

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE YEAR 1810

On the 6th of February 1810 Brunora Ravelli, Fr Gaspar's mother, died, at the age of 64. She was the last true vital connection with his family and a spiritual support for his priestly and apostolic life. On the 20th of the previous month his uncle James Ravelli had also died. He was 56 and had been afflicted by a mental illness, caused probably by psychological tensions as a consequence of his imprisonment for political reasons. Fr. Gaspar had long before given up hope of contact with his father, Francis, who was living an irresponsible life he could not share. Apart from a disastrous administration, his father was cohabiting with his former housemaid, Catherine Slavier.

In March he decided to move out of his family home. He found a shelter with his uncle, the Scudellini family. Fr M. Marchi (a priest who was very close to Fr Bertoni) will later comment on the event by saying: "After the burial of his mother he abandoned his father's house and he did as St Francis, saying to God "Now I can say: Our Father, who art in heaven..."
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The changing of residence must have been motivated by a strong spiritual experience and a step forward in that "detachment" which Fr. Bertoni saw as necessary for following Christ more radically. What he wrote in the note for a Course of Spiritual Exercises to the Clergy, just after his transfer, sounds autobiographic. In commenting on the incident of the Child Jesus lost in the Temple and found among the Doctors of the Law, he said:

...without the knowledge of his parents means that He did not want them to become an obstacle and prevent Him from freely doing His Father's will. Some priests let themselves be determined by the worldly ambitions of their relatives in accepting Offices and Benefices. He remained : this means that we have to detach ourselves from the worldly love of our relatives. We must not hesitate to even leave our relatives in pain and suffering, when it is necessary, for the sake of making ourselves available with more diligence for the things of our Father in Heaven. We should not remain with them for a longer time than it is God's will. The moment I suspect that my relatives, or any other person in the world, become a hindrance and prevent me, willingly or unwillingly or with good intention, from doing God's will... I do better if I leave them without telling them anything. If they feel offended and react by reproaching me, I should disregard all this and be content in doing God's will.³⁰⁹

*He had also to change his parish. The Bishop made him assistant priest of the parish of St Firmus Major. This was, providentially, the beginning of a very important apostolic activity of Fr Gaspar among the Clergy. In that church he would have, within a couple of years, the inspiration of founding a new Religious Congregation.*³¹⁰

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³⁰⁸ **Summarium Additionale**, p. 363.

³⁰⁹ **MssB 2485.**

³¹⁰ **Web-site Note**: Fr.Stofella had provided a very brief Introduction for the year 1810 - the translator compiled this more extended presentation of the year from Stigmatine sources.

10th MARCH 1810

**[152.] Fast, so that you may not sin! Fast, because you have sinned!
Fast, that you may receive! Fast, that you may keep what you received!
Fasting is a characteristic of the Christian Religion.**

This 10th of March was Saturday after Ash Wednesday. The first sentence of this note could be both a plan for a sermon on Fasting in four parts, as well as a personal resolution. This is an insight into the young preacher's spirit: he lived what he preached. Fr. Bertoni could have taken these statements from St. John Chrysostom, in one of his sermons as commentaries on the book of Genesis. We prefer to think that this note was written as a personal resolution at the beginning of Lent. The formula could have come to him from Fr. Segneri³¹¹. The entry of this day, as well as that of the following March 12th seem to come from these Homilies. These Latin translations of the St. John Chrysostom's Homilies in Fr. Bertoni's Library came to him from his Grand-Uncle, Fr. James.

In February 1803³¹² Fr. Gaspar had given a homily which was inspired by St. Chrysostom's sermon ***The Lenten Fast to be undertaken with joy***. The cry was: Ifast, because you have sinned! In that homily Fr. Gaspar stated that the Lenten Fast, together with all the other exercises of Christian Penitence, was the most sure remedy. This is able of recovering and preserving the lost health of the soul. Fasting would remove evil at its very root. The Lenten Fast as well as all the other exercises of Christian penance which accompany it, offer a most sure remedy. To support his idea, he quoted the words of Jesus: ***this kind of demons are chased away only by Prayer and Fasting (Mt 17:21)***.

Then he said ***Prayer with Fasting is a good thing. When we fast we make our minds agile, swift and free. We give them wings to fly to God.*** Towards the end of the sermon he exhorted the people saying: ***Let us take care of our souls. We have to cleanse them and heal them when ailing and keep them sound and healthy for the future.*** What is the secret?...: ***Let us look at the Saints... We are Christians! Christ gave us the example and encouraged us to take this medicine, while He too, for forty days observed such a strict Fast.***

For the last line of the note of 1810, about Fasting being a peculiarity of the Christian Religion, we take again from the same homily quoted above, delivered in 1803. He continued:

³¹¹ Fr. Paul Segneri, SJ, *The Instructed Christian*, Part 3, Reason 20. This is found wholly near the end of sentences 4-7. It is attributed in this source to St. John Chrysostom: his Homily 1 on Fasting. However, all research in the alphabetical Index of his *Opera Omnia*, has remained in vain, among those H9milies of his *On Genesis* [some of these included in this Web-Site, under St. John Chrysostom.

³¹² *Pagine di Vita Cristiana*, pp. 262-270, *passim* – Sermon 16: 'The Lenten Fast to be observed with Joy', February 23, 1806. MssB ## 738 -755. Fr. Bertoni also has commented on St. John Chrysostom's 13 Homilies *On Genesis* – MssB ## 4615-4852: Gn 1:1-2:17.

... The common Lord of us all, God as a Father who loves all his children, longs to remove all the wrongs we committed. Thus He invented for our advantage this healing method which is the Holy Fast. (Incidentally: could we not refer at this juncture to his exhortation **Fast because you have sinned** ?). The pagans are confused, the Jews are scandalized when they see us joyfully and lovingly accept, as a community, the holy season of Fasting. Let them name *feasts* their revelries and drunkenness and all other uncontrolled and depraved behavior. But the Church of God calls *feasts* the Fast, the contempt of gluttony and it praises all other virtues which go with Fasting. (Incidentally, still: could we not say again, here, with him, **Fast so that you may not sin**?) These are the true *feasts* : Wherever there is welfare of souls, where there is harmony and peace, where one gives up all external [empty] appearances! ³¹³

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12th MARCH 1810

[153.] Noah did not convert a single person in one hundred years of preaching against Incontinence.

This sentence too was inspired by a reading from St John Chrysostom's 25th Homily *In Genesis* :

... We have learned that when God showed His wrath and promised disaster, Noah was five hundred years old. When the Flood came he was six hundred years old. There are therefore one hundred years between the warning of God and the Flood. During those one hundred years human-kind did not take heed of the warning in the least. Noah, on his part, kept on exhorting them while building the ark...

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³¹³ **Fr. Stofella's Note:** '*Fast so that you may receive...*' might come from the example, soon cited in this source, of Moses who with fasting received the tables of the Law So *that what you receive might remain* - this also comes from this source - when, after having broken the Tables, he received them anew in definitive fashion, but only after a second period of fasting.

18th MAY 1810

[154.] Is it difficult for Mary to intercede? Is it difficult for Jesus to grant us any grace?

[This May of 1810 was the first *Month of Mary* for the *orphaned* Fr. Gaspar. We can imagine him even more intensely committed to making the Mother of God his own *mother*. We have two important Marian thoughts in this month. The first entry of this date shows how he put Mary in an outstanding place in his ministry. The second, on the 24th, gives us a prayer which will accompany him all throughout his life.³¹⁴]

The words **any grace** is the object of both sentences under this date.. We take some lines from a sermon of Fr Gaspar on *The Name of Mary*³¹⁵ :

... Is it difficult for Mary to plead for any grace, on our behalf? Not at all! She is the Virgin Mother of God. She can influence with easiness and security the heart of the King, her Sovereign and yet her own Son. Is she not then the owner of all the treasures... of that limitless sea of graces and mercies? She is sung by the Church as *Queen of the Angels* . Do you wish to frighten all of Hell? Just proclaim the name of Mary with trust...

In his sermon on *The Law of the Gospel*,³¹⁶ he stated:

...Is it difficult for Jesus to grant us any grace? Not at all! He invites us with His own words saying *Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened, I will refresh you...*

In an earlier sermon on *Perseverance*³¹⁷ he quoted the very words of Jesus Himself:

... If you, who are wicked though, know how to give your own children those gifts which they ask of you and which yourselves were given by God, all the more so your Father in Heaven will give the Good Spirit to those who ask for it? Ask and you will receive. Believe that you will receive it and it will be done for you.

To conclude here, there is a challenge found in a still earlier Sermon:³¹⁸

³¹⁴ **Web-Site Note:** this note is added by the Translator to provide the historical setting for this entry.

³¹⁵ *Pagine di Vita Cristiana*, pp. 311-320, *passim* - 'The Holy Name of Mary', September 15, 1805 – MssB ## 1069-1093.

³¹⁶ *Pagine di Vita Cristiana*, pp. 23- 32: 'The Law of the Gospel', June 5, 1803, the 12th Sunday after Pentecost – MssB ## 813-840.

³¹⁷ *Pagine di Vita Cristiana*, pp. 111- 120, Sermon 17, 'On Perseverance', April 11, 1803, Easter Monday – MssB ##773-793.

... Jesus Christ awaits you, Mary calls you...!

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[154a.] We have to purify our minds thoroughly.

The last line of this *Journal* entry under this date sounds as the condition for obtaining the graces from Jesus through Mary. A **thorough purification of the mind** is indispensable in order not to put any obstacle to God's generous giving. It is an expression on the same radical level as the entry of May 1809 about **universal mortification**. The ideal is noted as well on the 14.15.16.23.24 July 1809 about the absolute requirements for Perfection.

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24th MAY 1810

155. In a Monastery, where even the smallest rules are observed, there the vigor of the Monks remains unchanged and there is peace among brothers. Where, on the contrary, the Religious do not take any account of the little transgressions, there the whole community is little by little dissipated and is destroyed. (St Anselm of Canterbury, in his Letter on Ep 6).

With all due regard to Fr. Bertoni, this citation is not found in Anselm's Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Ephsians, c. 6. It is found rather that this is a citation of a second, or even third hand. It is found instead in Cornelius a Lapide's commentary on **Sirach 19:1** *He that contemns small things, shall fall little by little...* There follows then the comment from Cornelius: *This golden sentence of St. Anselm, Letter 6, to the Cistercian Monks. This is a most certain sign, he says, that we have learned in many churches. This is the counter-sign of that full certitude that we have learned from experience.* Here is the original text: *It is the surest pattern which we have been confirming from experience in the life of many communities. The fact, namely, that in a monastery where the tiniest rules are very strictly kept, there the austerity of the monastic life remains unchanged...*

We should note that Fr Gaspar did not use the Latin adverb **districte** (= very strictly) and he chose *strength* (**vigor**) instead of *austerity* (**rigor**). In the text of Cornelius a Lapide, after the **peace among brothers**, we read: *And in the Chapter - room the animated discussions are quieted down.* Then he wrote *Community* with a capital **O(Ordo)**, meaning the entire Order: which makes the consequence of the laxity of monastic life that endangers the whole Cistercian Order of monks, not only their small community. [It should be noted lastly, that in Cornelius a Lapide's text, there is a corollary in good Latin: **ubi rigor ibi vigor** (where there is austerity there is strength)³¹⁹.

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³¹⁸ *Pagine di Vita Cristiana*, pp. 301-311. Sermon 8, December 13, 1801, 'Feast of the Translatoion of the Holy House of Loreto' – MssB ## 572-592.

³¹⁹ Translator's Note.

[156.] Let us pray for our Princes: may the Lord *speaks to them words of peace in favor of His people (Ps 85:9)*; may He give them desire for harmony. Let us pray also for our Pastors that they might dedicate themselves to the reformation of the Church. As you can see, everything is getting ruined. If the Church does not find the way for some reformation, there is no hope for a better situation. (St Thomas of Villanova, p 65,D).

This comment seems to have been noted first hand by St. Gaspar, from the Sermons of St. Thomas of Villanova. The antiquated citation system has been used by Fr. Bertoni.

St. Anselm of Aosta [1033-1109] and St. Thomas of Villanova [1488-1555] - As for the previous note which carried the quotation of St Anselm, we seem to hear Fr Bertoni remarking: "You see, the problems of those times are repeating themselves in our own times!"... In that month of May 1810, the worries were quite similar.

On 11 May a Decree was signed by Napoleon at Compiègne, and on 25 April, had been proclaimed in Verona. It abolished "all the ecclesiastical establishments, corporations, congregations, communities and associations of any nature and denomination." It made "exception of bishoprics and archbishoprics, seminaries, cathedral chapters and of the larger parishes, hospital care-givers, sisters of charity and other houses for the education of girls which We shall decide to be retained with special Decrees." The Royal Decree secularized convents and monasteries. It abolished the religious habits and the monastic life. It sent nuns, monks and religious back to their families, granting them a pension for life, for each one according to the hierarchical status they had in their respective Orders. The cloisters were to be evacuated and the Friars had to vacate the premises before the last day of May. The Nuns were given more time for the evacuation: until the end of July."³²⁰ This is only one aspect of the historical tragedy of those times. Pope Pius VII and many other eminent ecclesiastics had been arrested and imprisoned. Within the Church the *new ideas* of the French Revolution had caused divisions among Bishops and Cardinals. Many of the Clergy and the people of God became confused and polarized.

Fr. Bertoni, as far as he was concerned, and with the wisdom of saints, saw in Napoleon's wicked dealings a superior plan of God. In his instructions to the Seminarians he tried **to read Napoleon's Decree in the light of the events, which are the language of God**. Thus, in the very suppression of Religious Houses and Monasteries, perpetrated in those months he saw also the judgment of God against the widespread decadence of the Monastic discipline and of the Religious spirit. Similar causes and effects had been described by the above quoted St Anselm.

³²⁰ Perini, *History of Verona*, Vol. III, pp. 214, ff.

As Saint Thomas of Villanova said before the Council of Trent, Fr Bertoni saw no other hope except a **general reformation** which the Clergy should have performed among themselves. He was happy to be able to present the courageous behavior of the Holy Father Pope Pius VII: **This corner - stone is upright and firm. In the unflinching uprightness of the First Stone there is displayed and disowned the crookedness of the Worldly Spirit in both subordinate and superior Ministries of the Church.** ³²¹

It was in this context that the idea of collecting around himself some zealous priests for a new Congregation began to take real shape, through the *reading of the signs of the times*³²². The spirit of the many entries in the *Journal* on this day is clearly revealing the desire to *reform* himself and others. The request from the Bishop to become the Spiritual guide of the Seminary and to preach a month of Ignatian **Spiritual Exercises**, in September, will find him humbly surprised and obedient, but will encourage him to embark in his long apostolate among the Clergy.

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[157.] **Today, therefore, if you shall hear His voice... harden not your hearts as those ones did, to whom He swore in His wrath... if they will enter into His rest.**

The Latin text of **Ps 94:8,11** is put together rather at random. Just where Fr. Berotni found the text this way, is not known. In the original it sounds as follows: **Oh that today you would hear His voice: harden not your hearts as (the Israelites did) at Meribah and in the day of Massah in the desert... Therefore I swore in my anger: they shall not enter into my rest.**

It appears clearly that this note is very closely connected to the previous two. That **therefore**, which is not in the biblical text, is the word which gives the tone to the sentence. It seems to say: "Look at **the events**: let them talk! They are the **language of God**. Woe to those who harden the ear and the heart in front of these such solemn lessons... The Lord says: **They will not enter into His rest!**

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[158.] **A hardened heart will be in great trouble at the end.**

The correct and complete text, as we have seen on 9 Aug 1808, is in **Si 3:27. A hard heart shall fear evil at the last: and he that loves danger shall perish in it...** This sounds like a marginal note to the previous entry: **Do not harden your hearts...** "because a hardened heart will end up in trouble." It will be damnation... cf. 9 Aug 1808 and 17 March 1809.

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³²¹ St. Gaspar's Conferences based on St. Gregory's Exposition on *Primum Regum - Meditations 13 and 20 January 1811 - Meditation 13* [## 5296 - 5336] - 1 Reg. 2:26- 29; *Meditation 14* [## 5337 - 5383] - 1 Reg. 2:30-36 [?Jan 20, 1811: Most Holy Name]

³²² Translator's thought.

[159.] I greet you, O my Mother: give me your blessing; bless me and all who are dear to me. Vouchsafe to offer to God all I have to do and suffer today, in union with your merits, as well as those of your Blessed Son. I offer you and consecrate to your service all my being and whatever belongs to me placing everything under your protection. Obtain for me, my dear Lady, purity of soul and body, and grant that I may not do anything today displeasing to God; I entreat you through your Immaculate Conception and your perfect Virginity [before the birth, in the birth and after the birth].

(A *Hail Mary* for the person who wrote this prayer.)

Following the four texts that are so closely linked, that we may call belonging to the reform of the Church, here – without any change in the date – we find a beautiful prayer. This is a real treasure for the understanding of Fr Bertoni's spirit. We think that this text became part of his daily morning prayers. This will then be followed by a series of Patristic texts with varied thoughts. And then lastly, two short lines from a Psalm. We have the suspicion that all these entries were placed on different days – but the Servant of God who had written this notebook for his own eyes only, does not indicate any change of date. These entries from May 24th-31st, just as they are, will round out the entries for this year 1810.

We have already noted ³²³ that this prayer is a real gem, and it does not seem easy every to exaggerate its value. The last line **A *Hail Mary*...** seems to exclude the possibility that it was a personal composition. He took it from some source and, finding it very proper for himself, he added also the spiritual token for the demands of honesty, with regard for the unknown author. The Founder has handed this on to us through its inclusion in his *Journal*.

If we examine this prayer, we can easily see it as an expression of the ***Treatise of the True Devotion to the Virgin*** by St Grignon Marie de Montfort (+ 1716). In Fr. Bertoni's time this *Treatise* was already written for a while, but it remained hidden until 1842. Since that year it began to be spread very widely in the Church. The wording of Fr Bertoni's prayer is very close to the expressions of *Spiritual Slavery* of St de Montfort's doctrine.

This prayer is already in the spirit of a total dedication to Mary as the Mother and *Lady of the House*. We should greet her every day as such. Our offerings and prayers pass to God through her hands, and similarly all our daily activities and suffering, in union with her merits and those of her Divine Son. The whole of ourselves and our world, every day, are placed at her service: all under her mantle... St Grignon de Montfort could not agree more!

³²³ ***Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. 1, p. 341.**

In return for this service, we expect every day *purity of mind and body* and that *we should not do anything which can displease God*.

A strong foundation for our petition to Mary is her great privilege as the ***Immaculate Conception*** . Fr Bertoni supported the doctrine of Mary's *Immaculate Conception* long before the dogmatic definition of 1854.

In all the research, this text of this prayer has not yet been uncovered. This is so despite having pondered the prayer manuals of many Marian Congregations. A partial text, though, perhaps even the substance of the second part of the text. Might be found in an invocation that was in use of the old ***Preces Matutinae*** [Latin for **Morning Prayers**] often used by Priests and Seminarians. The title of one of these prayers was dedicating to that of commending the living of chastity, The text reads: *By your Immaculate Conception, and most pure Virginity, cleanse my heart and my body, a Mother and Virgin before the Birth, in the Birth and after the Birth.* ³²⁴

With this in mind, does not the deMontfort devotion pertain quite closely to Stigmatine Spirituality?

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[160.] To be sure that your will is sufficient, see whether it is accompanied by your effort. (St Augustine)

The text is from a Letter 127 addressed by St. Augustine to the saintly couple Armentarius and Pauline. He wrote:

... It is necessary to put effort into action in order to obtain things which are wanted and loved. The will is not sufficient when the power is lacking. Righteous living -if we want it- is already a fact. When we really want it, it is already justice. To practice it, is sufficient that we want it fully and completely...

St Augustine intended to encourage that couple not to draw back from the vow of conjugal celibacy. The expression "Righteousness is reached by nothing other than perfect will"... is summarized and expressed by the following note of Fr Gaspar on the same day:

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[161.] One who has good will has everything, but the will is not good if it does not do what it can. (St Augustine)

We already know this text from the entries of 22 Feb and 22 March. However, we have failed to find the precise words in the works of St Augustine. The second part is evidently an extension and explanation of the first. At any rate we should like to complete the text with an authentic Augustinian quotation: "Without the grace of God, man cannot have even good will". ³²⁵

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³²⁴ ***Veni mecum piorum Sacerdotum. Patavii 1753, p. 14.***

³²⁵ **Letter 188, 7 to Juliana, widow, the mother of Demetriadis.**

[162.] We need will: not just any one, not the ordinary one, but consistent and genuine. (St John Chrysostom)

The text is from the Introduction to the Saint's Homilies on St. John's Gospel. We can summarize the thought of St John Chrysostom as follows:

... One cannot possibly understand St John, the Evangelist, unless he purifies his soul as if he had to enter into Heaven. Do not tell me that 5 days are not sufficient. This is the time namely which it takes to follow [my talk] from the introductory Homily until the beginning of the treatise. The Good Thief, who was a rascal and a murderer, reached the height of virtue and of Paradise in an instant. The mud that we are can be changed immediately into pure gold. Don't you see that one needs only to want it? I don't mean any will or ordinary will, but consistent and genuine...

The expression of St John Chrysostom agrees easily with St Augustine's texts. The point is always the same: the service of God and the spiritual life require the engagement of the whole human will, but always with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. St Augustine said again: "Good will without the help of the Holy Spirit cannot work."³²⁶

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[163.] To live in a Christian way among Christians is [looked upon] as shameful. (St Bernard).

This sentence reflects the difficult times of St Bernard's. We cannot however find a proper source for this quotation in the works of the Saint. Fr. Bertoni found that this text - as well as the ones which follow on this day - reflected the appalling situation of his times, too. He will use these texts in his daily ministry, when he had to denounce the spiritual disaster that *human respect* was causing among people.

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[164.] People believe in the world. They believe in the Devil. They believe in the body. But in the only God of truth they do not put their security.

The text (which is not given the source) will be used by Fr Bertoni again in the 17th Meditation on the first Book of Samuel. There, he will use **faith** instead of **security**. He criticized the unbelief, the naturalism and the licentiousness of his times.

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[165.] How long will you judge unjustly: and accept the persons of the wicked? ...They have not known nor understood: they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth shall be moved ... (Ps 81:2,5)

Fr. Bertoni seems to condemn the injustices perpetrated in his time using the authority of the Word of God. The Latin word should be in the plural: **peccatorum**. This is a text that condemns contemporary injustices. One comment holds that they are in ignorance, deprived of the good of their intellect; they walk in darkness – and the foundations of this world are shaken...

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³²⁶ St. Augustine, *Concerning Patience*, c. 24.

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE YEAR 1811

In 1811 Fr. Bertoni was very much engaged in the Diocesan Seminary of Verona. He had to hear confessions and do Spiritual Direction with preached Meditations on Sundays and Feast Days. He gave Spiritual Exercises to the Candidates for Ordination. At the same time he was asked to give monthly Recollections and spiritual assistance to the College of the Acolytes together with some other ministries for the Clergy and the people as a whole. He continued to give Spiritual Direction and personal assistance to the girls and consecrated women of the Canossian "Retreat". Of great importance was the beginning of the systematic Spiritual Direction of the Superior of the "Retreat" i.e. Mother Leopoldina Naudet who was busy forming the new Religious Congregation called "Sisters of the Sacred Family". The first of the very few entries of the Journal in 1811 was in connection with this Direction.

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12th JANUARY 1811

**[166.] You should not study for the direction of N.N.
You should rather appeal to the Source of Light.
In this way you will have an advantage for yourself too.
You should not walk before the Lord but follow Him, Who will enlighten you. Provided you ask Him, He will suggest to you the way to make her progress and respond.**

Only in 1930 were we able to detect the name hidden under the **N.N.** We were given the hand-written ***Spiritual Diary*** of Leopoldina Naudet and were able to compare it with Fr. Bertoni's entry in his own *Journal*. This was on the occasion of a particular study which appeared as a Supplement to the ***Bertoniano*** of 1930, for the 77th anniversary of the death of Fr. Gaspar. This study covered about 80 pages, and bears the title: ***The Spiritual Diary of Leopoldina Naudet and the Venerable Fr. Gaspar Bertoni.***

Leopoldina's *Diary* began on 9 Jan 1811 with an abrupt note which reported that she expressed the desire *of having an external help...* in being directed in her spiritual journey, beside the Lord. She did not mention the name nor did she describe the encounter. She stated: *I exposed the spiritual desires that I had...* but she does not say to whom.

From what we know of the life of Leopoldina Naudet, she was comfortable to be guided by God alone. Suddenly she felt as if having a dialogue with the Lord in the following way: "- Entrust yourself to my Minister! - 'My Lord, I am so comfortable with You! - 'I tell you to entrust yourself to him: you will feel even more comfortable with Me!" The encounter with Fr Bertoni took place during the weekly Confessions on Wednesday 9 Jan.

In her evening private prayer Leopoldina heard again the Lord as if giving further assurance of the goodness of that decision. She wrote He told me that He asked me to do that because He was sure that that *person* was going to continue what He wanted of me."³²⁷

"Some days after that" - she wrote again - "he (i.e. Fr Bertoni) gave me as Particular Examen **to imagine myself always in the presence of God, and to do what we understand is of His pleasing**".

This went on until 2 March. On that day she wrote: "I was told to begin the Particular Examen on the following words of St Gregory, *In anything that you do look always to Jesus. Direct your life towards Him. Recognize Him as the one who came to us to give us His grace and to number us among the Elect, through our humanity which he has put on.* This very text was commented by Fr. Bertoni to the Seminarians on 20 Jan, the second Sunday of the Epiphany. On this day, there was celebrated the Most Holy Name of Jesus. The Biblical text was 1 K, c. 2: *He will walk always before my Christ.* Each of the Elect is to walk in the presence of Christ. In all that one does, he should always look toward Him, and to Him direct the rectitude of one's life, as He has come on earth to recompose, through the Humanity that He has assumed, the number and the Grace of the Elect. We have also reason to believe that the same text was used by Fr. Bertoni for his own Particular Examen. St. Gaspar had preached on these texts to the Seminarians of Verona."³²⁸

There is a very important remark to make here. The probable reason for the progressive reduction of entries in his *Journal* until it reached a complete stand still, is to be found in the fact that every thing which he wrote in connection with Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation was all ***Spiritual Journal***. He felt involved at a deep personal level every day of his life.

It is interesting to compare Leopoldina's first entry in her DIARY with the spirit of Fr Gaspar's note on 12 Jan. Mother Naudet wrote:

... The Lord made me understand that to be assisted I had to ask for counsel from Him alone, and trust that He will give me His light. It seemed that He said that to direct me there was no need of learning, because what operates in me was only one thing, namely Love. This is the main activity. I therefore need only help towards this. And this can be drawn only from the same Source and not from learning...

The last sentence of Fr Gaspar's note (which shows some similarities in Leopoldina's *Diary*) completes the resolutions of the new Spiritual Director. It is a practical application of the principle of action which will appear as a characteristic of his whole life. **You will not precede, go on ahead of God, but will follow Him!** With

³²⁷ Mother Naudet's Diary appears in this Web-site.

³²⁸ St. Gaspar Conferences on St. Gregory's Exposition in *Primum Regum - Meditation 14* [## 5337 – 5383] – 1 Reg. 2:30-36 [?Jan 20, 1811: Most Holy Name]

regard to this we should like to pick up again what Fr Marani wrote in *Notes about the Congregation*, two years after Fr Bertoni's death:

... I want to explain what happened as we followed the plans of God. Indeed we have to follow after God and not walk in front of Him. This is what my beloved Father used to say frequently and what he used to practice all the time...

In the particular case of January 1811 that principle found its clearest, most effective and beautiful expression.

This entire entry is highly recommendable for the reflection and practice of Spiritual Directors of people who intend to grow sincerely in their spiritual life. The spirit of it, however, is to be cherished by all of us.

†††

28th APRIL 1811

[167.] Watch and pray: This summarizes all the advices of Scripture and of the Gospel.

WATCH: This means we have to be fully awake and strong: but without weapons. One could not resist if attacked: we shall be conquered.

PRAY: This means to be well armed, but asleep. If we are to be attacked we shall be stripped of our arms and killed by treachery.

Watch and pray! This is a man who is strong, awake and well armed. He won't be conquered.

There is not much to say. This text of St. **Matthew 26:41** was already considered in the context of Contemplative Prayer, on 5 July 1808. The short comments to the text sound here decisively as imperatives for the will. They worthily correlate all the texts which deal with temptation and struggle. Didn't he say on 24 July 1809 that **we must get ready for a great war with Hell?**

†††

18th MAY 1811

[168.] Undertake the spiritual journey by the narrow way and by Penance.

The text is inspired by the verse in **Matthew 7:14: *Narrow is the road that leads to life.*** It could have been an *inner voice*, or taken for such by Fr. Bertoni who wanted to register it on paper and make it into a personal resolution. It could otherwise have been a generous resolution developed by himself which became a decision of his conscience in imitation of the Saints. What we are sure of is that he took it very seriously. So seriously that his biographers gave the blame to the severe *miliary* fever, which flattened him in 1812 and put his life in jeopardy, due also to his excessive work. He had not spared himself in the ministry and in the acts of penance: fasting and mortification to gain self control. Furthermore, he was convinced that in order to correspond to the graces God gave him and to follow the mission he felt he was invested with, he could do nothing less than that.

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[169.] I shall forget your sins, and I shall show you how many things you have to bear for my name.

It sounds like part of a dialogue between the Lord and his Servant. God calls Fr. Bertoni to the undertakings of His glory. Fr Bertoni, (we suppose), objected like St. Peter after the first miraculous catch of fish: ***Depart from me, Lord, because I am a sinner (Luke 5:8).*** The Lord replied: ***I shall forget your sins... (Is 43:25)*** or ***I shall never again recall their transgressions (Heb 10:17).*** He repeats what he had said to St Paul: ***I shall show him how many things it is necessary that he should bear for my name. (Ac 10:16).*** Similar words have been directed to several Founders of Religious Orders. Fr Bertoni will address these - and in Latin! - to Leopoldina Naudet on 14 Dec 1812. He will even add, jokingly as Saints can do: ***Take courage! This is the best share which God keeps in store for His beloved ones: ...it is not a mouth-full for all!***

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[170.] Very few are the people who have the perception of what God would do of them if He was not hindered by them in His plans.

It is the great Ignatian principle which became one of the corner-stones of Fr. Bertoni's spirituality. Here it is presented in the form in which Fr. Mariani, S.J. reported it. It is worthwhile to quote here the original form as we have it in Bartoli's book:

... Very few are those who have the perception of what would God do with them, if they would put themselves totally into His hands and let His grace work in them. One would never believe that a rough and shapeless trunk of a tree could become a statue which will be admired as a miracle of wood-carving. That trunk, if it depended on itself, would never let itself be cut by the chisels of a wood cutter. Only the wood cutter, as St. Augustine said, can foresee with his artistic eye what could come out of the trunk. Similarly there are many people who think they can just live as ordinary Christians. They have no perception that they could become saints if they just let themselves be

*fashioned by the grace of God and, by making resistance to God's work, would not spoil the design that God should like to realize in them...*³²⁹

It is clear that the principle written by Fr. Bertoni is a summary of all this. In a Meditation in ***Primum Regum*** to the Seminarians he used it several times and made a moving application of it. We have noticed it already on 29 July 1809 but did not explain it:

...We cannot imagine what would God do of us, who are the apple of His eye, if we could not raise obstacles to His Grace, but would instead surrender ourselves always and totally to His hands...

For that expression: **apple of His eye** Fr. Bertoni quoted **Zc 2:8: For he that touches you** (i.e. my priests) ***touches the apple of My eye ...***

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³²⁹ Bartoli, o.c., Book 4, n. 36 margin.

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE YEAR 1812

Fr. Bertoni continued with great determination his apostolate and his penances until October, the month during which a very severe illness struck him. He was hardly recovering from that illness, when Bishop Innocence Liruti gave him more ministries to accomplish in the Seminary. He had to suspend the assistance to the Canossa "Retreat", except for the Direction of its Superior, Mother Leopoldina Naudet.

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*Before presenting an outstanding "gift of Prayer" which Fr Bertoni received on 30 May 1812 (during the Octave of Corpus Christi), we should like to give an extract from Leopoldina's **Diary**. It deals with an experience of ecstasy which she tried to resist, during the Mass of Holy Thursday which on that year fell on 26 March:*

... While thinking of the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament I was taken in spirit to the place of the Last Supper. In the contemplation of what was going on there I felt being very pleasantly but strongly drawn out of myself. I abandoned myself and surrendered to the power and pleasantness of that pulling force. When I realized that my body was also going to be involved and it started to lose its sensitivity, my natural reaction forced me to become distracted. I did that, however, with some hesitation. I knew that I was told not to do like that and to trust in God. Notwithstanding that I gave myself an excuse thinking that what I was experiencing could be a physical weakness. I continued to distract myself in order to have control over my feelings and to remain self conscious..

*Fr Bertoni had previously advised her with a statement so characteristic of him: **Do not resist God. Trust in God!** What would have happened on that Maundy Thursday if Leopoldina would not have resisted the attractions of God, seems that her Spiritual Director experienced himself a couple of months later on 30 May 1812.*

†††

30th MAY 1812

[171.] While in prayer before Mass I was taken over by some drowsiness and I heard from the Crucifix these words addressed to my heart: *Look at this Heart of mine !* Those words immediately brightened my mind with light and my heart felt suddenly a great fervor. Then it was as if my spirit rose up to see the lovable object which was indicated. I felt a shivering throughout my whole body. I found I had my eyes and mouth closed but my soul was wide awake and full of delight.

It seemed that my soul wished to separate itself from my body. It seemed to be dying and yet to enjoy this. When it turned again back with desire towards the one who was talking to it, I had another shivering and the feeling of a sweet painful death. My soul was then confused about what to do. If the experience had continued it was going to die or at least to be separated from the body. In such inability to act, it rested with delight in

the hands of the Lord and finding great peacefulness it was ready to die in that very moment. Then, in an instant, it regained contact with the senses.

The effect of this was a very tender devotion to the Sacred Heart. During Mass I was full of sentiment. My soul was moved to tears at Holy Communion. After Mass I kept much recollection and gladness for the whole day with an increase of Faith, Hope and Charity.³³⁰

The text is worth reading and meditating with devotion. This would be sufficient to understand it and to savor it without pretending to penetrate the deep phenomena which it narrates. However some remarks are helpful. We take from what Fr. Dalle Vedove wrote with regard to that mystical experience of Fr Berton:

... It is probable that he was preparing in those days the homily for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the following Friday. Spending nights in work, study and prayer makes one somehow drowsy early in the morning. But Fr Berton's drowsiness was not just natural: it was that *turgidity* and tying up of the human faculties which is characteristic of mystical experiences. The words **Look at this Heart of mine !** were heard distinctly. What followed was like a flash of lightning: an irresistible desire to **see the lovable object which was indicated.**

... The sudden and almost violent way in which Fr. Gaspar was taken by this mystic gift showed that it was not a simple ecstasy, which should have developed slowly and pleasantly, but rather a real *rapture* or *flight* of the spirit. The effects of this extraordinary experience invaded not only the spiritual faculties of mind and will but also the physical ones with characteristic phenomena like shivering of the body and shutting off of sight and voice. He even reached, twice, the state of *alienation* close to death. Yet the whole experience was described as **delightful** and in great **quiet**. The *rapture* in front of the Crucifix marks the height of Fr. Gaspar's extraordinary spiritual gifts. After this mystical experience he was no longer sure what he should write down on paper. He will record only seven more short notes and will leave blank the remaining 90 pages of his JOURNAL. The reason could be that a new phase of his life was opening up.

... Within few months he will be struck by a sickness which will accompany him for the remaining forty years of his life, marked by intense suffering. From the ecstasy in front of the Crucifix which showed him the Sacred Heart, a new journey began. It will lead

³³⁰ **Web-Site Note:** it is interesting to note that in these days [less than a week later] Fr. Berton was thinking integrally also of the Glorious Wounds retained in Christ's Risen Body. In St. Gaspar's sermon on the Sacred Heart [June 5, 1812], he stated: His side, opened after His death, is used to show us that Heart, that same Heart wounded by the lance, that WOUND RETAINED IN HIS GLORIOUS BODY, render the Heart so sweet, evident, divine, so much so that it is impossible to venerate the Wounded Heart without remembering and venerating His immense love [cf. MssB # 1771]. This integral theme is much in evidence in Fr. Berton's spirit - cf. J. Henchey, CSS, 'S. Gaspare Berton: una speranza missionaria...', in": *Symposium...*, pp. 143-160.

him to the total sacrifice of self. Just like Jesus who, after his Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, took decisively the road to Jerusalem for his sacrifice on Mount Calvary...³³¹

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³³¹ Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un modello...*, o.c., pp. 191, ff.

30th SEPTEMBER 1812

[172.] Tomorrow I will be more diligent in doing everything out of pure love for God and to give Him pleasure.

It sounds like a resolution for a Particular Examen.

The emphasis is on **out of pure love...** which recalls the principles of perfection written on 14, 15, 16 July 1809 and on some other dates. He had learned from Scupoli's ***Spiritual Combat*** that the habitual background of Spiritual Life is ... *the dispossession of all our will and the total surrender to God's pleasure* (which is **Holy Abandonment**). *Furthermore, the rule of our activity is that absolutely every thing "should be wanted and done purely for the glory of God and only for His pleasure.*³³²

... *This extreme tension of all his psycho-physical powers - wrote Fr Dalle Vedove - will soon result in a health disaster. The methodical exercise of the **pure love** and the continuous effort in **doing what pleases God** without paying heed to any request of the weakness of nature, will make him live at a heroic level. He was aware of the answer which his directee Leopoldina Naudet had received from the Lord: "I want you to be slave of love and not of health..."³³³*

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³³² Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, cc. 1; 10. Addition, *The Path of Paradise*.

³³³ Translator's Note: Fr. Mittempergher adds this idea from Fr. Dalle Vedove: *Life*, Vol. 3, p. 402.

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE YEAR 1813

After the serious illness of October 1812, Fr. Bertoni resumed with more enthusiasm the spiritual care of the Seminary of Verona. There he had also the responsibility to direct some priests who had been "enclosed" by order of the Bishop with the view of being "reformed" from their irregular way of life. Unfortunately his recovered health did not last much longer. He had to be substituted by his former Teacher Fr Louis Fortis (who would one day become the Superior General of the re-established Order of the Company of Jesus). He made himself available, as much as he could, for several Ministries. In August he relapsed. When he recovered he was no longer able to assume the care of the Seminary. Towards the end of the year (27 Dec 1812) his father Francis Louis Bertoni died.

†††

21st JUNE 1813

[173.] At St Sebastian's the Lord gave me encouragement. He made me call to memory the graces of the past. He made me consider His power which will overcome my sins.

This also seems to us to be a *gift of Prayer*. It had to do with Fr Gaspar's vocation to found an Institute of Religious Life. He was shown his providential *history*. He might have had some hesitation about that. The Lord manifested Himself in that same church where he firstly had the inspiration and He confirmed his mission.³³⁴

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22nd JUNE 1813

[174.] He made me worthy to sustain a.... for the sake of His truth.

The subject is evidently *the Lord*. What shall we put on the dotted line? We think either *trial* or *tribulation*. Fr. Giacobbe reported, around that time, that Fr Bertoni was confronted in a public place, near the Church of St Firmus (not far from his uncle Scudellini's house, where he was residing), "by a rabid follower of Jansenist heresy. That man could not bear the battery of reasons with which Fr. Gaspar weakened and destroyed the position of the Jansenists. It was then that *the heretic* resorted to the most base and offensive words against the priest".³³⁵

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23rd JUNE 1813

[175.] Utmost, humble and active love to our Lord Jesus Christ

³³⁴ cf. *Journal* entries for May 10, 1811 – as well as for July 23, 24, 1809.

³³⁵ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p. 532.

Was it a mystical experience? Was it an inspiration which Fr. Gaspar had during prayer and which he saw as a confirmation of his resolution?

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24th JUNE 1813

[176.] Emotional affection to Christ with desire... and a painful humiliation which I experienced.

It could have been an intense desire to become so much assimilated to the humanity of Christ that he longed for his Master's self-sacrifice. On some other occasions he had expressed the desire for martyrdom. The second part of the note gives the impression that his Master gave him an opportunity of tasting what he longed for, on that same day.

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25th JUNE 1813

[177.] Consolation for a brother, who...

The *Journal's* last written page is partly torn. The Italian text after **che** (*who*) has either *car...* or *cam...* Our assumption is for the second syllable, which could be completed in **cambiò** (*changed*). This would make sense if we refer this note to a documented experience which Fr. Bertoni had at the time, in helping a certain priest to *convert* from an unfortunate moral situation. **Sinner, my brother!** Fr. Bertoni used to say. In that particular case the priest was Angelo Allegretti, previously a friar of the suppressed Monastery of *La Vittoria*, who was condemned to death on 27 March 1813. The sentence was executed on 8 July 1813. The crime: culpable homicide of his own mother by poisoning. He had intended to kill his brother but there was a mistaken swapping of the soup bowl.

It is worth while to report the narration of the fact as testified by Fr Cajetan Borsatti:

... In 1816 I was passing by the House of *the Stimmate* with the Vicar, Msgr. Dionisi. Monsignor said to me: "Do you see that house? A saint lives there!" "Oh, I know him" - I said. Then he continued: "Listen, I want to tell you something which that holy soul did..."

"An unfortunate man had been condemned to death. He refused to go to confession. He stated that he wanted to die without repentance. Several priests tried their utmost but all in vain. He even used to insult the image of the crucifix and utter heretical blasphemies. One day the Prefect Smancini called me and told me about that. He said he did not like that such scandal should happen in his department. He pleaded with me to find a way of convincing that wretched man to repent. I promised him to try my best and I went to see Fr Bertoni. When I entered I told him: "I should like to have a favour from you." Fr Bertoni answered immediately "What are you saying, Monsignor? You put me to shame. Just command me what you want me to do. Your commands are like favors to me!

"Then I told him the story and the situation."

"Monsignor"- he answered - here I am at your disposal. When do you want me to go? Now or tomorrow?" (it was already evening!)

"You can go tomorrow" - I replied. He was ready to go on the spot trusting in the voice of the Superior in which he used to see the voice of God.

"Very early in the morning, after having celebrated the Holy Mass (and, I think, after having spent some of the night in prayer for that poor priest) he went to prison. The criminal was surrounded by priests who were trying to help him. As he saw Fr Bertoni approaching from far he raised his hands and full of joy he shouted: "Here is the one who will put me in the grace of God!" Then Fr Bertoni "comforted him, heard his confession and consoled him..."(238)

Fr N. Dalle Vedove suggests another way of reconstructing the incomplete note of Fr Gaspar. The *car...* can be the first syllable of the Italian *carcerato...*(= *incarcerated*). Thus the text sounded as follows: **Consolation for a brother, who, imprisoned for a serious crime, repented and returned into the hands of the Divine Mercy.**³³⁶

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26th JUNE 1813

[178.] I heard a sermon on the Sacred Heart with affection....

This note too is not complete. One might ask whether this affection is one of those strong spiritual experiences of gifts of Prayer filled with love, gratitude, zeal and humble *confusion...* or just an ordinary enthusiasm. If he wrote it in his *Journal* it is more probable that it was an extraordinary affection. It is, as we like to say, *the secret of the King!* However we like to remark that as this ***Spiritual Journal*** opened, practically, with the Sacred Heart and reached its climax with the Sacred Heart. It is fitting that it should end with the Sacred Heart. That is something which is worth noticing.

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³³⁶ ***Summarium Additionale*, Document 20, pp. 119, ff.**

CONCLUSION

We just said that the *Spiritual Journal* has finally ended. We add, though, *unfortunately* ! The last series of notes give us some indication that it was winding down. The time of **doing** had limited and almost taken away the time of **reading** as Fr. Gaspar himself had indicated on 22 Sept 1808. Similarly, now, it has taken away the time of *writing*, with the exception of the urgent needs of the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It is true that the two services - which are blended into only one - implied also for himself a challenging commitment not to neglect any interest with regard to his own soul. Yet, those interests did not allow him to keep them jealously in a notebook for his own use.

We do, though, have therefore other writings. The first among these is surely the **CORRESPONDENCE** with Mother Leopoldina Naudet (1812-1834). And what a source for a *Spiritual Journal*! We wrote in another book that:

*...this Correspondence, though dealing with different subjects, appears completely filled with the spirit of the **Spiritual Journal**. So much so that the Naudet-Correspondence contributes to the content of the **Spiritual Journal** as an unexpected proof and confirmation. Furthermore, whatever in the JOURNAL is jotted down by hints and sketches, in the Correspondence is developed in much detail. And if in the JOURNAL one reads generally about doctrine and commitment of the will, in the Correspondence one has the feeling of how all that has been put into practical living...*

337

What about the **Correspondence** between Fr Bertoni and Fr Louis Bragato... or rather of what remains of it? ³³⁸ Certainly we have in this the spontaneous expression of Fr. Bertoni within the period 1835-1848, which was of his best maturity. They were writings where Fr Bertoni unwillingly manifested the traits of his moral picture. ³³⁹

One can finally move and try to find his own way among **the forest of the Meditations** St. Gaspar offered to the Seminarians on St. Gregory the Great's Commentary on *Primum Regum* [the **1st Book of Samuel**]. That forest was getting thicker and thicker while the *Spiritual Journal* was thinning out. An attentive reader can understand how often those expressions in these Conferences are somewhat autobiographical.

We should like to conclude by summarizing the message of this *Spiritual Journal* which Fr Bertoni left - though unintentionally - for his sons in his Congregation

³³⁷ *Summariium Additionale*, Document 35, III, p. 674.

³³⁸ Translator's Note: Fr. Louis Bragato [1790-1874] was one of the first Companions of Fr. Bertoni. After a few years of community life at the *Stimate*, the Bishop of Verona asked for a priest to serve as the personal and Court Chaplain of the Austrian Emperor's Italian wife, Maria Anna of Savoia. Fr. Bertoni gave him the best man at his disposal in the person of Fr. Bragato. The Correspondence between Fr. Bertoni and Msgr. Bragato was intense and deeply spiritual. Unfortunately, most of it had to be destroyed.

³³⁹ *Summariium Additionale*, Document 35, IV, pp. 735, 736.

and for the readers in general. We believe that there is only one clear lesson: ***The Careful Development of the Interior Life***. And with this, a loving quest and exercise of virtues. This is the nature and necessary condition for any genuine fruitful apostolic activity.

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(9 JULY 1808)

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

††††

11 OCTOBER 1808

When in a Religious Community each member does not apply himself deliberately to his specific perfection, the Community cannot progress. And even if it does go on, it will be without spirit and as if languishing.

May God bless us all!

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