hold of him again **along the street** when he was **on family business**. How this can happen, even St Teresa does not know. ¹³⁸She knows, however, that it does happen. It is an action of God. Who can fathom God's action? This is among the most sublime notes. The sigh of Fr Bertoni: ***I live, though not I: but Christ lives in me!*** (**Gal 2:20**).

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26th OCTOBER 1808

[73.] For he that will save his own life, shall lose it ... [Mt 16:25]. And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee to another... [Mt 10:23]

For these two texts we can give only the quotations: **Mt 16,25** and **10,23**. We are not sure what the texts told the heart of Fr Gaspar on this day: it remains his secret.

... This could refer to some consequences of that police harassment which he suffered on account of the Marian Oratories: suspicious persecutions against him as organizer of the city youth. Or perhaps his concern for the discomfort of those Religious compelled, by the repressive laws, to leave the town and look for some

¹³⁷ **Web Site Note:** Fr. Mittempergher, the translator, added this parenthetical note from: **DalleVedove, Vol, II, p. 667.**

¹³⁸ **St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle. Fourth Mansions, 2, 3.**

*accommodation in other regions. It happened to the monks of the Order of St Jerome, who fled to Venice....*¹³⁹

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27th OCTOBER 1808

[74.] In the first point of the Mid-day Examen, that is during the thanksgiving, prostrate on the ground in the sight of Heaven: great sense of the presence of God, and love and self-offering.

The graces of the consciousness of the Presence of God are given at any time! These came to Fr. Bertoni not only during Mass. He was graced with these special gifts both on Sundays and during the week... During Meditation... During the Spiritual Reading... At the penance service ... In the evening...(it will come also during the Eucharistic Benediction...)... They would occur outside the Church or along the street. And now during the mid-day Ignatian practice of the Examination of Conscience. It consisted in *Thanksgiving, Prayer and Examen*. This is an authentic picture of Fr Gaspar: **Prostrate on the ground, in the sight of Heaven. Great sense of the Presence of God, and love and self-offering.**

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¹³⁹ **Web-Site Note: Fr. Mittempergher added this note from; Fr. Dalle Vedove, Vol. 2, 668.**

16th NOVEMBER 1808

[75.] Progress in early rising, in fasting and in more time left for Prayer.

We remember that on 25 Sept Fr Gaspar was much impressed by the thought that Jesus **preached in Jerusalem the entire day fasting and only in the evening did He retire to Bethany.** He said: **this moved me intensely to love and to work.**

He then had the example of St. Francis of Assisi. In his second draft¹⁴⁰ of the *panegyric* he had said **Perfection has its root and fulfillment in Charity - *Charity is the bond of perfection (Col 3,14)* - consists in shaping our life on that of our Lord ... Because this Divine Master began by *doing and teaching [Ac 1:1]*, his actions - though peculiar and of incomparable excellence- are nonetheless possible to be imitated on the guide of his teaching.**

On this 16th day of November Fr Gaspar experienced the grace of ascertaining that that interior movement **to love and work** had borne its fruit. St Gregory the Great would say: "the proof of love is in showing the work."¹⁴¹

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[76.] Certain people begin to build their spirituality upside down. They start the external works of charity with enthusiasm. Rather than charity, this is more a work of nature. They do show some signs of extraordinary prayer: but this is only apparent. In fact this prayer is marked by inconsistency and it is short lived. It lacks those solid effects which accompany genuine prayer. Therefore if these people are left in such situation they remain truly idle, without any activity. They ought to change [manner of] prayer. They ought to go back to the basics, which is the Interior Spirit. This will produce fully matured fruits of charity, in its own time. It is supported, in the meantime, by a stricter discipline of obedience and by a more practical prayer which may arouse enthusiasm in the will.

Let us immediately quote St Ignatius: *The gifts of nature, in order to be of some advantage to our fellowmen, ought to be animated by the interior spirit.*¹⁴² Otherwise - he seems to say - that *advantage* is only an illusion.

People without this interior spirit appear to force themselves to enter into the *Unitive Way* artificially. St Ignatius comes again to our rescue: *The Unitive Way which is taken hastily (and by short-cuts), opens the way to illusions.*¹⁴³ It seems that this is also the opinion of St John of the Cross. He says that even *when one has reached the*

¹⁴⁰ MssB ## 1844-1874.

¹⁴¹ St. Gregory the Great. Hom 30 in Ezechiel, in Gospel 1 – In the Divine Office of Pentecost, 2nd Lesson.

¹⁴² Mariani, o.c., Book IV, c. 11, p. 422.

¹⁴³ St. Ignatius, *Institutum S.I.*, Prague 1757, Vol. 3. A synthesis of n. 7, c. 39 of the *Directorium Exercitiorum S. Ignatii*.

time to leave the dialogic Meditation, for the Prayer of Union, it is necessary not to leave it before time. Why? In order not to have to go back...¹⁴⁴ This has therefore justified the decision of Fr. Gaspar to **change prayer, and to go back to the beginning** namely to **a more practical prayer which may arouse enthusiasm in the will.**

St. John of the Cross supported also the appeal of Fr Gaspar for a **stricter discipline of obedience** when he proposed the same for persons afflicted with *spiritual gluttony* and who are not humble enough. He said: "Obedience is the penitence of reason and of one's own judgment. It is therefore, before God, more pleasant and acceptable a sacrifice than anything else."¹⁴⁵

[Commenting on this note Fr Dalle Vedove writes:

*... From Naturalism to Quietism: this could be called the wrong step which, according to Fr Bertoni, some people like to take. It is truly like building **upside down**. To start from the external activity which pleases one's inclinations. Then to exchange certain fleeting feelings and spiritual tastes for authentic supernatural prayer. The illusion is that these personal experiences are taken as mystical prayer or contemplation of Quiet. Dialogic Prayer is therefore abandoned together with applying responsibility, exercising free will and taking practical resolutions. All these are indispensable things for any spiritual progress...*¹⁴⁶

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17th NOVEMBER 1808

[77.] The just understand very well the vice of pride and boastfulness. They sense its most horrible and sad effects when they are tempted by it. Hence when they are slightly affected, their sensitive spirit gets frightened in proportion to the strength in which they have been built up, either by acquired virtues or by special gifts. They have the same preoccupation as the rich and opulent people of the world, who fear to be robbed [of their possessions] by ravenous thieves, and be left suddenly with an empty house.

Fr Bertoni had preached about this vice in St Paul's since his first year of priesthood. He said that

... it is a vice extremely difficult to recognize. This is because it is a moral sin and because it disguises all its deformity with an appearance of virtue. I will say more: it likes to hide itself among the most perfect virtues, as a poisonous snake does among the flowers. This is why the saints fear this vice more than any other. They engage themselves to detect its traces in the depth of their hearts with more diligence than for other vices. The fear of falling into pride grew in them in proportion to their growth in the

¹⁴⁴ St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Book 2, c. 13, p. 87; c. 11, 9.

¹⁴⁵ St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, Book 1, c. 6, 1.

¹⁴⁶ **Web-Site Note:** Fr. Mittempergher, the translator, added this note from Fr. Dalle Vedove, *Bertoni*, Vol. II, p670 – not found here in Fr. Stofella' comments.

knowledge (of God). When they felt they had to confess some pride, they would say that they were "rebels" and "thieves" of the honor which only belongs to God. My God! The very fact that one does not recognize one's own pride is perhaps the most serious sign of pride...¹⁴⁷!

In this entry, Fr. Bertoni presented the problem of *pride* by explaining its operational pattern with the guidance of Rodriguez, as it appears from Fr. Gaspar's hand-written extracts.¹⁴⁸ He quoted St Augustine's *On Holy Virginity*,¹⁴⁹ who author taught him that *in matter of humility each person is assigned a measure which is sufficiently proportioned to one's own spiritual growth. So much so that the higher one is, the more one needs humility.* Why? Because of the danger of pride. This normally threatens more those who are more greatly endowed. Fr. Bertoni will drive this point home very insistently in his instructions to the Clergy¹⁵⁰.

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20th NOVEMBER 1808

[78.] The bishop came to pay me a visit to the Class of Christian Doctrine, while I was teaching Catechesis to the adults. He wanted me to carry on. My mind became completely confused. All my ideas disappeared. I decided then to summarize, as the last resort. I did that without almost knowing what I was saying. In the mean time I was reflecting within myself, wondering how would my spirit have found itself if it had to give an account of my priestly ministry in front of the tribunal of Christ. Even if I had lived in the utmost innocence, and if I had accomplished all my duties...how much would I have felt discouraged and fearful in that moment! We have therefore to get ready to stand with confidence before Christ, no longer as a "Father" but as a "Judge".

As a commentary to this interesting episode let us hear what Fr Giacobbe had to say:

... *The reader will be very amazed in that Fr Bertoni, as discouraged and confused as he found himself, was able to find immediately a sentiment of great humility and to draw much profit from his sense of the "fear of God..."*¹⁵¹

[The Translator notes: We have also to add that Bishop Innocence Liruti had an extremely good impression of that young priest. Fr Gaspar, in fact, managed to make a very clear summary of his Christian Doctrine lesson, thanks to his excellent preparation - as we can ascertain from his manuscripts. Some months after that incident, on 27 Feb 1809, the Bishop showed much reliance on Fr. Gaspar's capacities by choosing him as Moderator of the "Moral Cases" discussed by the Clergy in the College at St Nicholas'. He called on him also for several other charges of more responsibility...¹⁵².

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¹⁴⁷ PVC, pp. 140, 141. Sermon 7, July 26, 1801 – MssB ## 547, ff.

¹⁴⁸ Rodriguez, Part I, Tract 3, cc. 3-5.

¹⁴⁹ c. 31.

¹⁵⁰ CS Vol. II, p. 485.

¹⁵¹ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p. 469.

¹⁵² Fr. Mittempergher offers his commentary based on Fr. Dalle Vedove, *Bertoni* 2, p. 272.

2nd DECEMBER 1808

[79.] We have above all to take care that, as far as we are concerned, we do not fail the Lord. We are sure that as far as He is concerned He will surely not fail us. Since this is so, when we have a good relationship with God, who can harm us? Who can interfere with our undertakings?

What undertakings? The personal interior enterprise of one's own Vocation? Or the external apostolic enterprise recently inspired by the recent visit to the altar of St Ignatius? ¹⁵³The two, i.e. his progress in spirituality and the plan for a new Congregation, were inseparable in his mind.

The source of this note is a letter of St Ignatius *To the Fathers and Brothers of the Society of Jesus who are in Spain, on Religious Perfection*. This letter is an example of those *Letters filled with his spirit of inflaming charity with which he used to enkindle fire wherever he sent them*. Fr. Daniel Bartoli ¹⁵⁴ gives this entire letter in his *Life of St. Ignatius*. We will provide here a few lines in order to supply the background for St. Gaspar's thought here:

*"May the grace and the eternal love of Jesus Christ Our Lord be always to your help and favor. ...It gives me joy to see that His Divine Majesty gives you stamina and vigor to increase ever more in knowledge and virtue. The good news of this has reached us, so that many are inspired. All should rejoice because of the glory and honor given to God the Creator by your work, but I rejoice even more, because I keep you in my heart with a particular affection. May God always be blessed and praised, our Creator and Redeemer from Whose generosity all good, all graces derive. I pray Him to open every day more abundantly the sources of His mercy so that you further and increase all the more what He has begun. **I am most sure that He will do this: because His infinite goodness is extremely generous in communicating his gifts. In His eternal love he is more ready to give us holiness than we are desirous of having it.** If it were not so, His Divine Son would not encourage us to holiness. He knows that we cannot reach it except by His help. He said: **Be perfect, as your father in heaven is perfect. (Mt 5:48).** Therefore we do not doubt that **on His part he does not fail us at all, as long as we keep ourselves humble and that He makes us able to receive His gifts, and give us the desire to get them as well as the readiness to cooperate, with hard work, through the help of His grace...**" ¹⁵⁵*

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[80.] It is most unfortunate and a shame to see so much holiness in the Laity and so much imperfection and vices in a priest.

This is a stimulating reflection for the work of personal progress in holiness. It reflects at the same time a grace and a disgrace most evident in the times of Fr Bertoni. Bishop Innocent Liruti, at the end of his first year as bishop of Verona, had to write the

¹⁵³ cf. above, September 15th.

¹⁵⁴ Book 4, marginal note 17.

¹⁵⁵ This passage is taken from the initial part of the Letter. The two priests worthy of their Founder's praise are Fr. Simon Rodriguez, one of St. Ignatius' first companions, and the Provincial of Portugal – and Fr. Santacroce, Rector of the College.

following decree: *If anyone who officially militates as an ecclesiastic, both Secular and Regular, in the city or in the Diocese, will in any time walk around disguised with masks or will frequent theatres, comedies, balls or will give his cooperation to such things, he is by that very fact (ipso facto) suspended from exercising his sacred Office (a Divinis...).* As for the clerics in Minor Orders who will be guilty of the same things, they will lose their hope of further Ordination. However, he went on to say that *The deplorable life of some who depart from the good example of others, cannot take away the honorable reputation that our Clergy justly possesses.*¹⁵⁶

When Fr. Bertoni would be 33 years old, he was called by his Bishop to an official **apostolate among the Clergy**¹⁵⁷, in 1810, he will present the same stimulating thought during the Introductory Meditation of the Spiritual Exercises on ***The End of Man***:

... Many secular people fulfill this End better than the Clergy. Their lives are full of good works while ours are full of hot air. Their lives are immaculate, while the lives of many clergy are unfortunately very filthy.... The Church, in these times, cries bitterly over this disorder which brings down scourges and gives scandal to the people more than ever. If your lives are of this sort, seminarians, withdraw yourselves! Wait before ascending to the sub-Diaconate: "*It is better to marry than to burn*" (1 Co 7,9). If you are already deacons or priests, then weep, weep! With penance wash away these stains. Begin with your own before those of others. As far as we are concerned, we have to correct that in which, perhaps, "we have sinned without knowing"... Let us put our lives in order. Let us learn from many secular people how to live properly. "The unlearned come to the fore and snatch the Kingdom of God for themselves" [cf. Lk 16,16]. And we ourselves with all our learning, where shall we go?..."¹⁵⁸

He gave a similar teaching to the Seminarians in Jan 1811:

... There, in the good example of secular people: in the faithful observance of religion and the perfect charity of many secular people, Divine Providence supplies His chosen ones with a powerful stronghold against the scandal of sensual and worldly priests... Therefore, whoever clings to this help, will not only overcome the scandals of priests, but will make an effort not to be overcome by secular people in progressing towards perfection. Such a person has sure signs of a genuine ecclesiastical Vocation...¹⁵⁹

It goes without saying that Fr Bertoni preached these things to himself before preaching them to others.

¹⁵⁶ Bishop's Letter, Septuagesima 1809, in: *Raccolta di Lettere Pastorali*. Verona 1817.

¹⁵⁷ **Web-site Note**: With this apostolate, Fr. Bertoni indeed merits the title: ***Apostolic Missionary to the Clergy***.

¹⁵⁸ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. I, pp. 119, 120.

¹⁵⁹ Meditation 11 on *Primum Regum*, January 1, 1811 – MssB ## 5182-5939.

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3rd DECEMBER 1808

[81.] The Lord just shows us the Cross so that in accepting it for His sake, we could have the merit of the good will. But in the end it is He Himself who will carry it.

Fr. Bertoni knew very well that there is no holiness without the Cross, nor apostolate, nor Christian life. Was it the liturgical feast of St Francis Xavier which inspired in him the subject of this reflection?

The following extract has been taken from a letter of St Francis Xavier Fr. Gaspar had taken the following extract:

... it is proper for a Christian to rejoice more in the Cross rather than in relaxing". This was the conclusion of a sentence which is shocking for our nature: "Nothing in life could give me more pleasure than to experience the most terrible dangers, as long as they are undertaken for love of Jesus Christ and of the Christian Religion!"¹⁶⁰ [Fr. Bertoni wrote down another quotation from St Ignatius which reveals the secret of that attitude]: ... All the honey that one can draw from the delights of the world does not give as much sweetness as do the vinegar and gall of Christ...¹⁶¹

The Cross and the Passion of the *Apostle* re-enact the Cross and Passion of Christ. Together with the *Imitation of Christ*, Fr. Bertoni thinks that: *This is not within the power of man but it comes from Christ's grace, which is able to do so much in a frail body.*¹⁶²

Two months earlier, he had admired in the Saint from Assisi St. Paul's statement:

... For Christ I am nailed to the cross...and it is the same cross of Jesus Christ. In Greek it is more clear: *Christò synestàuromai* i.e. *together with Christ I am nailed to the cross* . It is as if I am grafted and planted together with the tree of the Cross of Christ. I possess in communion with the same tree its sap and its life: namely Grace and Charity...¹⁶³

So, in inviting both to self-denial and to the cross, Fr Bertoni was sure **that as far as the Lord is concerned, He will never fail**. On the other hand, he also saw the cooperation of God with so great an amount of Grace that human cooperation - as spontaneous as it can be - did not seem to him much more than a simple acceptance of an *invitation*. Furthermore, the cross was consequently so much lightened, to be able to say **It is not us, but Jesus who, out of love for us, carries it in the end.**

¹⁶⁰ Letters of St. Francis Xavier, II, Letter 12.

¹⁶¹ Mariani, *Life*, o.c., c. 10, p. 404.

¹⁶² *Imitation of Christ*, Book 2, c. 12: 'The Royal way of the Cross', 7.

¹⁶³ Panegyriic I, Point 2: MssB ## 1795-1842.

In the Spiritual Exercises to the Clergy, Sept 1810, Fr Bertoni will say with some regret in his heart:

... **Jesus tells us: *Whoever wants to come after me let him deny himself and pick up his cross.*** But the priests reject all mortification. They never fast. They never use hair-shirts, while many laity walk in front of us with their example. Priests never give a try in mastering themselves. While they expect the laity they guide to do just that. They flee from crosses and suffering... The cross which is peculiar to the priest is: the Breviary, chastity, study, hearing of Confessions etc. But the point is ***Let him take up the cross not let him drag the cross...***¹⁶⁴

We find Fr Bertoni more cheered up when talking to the Seminarians. He talked of the **wondrous ways in which Christ operates and governs the Church** and among them he chose the **tribulations** as his theme for his reflections on December 2, 8 and 9 of December 1810. This was the time of the war with Napoleon.

Here is the concluding prayer, which referred to **Gal 6,14** and **Mt 16,24**:

... Lord, we have experienced the tribulations of Your Church, in which we see the enhancement of both Your wonderful providence as her Spouse and the prudent and virtuous behavior of Your Bride. We highly respect Your most wise governance. We pray that You may make Your Spouse to imitate You in following and carrying out what You said: ***He who wants to follow me let him carry his cross***. Grant that we may carry the cross, not to drag it. That we may carry it so willingly that we boast of it. That we may carry it with so much love that we end up in boasting in nothing else but in it. This cannot happen unless first the world should be crucified to me and myself to the world. This will never happen until the world becomes a cross to me, as I am to the world, because of the irreconcilable opposition of feelings...¹⁶⁵

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4th DECEMBER 1808

[82.] While going to bed: compunction and fear of God.
During Mass: a lively sense of the presence of Jesus Christ which roused much confidence, though for a short while. The recollection, however, lasted also afterwards and the devotion for the whole day.

This date was the second Sunday of Advent. Fr Bertoni registered two distinct graces. The first caught him, suddenly, while getting ready for bed. This must have happened the evening before Saturday 4 Dec. The note which interests us is to be referred to the dawning of the new day, i.e. Sunday, giving further proof of the biblical

¹⁶⁴ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Volume I, p. 227.

¹⁶⁵ 5th Meditation on *Primum Regum*. December 9, 1810. MssB ## 4963. [All students of St. Gaspar remember his beautiful insight in considering the Church as 'a Model of Holy Abandonment' [cf. *Epistolario*, Letter 38, October 26, 1813. p. 99.

saying: ***the Spirit blows where He will...*** Fr. Bertoni prepared himself for this kind of supernatural gift by his daily usage of the book of the ***Imitation of Christ***:

... If you want to make any progress, keep yourself in the fear of God. Exercise yourself in the compunction of the heart and you will find devotion. Compunction opens the way to much good which is quickly lost by distraction. Happy the one who can cast away all the impediments of distractions and recollect himself in the unifying action of holy *compunction*. It is our fault if we lack God's consolations because we do not look for the *compunction* the heart. When a person has perfect *compunction*, then the whole world will appear burdensome and distasteful. Pray therefore humbly to God that He may give you the spirit of *compunction*...¹⁶⁶ Fr. Bertoni was persuaded that no one is worthy of heavenly consolation unless he was diligently exercised in holy compunction¹⁶⁷. He was more concerned in experiencing compunction than in knowing how to define it. He prayed humbly to the extent that he was able – and finally, this gift from heaven was graciously bestowed.

The second grace he received during Mass of this 11nd Sunday of Advent. It is described in terms which are now easy for us to understand: one might reflect on his entry, ***after Mass*** of 11th July and the Mass of 23rd October. But with regard to the realities of the Spirit, we lack an adequate vocabulary. As we have said earlier, God does not like to repeat Himself. Also regarding the gift which followed his experience during Mass and which filled his whole day, the terms are not that different. Though Fr. Bertoni distinguished them, they are in fact very similar. ***Recollection, Devotion, Compunction***...they are all terms which we would like to experience rather than struggling in trying to explain them!

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7th DECEMBER 1808

[83.] When God calls people to some projects of spiritual life, one has to seize the opportunity of the moment. And at once they left the nets and followed Him.

We can trace the thought of Fr Bertoni in a Meditation from DaPonte which is entitled *The Calling and Vocation of the Apostles*. The text is from St. **Matthew 4,20**. Fr Bertoni summarized the 4th point as follows: **The obedience of the Apostles to God's vocation was most perfect with regard to:**
1. the intellect 2. the will 3. the execution.

Da Ponte wrote¹⁶⁸:

... Consider the excellent obedience with which the Apostles answered their calling. In fact...while Peter and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea and Zebedee's sons were mending their nets in the boats with their father, when Christ called them

¹⁶⁶ ***Imitation of Christ, Book 1, c. 21, passim.***

¹⁶⁷ ***ib., c. 20.***

¹⁶⁸ ***Meditation 6.***

immediately and at once, they left their nets and their father and everything and followed Him.

... With this kind of obedience the apostles showed the three excellent properties of this virtue. The submission of intellect and judgment: making them obey Christ and subjecting them to His orders without making any excuse¹⁶⁹. The submission of will¹⁷⁰: subjecting it completely to that of Christ, dispossessing themselves of the love they had for their wives, children, fathers, relatives and their own properties. The perfect execution: which was - as Saint Chrysostom says - prompt, punctual and cheerful, without delay not even for a moment and without contradiction. Oh, the miracles of God's power! Oh, what changes can God do!

Fr. Bertoni spoke of **Divine Vocation**. His teacher here, Fr. DaPonte, has stated that it comes "through the grace of the Holy Spirit, not depending on our merits, and that with it all other necessary goods are given for our salvation...then it was really the case to exclaim: **I fear Jesus passing by!** This is seen in the traditional sense, i.e. "Woe to those who let Him pass without following after Him! Woe to those who do not seize the opportunity of the moment!

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11th DECEMBER 1808

[84.] During the Canon of the Mass, at the *Te igitur*, a very lively, reverential and loving sense of the presence of the Father. A vivid confidence and love towards the Son. Again a sense of the priestly dignity during Consecration as I was acting in the person of Christ before His Father. Even more tenderness and deep humility immediately after Consecration when I was holding Christ tightly in my hands. There it was: the utmost Goodness joined to the utmost wickedness. The most pure to the most impure. The most holy to the most sinful. That sentiment lasted until after communion. The compunction until evening.

It was the Third Sunday of Advent. Judging from the notes of this *Journal*, it seems that God had favored Fr. Bertoni with his gifts often during Sunday Masses. What shall we say now? Perhaps what we said on the feast of the Maternity of Mary (which was his birthday). We need to fall on our knees and read the note again and again.

This was another experience of the Presence of God, pondering anew the mystery of the Trinity (cf. above, the 24 Aug), reviewing the Persons of the Father and the Son. Therefore at the words of the Canon of the Mass, Fr. Bertoni felt **vivid confidence**. At the Consecration he felt the loftiness of his priestly dignity: **reverence, love, confidence, tenderness and deep humility**, and each of these sentiments immerse Fr. Bertoni into the abyss of **compunction**. His innate feeling of wretchedness and culpability in any contact of his joined to God's supreme goodness, Infinite Purity and

¹⁶⁹ St. Gaspar puts this among his Grades of Obedience in his *Original Constitutions* - CF # 144.

¹⁷⁰ Noted in St. Gaspar's *Original Constitutions* - CF # 141. The qualities Fr. Bertoni notes here, based on St. Ignatius, are: *integra, prompta, fortis, humilis*.

Infinite Holiness! Those expressions can be judged by us, who are far from those lofty experiences, as excessive. St. Teresa of Avila had similar compunction for her faults, and ingratitude, due to those special caresses and favors which God so often poured out on her. She said that *When I see that I receive daily more and more graces, while I correspond so badly to the past ones, I feel a sort of terrible torture*.¹⁷¹ This Sunday in the life of St. Gaspar with all of its ministries, rendered him full until evening. Would that the Lord might grant also to us a similar gift of light!

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17th DECEMBER 1808

[85.] While browsing again over Scupoli's and reading the *Imitation of Christ* I felt a desire to acquire perfection and to wage war upon any negligence.

St. Francis de Sales used to refer to Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*, "my dear book". That book was followed by two shorter works, *Addition to the Spiritual Combat* and *Path to Paradise*, added as an Appendix to the work itself. The expression: **browsing again over...**, would indicate that Fr. Bertoni was therefore going through once more a book which he had already read and studied. We can be sure that he was re-reading chapter 20, *How to combat negligence*. Here are a few extracts:

... In order, for you, not to fall into the miserable slavery of *negligence* -(which would not only hinder your journey to perfection but would also give you over into the hands of your enemies) - you must shun all curiosity and worldly attachment and any occupation which is not proper to your condition. Then you have to make all effort to heed every good inspiration. Do not delay even for the shortest hesitation. The first little delay leads to a second. This to a third and to others with which our senses comply and to which they yield more easily than to the first ones because they are already allured and taken up by the pleasure they have felt.... It is not sufficient to do the work you have to do. You must do it in the time which its quality and nature expect. You must do it with all proper *diligence* so that it might be as perfect as possible. To do a work before time and hurry through it without doing it well, is no diligence but utter *negligence*...

Reading the *Imitation of Christ* : from this expression, it seems that this was therefore an ordinary reading, perhaps even a daily reading, which Fr. Bertoni had noted as a habit in the life of St Ignatius: *...every day he used to read a chapter of the Imitation of Christ in the form of meditation...*¹⁷². It is not easy to individuate a precise passage, as he could have been struck by the following words¹⁷³:

...'Of the Examples of the Holy Fathers of the Church': Alas, what is our life when we compare it with theirs? ...What lukewarmness and negligence of our condition, that we so soon fall away from our initial fervor!... We have to renew every day our resolutions and to stimulate ourselves to fervor as if we had reached conversion just on this today. We have to say: Help me, Lord

¹⁷¹ Teresa of Avila, *Life*, c. 7. in: *Opere*. Ed. Roma 1949, n. 19.

¹⁷² Mariani, *Life*, op.c., Book 4, c. 9, p. 400.

¹⁷³ *Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, c. 18, n. 1, n. 6. c. 19, n. 1, n.2; c. 22, n. 6; c. 23, n. 3, n. 11...

God, in my good resolution and in Your service. Grant that I may begin perfectly today because there is nothing that I have done so far. ... There is a need of much diligence for those who want to progress well. ... Through negligence we can quickly lose what we have acquired by grace after much pain and effort. ... Your grief will be great for having been neglectful and slothful.... Be watchful and diligent in the service of God.... No matter what others do, you must not neglect yourself. You will progress in the measure in which you will control yourself vigorously.... Keep ever in mind your own end, and remember that the lost time never comes back. You will acquire no virtues without care and diligence...

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[86.] When looking for counseling one should bear in mind that also holy persons can sometime have wrong opinions. It was said that Palafox had misunderstanding with almost all Religious Orders except the Carmelites. In fact he has the title of "Venerable" but his Canonization process has been interrupted for ever.

Fr. Bertoni found this caution quite pertinent and necessary. There was confusion of opinions even among the Clergy about this matter. As regards the Venerable Bishop John Palafox (1600-1659), we know that he was a very zealous and virtuous Carmelite. He was bishop of Los Angeles in Cuba and of Osma in Spain. He had conflicts of jurisdiction with Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans and especially with the Jesuits. The Cause of his Beatification and Canonization was favored and supported by the governments hostile to Jesuits. It was stopped four years after the suppression of the Company of Jesus (1777) because of a letter against the Jesuits which bears his signature. That writing - which is perhaps humanly explainable in the turmoil of the controversies of the time - did not seem worthy of a candidate for Canonization¹⁷⁴.

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20th DECEMBER 1808

[87.] In the spiritual enterprises it is of great advantage when two people find that they can share the same perception.

Fr. Gaspar found this advantage from the outset with Fr Matthew Farinati (ordained in 1802) and afterwards also with Fr Cajetan Allegri (ordained in 1805). Fr. Giacobbe¹⁷⁵ wrote that ... *these priests, animated by the zeal and spirit of Fr Bertoni, formed, as they put it, a **threefold cord** of admirable harmony among themselves...* This principle held not only collaborating in the youth apostolate (to which Fr Giacobbe seems to refer) but also in **common study** for their mutual spiritual growth. In addition to many other indications, we have a witness of this in the various extracts of quotations which the three priests drew together from the Life of St Cajetan of Thiene and above all from Rodriguez' ***Exercise of Perfection***. Very revealing are the words which Fr. Farinati wrote on the inside page of the hard cover of that book: *There are excellent ideals contained in this booklet!* These words are followed by a quotation from the prophet Ezekiel: ***I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge and stand in the gap before me I favor of the land so that I should not destroy it: but I found none. (Ezk 22:30)***. It seems that Fr, Farinati recognized in that prophetic text a common vocation of the *three*

¹⁷⁴ cf. L. Pastor, *Story of the Popes*, Vol. 15, Part 1, pp. 156-162; Vol. 16, Part I, pp. 239, f.; Part 3, p. 266.

¹⁷⁵ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p. 342.

friends to be just that man. This was what stimulated them – as priests belonging to no Order - applying to themselves the whole exercise of perfection which was reserved for the Religious. It was also in the strength of the principle which Fr. Bertoni will support strongly, i.e. that what in the Religious is a *tension* towards Perfection, in the Priest should be *acquired* perfection.¹⁷⁶

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[88.] While we feel called to some high degree of Perfection, we should pay attention not to underestimate those who do not want to follow us. They might perhaps be of equal and greater merit in front of God. We all have the same purpose. Not all use the same means.

This maxim is a development on that of 12 Oct: **He who is drawn by the Spirit to a way of greater perfection...should not resent others who are of lower virtue and use lesser means as long as these are good.** We were saying, there, that such is the spirit that filtered through the meditation of *The Kingdom of Christ*, according to St Ignatius and Da Ponte. Different people are freely called to militate under the banner of Christ. It is clear that each person must imitate Him in the condition to which each has been called, for himself following those different invitations.

Fr. Bertoni intended to keep the commandment which regards our neighbor: **Do not judge...** and to preserve one's own meekness and humility of heart. We can see an encouragement in reminding ourselves that merit does not depend on the greater or lesser excellence of a vocation. This is God's gift. It depends rather on the greater or lesser correspondence to such a gift. It could therefore happen that somebody with a lesser gift of God would correspond to it with greater perfection than others with a greater gift.

As for the variety of ways and means to reach the same Ultimate End, this is but a logical consequence of the variety of the same vocations.

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[89.] - It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you (John 15,16). We have to pay much attention not to set ourselves against the Lord with our sins and lack of mortification.

The text from St. John's Gospel could have been applied also to the preceding entry. But Fr. Bertoni wrote it with a dash separating it from the previous note. He admonishes the *chosen one* - i.e. no one other than himself - not to put obstacles against the action of God with sins and the lack of mortification. He saw also here the connection between two undertakings: that of his personal sanctification (cf. **12 Oct**) and that of the promotion of the greater glory of God through a life dedicated to the Apostolate (cf. **15 Sept**). We could have expected a hint at the Ignatian principle which is at the base of everything, as we have said in the note of **12 Oct: very few are those who...** And also the encouraging sentences of **2 and 3 Dec.: Take care that we do not**

¹⁷⁶ cf. his Retreat to the Clergy, in 1810, in: *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. 3, p. 129, 'The Purpose [End] of the Priest'.

fail the Lord, because He will surely not fail us. The Lord, just *shows us the cross...*

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23rd DECEMBER 1808

[90.] When people are at the threshold of death and are well prepared to die, it is not to appeal that the Lord should lengthen their lives. Death is like a bridge between two eternities: the one before and the one afterwards... It is just a step. When a person can be assured to take this step well, he should not be encouraged not to seize this opportune moment. It is too difficult to keep the faith in this present life. We do not wish any good person to live [longer] in this life.

The first sentence is simply a maxim of good Christian wisdom. The sentences which follow clearly justify it. The passage across the bridge which divides a previous eternity from the subsequent eternity is reminiscent of scholastic discussions. Passing from time to eternity is a sure passage, which nobody can avoid. It is most unsure, though, as far as the precise moment of it. When therefore the opportunity of knowing this presents itself clearly, it is a great risk to let it escape. Will it come back again? Therefore...

Fr. Gaspar was of this opinion also during his last years of life. One day, Fr. Marani (spiritual director of the Sisters of the Holy Family) went to consult with Fr. Bertoni. He told him how saddened he was by the death of some young Sisters. He got the following comforting words: **These young Sisters came to the convent to make a good death. They have had the great blessing to make it.**¹⁷⁷ So: *Sursum corda!* (Lift up your hearts!).

Some could find some fault with Fr. Bertoni's statement: **It is too difficult to keep the faith in this present life.** It sounds something like a conclusion against the discernment and justice of God. To us, though, it seems that he intended only to recognize a fact. He was not concerned about the justice of God, but rather about the slothful irresponsibility of man. We should also consider that what we translate with *too* (the Italian *troppo*), in the archaic language can mean just *much*.¹⁷⁸ In his youth, Fr. Bertoni had been taught by the language expert Cesari.

With regard to the last sentence: **We do not wish...**, we see a reference to **Wisdom 4,10.11: He pleased God and was beloved, and living among sinners he was translated. He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul...**

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[91.] We have to seek God alone and nothing else: no consolations, no gratifications.

¹⁷⁷ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. 3, p. 385.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. F. Palazzi, *Italian Dictionary* – *troppo* is an archaic word, meaning *much*.

This is a Carmelite principle. St Teresa wrote:

*... Lord, do not allow that a thing of such great price, as Your Love, be given to people who serve You only in view of the gratification they get out of it... The love of God does not consist in having tears (of consolation), nor in the delight and tenderness of devotion... but rather in serving with justice, fortitude and humility. By getting (spiritual) gratifications, we only receive from the Lord, rather than giving anything to Him...*¹⁷⁹

As for St John of the Cross, we know that he is the **Doctor of Nada** (*nothing*). No quotation is needed.

This principle is also of a decisively Ignatian spirit. St Ignatius wrote in his Constitutions:

... All should strive to have the right intention, not only as regards the [choice of one's own] status in life, but also in all particular situations. They should see to it that they serve and please God for his own sake: for his love and those very special favors with which He has protected us, rather than for the fear of punishments or for the hope of rewards. These last attitudes are only useful as encouragements. [Then the Saint becomes more incisive]: Let them seek God in everything, stripping themselves as much as possible of the love towards all creatures in order to direct all their affection towards their Creator. Let them love Him in all creatures and all creatures in Him. This is His most holy will...!

This is how St Ignatius wanted all his sons. This is the principle which reflects the spirit of the entire *Journal* of St. Gaspar (cf. **2** and **30 July**).

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[92.] The vow of Obedience for a person who is not under a Superior - because he is a Superior - binds his spirit to a total dependence on God in everything.

We have already said, in the commentary to the first note of this *Journal* (**1st July**), that the source of this principle is the resolution and example of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Fr. Gaspar said of him that **He dwelt in the hands of God with full submission of mind and indifference**. This because he had no Superior, and yet he was a Superior. *... He therefore strongly wished that the men of his Company should be in the hands of their Superiors with similar submission and indifference...*¹⁸⁰

To illustrate this point further, we give here a reasoned resolution of a Jesuit Superior, who actually lived after the time of Fr Bertoni, but who nonetheless expressed his thought better than we could. It was Fr Peter Olivaint who was a martyred of the time *Comune* in 1871. The text is from his *Spiritual Exercises* of 1860:

... I have been reflecting on St Joseph's obedience. It is a danger for Superiors to think of themselves as above obedience. In this way they fall again under the sway of pride and sensuality. The Superior is bound more than others to obey the Rule of which he is the guardian and of which he is therefore to be the example. He is bound

¹⁷⁹ St. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, c. 11. *Opere*, Ed. Roma 1949, c. 11, nn. 12, 13.

¹⁸⁰ Maariani, *Life*, o.c., Book 4, p. 435.

more than others to obey the Spirit of God which guides him, like St Joseph. He is unfortunate not to have, as others do, a Superior who sees him, who understands him, keeping the place of God. He has, therefore, to be more faithful in consulting with the Holy Spirit...¹⁸¹

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25th DECEMBER 1808

[93.] During the three [Christmas] Masses: recollection and an experience of the great benefit of [my] vocation. What a great blessing it is to become oblivious and stripped of all created things. To seek only God. How much did God honor and love His humiliated Son. Oh, what a responsibility do we have to do for Him, partly at least, what He firstly did for us.

Christmas fell on Sunday that year. Fr. Bertoni was overwhelmed by the blessings he had received, which he shares through brief hints and interjections.

The benefit of his Vocation is to be understood as total Vocation: a vocation to the priesthood and a vocation to holiness. When he contemplated mystically the stripping and humiliation of God he felt he could justify his own ascetic work of self-denial which appeared no longer as a sacrifice but rather as a grace and a privilege. One feels that God was showing, there, much gratification.

What is left for us is perhaps to pick up quietly that spiritual surprise with which Fr Bertoni could contemplate: **how much did God honor and love His humiliated Son.** He made comparisons and concluded for himself and for us: **What a responsibility do we have to do for Him, partly at least, what He firstly did for us.** May Fr, Gaspar obtain for us the grace to be struck by awe at God's action.

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¹⁸¹ *Retraits Annuelles.* Paris 1963. Tome I, pp. 14, 15.