

St. GASPAR BERTONI:

**BIBLICAL and THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
on his DEVOTIONS,**



the HOLY ESPOUSALS and the SACRED STIGMATA

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HOLY ABANDONMENT: A SYNTHESIS OF THE STIGMATINE DEVOTIONS

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AN ATTEMPT AT UNION

A Brief Forward

In reflections on the charism of Founders and Foundresses of religious communities, it is becoming ever more clear that their graces have been bestowed by God for the good of the whole Church, and are a rather complex reality. There is always an historical part in the study of these graces, which serves as the foundation of all other investigations: biblical, patristic and theological meditations, as well as trying to see the types and depth of the influences received from other spiritual families and movements.

As far as the Stigmatine Founder is concerned, the words of the Italian spiritual writer, Divo Barsotti, of a few years ago, offer a suggestion in his regard:

... One study that it would be very important to make (in the spirituality of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni) would be that of the biblical citations that he uses so profusely. These are not only very numerous, but they include citations from almost every book of Sacred Scripture. It would be important to see if his biblical doctrine depends directly from his own meditations on the word of God - or, on the contrary, if these citations are only a confirmation of the doctrine that he drew essentially from his favored sources: the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas and the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius...¹

This present effort presented here is only one attempt - using the very words of those who are more competent in different areas of study - to suggest some thoughts, from a variety of sources, concerning the Stigmatine Devotions, and principally, the Holy Spouses and the Sacred Stigmata.

¹ cf. Divo Barsotti, "Spiritualita' di abbandono nel San Gaspar Bertoni", in: *Magistero di santi*, Roma: AVE 1971, p. 14.

It is my hope - without abusing a principle dear to the Founder, and also without presuming on his principles - to compile this study with these in mind. Fr. Giacobbe, in the first biography of Fr. Bertoni, stated:

... You would never hear from his lips: 'I would counsel you to do this ... or, I think this is the answer; or, this is my judgment...' What would often be heard from his lips was: 'I read somewhere', or 'I remember hearing...' ².

Fr. Stofella comments on this same principle of the Founder concerning the Original Constitutions. In the Introduction to that booklet (p. 19), Fr. Stofella writes:

... Moreover, the Constitutions of the Founder are a work of selection, of synthesis, or adaptation, or organization. If he customarily preferred the formulae of others, this was because he did find them corresponding to his own thoughts...

In the pages that follow, while the responsibility of the interpretation is my own, the thoughts suggested are for the most part taken from the studies of others.

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In presenting this study, which makes a modest attempt at approaching the subject theologically and biblically, a guideline has been offered by an insight afforded by Vatican II. The text reads this way:

... The tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities which have been handed down. This happens through:

the contemplation;
and study, made by believers, who treasured these things in their hearts [cf. Lk 2:19, 1];
through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience,
through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession, the charism of truth.

² cf. *Summarium Additionale*, Doc. XXVI, p. 550. [Hereafter: *Summ. Add.*].

For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth, until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her. [DV 8].

The Stigmatine Founder lived these various steps in his own time. His dedication to contemplation, his own "severe" studies, and his "obsequious" attitude toward the Magisterium of the Church will be the matter of other studies, which may prove useful for our reflection in covering his charism. Here the reflection is directed more to the lived experience of the Stigmatine Founder. The insight afforded from a reflection on the story of his life can be an aid in understanding the grace he received from God.

Reflecting on his family experience, several factors among others, stand out which made a deep impression upon him and the development of his spirit:

- the deaths of those he dearly loved during his formative years - perhaps in particular, his only sibling, his three year old sister, Matilda;
- the subsequent separation of his mother and father this stemmed from the latter's decision simply to leave his wife and only other child;
- life-long illness beginning while he was still a relatively young priest;
- some failures in the apostolate;
- the Congregation he founded, never fully developed according to the plan he had for it.

It is interesting to note, too, that with Fr. Bertoni, the family name came to an end. Without any exaggerated insistence on any one of these factors, they may have some bearing on the "experience" of Fr. Bertoni which were factors in the shaping of his charism.

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With the invitation of the Second Vatican Council, all the religious institutes have given much effort and study toward a deeper understanding of the fundamental charism of their foundations. Perhaps the Society of Jesus has shown exemplary leadership in this regard - as even the briefest perusal of the titles of their recent studies might suggest. In addition to annual courses which they offered on the Ignatian spirit, they also offer many publications from the *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis* in Rome, and at St. Louis University - not to speak of other centers in Spain and France.

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Section 1

The Nuptial Metaphor in Biblical Spirituality

I. Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God does not reveal Himself only as the "Lord", or "the Creator", the "Most High", and the "Most Holy " - but, He is has also and most especially revealed Himself as "Love". More than anything else, God reveals Himself as loving Israel very much - a weak, poor, sinful, but chosen people. This extraordinary divine love has been revealed in so many ways: by means of direct declarations, very special manifestations of love on the part of God [Creation, Vocation, Pardon] - and by the comparisons He employed in divine revelation to communicate and reveal this love. It is these last - the divine comparisons, the metaphors, the anthropomorphisms, the "anthropopathisms" - all of which bring out the great taste, the infinity, the extent, the intimacy and the tenderness of His love.

A. Some Comparisons taken from the Life Israel Lived:

The history that Israel lived indicates that at the beginning, they were slaves, and then assumed the wandering, nomadic life of the desert bedouin, before reaching the Promised Land. It seems that the great Patriarchs, then Moses and even David, were all Shepherds. But, then, after the successful crossing of the desert, with the Book of Joshua, Israel finally arrived at the Promised Land, and after the Conquest, settled down to an agricultural life. Therefore, to reveal His immense love for them, God used symbols from both these ways of life: God manifests Himself as a Shepherd, and also as a Farmer, the Planter of the Vine:

1. God, the Shepherd of Israel:

Of all the Shepherds, God is the best of all [cf. Ezk 34; Ps 23; 78:13; 95:7]. This comparison expresses the idea of belonging: the Lord is the Owner, the Responsible One for His flock. The people really is His very own, bought and paid for by the Lord Himself. Far from being a harsh and uncaring proprietor, the Lord is much to the contrary, the vigilant savior of His special People, His beloved Flock [cf. Is 40:11; Ezk 34:16; Ps 78:13, f.; Jr 31:10]. As Shepherd of His People, the Lord Himself takes care of each one of the sheep, of the lambs in particular [cf. Ps 23:1-4].

The particular activities of this very special Shepherd may be reduced to these:

- to seek the lost sheep of Israel;
- to bring back the strays;
- to nurse the sick back to health;
- to heal the wounded [cf. Ezk 34:16; Zc 11:15-16; Is 40:11].

Small wonder, then, that the title "Shepherd" was intimately connected to the ancient concept of the ideal monarch.

2. God is the Vineyard Keeper:

In Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" [cf. Is 5: 1 +], this title is used by God to communicate Himself, indicates that Israel is most precious in His eyes - and there is also the idea of the fruit that Yahweh 'hoped' to derive from His people:

... I had planted you a choice vine, a shoot of the soundest stock..." [cf. Jr 2:21; cf.

5:10; 8:13].

"... Glean, glean as a vine is gleaned, what is left of Israel; like a grape-picker, pass

your hand again over the branches..." [cf. Jr 6:9].

In his chapter 5, the Prophet Isaiah offers a poem that was composed at the beginning of his ministry, perhaps taking inspiration from an ancient Harvest Song. The theme of Israel as a Vine that was very specially chosen, and planted, and then later, rejected - was already prepared for by the Prophet Hoseah [cf. 10:1], and then would be taken up more fully by Jeremiah [cf. 2:21; 5:10;6:9; 12:10], and eventually it would 'flourish' under Ezekiel [cf. 15:1-8; 17:3-10; 19:10-14; cf. Ps 80: 9-19; Is 27:2-5].

In the New Testament, Jesus would transfer this into the Parable of the Owner of the Vineyard sending his servants and finally his own son who would then be put to death by the wicked husbandmen [cf. Mt 21:33-44, p.; cf. also the Parable of the barren fig tree which did not produce, cf. Mt 21:18-19, p.]. Jesus will reveal the mystery of the true Vine in John [cf. 15:1-2]. Other aspects of the vine [cf. Dt 32:32, f.; cf. the Note in the Jerusalem Bible here:

"... I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser... Whoever remains in Me,

with Me in him, bears fruit in plenty ..." [cf. Jn 15:1, ff.]

B. Comparisons taken from Political Life

Over their long history, Israel had a variety of forms of government before their defeat and exile by Babylon. Based on these forms in their ideal state, Israel imagined that God was:

1. **Judge:** this term is not to be understood in the legal sense as we do in our time. The "Judges" of Israel, from whom one of the Books of the Old Testament takes its name, were really "saviors". So, Israel would pray to God with Isaiah:

"...Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our law-giver, Yahweh our King and Savior..." cf. Is 33:22].

One of the signs of the Messianic Age will be the appearance of a just and compassionate Judge [cf. Ps 7:8; 96:13].

2. **King:** It is probable that at least somewhere in Israel's long history there was an annual "Enthronement Ritual", in which the king would renew his commitment to the Lord - or, that the Lord would be proclaimed the true King of Israel, and each would renew him/herself before the Lord. The idea of Yahweh-King is found very often in the Psalms [cf. Ps 5:2; 29:10; 44:4; 47:8; 48:2; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 95:3; 97:1; 99:4; 146:10]. During the years of exile, the saddest part of Israel's history, there arose an anonymous Prophet who promised a future King, one who would be genuinely interested in the lowly. His future reign was promised as one being especially for the poor, those who suffer, and those who mourn. [The "Book of Consolation", Is 40-55 - and cf. the last part of the Book, Is 56-66].

C. Some Comparisons from Daily Life

In Israel's ordinary, daily life, there was need also for the doctor - and in the wandering existence of so many persons, there was frequent necessity to seek for hospitality, one of the characteristic qualities of the bedouin. Thus, God also presents Himself in revelation in these ways:

1. **Doctor:** The wounds and illnesses of life often need healing. Too often the chosen people sought this "cure" among other nations - but only the Lord offered His people health, and ultimate salvation:

Ephraim has seen how sick he is, and Judah the extent of his wound! So Ephraim has turned to Assyria and Judah has appealed to the Great King; but he has no power to cure you, nor to heal your wound [cf. Ho 5:13].

In Jeremiah, we find God promising the definitive cure for the scrapes and wounds of life more than in any other single writing:

Why bother to complain about your wound? Your pain is incurable... but I (Yahweh) will restore you to health and heal your wounds... [cf. Jr 30:14-17].

Pity me, Yahweh, I have no strength left, heal me, my bones are in torment...

Bless Yahweh, my soul ... and remember all his kindness: in forgiving all your offenses, in curing all your diseases... [cf. Ps 103:1, ff.].

2. Inn-Keeper: The divine goodness also has expressed itself under the image of a most warm and welcoming Guest-master, One Who takes care of His people with touching solicitude. Life itself is often compared to an Exodus, to a wandering life-long pilgrimage that lasts until death. In the hours of worry, tiredness and loneliness, God is the Host Who awaits the weary way-farer, who always offers His own special welcome:

... Yahweh alone is his guide, with him is no alien God. He gives him the heights of the land to ride, he feeds him on the yield of the mountains, He gives him honey from the rock to taste, and oil from the flinty crag; curds from the cattle, milk from the flock, with rich food of the pastures, rams of Bashan's breed and goats, rich food of the wheat's ear and blood of the fermenting grape to drink... [cf. Dt 32:13-14; cf. also Gn 31:54; Ex 18:12; Is 25:6, ff.; Ps 25:5; Mt 22:1-14; 26:20-26, 29].

As a sign of the dawn of the "Messianic Times", the Lord promises a banquet especially for the poor:

... On this mountain the Lord will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of food rich and juicy, of fine strained wines ... He will destroy death forever. The Lord Yahweh will wipe away the tears from every cheek. On that day it will be said: See, this is our God in Whom we hoped for salvation. Yahweh is the One in Whom we hoped... [cf. Is 25:6 ff.].

... Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come!... Listen, listen to me, and you will have good things to eat... Listen, and your soul will live...! [cf. Is 55:1-3].

The Good Samaritan of the NT is also a figure of the Lord Himself, a real Host:

... He went up and bandaged his wounds... look after him and on my way back, I will make good any extra expense you have... [cf. Lk 10:29, ff.]

The Messianic Age will be an invitation to a great nuptial banquet, and the Son of the King is the Messiah offering it. The guest list includes especially the poor of the street, all those who are struggling in any way. In the parable, anyone who responds to the invitation must procure a wedding garment, through the works of justice that have to accompany the faith [cf. Mt 22:1-14 +; cf. also 8: 11 +; Lk 14:16-24; Pr 9:1-6].

D. Some Comparisons taken from Family Life

The family is the unit on which the society is built. Therefore, some of the image employed by sacred Scripture present the Lord as a living part of the family. The idea offered is that God in some way, perhaps after the Ritual of Blood on Sinai [Ex 24] is a "blood relative" to His specially chosen People.

1. Kinsman: God Himself is a part of the family, the tribe, or the "clan": ... If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the Kinsman of Isaac, had not been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed [cf. Gn 31:42] ... Then Jacob swore by the Kinsman of his father, Isaac... [cf. v. 53].

Many interpreters translate this as the "Terror of Israel" , it seems to indicate that a person whose task it was in the tribe, clan, or family, to indicate its rights.

2. Father: Perhaps this is among the most common images of the God of Israel, that will peak on the lips of Christ in John's Gospel. The love of God for His people is also described under this form of paternal love - the Lord Himself has generated Israel, created this nation as His own special people [cf. Dt 1:31; 32:10, 18; Ho 11:1-4; Is 1:2-3; 63:15, ff.; 64: 7, ff.; Jr 3:19, 22; 31:4, 9, 20; Ps 103:13, ff.; Lk 15:11-32]

The biblical image of God the father is found in an eminent manner also in these passages, one from the OT and the other from the NT: each of them sheds some light on the nature of God:

... When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt
... I led them with reins of kindness, with leading-strings of love. I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek, stooping down to him I gave him his food... [cf. Ho 11:1-4].

The second passage is that of the "Prodigal Son", who many interpreters see more as the Parable of the Compassionate Father:

... While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly ... The father said to the servants: Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; p[ut] a ring on his finger ... we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost and is found... [cf. Lk 15:11, ff.].

3. Mother: To reveal how His divine love hardly expects a return, is unselfish, deep, and unwavering, God declares that He loves His people as a Mother would love her child, especially the last-born:

... Does a mother forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? Yet, even if these forget, I will never forget you. See, I have branded you on the palms of my hands... By my life - it is Yahweh who speaks - you will wear these (jewels), they will adorn you as bridges are adorned... [cf. Is 49:15, 16, 18]... Like a son comforted by his mother, will I comfort you... [cf. also Ps 51:1, ff.' 131].

4. "Brother-in-Law": This is the "Law of Levirate" simply applied to Yahweh in His relationship with His Chosen People. The experts tell us that the word redeemer in the Hebrew language is derived from a word which indicates 'intimate solidarity' with the family. Once again, in some way, Yahweh reveals Himself as being a very vital part of the family circle. The ancient law of the Levirate is explained in the Book of Deuteronomy:

... If brothers live together and one of them dies childless, the dead man's wife must not marry a stranger outside the family. Her husband's brother must come to her, and exercise his 'levirate', make her his wife, and the first son she bears must assume the dead brother's name, and so his name shall not be blotted out in Israel... [cf. Dt 25:5, ff.; Gn 38; Rt 4; Mt 22:14, p.].

This Law of the Levirate assures the continuation of the descendency, that is so necessary rights of the Covenant. The institution of the Levirate seems to have had also the scope of assuring the stability of the family patrimony.

Christ, as the NT Redeemer, has generated a new Israel with His Spouse, the Church - this continuing an ancient line, which seemed to have died. It is interesting to note that in the life of Fr. Bertoni, he would be the last of his family.

5. Spouse: To reveal the intensity, the fidelity of the divine love, its intimacy, tenderness, and so much else - Sacred Scripture uses the conjugal imagery. The Lord is the Spouse of Israel, and Israel is the Spouse of Yahweh.

The Covenant between Yahweh and His people has been compared to a marriage. There are many OT passages, where the relationship between God and Israel is presented as a marriage - and these following are some of the more significant texts in this regard:

Ho 1-3; Jr 2-4; 16:1; 31:3-4, 21-22; Ezk 16; 33:1-4; 46-49; II-Is 49:14-23; 50:1; 51:1-14;
57:7, 11; 60:1-16; 61:10; 62:1-5; Canticle of Canticles; Ps 45; 63:6-8; 106:39.

In this marriage, there is envisioned a marvelous exchange between the two realities: the Covenant is immersed in love - rather than being simply a contract between Sovereign and subjects. In many Canticles of the Prophets, God is presented as 'choosing Israel as His spouse'. God has always manifested toward Israel - His spouse who was often unfaithful - a love full of tenderness and generosity - forgiveness and compassion; God gives, gives Himself, and repeatedly forgives His Spouse. He does not seem to seek His own interests, but always the greater good of His beloved.

Nonetheless, God does ardently desire to be loved, to be served - He is not a distant Lord, nor is He a condescending benefactor. As He commands that Israel serve God only, He promises His divine fidelity in His word as well as in His activity. In His dealings with Israel, love will always have the last word - it is a divine love which participates in the tragic vicissitudes of Israel's history, the story of betrayal, of refusal - but also it is one of conversion.

This metaphor has taken two forms in the Christian tradition as well:

- the Spouse is God;
- the Wife is the People, the Church, or some individual.

a. The Divine Spouse is often offended and outraged, but remains faithful through it all:

The element of suffering is never far from this divine espousals on both sides, but there is always the promise of a healing of hurts and the deep wounds of life:

1.] The Prophet Hoseah and his Unfaithful Spouse: he was the first biblical author to compare the Covenant of Sinai to a marriage concluded between the Lord and Israel [cf. Ho 2:4, ff.]. Through innumerable proofs of love, the Lord has tried to conquer the affection and the heart of His Spouse. But the Spouse so often showed herself to be unfaithful: in the adoration of false gods, she abandoned the Spouse Who chose her. Nonetheless, the fidelity of the Lord has remained despite these infidelities which were so often met with the 'antiphon' of the slowness of divine anger, the "Exodus Antiphon":

... I did forsake you for a brief moment, but with great love will I take you back. In excess of anger, for a moment, I hid my face from you. But, with everlasting love I have taken pity on you, says Yahweh, your Redeemer...[cf. Is 54:7, ff.; also Ex 34:6; Nb 14:8; Jl 2:13; Job 4:2; Heb 3:12; Ps 86: 15; 103:8; Ne 9:17; Ps 145:8].

God multiplies His gestures to induce His Spouse to return to Him, and to have her say:

... I will go back to my first husband, I was happier then than I am today...[cf. Ho 2:9, ff.]

This is something similar to what the Prodigal Son would say in the Parable many centuries later. She is reduced to misery, the fruits of the earth have been taken away from her; the Lord states: I will retrieve My wool, My flax, My corn, and My wine; her food and clothing [cf. Ho 2:11-5]. But, most of all, God wants to lead her out "into the desert", that He wants her to return to that place and time of their first love, when Israel was not courting strange gods, and loved only the Lord. And in the desert, God will once again speak to her heart - so that she will once again and decisively, follow her one God, who has never ceased loving her [cf. Ho 2:16-19]:

... That is why I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart. I am going to give her back her vineyards, and making (transform) the Valley of Achor (misfortune) into a Gateway of Hope. There she will respond to me as she did when she was young as she did when she came out of the land of Egypt ... I will betroth you to myself forever, betroth you with integrity and justice,

with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness, and you will come to know Yahweh.. [cf. Ho 2:16-19].

This nuptial love is meant to be a transforming love, one of fidelity in which Israel 'will learn' the lesson of hope. As the Valley of Achor and misery will be transformed into a Gateway of Hope - so, the poor Spouse will become faithful, as is the Lord.

Hoseah also says that the return to the Lord should not be a love like the morning cloud, like the dew that quickly disappears. In describing the short-lived and shallow repentance, Israel falsely presumes on the Lord, who 'will bandage our wounds...' [cf. Ho 6:1, ff.].

2.] Jeremiah, as a celibate: also learned much from his own lived experience:

... The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows: You must not take a wife, or have a son or daughter, in this place... [cf. Jr 16:1, ff.].

As Hoseah suffered the tragedy of infidelity, Jeremiah lived the experience of loneliness - in his prophecy there is also found the theme of the Nuptial Canticle, a promise of the Times of Restoration.:

... once more there will be heard in the towns of Judah and the ruined streets of Jerusalem... shouts of rejoicing and mirth, the voices of the bridegroom and the bride..." [cf. Jr 33:10, ff.].

Jeremiah seems to have borrowed from Hoseah the image of the espousals between the Lord and Israel; and he, too, condemns the infidelities of Israel [cf. Jr 2:23-25; 3:1-4]. The outraged husband will have to reject his spouse. According to an ancient law [cf. Dt 24:1-4], a woman thus sent away in that male society, could not be taken back again by her first husband. But, notwithstanding the law the Lord cannot reject his unfaithful and idolatrous people - provided that this people on its part, makes the effort for a sincere and lasting return. Therefore, God speaks to Jeremiah:

... I remember the affection of your youth, the love of your bridal days: you followed me through the wilderness, through a land unsown. Israel was sacred to Yahweh, the first fruits of his harvest... [cf. Jr 2:2, ff.] - Come back, disloyal Israel - it is Yahweh who speaks - I shall frown on you no more, since I am merciful - it is Yahweh Who speaks. I shall not

keep my resentment forever. Only acknowledge your guilt; how you apostasies from Yahweh your God, how you flirted with strangers and have not listened to my voice..." [cf. Jr 3:12, ff.].

In his "Book of Consolation". Jeremiah foresees a new era for the Spouse of God:

... Yahweh has appeared... from afar: I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you. I will build you once more; you shall be rebuilt, virgin of Israel. Adorned once more with your tambourines, virgin of Israel. Adorned once more with your tambourines, you will go out dancing gaily. You will plant vineyards once more on the mountains of Samaria..." [cf. Jr 31:3, ff.].

As a promise of the last times, Jeremiah is told:

... I will restore you to health, and heal your wounds ... I will restore the tents of Jacob and take pity on his dwellings ... From them will come shorts of joy and thanksgiving ... and you shall be My People will be your God... [cf. Jr 30:17, ff.].

3]. Ezechiel, a Widower: It seems that Ezechiel meditated profoundly on the books of Hoseah, Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, as well as on the "Priestly Code" of the OT. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, but somewhat younger. The entire chapter 16 of his prophecy is the story of the marriage between God and His people. God discovered Israel as an abandoned baby girl, still in the blood of her birth - and the Lord took her to Himself:

... I saw you struggling in your blood... I bathed you in water, I washed the blood off you, I anointed you with oil [cf. v. 9]... I gave you embroidered dresses, fine leather shoes... I loaded you with jewels, gave you bracelets for your wrists and a necklace for your throat ... earrings and a beautiful diadem for your head... [cf. vv. 10, ff.].

The Lord promises His mercy, notwithstanding the great difficulties of the spouse:

...I will remember the covenant that I made with you when you were a girl, and I will conclude with you a covenant that shall last forever ... I am going to renew my covenant with you and you will learn that I am the Lord... [cf. vv. 60, ff.].

This prophet, too, lived through a very painful human experience in his married life, but of another kind. Ezechiel had the great sadness of seeing the destruction of his beloved city, Jerusalem, and perhaps also saw the smoke of the temple floating over the eastern horizon of the sacked city. But, Ezechiel has left us a note of a far more personal nature that happened on the very day of the fall of Jerusalem:

... Son of Man, I am about to deprive you suddenly of the delight of your eyes [an affectionate term designating his beloved wife]. But, you are not to lament, not to weep, not to let your tears run down... I told this to the people in the morning and my wife died in the evening ... [cf. Ezk 24:15, ff.].

In this double tragedy, Ezechiel is assuming the role of Yahweh Himself - the death of his beloved wife is also symbolically the destruction of the city and the Temple. It is in situations such as these that the prophets wrote their Books of Consolation, when all the reason for living had been taken away [cf. Is 40-55; Jr 30-33] with the death of his wife, Ezechiel becomes the Prophet of Hope, of the resurrection. In this extremely dark night in his life it seemed that all relationships between Yahweh and Israel, His spouse, had been severed forever. But it is precisely at this time that Ezechiel begins to think more and more of the future: he becomes the Prophet of the "New Spirit, of the New Covenant" for all the dispersed for all times:

... I will gather you together from the people, I will bring you all back from the countries where you have been dispersed and I will give you the land of Israel. I will give them a single heart, and I will put a new spirit in them. I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh instead so that they will keep my laws and respect my observances and put them into practice. They shall be my people and I will be their God ... [cf. 11: 17, ff.]

... make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, and shake off all the sins you have committed against me... [cf. 18:31].

... Then I am going to take you from among the nations and gather you together from all the foreign nations and bring you home to your own land ... I shall put clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit into you; I shall remove the heart of

stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead; I shall put my spirit in you and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my ordinances. You shall live in the land which I gave your ancestors. You shall be my people and I will be your God... [cf. 36: 24, ff.]

In Chapter 37, Ezechiel speaks of the dry bones, which is the promise of the New Israel:

... The house of Israel was saying: our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, we are as good as dead. So, prophesy, say to them: The Lord Yahweh says this: I am going to open your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel. And you will know that I am Yahweh, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. And I shall put my spirit into you, and you will live, and I shall resettle you on your own soil and you will know that I, Yahweh, have said and done this... [cf. 37:11, ff.].

[In English, there is something on a play of sounds in the words "tomb", where all life seems to come to an end - and "womb" where it all begins. The burial of Jesus is like the seed of new life in the Christian tradition].

And in this Nuptial Theme, Ezechiel speaks of the healing of wounds by the Lord, as Good Shepherd:

... I myself shall look for the lost sheep, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong. I shall watch over the fat and healthy... [cf. 34:11, ff.].

4.] Second-Isaiah: In the "Book of Consolation," "Deutero-Isaiah" compares Israel to an abandoned woman [cf. 49:14]. But, Yahweh, moved as He always is "by an immense tenderness", takes Israel back again: in His eternal love, He has mercy on Israel [cf. Is 54:5-8], and establishes with her a community of life and love [cf. 62:4-5].

One of the more beautiful passages of this anonymous Prophet may be Chapter 54:

... Do not be afraid, you will not be put to shame, do not be dismayed, you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth and no longer remember the curse of your widowhood. For now your Creator will be your husband... Your Redeemer will be the Holy One of

Israel... like a forsaken wife, distressed in spirit, Yahweh calls you back..." [cf. Is 54:1, ff.].

Here the Spouse admits His sense of loss for the absence of His beloved, Israel/ In the concluding chapters of the Prophet Isaiah, the theme of the spouse who is pardoned is continued:

... Though you have been abandoned, and hated and shunned, I will make you and eternal pride, a joy forever and ever... [cf. 60: 15].

As a promise of the glorious resurrection of Jerusalem, the Lord has left this joyous vision of the last times:

.... no longer are you named 'Forsaken', nor your land 'Abandoned', but you shall be called 'My Delight', and your land, 'The Wedded'; for Yahweh takes delight in you and your land will have its wedding. Like a young man marrying a virgin so will the one who built you we you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you... [cf. 62:4, ff.].

b. The Spouse - the Wife - "wounded" with Love for Her Husband:

In the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, there are also those passages which consider the Lord s the Spouse - and His wife, or intended [wither collectively considered, or individually] suffering because of the absence of her husband:

1.] The Canticle of Canticles:

In the Espousals Theme, the Song of Songs accentuates the singular love of God for the Spouse - and the reciprocal love of the Spouse. However, in this unique document, there may be a little more insistence on the deep love of the wife for the husband. The Husband is referred to as the "King", and the beloved wife is called "the Maid of Shulam" [cf. 7:1]. The allegorical interpretation of this Canticle is very old - however, today there are very many interpreters who understand the book in a much more literal manner. This type of literature was used in ancient times at the profane festivals of marriage - this book in its present state seems to be a collection of canticles which celebrate the mutual and faithful love, that is then sealed in marriage. The origin of this canticle might be sought in the feasts which accompanied the celebration of marriage [cf. Jr 7:24; 16:9; Ps 45]. The Canticle does not follow a pre-

established plan - it is perhaps a collection of a wide variety of hymns united only because of their common subject, namely that of mutual love [cf. The Jerusalem Bible, Introduction to the Book]. There is a kind of New Exodus indicated in some of the passage, such as this one:

... What is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, breathing of myrrh and frankincense and every perfume the merchant knows...? [cf. 3:6; cf. Ex 13:22 +].

The Latin Vulgate speaks of the "wounds of divine love": *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea, sponsa, vulnerasti cor meum in uno oculorum tuorum* [cf. Ct 4:9, ff.]: "... Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou has wounded my heart with one of thy eyes...]. Modern interpreters tells us that this expressions means more "to ravish one's heart" - an expression perhaps borrowed from similar Egyptian love poetry.

These "mutual wounds" of divine love with the Spouse express themselves in this almost "mystical" manner. In the Christian tradition, the Spouse has been almost unanimously interpreted as God Himself - as for the spouse, the wife, the interpretation has been varied: as for the collective sense, this is generally understood as Israel, and Patrology saw it also as the Blessed Virgin, and Liturgy applies its texts to virgins in general. The mystical tradition sees more the union of the individual with Jesus Christ.

There is found in the text a comparison with a closed garden" - there is mention of the vineyard [cf. 1:6; 2:15; cf. also 9:11, 12] - a garden with its font of water, and its choice flowers - a kind of "paradise" [cf. Gn 2:9-10]. This is the image of the Garden of the Beloved. The garden is closed until the moment in which the engaged young woman opens the gate to her beloved for the wedding feast [cf. 5:1]..

2.] Ps 45: A Royal Wedding Song:

According to some exegetes, this Psalm would be a profane Chant for the nuptials of an Israelite King, [perhaps Solomon, Jeroboam II, or Achab - who married a Princess from Tyre, cf. I K 16:31]. However, both the Jewish and the Christian traditions have interpreted it concerning the nuptials of the King-Messiah with Israel, the figure of the Church [cf. Ezk 16:8-13; Is 62:5; Ct 3:11]. The poet first addresses himself to the King-Messiah [vv. 3-10], applying to him the attributes of Yahweh [cf. Ps 124:4-7, 12-13], and of Emmanuel [cf. Is 9:5 - 6]; then, the author attends to the Queen [cf. vv. 11-17]]. [cf. the note in the Jerusalem Bible here].

The robes of the spouse are all permeated with myrrh and aloes [cf. v.. 9]. She is invited "to forget her nation and ancestral home" [as Abraham of old in Gn 12:1, ff.]. There seems to be the background here for a line in Mary's *Magnificat*:

... I shall immortalize your name, nations will sing your praises for ever and ever ... [v. 17]

c. **The "Spouse of Blood" [cf. ex 4:24-26].**

To conclude this section, mention should be made also of this most unusual episode in the Book of Exodus. It is a most enigmatic account because of its brevity and the absence of any context to speak of: the episode seems just to break into the chapter. Moses is not named and it is unclear to whom the personal pronouns apply in some instances. It might be considered that the non-circumcision of Moses would attract on him the divine wrath. This, though, is called when Zipporah performs the ritual of circumcision on her son, and simulates the ritual on Moses. [As for the Circumcision, cf. Gn 17:10 +]. The text from exodus reads:

... Truly you are a Bridegroom of Blood to me, she said. And Yahweh let him live. It was then that she said "Bridegroom of Blood" on account of the circumcision [cf. Ex 4:25, ff.].

These verses are among the most obscure in the Old Testament. Some of the experts maintain that this is a narration from the "J" tradition - and was probably narrated to justify the ritual being performed on children, because of itself, the ritual circumcision was a ritual of initiation into adult manhood and marriage. Being performed on infants diminished to a great extent the strength of its symbolism, but it was more easily done at this early age.

Many exegetes compare this episode with that of Jacob wrestling with the divine visitor:

... And there was one who wrestled with Jacob until day-break [i.e., through the night prior to the dreaded meeting with Esau and the return to the Promised Land] ... The divine visitor said to Jacob with the approach of dawn ... Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have been strong against God, you shall prevail against men... [cf. Gn 32:23-31].

The encounter with Esau was much feared in that he had every reason to be hostile toward Jacob. Easily he could have annihilated Jacob and his whole family. The entire future of the Promises made repeatedly to the Patriarchs seemed to hang in the balance of this meeting between Esau and Jacob. Then, very unexpectedly, on the vigil of this fateful meeting, there takes place the true encounter - not with Esau, but with God.

In the account under discussion here, as it is now found in Exodus, Moses was on the vigil of a fearsome encounter with a fellow human being: Moses was on his way to meet with the powerful Pharaoh, and to communicate to him a bold divine message. The eventual meeting, though, with the Pharaoh seems almost to be anticlimactic, because Moses first had a more terrifying experience: the encounter with God in person.

However, the most impressive parallel between the night struggle of Jacob and the account of Moses is offered by the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, just prior to His arrest. This was the time of the true battle - just as the "Temptations of Jesus" anticipated the decisive struggle with the powers of darkness. John does not refer to the account of the agony in the Garden, but anticipates it [cf. Jn 12:27-28]. The Passion scene and the Last Supper in the Fourth Gospel already manifest the aura of victory.

On the night preceding His Passion, the Messianic Temptation of the forty days in the desert are recalled, but with an ever greater power. Luke describes this moment as a true "agony" of spirit. When Jesus says: "Not My will, Father, but Yours be done!" - the struggle is really over, and the victorious outcome is already assured. The Evangelists describe the Passion in a manner that indicates that Jesus has absolute dominion over the events that follow. His victory over death is a foregone conclusion, so much so that in two of the Gospels the Resurrection seems almost to be an addition. The Gospel of John seems to describe the moment of earth, but the whole emphasis seems to be on the effusion of the Holy Spirit [cf. 19:30]. Mark [cf. 15:33-39]. The Gospel describes the Cross as the beginning of the revelation of the Day of the Lord. Most would agree that this Gospel ends with 16:8, without the appearances of the Resurrected One, which were a later addition.

It should be pointed out that both in the story of Jacob, as well as in the accounts about Moses and Jesus, the sacred writers do not even attempt to describe in detail the true nature of the mysterious struggle. They attest solely to the reality of it without trying to describe that "Dark Night" of the soul that all the Elect of God seem to have suffered.

It seems, therefore, that the “J” Tradition has recognized in the account of Exodus [4:24-26] one more prophetic sign of salvation that would come for Israel. That night in which the blood of the first-born was applied to the door-posts led the Lord to keep far away the Avenging Angel from Israel’s first-born [cf. Ex 12:22-23]. [For this section, cf. J. Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*. Bruce. Ital. tr., Marietti 1976, pp. 74-78; cf. also F. Michaeli, *Le Livre de l’Exode*, Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé 1974, pp. 60-62].

As material for perhaps a further study in this connection in the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the Spouse of the New Israel. Generally, the theme of “Spouse” is applied in the collective meaning, to the Church herself, especially in St. Paul. In the Apocalypse, the Spouse of the Lamb is the Church [cf. Rv 12:1-18]. The author reassumes the ancient promise already made in Isaiah:

... Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven as beautiful as a bride, all dressed for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne: ‘You see this city? Here God lives among men. He will make his home among them; his name is ‘God-with-them.’ He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning, or sadness. The world of the past is gone.... [Rv 21:1-4].

This is the new Betrothal of Jerusalem with its God in jubilation and in joy [cf. 19:7; cf. Is 65:18; 61:10; 69:4-6], and the ideal of the exodus is finally realized [cf. Jo 2:16 +].

It is with the Nuptial Theme that all of Sacred Scripture draws to a close:

... Then I saw ... a Lamb that seemed to have been sacrificed... [Rv 5:16].

... The reign of the Lord Almighty has begun; let us be glad and rejoice and give praise to God, because this is the time for the marriage and the Lamb. His bride is ready, and she has been able to dress herself in dazzling white linen, because her linen is made of the good deeds of the saints... [cf. Rv 19:7, ff.].

... The Spirit and the Bride say: Come... come, Lord Jesus... ‘cf. Rv 22:17-20].

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II. In the Christian Tradition

[For this part, cf. Odo Casel. cf. also Louis Bouyer, *La Chiesa di Dio*. Assisi: Cittadella 1971, pp. 569-621].

A. Christ as the New Adam: The Church as the New Spouse

For the early Christians, the Church was first of all a pact of love, built on divine love, and made manifest in Jesus Christ. The Church expresses herself in the most beautiful and complete manner at the table of love, the *Agape'*. One of the most profound and expressive definitions of the Church was here qualification as "the Spouse of Christ."

1. **The become One in Self-less Abandonment:** the word "spouse" incarnates the concept of the most profound love, very rich in the meaning of self-surrender, forgetfulness of self. God created husband and wife that they might sacrifice themselves in the other's interests, that they might give to one another, that they may become one in self-less abandonment. The woman, as wife, does not live for herself, but lives fully for her beloved husband, and the husband dedicates himself totally to the well-being of his wife. Scripture has presented this human communion of love, as an image, an analogy, of the love of God for humanity. and as the ideal of the correspondence of love on the part of humanity.

2. **The are totally 'Available' to One Another:** the exegetical and speculative investigations on the theme of the First Adam and the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, have brought to light a kind of complement, an investigation of the Church as the Spouse of Christ, as Eve was of Adam. The Church is represented as totally extended toward God and ready to receive Christ - and recalls Christ as the One Who has remained totally "available" to the Father's Will. The Latin word for "Church" comes from a Greek very meaning "to call outside", indicating the Church, chosen by God, selected to be the Spouse of Christ, and abandoned to Him.

B. The Birth of Eve - and the Birth of the Church

There is a mysterious parallelism between the creation of the first woman and the birth of the Church. Eve was not created directly [according to at least one of the traditions in the Pentateuch], but was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam, the first-born son of God [cf. Lk 3:38]. Both were created to the image of God and animated by His Spirit [cf. 1 Co 15:45; 2 Co 3:17]. In the typology with the Church, she, meaning the Church, returns to God only through Christ. Eve is flesh of Adam's flesh, bone of his bones. In the NT typology, this is the foundation of the complete

and substantial dependence of the Church on Christ and, at the same time, the intimate, reciprocal communion of life.

1. The Spouse springs to Life from the Side of the Sleeping Spouse: in a similar manner to the old creation story, the Church springs from the side of the Second, and final Adam, asleep in His real death on the Cross. She is born from the blood of His Sacred Heart, a blood which He has poured out unreservedly for her in His death. The work of redemption of Jesus Christ is directed toward the Church. She is the fruit of the death and the new life of Jesus, because she rises with Him from His death. Jesus is the Son of God in the highest and fullest sense of the terms. And the Church is the Spouse of God through Jesus Christ, and precisely through His Body.

2. They are bound in Unity: the idea of the “body” expresses the life of the Church in union with its Head, Jesus Christ. The idea of “woman” manifests the full liberty of the *agape* wherein two persons who freely love one another, are yet bound in unity. If the idea of “body” implied the idea of a fusion of God with human nature, the idea of “woman” manifests the characteristic humanness of the Church, in her most profound and living unity.

3. Christ is the Model of the Church: Jesus is, therefore, the Spouse of the Church: He has entered into communion with the Church through the giving of His Body and Blood; He has espoused her through His Spirit, He over-shadows the Church, permeates her entirely, so that His Blood is at the same time also hers, and His Spirit is the “Soul” of the Church. In all things, therefore, He is her original model, her prototype; she is His Body, His fullness, i.e., the full realization and representation of Him, Who is gradually being put on as the fulfillment in all their members [cf. Casel, pp. 58, ff.]

4. The Church belongs integrally to Her Spouse: [cf. o.c., p. 65].

C. The Spouse has descended into the Depths of the Night:

By a free act of love, the Spouse has often descended into the very depths of the “Night”, into the most obscure abyss of sin and suffering. He has been immersed to the very limit in the matter of sin, and has suffered humiliations even unto death on the Cross. The awesome tide of sin has passed over Him and death, the punishment for sin, caught up with Him in its most harsh and fearsome form. The anguish of abandonment on the part of God so overwhelmed Him that He would cry out:

... My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me...? [cf. Ps 22; Mt 27:46; Lk 15:34]

However, this terrible “dark night” would not finish in eternal darkness:

... I have loved you with an everlasting love ... I build you once more ... I will make a New Covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah... [cf. Jr 31: 3, ff, 31, ff.].

1. The Moment of Death of Christ is the Birth of His Spouse: the moment of His Death is the very instant that His Church comes into being, in which He creates His Spouse: this calls her into life precisely as Spouse, sanctifies and purifies her. God and whoever shares in Him is holy. Thus, the Sacred Spirit of God is divine life which Christ obtains for all on His Cross through the shedding of His Blood, through His Sacred Stigmata. Prior to the Passion, as the Evangelist states: the Holy Spirit had “not yet come”, since Jesus had not yet been glorified [cf. Jn 7:39]. The Holy Spirit came when Jesus “inclined His head” and breathed forth His last, His Spirit [cf. Jn 20:30].

2. In creating His Spouse, Christ is united to Her: Christ creates His Spouse and unites her to Himself, by communicating to her His life, the new divine life, that flowed out of the Sacred Wounds of His death. Thus, the gift of the nuptials of the heavenly spouse to His Church is the Sacred Spirit of the Divine life, germinated by the blood of Christ and proceeding from the Father, given to the victorious Hero of the Pasch.

3. The Church is purified n Her Establishment: from His crucified body, there flowed water from His heart into the Church which thus receives the power of Divine Mercy to purify from all sins and is vivified by the Paschal Life of Christ.

4. We are “Companions of the Lamb” preparing for the Nuptials: much like St. John the Baptist, we are all accompanying our fellow human beings, on the way to the nuptials of the Lord, the “Companions of the Lamb”, of the Spouse - we are the precursors of the mystery and witnesses of the Resurrection [cf. Ac 4:33; Rv 14:1-5] [cf. Casel, pp. 58, ff.; 91, ff.].

5. Texts from Vatican II: some texts from Vatican II use the image of the Church as Spouse that was born from the side of Christ:

... The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ, now present in mystery, grows visibly in the world through the power of God. This inauguration and this growth are both symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus [cf. Jn 19:34], and are foretold in the Lord’s words concerning His death on the Cross: ‘And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself...’ [cf. Jn 12:32]. [LG 3].

... The wonders wrought by God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby, 'dying, he destroyed our death, and, rising, He restored our life.' For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death on the Cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament which is the whole Church... [cf. SC 5].

D. The Church is the "Model of Abandonment" to Her Spouse

1. To be "One with the Lord" is Agape', Trinity, Church, Community: the *agape'* is to be "one with Emmanuel", with the Lord, to be submitted to Him in love - not as a slave, or merely a servant - and not even as an infant without the use of reason [even the Old Testament tradition of the *anawim* channels into the New Testament the idea of Spiritual Infancy]. This submission, then, to the Lord, is that of a son/daughter being subjected willingly to the heart of a loving Father - and the wife to the heart of the husband and the husband to her. Life is communicated from the beloved, and there is complete sharing of it - both depend on this love, and do not wish anything else. So the *agape'* consists in this submission to, in the reception of the Most High. As Christ proceeds from the Father, the Church proceeds from Christ. Reciprocal self-giving and mutual exchange, a corresponding give and take, to enrich and to exalt the other:

- this is the Trinity;
- this is the *agape'*;
- this is the Church;
- this is Community.

2. The Espousals makes One Sole Reality: to share in the Espousals as husband and wife, implies to give oneself completely to a more sublime principle: only in this way do Spouses become one sole reality. Jesus shows His love to the Father by union with His Will - and the Church shares in the higher dignity of the "Other" - and Christ by a marvelous condescension reaches any level of response within the Church and seeks especially those who apparently are a family line gone "dead." Christ, equal to the Father, communicates a share in His own dignity.

Thus, one who loves Christ, in the state of Holy Abandonment, will not ask Him for explanations for His way of acting, nor would one question the inscrutable designs of God. The genuine Spouse, the Church, wishes to reflect on the Spouse, contemplate Him, and be ever united to Him - as Christ with the Father.

3. The Espousals is a Sharing in a Common Destiny: the spouse, the wife, shares in all that the husband lives and loves - while the husband strives to share in all her

effort. The communion of destiny, of suffering, and of joy, is a communion of love. Christ has suffered to bring about the *agape'*, and by His passion and death, He bestows on the *agape'* His ultimate triumph.

4. The Espousals follow the sufferings of the Cross: the dying of the Lord is the origin of the true life. From here the Lord recognizes the fidelity of the Spouse, and therefore is united to her in an espousal, for all eternity. The sufferings of the Cross pre-announce the nuptial festival forever.

**E. The Church depends on Christ, as Christ 'depends',
is coordinated with the Father**

This holds true:

- for all that pertains to being, that it be one with His being;
- for all that pertains to activity, that it be one with His activity, Mission.

In this sense, the Church forms one body with Christ; they are really 'two in one flesh', *Sponsus et Sponsa*.

1. The New Testament emphasizes the Nuptial Theme: the theme of the Church as Spouse makes its appearance in the New Testament, Ep 5: - as well as in the last chapters of the Apocalypse of St. John, and innumerable other texts, as: [Mt 22:1, ff.; Lk 17:7, ff.; Ga 4:22-31; Rm 7:1-6; 1 Co 7:2-3; 11:21; Jn 2:1-11; 3:29]. This motif then runs throughout the Patristic Literature, and Origen gives it very special attention in a particular development in his Homilies on the Song of Songs. [cf. his Commentary; cf. also St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Cistercian Fathers, ## 4, 40, etc.]

It should also be noted that the present second reading for the Stigmatine celebration of the Sacred Stigmata - as was true also of the former "Second Nocturne" of Matins for this Festival - is taken from St. Bernard's Commentary, where we read:

... Where is a safe stronghold for the weak to find rest if not in the wounds of the Savior...? [St. Bernard, Sermon 61, 3-5].

This passage is the Second Reading for the third week of the year, Wednesday, which almost coincides with the Stigmatine celebration of the Espousals, January 23rd.

In the Middle Ages, without the so-called "collective interpretation" ever disappearing, the Nuptial Theme was interpreted more on the individual level - and the Commentary of Origen would lend itself to such an interpretation.

2. The Church is the "Body" and the "Spouse" of Christ: in Scripture, the Church is first presented to us as the "body" of Christ, then appears to us as His "Spouse".

Spouses are depicted as being “two in one flesh” [cf. Gn 2:24; Ep 5:22], the fitting description of Adam and Eve, Christ and the Church.

3. A Christological Ecclesiology: St. Paul states that the Spouse loves His Spouse, the Church, as His own flesh, and it is here that there is articulated the fundamental Christological Ecclesiology. The work of the Holy Spirit is achieved in us entirely through Jesus Christ, and achieves our union with Christ. The work of the Spirit is certainly the work of a unity which is essentially inter-personal - in which the persons, rather than blurring their distinction, achieve the authentic fulfillment of themselves.

4. The Church is a Personal Being: this has developed in comparison with the being of Christ and in a way, completes His humanity. Historically, the Church was born in the Passion of Christ, in that moment in which this passion reached its completion in death - as Eve is described in Genesis [2”11-13] as she who came to life from the sleeping Adam.

5. A Two-fold Relationship to Christ: the Church is considered as a “prolongation” of Jesus Himself [cf. the restrictions added to this theme by Yves Congar, OP, in: *Santa Chiesa - Saggi ecclesiologicali*. Brescia: Morcelliana 1967, pp. 65-98]; the Church, on its part, is also yearning for her completion in Christ for all eternity. These two aspects are inseparable, and they are one in the sense that Christ and the Church are:

a. Two in One Flesh: Christ is Present within the Church: in this first aspect, placed in particular evidence by the apostolic ministry, Christ is not only present “to” the Church, but He is presented to the world “in” the Church [cf. SC 7; Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, September 3, 1965], through the Word which is entrusted to her, in which it is Christ who speaks, in the sacraments which she celebrates, and above all, in the Eucharist in which Christ Himself accomplishes in us His announced mystery.

b. As Spouse of Christ, His Sacrifice is Her own: in this second aspect, which is merely a refrain of the first, the Church fathers within herself humanity to be united with Christ. The Church listens to the Word of Christ, which is Christ, responding in Him with her Eucharistic Praise. She makes the very Sacrifice of Christ her very own, so much so that she is at one and the same time the one offering and what is being offered “in Him” and adopted in Him [cf. S. Tromp, SJ, *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia*. pp. 35, ff., “Ecclesia ut Sponsa”].

6. Pope Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud Munus*: [cf. Acta Sanctae Sedis 29, 1896-1897]:

... The Church was already conceived, and is born from the side of the Second Adam,

sleeping on the Cross... and then the Church say the light of day on Pentecost...

This is the most celebrated image of the Church as Spouse, united to Christ on the Cross. The Church was born from the Side of the Savior, pierced through with a lance. The Council of Vienne used this language in referring to the Church as the unique and immaculate Holy Virgin, "Mother Church", Spouse of Christ [cf. DS 480].

There is this Chant, then, that is sung on the Fast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus:

... From His pierced heart the Church is born, espoused in Christ [*Ex corde scisso Ecclesiae Christo iugata nascitur...*]

7. Eve as our First Mother, a Figure of the Church: this idea pervades a great deal of the Christian literature. It is a logical corollary from the reading from Ephesians:

... husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church ... because it is his body - and we are its living parts. 'For this reason a man must leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one body' [cf. Gn 2:24]. This mystery has many implications but I am saying that it applies to Christ and to the Church... [cf. Ep 5:21, ff.].

8. What God has united no one can divide: on the Cross, Christ has the Church united to Himself as a spiritual rib. The Church reposes on the Heart of Jesus as Eve on the side of Adam. The union of Christ with His Church is inseparable: "what God has united, man must not divide" [cf. Mt 19:6].

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A BRIEF SUMMARY OF SECTION I

[1] The exchange between God and humanity here on earth could not be any more intimate than on the Cross. There, the Son of God, in His own sacrificial blood, becomes a consecrated Spouse; there, He sanctified humanity as His own Spouse - just as He had expressed Himself in the priestly prayer to the Father:

... and for their sake I consecrate Myself so that they, too, may be consecrated in truth... [cf. Jn 17:19].

[2] From the very first moment of His Incarnation, Jesus participates in the fullness of the divine holiness, as the Word of God Himself. However, out of love for us, in so

far as He is man, He needs, according to the flesh, full glorification; thus, He has taken a body from the flesh of Adam and in this body carries the sins of humanity.

[3] The Nuptials on the Cross are a sacred exchange: this is the most moving human-divine communion, a mystery which truly breaks through to the most profound manifestation of the love of God. The Church is the redeemed humanity united to the Lord, as the Spouse, whose heart - together with the Heart of her divine Spouse, "beats in unison with that of the Father." In virtue of Christ, the Church is the great mystery of God in this world. In fact, this is the essence of the Church: it represents in this world the plan of divine love for humanity, and by its existence, renders visible the divine **AGAPE'** - which from all eternity longs for, "thirsts for the nuptials with humanity.

[4] The nuptials of Christ with humanity take place in the Incarnation: but they are celebrated with solemnity at Easter, when the Resurrected One, the Glorified One, the One exalted is anointed with the fullness of the Spirit. In the Resurrection of Christ already there is contained the Resurrection of believers as a Pledge and the Spouse [the Church] receives a pledge of the Spirit of the Glorified Lord - according to matrimonial law - for the duration of her earthly pilgrimage.

[5] The time of the Nuptials is extended from the beginning of the Incarnation until the return of Christ, so that all the mysteries of these Espousals might be fulfilled. All those called, Hebrews and non-believers alike, all the saints of the Old Testament and of the New, have been invited to this Wedding Feast. These are renewed each day, through the Eucharist, and last for all eternity.

[6] The Apostolic Mission - the sending of the Apostles on Christ's own Mission = happens precisely as Christ Himself was sent by the Eternal Father [cf. Jn 20:21]. It is a Mission to call all to the Nuptials of the Immolated Lamb with the Church:

... Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them: Peace be with you! and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and He said to them again: 'Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, so, I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit... [cf. Jn 20:20-22; cf. also Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47, f.].

This Apostolic Mission was conferred after the confirmation of the faith and joy of the Apostles through the Sacred Stigmata. "Come here, and I will show you the Bride that the Lamb has married [cf. Rv 21:9]. There is an intimate connection between the Stigmata and the Apostolic Mission of the "Companions of the Lamb" to follow Him, "immolated", wherever He may go [cf. Rv 15:1, ff.]: a kind of apostolic, geographical abandonment.

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Section 2

The Nuptial Metaphor in the Various Traditions of the Religious Life

Presentation:

The Espousals Theme offers at least three major aspects in the history of the spiritualities of various religious families. These three may be considered:

- I. The Franciscan Aspect: the “Mystical Nuptials” with “Lady Poverty.”
- II. The Dominican-Carmelite Aspect: the “Mystical Nuptials” of the Unitive Way, as exemplified by St. Catherine of Siena, [of whom the Church celebrated the sixth centenary of her death in 1980] - and St. John of the Cross, who was born about 150 years after the death of Catherine. This is known as the “Union of Transforming Love.”
- III. The Ignatian Aspect: a mysticism of total service to the Church, considered specifically as the “Bride of Christ”. Ignatius does not have the “individual aspect” of mystical union.

Each of these aspects has had a major influence on the Church. After pondering them, a clearer insight may be possible for some reflections on the Stigmatine devotions.

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I. The Mystical Nuptials of St. Francis of Assisi and His Companions with Lady Poverty.

1. The very intimate relationship between St. Francis [1182-1226] and poverty has assumed the characteristic between configuration of “mystical nuptials”. This theme has been developed to a great extent in both literature and art - not to speak of Franciscan spirituality as such. It is interesting to note that this little work which has come to be known generally as The Mystical Nuptials [*Mistiche Nozze*] in Latin,, bears the title: *Sacrum Commercium beati Francisci cum Domina Paupertate* . It was St. Bonaventure who was the first to give the name “Spouse” to this Lady Poverty³. There was thus a kind of “Canticle of Canticles” from the Franciscan tradition.

2. One of the early biographers of St. Francis, Tomaso de Celano, brings out the Christological and Nuptial aspect of this “song of songs”:

³ St. Francisco de Assisi. Madrid BAC Edition 1978, p. 931.

... While living in this valley of teas, this blessed Father disdained the poor riches of the sons of men - and through an ambition of the highest type, with all his heart, he yearned after poverty.

Considering poverty as a very special friend of the Son of God, and wishing instead to abandon this entire world, Francis wishes to espouse poverty with a bond of eternal love. Having fallen in love with the beauty of poverty and wishing to be united to her most intimately as his wife, so that from the two of them one sole spirit might be formed - Francis not only abandoned his father and mother - but he put distance between himself and all created things, and embraced poverty in a most chaste manner - and ever for a single hour did he ever fail to be her most faithful husband...⁴

3. The little booklet of the *Sacrum Commercium* has been considered by many to be “the pearl of Franciscan Literature”. Its evangelical spirit, lived and experienced by Francis and his first companions in all its sublime beauty, is the inspiration lying behind the account contained in the “Canticle.” Lady Poverty is a Spouse and Mother, a true noble lady. After hard years of struggle and personal renunciation, Francis finally discovered his treasure, and bereft of all on the naked earth, he went to sleep in the Lord - exhorting all the Friars Minor that they “would always love and observe Lady Poverty.”

4. In this tradition, Lady Poverty is presented as going out to meet the Friars. Before receiving them fully as her sons, she [because she remembered so many others, who later regretted that they had chosen her, and turned back to the empty quest of lowly and base comforts], puts them all to the test:

...What moves you, my brothers, to come here to me? Why have you hasten to come here from the valley of miseries to the mount of charity? If you are looking for me, don't you see that I am poor, harried by storms on all sides, and without anyone to console me...? ⁵

5. The response to this is a “Hymn to Poverty” and to the ideal of perfection that is incarnate in it:

...We come to you, Lady Poverty, our Lady, and we ask you to receive us in peace. We desire to be the Servants of the Lord of all virtues, because He is the King of Glory. We have heard and we know it by experience that you are the

⁴ *La Poverta'*, a cura di Melani. Assisi 1967, p. 314.

⁵ o.c., p. 318.

queen of the virtues. We cast ourselves at your feet, humbly begging you to accompany us through life...

6. The essential element of “Franciscan Espousals” seems to be the intimate union between the individual, and the community, with poverty, that establishes a single spirit. This is a biblical teaching that was truly lived and experienced by Francis and his companions.

II. The Mystical Nuptials of Transforming Union

After many purifications, the individual achieves that calm and lasting union which is called Transforming Union: which seems to be the last term of mystical union and the immediate preparation for the vision of the blessed. The principal characteristics of this union are intimacy, serenity, and indissolubility.

Among the effects of this union there is a Holy Abandonment into the hands of God, to the extent that the individual becomes almost indifferent to all that is not God. There follows a great willingness for sharing Christ’s sufferings, an ardent zeal for the apostolate and mission.

The two best examples that we might offer here are the Dominican School and the Carmelite Tradition:

A. The Dominican School: St. Catherine of Siena [1347-1380]

St. Catherine never uses the expression, “Mystical Espousals” with the Lord - she speaks in her “Dialogue of Transforming Union of an exchange of hearts.” Her biographer and confessor, Blessed Raymond of Capua, describes this intimate union with Christ as an “espousals.” In Chapter 12 of the First Part of his Biography of the Saint, Blessed Raymond states:

... From now on Catherine’s soul increased in grace daily. She flew rather than walked along the way of virtue, and a holy desire developed within her soul to attain to perfect faith, so that, utterly subject to her Bridegroom, she might be utterly pleasing to Him. She began to pray to the Lord as the disciples had done, to increase her faith and to make it perfect and solid as a rock. The Lord spoke to her and said: ‘I will espouse you to Me in faith.’

Near Lent [when the faithful abstain from meat and fats in the days when men celebrate the vain festival of the stomach, 'Mardi Gras], the virgin was to be found alone in her little room seeking through prayer and fasting the face of the eternal Bridegroom, praying endlessly for the same thing. Then, the Lord said to her:

Since for love of Me you have forsaken the vanities and despised the pleasure of the flesh and fastened all the delights of your heart on me, now, when the rest of the household are feasting and enjoying themselves, I have determined to celebrate the wedding feast of your soul and to espouse you to Me in faith, as I promised.

Keep this faith unspotted until you come to me in heaven and celebrate the nuptials that have no end. From this time forward, daughter, act firmly and decisively in everything that in My Providence I shall ask you to do. Armed as you are with the strength of faith, you will overcome all your enemies and be happy...⁶

This Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine occurred at the time of "Carnevale", Shrove Tuesday, 1367, "Mardi Gras".

In Her Dialogue, [c. 78], which is also entitled: *The Treatise of Divine Providence*, we read:

...These souls [in the unitive state] are thrown into the furnace of My charity, no part of their will remaining outside, but the whole of them being inflamed in Me, are like a brand, wholly consumed in the furnace, so that no one can take hold of it to extinguish it, because it has become fire. In the same way, no one can seize these souls, or draw them outside of Me, because they are made one thing with Me through grace, and I never withdraw Myself from them by sentiment, as in the case of those whom I am leading to perfection...⁷

In this same Chapter 78, describing such union, Catherine speaks of receiving the Stigmata and following the Lamb. It is interesting to note that the image of the Crucifix before which St. Catherine received the Stigmata, is a very similar Icon to the

⁶ cf. *St. Catherine of Siena*. Biography by Bl. Raymond of Capua. Part I, XII, tr. by Gorge Lamb. London: Marvill Press 1960, pp. 99, ff. Cf. also Johannes Jorgensen, *st. Catherine of Siena*. tr. from the Danish by Ingebord Lund, London: Longmans, Geen & Co. 1938, pp. 57, ff..

⁷ cf. A. Thorald, *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin, Catherine of Siena*. London: Burns & Oates & Wasbourne 1925]

well known Franciscan image, which spoke to St. Francis at San Damiano, Assisi.⁸ This latter is an imitation Byzantine Cross depicting the serenity of the Crucified, Ascending Christ. There may also be included St. John's idea [as he is sometimes represented at the foot of this Cross with Mary] of the exaltation theme [cf. Jn 12:32: when I am raised up...]. These Crucifixes are outstanding for the fact of the wide opened eyes which are gazing out on a suffering world. Its countenance is one of compassion, pity and love.

The Mystical Nuptials of Catherine with Jesus, of which the Stigmata served as a kind of seal, is expressed as the external sign of the interior exchange of hearts:

... After the incomparable Bridegroom had proven His chosen one in the fire of many tribulations, and taught her how to beat the old adversary in all her battles with him, the one thing that remained for Him to do was to give her the full reward for her triumph. As, however, the souls on earth who by the eternal decree and promise of this same Bridegroom were to be helped by her had not yet received the full benefit of her aid, it was necessary for her to remain for a little while longer among the living. But she was given a token of the eternal reward:

...And so this Lord and heavenly Bridegroom willing that His bride and servant should begin to lead a heavenly life in this vale of tears, and at the same time, continue to have dealings with those on earth, prepared and trained her with ... revelation...⁹

Thus, St. Catherine of Siena is considered under the aspect of "Spouse" and "Handmaid", in response to her view of Christ as "Servant" and "Spouse."

B. The Carmelite Experience: St. John of the Cross [1542-1591]

1. A "Spiritual Marriage" after a Terrible "Dark Night": According to this Doctor of the Church, the most complete perfection possible in this life is found only in the transforming union, or spiritual marriage - it is an intimate union with God, coming only after a long arduous "spiritual winter" [Tauler, OP - German mystic], or "intense dark night" [John of the Cross]:

⁸ This will be treated in Part Three, Section One of this study

⁹ cf. Biography by Raymond of Capua, Part II, c. 5.

... For see, the winter is past, the rains are over, and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The season of glad songs has come, the cooing of the turtle dove is heard in our land...[cf. Sgs 2:11, ff.]

This is a state of full development of charity - which accepts [or is “abandoned” to] every work and whatever suffering may come. This is all accepted for the interests of God and His kingdom. St. Peter even speaks of joy in this situation:

... If you can have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, because you will enjoy a much greater gladness when His glory is revealed... [cf. 1 P 4:13].

2. As Two in One Flesh, One Spirit with Him: In this state of mind and heart, there is no longer fear of death, but a willingness to accept it under whatever form it will come. The individual attributes nothing to him/herself, but all to God - and the person is “transformed” into God by grace, according to this expression of St. Paul, often quoted as the best description of a “spiritual marriage”:

... Anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him...[cf. 1 Co 6:17; compare with Mt 19:6]

3. In this Espousals, One is “Divinized”: in this state of union, the Lord communicates Himself to the individual who is “transformed”, in a way, into God, a kind of “participated divinization”. This is the state of perfect union between the individual and God - as intimately united as the window and the light; coal and fire; as the light of the stars and moon, and the sun. Despite the extraordinary depths of this union, it is never as “essential”, or as complete, as the eternal union with God ¹⁰.

a. A Spiritual Espousals: in the classical poem of St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, the perfection of love is described as a kind of “spiritual espousals.” Before the formal “marriage” takes place, there is a time of “engagement” [biblically, this is explained by Hoseah 2:14-16 + - cf. the extensive note in the Jerusalem Bible at this point].

b. The Presence of Wounds: St. John of the Cross comments on the “spiritual marriage” theme in his poem [cf. stanzas 14, 24, 27-29] - in this “spiritual marriage” there is also the recurring theme of piercings, wounds and death [cf. stanzas 20-121]. The following are some of the principal stanzas the Saint composed in this regard:

¹⁰ cf. Garrigou-Lagrangé, OP, *Three Ages of the Interior Life*. Eng. tr., p. 352, ff.

... After wounding me, I went out calling you [1]. Tell Him that I sicken, suffer and die [2] ... All wound me more, and leave my dying [7] ... Why, since you wounded this heart, don't you heal it? [9]... For the sickness of love is not cured except by Your very presence and image [11]... The wounded stag is in sight of the hill [13] ... And then we will go on to the high caverns of the rock which are so well concealed. There we shall enter and taste the fresh juice of the pomegranates...[37].

4. A Communication of Love: by means of a complete sharing, the two parties participate a certain consummation of the union of love - the individual is "divinized" insofar as all that is temporary is concerned -one "becomes" God by participation. The individual enters this state in that it has not been bogged down by anything that is merely temporal, material or emotional. While sharing in these as well, they are seen as a means to reach God, and to lead others to Him.

a. An Important Comparison: Mt 19:6/ 1 Co 6:17:

They are no longer two, but one body ... [cf. MT 19:6; Gn 2:24; Ep 5:31; 1 Co 6:16; 7:20]

But anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him [cf. 1 Co 6:17; Rm 8:9-10]

b. The Forming of One Spirit with the Lord: this union with the Lord, forming one sole spirit with Him, is "spiritual marriage" in the sense of the mystics. Others have developed this idea of God, or Christ, as the Spouse of the Consecrated Person [cf. St. Alphonsus, *Sponsa Christi*]. More recently, Dom Columbia Marmion, a former student of the old Irish College in Rome, at St. Agatha of the Goths [from 1836 to 1925], applied this ideal to priests. St. Ignatius used almost the same mystical language to explain the apostolic union to the Church, a "mysticism of service" in the Apostolic Mission.

5. The Trials of the "Dark Night": in the theology of St. John of the Cross, there are the very harsh trials of the "Dark Night" of the senses as well as of the spirit. To purify and reform the human person, God leaves the mind in darkness and the will in total aridity, the memory almost without consoling recollections, and affections seem immersed in affliction. God Himself works out this profound purification with the light of contemplation - this "light" is vivid in itself, but to one in this state, it seems to be still dark and painful, because of the limitations of the recipient.

a. **Sufferings of the Intellect:**

1.] **Nothing will ever Change:** the insight that opens the way for a deeper contemplation is of itself painful - this may be the result of the inherent weakness within one, the inability to support such "light".

2.] **The Encounter between the Created and the Uncreated:** a real suffering is experienced by the encounter between the divine and the human [the commentators on St. Ignatius indicate this "encounter" as one of the reasons for the oft-recurring mention of "tears" in his "Spiritual Diary" and perhaps this might be applied to the Stigmatine Founder in his Spiritual Diary, known as his *Memoriale Privato*.

3.] **Overwhelming View of One's Poverty:** there is often an overwhelming view of one's own spiritual incapacity. The sensitive part of the human nature is immersed in aridity - and the intellectual part, in darkness.

b. **Sufferings of the Will:**

1.] One gets the view things will always be this way - and very little outside influence can bring consolation, or relief.

2.] The great suffering caused by the experience of rejection, or abandonment - this seems to have been the rejection experienced by Christ Himself: 'My God, my God, why have You deserted Me?[cf. Ps 22].

3.] The inability to pray. In the works of St. John of the Cross, these [and so many other] expressions of the "Wounded Spouse" are found with some frequency:

... The Spouse of the Canticle consequently says of His Bride that she wounded His heart by merely the look of her eye [cf. Ct 4:9].¹¹

... This love of God finds that the soul is equipped to receive the wound and union is the measure that all its appetites are brought into subjection, alienated, incapacitated, and unable to be satisfied by any heavenly or earthly thing...¹²

When the soul is wounded, touched and impassioned, all its strength and its appetites are recollected in this burning of love. How will we be able to understand the movements and impulses of all this strength and appetites?¹³

¹¹ *Night*, II, c. 21, n. 8, p. 380

¹² *Night*, II, c. 11, n. 2, p. 353.

¹³ *ib*, n.5,p. 353.

... 'My soul thirsts for you...' [cf. Ps 62:2]. As a result, the soul proclaims in this verse: fired 'with love's urgent longings', and not: 'with an urgent longing of love.' In all its thoughts and in all its business and in all events, it loves in many ways, and desires and also suffers in its desires in many ways, and at all times and in many places. It finds rest in nothing, for it feels this anxiety in the burning wound...¹⁴.

This same thought permeates so much of *The Spiritual Canticle*:

... After wounding me... In further explanation of this verse, it should be known that besides the many other different kinds of visits God grants the soul, in which He wounds and raises it up in love, He usually bestows some secret touches of love, which like fiery arrows pierce and wound it, leaving it wholly cauterized by the fire of love. And these wounds, mentioned here, are properly called wounds of love. They so inflame the will in its affection that it burns up in this flame and fire of love. So intense is this burning that the soul is seemingly consumed in that flame and the fire makes it go out by itself, wholly renews it, and changes its manner of being, as in the case of the phoenix which burns itself in the fire and rises anew from the ashes...¹⁵.

... I went out calling for You, and You were gone ... No medicine can be gotten for these wounds of love except from the One who causes them. Thus, the wounded soul, strengthened from the fire caused by the wound, went out after her Beloved Who wounded her, calling for Him, that He might heal her...¹⁶.

In Stanza 7, a few of the pertinent numbers are as follows:

All who are free
Tell me a thousand graceful things of You;
All wound me more
And leave me dying
Of, ah. I-don't-know-what behind their stammering.

n. 2: We can deduce that in this matter of love, there exists three ways of suffering for the Beloved corresponding to the three kinds of knowledge for Him:

The first is called a wound [*herida* in Spanish, *ferita* in Italian]. It is the mildest and heals the most quickly, as does a wound. This wound arises from

¹⁴ib.n.6, p.354.

¹⁵ *Canticle* I, 17, [. 422.

¹⁶ ib., n. 20, p. 423.

the knowledge the soul receives from creatures, the lowest of God's works. The bride of the Canticle refers to this wound, which we also call sickness, saying, 'I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved that you tell Him that I am sick with love' [cf. Ct 5:8]. By the "daughters of Jerusalem" she refers to creatures.

n. 3: The second is called a sore wound [*illaga* in Spanish; *piaga* in Italian] and cuts more deeply into the soul than the simple wound. As a result, it is longer-lasting because it is like a wound that has become sore, from which she feels she is indeed sorely wounded by love. This sore wound is produced in the soul by knowledge of the Incarnation of the Word and of the mysteries of faith. Since there are more remarkable works of God, embodying in themselves a greater love than that show forth in creatures, they produce in the soul a more intense love. Thus, if the first is like a wound, this second is like a sore wound, which lasts longer. Speaking of this to the soul in the Canticle of Canticles, the Bridegroom say: 'You have wounded my heart, my sister, with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck' [cf. Ct 4:9]. The eye refers to faith in the Incarnation of the Bridegroom and the hair signifies love for this very Incarnation...¹⁷.

Hoping that it is not an interruption, we might note here in another connection that the late Fr. Ignazio Bonetti, CSS, notes in his doctoral thesis the distinction made by St. Augustine between "wound" [*ferita*] and "scar" [*cicatrici*]. This distinction becomes habitual in the writings of the Holy Doctor. Under his influence it will then become usual also among the writers of the West and the Medieval theologians:

... *Cicatrici* is the technical term to indicate the sign in the glorious body of the Savior...¹⁸.

St. Thomas, in contrasting *cicatrici* of the Resurrected Christ, and the *ferita* of the Crucified Jesus had no other scope than to eliminate from the glorious wounds all that implied the sorrowful aspect, all that was repugnant and humiliating - but, he did not intend by any means to eliminate from the Glorious Wounds the substantial identity that there is between them and the Signs of the Passion of the Resurrected and Crucified Christ.

St. John of the Cross, on the other hand, as has just been noted, does make a distinction between *ferita* [*herida*, "wound"] and *piaga* [*llaga*, sore wound]. This last, of course, being the more painful. St. John continues his explanation:

¹⁷ *Canticle*, I, stanza 7, n. 2, ff., p.438.

¹⁸ cf. Bonetti, p. 72, n. 39.

... n. 4: The third kind of suffering of love is like dying. It is equivalent to having a festering wound , since the soul is now wholly festered. She lives by dying until love, in killing her, makes her live the life of love, transforming her in love. This death of love is caused in the soul by means of a touch of supreme knowledge of the divinity... 19.

Almost all of Stanza 9 concentrates on the wounds, the “sore wounds” [i.e., the *llagas*] of the Spouse:

... Why, since you wounded this heart, don't You heal it?
And why, since you stole it from me,
Do you leave it so,
And fail to carry off what you have stolen?

Again, Strophe 13, n. 9 has this theme”

... The wounded stag.

The Bridegroom in this verse compares Himself to a stag. It is characteristic of the stag to climb high places and when wounded to race in search of refreshment and cool waters. If he hears the cry of his mate and sees that she is wounded, he immediately runs to her to comfort and coddle her.

The Bridegroom now acts similarly. Beholding that the bride is wounded with love for Him. He also, because of her moan, is wounded with love for her. Among lovers, the wound of one is a wound for both, and the two have but one feeling. Thus, in other words, He says:

Return to Me, My bride, because if you go about like the stag wounded with love for Me, I, too, like the stag will come to you, wounded by your wound. 20.

There are several Stigmatine comparisons we can make here:

In Letter 2 to Fr. Bragato, Fr. Bertoni speaks thus to his beloved friend:

... If you cannot come to our little house [i.e., the “Stimate” in Verona, Italy] bodily, then be with us in the clefts of the rock [cf. Ct 2:14], in the Wounds

¹⁹ *Canticle*, 7, nn. 3, 4, pp. 437-438.

²⁰ *ib.*, pp. 460-461.

[*piaghe*] of our most loving and most humble Savior, where I leave you now, embracing you with all my heart...²¹.

St. John of the Cross says in Stanza 37 of his *Canticle*:

And then we will go
To the high caverns of the rock
Which are well concealed
There we shall enter
And taste the fresh juice of the pomegranates²².

There is much benefit in reflecting on the Sonnet written by young Gaspar Bertoni commemorating his First Holy Communion - comparing it with this Canticle of St. John of the Cross [cf. ahead in these notes, page 34].

III. St. Ignatius of Loyola: [1493/5 - 1556]: The Unlimited Service of God through the Church, as the Spouse of Christ:

A. The Original *Formula: Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* [1540] : the original “Formula” of the Company of Jesus came in the form of a Papal Bull, approving the Society of Jesus, from Pope Paul III, dated September 27, 1540. This document reads, in part, as follows:

... Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and the Roman Pontiff, His Vicar, here on earth...

B. The Definitive *Formula: Exposcit Debitum* [1550]: after they had experienced the life of companionship for ten years, Pope Julius III, on July 21, 1550, acting upon the request of Ignatius and His Companions in the “Society of Jesus”, published a slight modification of the Bull of Paul III. This second Bull entitled *Exposcit Debitum* reads, in part, as follows:

...Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the Cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, **His Spouse**, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth...

²¹ cf. Bertoni, *Epistolario*, p. 312.

²² St. John of the Cross, *Canticle*, p. 550

1. The Second Formula adds the Words: “the Spouse of Christ”: the slight addition in these early lines of the Papal Document is that the Church is indeed “the Spouse of Christ”. The document then continues:

... should after the solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience keep what follows in mind. He is a member of the Society chiefly [*potissimum*] founded for this purpose:

to strive especially [*praecipue*] for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of:

public preaching,

lectures,

and any other ministration whatsoever of the Word of God;

and further:

by means of the Spiritual Exercises,

the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity,

and the spiritual consolation of Christ’s faithful through the hearing of confessions, and administering the other sacraments.

Moreover, this Society should show itself no less useful:

in reconciling the estranged,

in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons, or

hospitals,

and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what

seems

expedient for the glory of God and the common good.

Furthermore, all these works should be carried out free of charge ...

2. In listing the Ministries, “especially” indicates the Importance of the First Group: it has been noted that the two Latin adverbs: *potissimum/praecipue* are really a repetition. However, St. Ignatius has conserved them in three separate texts, as though to underline the importance of the first list of ministries. The enumeration is by no means complete - but it does contain the essential points ²³.

3. The Addition of “Spouse” expresses better the Totality of Service: therefore, the **Formula** of the Company of Jesus as this was delineated by the Bull of Pope Paul III was modified to express better the meaning of the universal service to the Church - as this is the scope, or “end” of the Company. The second **Formula** of Julius III

²³ cf. G. Bottreau, *Il fine della Compagnia di Gesu’*, in: **La Formula dell’Istituto**. Recherches 12, p. 34.

added the word **Spouse** after :Church”, to reflect better the universality, totality of the service to the Church. The word **Spouse** applied to the Church recalls still one more time, the Christocentric charism, experience, which is the common font of all love, for all service to the Church, to the Pope, to the Bishops , and to all humanity - in the Apostolic Mission ²⁴:

...’To serve the Church, the Spouse of the Lord, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth’... in this service, the Company of Jesus seeks from the Roman Pontiff the decisive discernment for its field of the apostolate...²⁵.

4. Total Absence of the Earlier “Nuptial Aspect” in St. Ignatius of Loyola: one clear characteristic note of the Spiritual Diary of Ignatius, as of all the documents of his regarding the interior life, is the total absence of the “nuptial aspect” of mystical union. In the “Spiritual Exercises” [cf. nn. 353; 365], Ignatius presents the Church as “the Spouse of Christ” - but in no place does he represent the individual soul as the Spouse of God, or of Christ. The union of Ignatius with the Lord was truly something of the most sublime intimacy: but, in no text does he ever speak of his own personal “spiritual marriage” ²⁶.

The texts from the Spiritual Exercises regarding the Church as the “Spouse of Christ” are these:

...Putting aside all private judgment, we should keep our minds prepared and ready to obey, promptly and in all things, the true spouse of Christ, our Lord, our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church...

...For I believe that between the Bridegroom, Christ our Lord, and the Bride, His Church, there is but one spirit, which governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls, for the same Spirit and Lord, who gave us the Ten Commandments, guides and governs our Holy Mother Church...

²⁴ cf. Salvat, *Servir en Mission*, p. 106.

²⁵ cf. ib, pp. 181.

²⁶ cf. Joseph DeGuibert, *The Jesuits - Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*. Chicago: Loyla Press, p. 55.

n 13: If we wish to be sure that we are right in all things, we should always be ready to accept this principle: I will always believe that the white I see is black, if the hierarchical Church so defines it...

[NB: This “black-white” idea was in reaction to a statement which Erasmus had made: Black would not be white, even if the Roman Pontiff should say that it is, something which I know that he will never do...²⁷].

The Spouse of Christ, and the Vicar of Christ, sign of contradiction, seemed to Ignatius and to his companions, to be the object in which there was incarnate their adherence to Christ. ²⁸

To express the ideal of service to the Universal Church, considered as the Spouse of Christ, one of the concrete manners in which this was to be rendered is behind the special vow of obedience to the Roman Pontiff, in relation to the “apostolic missions” ²⁹.

There is an intimate connection between the various motives for the Vow to the Pope, particularly the first and the third: the obedience and devotion to the Holy See, and the most certain direction of the Holy Spirit have a common side: already expressed in those rules which can be entitled “to feel with the Church: St. Ignatius has proposed that between Christ, our Lord - as Spouse - and the Church, His Spouse, there is one and the same Spirit, which governs us and directs us toward the salvation of our souls. The love for Christ, under Whom the Company of Jesus places all its life, have encountered its “incarnation” in the love for the Church, where the Company finds the direction of the Spirit of Christ, and this is the “most manifest vocation” of the Society ³⁰.

The key affirmation of the “Pneumatology” of St. Ignatius is found in the rule: ***sentire cum Ecclesia***. There is affirmed in this rule that the aspect of union of the Church with Jesus Christ is precisely the same Spirit of Christ which governs us in the Church, and rules us for the salvation of our souls - between Christ, our Lord, as Spouse - and the Church, His Spouse, there is one and the same Spirit.

²⁷ cf. *Obras completas de S. Ignazio de Loyola*. BAC Madrid, pp. 272, ff.

²⁸cf. Salvat, o.c., p. 13.

²⁹ cf. *ib.*, p. 64.

³⁰ *ib.*, p. 68.

This sense of “total giving” to the Church seems reflected in a few key Ignatian expressions: this might be a kind of “play on words”, or a near alliteration of the same, or similar sounds. These words seem to express a kind of total abandonment to the Church under various aspects.

a. **QUICUMQUE** : 31

The “Missions” are among the principal ministries of the Society; and therefore, **all** ought to be sent on them, always prepared [***semper parati***] to travel to different places and to live in sections of the world where the greater service of God [***obsequium***] might be hoped, or the greater assistance of souls.

b. **QUODCUMQUE** 32

In selecting the ministries, the Society will follow this rule, that they will always seek the greater divine service [***obsequium***], and the more universal usefulness. A good is the more universal, the more divine it is. Therefore, all else being equal, those ministries will be preferred which bring about greater and longer lasting good.

c. **QUOCUMQUE**: 33

The intention of the Fourth Vow pertaining to the Pope was not to designate a particular place, but to have the members distributed throughout the various parts of the world. For those who first united to form the Society were from different provinces and realms and did not know into which region they were to go, whether among the faithful or unbelievers; and therefore, to avoid erring in the path of the Lord, they made that promise or vow, in order that His Holiness might distribute them for the greater glory of God. They did this in conformity with their intention to travel throughout the world, and when they could not find the desired spiritual fruit in one region, to pass on to another and another, ever intent on seeking the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls.

Ignatius’ was a “Mysticism of Service”, a spiritual and apostolic abandonment to the Church, the Spouse of Christ.

³¹ cf. *Epitome’ Societatis Iesu*, # 612.

³² cf. *Jesuit Formula; Epitome*, # 602.

³³ cf. *Jesuit Constitutions*, # 605, B.

C. **Some Recent Reflections of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, on the Ignatian Nuptial Theme:**

Some years ago, at the *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis*, held at the General Curia of the Jesuits in Rome, a five-week course was offered from about mid-January to mid-February, on Jesuit spirituality. One of the high-lights of this course is the lectures and informal visits of Fr. Arrupe with the participants. At the conclusion of the course in January - February 1978, he came, and these are a few quotes from his address which was entitled:

'To serve the Lord alone, and the Church, His Spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on Earth:

... Service is the key idea of the charism of Ignatius. It is an idea whose loving power achieved in the life and spirituality of Ignatius - even in his mystical phase - a total realization: unconditioned and limitless service, service that is large-hearted and humble. It could be said that even the Trinitarian 'lights', which enriched his mystical life, rather than leading to a passive and contemplative quieting, spurred him to a greater service of this God he contemplated with such great love and reverence.

...The service of Christ, to which the Society is dedicated and with which the service of His Vicar is identified is total and unlimited ... What is surprising is the fact that at a time when it was not yet a common opinion that religious are bound to obey the Pope, as a supreme superior, by reason of the ordinary vow of obedience, St. Ignatius, speaking of this vow in Part VI of the Constitutions, exhorts us to apply 'all our energies with VERY SPECIAL care to the virtue of obedience shown first to the Supreme Pontiff, and then to the superiors of the Society... [cf. Const. 547].

...Thus, it is clear, that in the thought of St. Ignatius this entire doctrine on obedience applies to obedience to the Pope and to that in the first place in a special and outstanding manner. Consistent with this attitude of living obedience is the concern of Ignatius to reject everything that could seem as opposition, or criticism directed to the Vicar of Christ.

... 'To serve the Vicar of Christ' was replaced in the second *Formula* of the Society [that of Julius III] by a phrase that is the equivalent, but more clear:

“... to serve under the Vicar of Christ [*sub fideli obedientia Romani Pontificis..*]

... Explicit mention is made in the new formulation of the service of the Church; but, it is service to it as the Bride of Christ. We remain, thus, within the framework of service to the Lord alone. For the loving union between Christ and His Spouse is so intimate that the Patristic tradition did not hesitate to speak of a single, mystical person, the “whole Christ” of St. Augustine. The broom is the Head of the Bride - St. Paul says - just as Christ is the Head of His Bride, the Church, that lives and works in her, making visible His action through the supreme and universal ministry of His Vicar, the Pope, the subordinate ministry of the bishops and priests...

...The Ignatian vision of the Church is supernatural. In his mystical experience, Ignatius reached the point of glimpsing the mystery of the Church which became one of the principal teachings of Vatican II [cf. LG 1-8]. He proposes the Church to us in the first place as the Bride of Christ, vivified and guided by the Spirit of Christ; and it is on this that the fundamental attitude of a Christian is based...It is an unconditional attachment to the Church, the Bride of Christ, and its decisions ...

D. An Explanation of the Ignatian “Instrument”:

The union of the individual with God for the apostolate [*contemplativos en accion*] seems to flow from another aspect of Ignatian Thought: his views on the Society being an “Instrument” in the hands of the Holy Father. Ignatius emphasized the expression of love, as Christ’s union with the Will of His Father. The word “Instrument” appears frequently in the Jesuit Constitutions ³⁴. Applied to the individual Jesuit, it means that each one is meant to be an “instrument” at the disposition of the Church:

... for the attainment of the objective that the Society seeks] which is to aid souls to reach their ultimate and supernatural end, the means which unite the human instrument with God, and so dispose it that it may be wielded more dexterously by His divine hand...³⁵

This union has two effects:

³⁴ cf. Const. S.J., ## 30, 638; 661 (bis) 813, 814, etc.

³⁵ cf. Const. S.J., # 813.

- when the “instrument” is the more united to the principal agent, it may both work more effectively, as a result of this union;
- and depend more completely on the divine power in the exercise of the Apostolic Mission.

This could explain the “intrepid” and the “impetuosity” of the apostles in the “Mission”; these characteristics are based on the total availability of the Jesuit apostle to the Will of the Lord, and to the “Missions” of the Roman Pontiff. This more effective Apostolic Mission, flowing from an intimate union with the principal agent was meant for “the greater glory of the One Who sent them”³⁶.

In his letter to Fr. Diego Miron [December 17, 1552], named Provincial of Portugal under very difficult circumstances, Ignatius explained the dimension of obedience in his idea of “instrument.” The contact of the instrument with the principal agent is incarnate in obedience. This virtue unites the members of the Society to the whole body, to the Vicar of Christ and to the entire Church. Ignatius explains to Fr. Miron:

... As we see by experience, that even ordinary talent, and that which is below average, are very often ‘instruments’ of great and supernatural good, by being entirely obedient - by allowing themselves to be moved and possessed by this virtue and by the powerful hand of the Author of all good.

...On the contrary, we see those with great talent achieving far less than average results: because they are their own motivation, that is, they are inspired more by self-love; or, they do not achieve results that are truly proportionate to the omnipotent hand of God, Our Lord, Who only accepts as instruments those who are very weak and helpless...³⁷.

This union with the principal cause is also an element of hope, as Ignatius explains in his letter of June 6, 1556, less than two months prior to his death:

... If one considers how powerful is God, Our Lord, Who achieves very great results even with very weak instruments of His, whenever these instruments are motivated by holy obedience. One would not be discouraged - for the one lowly, who may be reflecting on their own smallness - these are all the more elevated

³⁶ cf. A. Ravier, *Ignace de Loyola fonde la Compagnie de Jesus*. Paris: Desclee de Brouwer 1973, pp. 350, ff.; I. Salvat, *Servir en Mision*, o.c., pp. 102, ff..

³⁷ cf. *Obras Completas*, o.c., p. 801.

by the divine power. God is accustomed to make use of the weakest instruments of His own Company, through the exercise of His mercy³⁸.

Love for Jesus Christ, then, fuses in a love for the Church, vivified by His Spirit. Ignatius considered the Eucharist as a great model to reflect on the “poor Jesus.” This adherence to the poor Christ - radically poor in the Eucharist demands also from the Company a radical poverty, including a juridical poverty. This means that the Company of Jesus, with even greater affection is to be united with the Church, since it is in the Church where the Eucharistic mystery is realized, the sign and what accomplishes unity among the faithful. For Ignatius, the fundamental idea will always be that the Church is the Spouse of Christ³⁹ - the Church is a kind of Incarnation of Christ, to Whom the entire Company is committed with all its “understanding and its seeking.”⁴⁰

This adherence is not merely “juridical”. In the Papal Bull of Julius III are found these words in respect to the “Fourth Vow”:

ob maiorem devotionem Sedis Apostolicae.

The term “devotion” brings us into the sphere of that “greater affection” with which each one in the Company seeks to be committed to Jesus Christ and to His hierarchical Church.

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³⁸ cf.o.c., p. 953, an example of the *tantum-quantum* rule of St. Ignatius

³⁹ cf. Spiritual Exercises, # 365.

⁴⁰ cf. I. Salvat, o.c., p. 105.

Section 3

Holy Abandonment: **The Fundamental Spirit of the Stigmatine Founder**

I. Charisms in General

A. Centered on Jesus Christ

The charism of a Founder, or Foundress, is a unity made up of a rather wide variety of elements, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in accord with the human nature of the individual and with the contemporary needs of the Church. Among the Founders, some of these following elements would be in common: a great faith in God, a developed devotion for Jesus Christ and the Eucharist, to the Blessed Mother, to the Saints - or, to one in particular, often chosen as a model [e.g., St. Ignatius of Loyola chose St. Ignatius of Antioch, he name-sake, as his model; St. Gaspar Bertoni chose St. Ignatius as his model].

Some of these elements might predominate in an individual to the extent that a particular charism might be called "Trinitarian", "Christological", "Pneumatological", "Mariological". The Founders of the Trinitarians and the Missionaries of the Most Holy Trinity would have a Trinitarian charism; the Jesuits, the Redemptorists [even though St. Alphonsus Liguori wrote so much and so beautifully about Mary], the Passionists, the Resurrectionists and the Stigmatines - would have a Christological Charism. The Missionaries of the Paraclete, or of the Holy Spirit, would have a "Pneumatological" Charism. A good many Congregations and Orders are founded with a clearly Marian Charism: the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Servites of Mary.

It would seem that the fundamental devotions of these various religious groups would flow from whatsoever their basic charism is. In some ways, it would seem that the main devotion of the Congregation would be inspired by its charism.

B. Various Factors

The Charism of any Founder is a complex reality made up of a variety of elements. This was brought out in one of the papers delivered during the Holy Year of 1975, for the second centenary of the death of St. Paul of the Cross, the Founder of the Passionists. A Congress was held in Rome to commemorate both events, entitled : **The Wisdom of the Cross Today.**

1. Personality, Grace, History, Doctrine, Experience, Church: a Passionist Father developed the charism of his Founder, St. Paul of the Cross. In the course of his study, he pointed out that according to many interpreters, these might be considered as some of the basic elements comprising a “charism” of a Founder:

- the personality of the Founder, with his qualities, or natural and supernatural characteristics;
- his historical background, or environment and times, as well as the society in which any given foundation, or spirituality came to light;
- the special grace from God, as the supernatural elements which moved and accompanied the work of the foundation of a religious family, and therefore, of its spirituality;
- the preference for a certain truth of the faith, or at least, for a particular manner of conceiving, emphasizing, and formulating that truth - this is the so-called doctrinal factor.
- a determined virtue, or several virtues, which a spirituality suggests to be achieved in a particular manner, and this in imitation of Christ, in accord with the teaching and experience of the Founder;
- the end, and both the immediate and secondary specific scope, remembering the traditional distinction from the “primary” end, which was understood as the sanctification and salvation of the members - and which is common to all religious. The sixth element here is more the Mission within the Church which the initiator of a foundation and of a spirituality proposes. From this ultimate element in some way, proceed many other aspects ⁴¹.

2. A Basic Christian Experience: for the Passionists, the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ is the unifying center of a certain style of living Christianity. Christ is the point of convergence and the living center for all Christians. The Christian experience appears, therefore, as a series of relationships with Christ, the Savior: at times, in a “Pneumatological”, or “Mariological” charism, achieved through the Holy Spirit, or through the Blessed Virgin Mary. These multiple relationships are all posited by the faith: each one of them incarnates an aspect of faith in Jesus Christ, realizing an aspect of union with Christ, a manner of existing before God, and before His word, which characterizes the Christian experience.

⁴¹ cf. Piergiorgio Nesti, CP, quoting A. Matanic’, OFM, Pont. Athen. Anton. Rma 1971, p. 17; Fr. Nesti’s article entitled, *Principio biblico teologico della Spiritualita’ Passionista*, in: *La Sapienza della Croce oggi* 2 1975, Torino: LDC pp. 81, ff].

3. Directly through Christ, Indirectly Through Mary: Christ asks His Apostles to teach, to baptize, to govern - but, Jesus Himself remains the soul of all this, the invisible power in the Holy Spirit, sustaining the entire Apostolic Mission. The “Christian experience” appears therefore as a net of relationships all centered on Jesus Christ: either directly, through some mystery of His life, or indirectly through the Blessed Mother, or one of the saints. These relationships might be summed up in the word of “adherence” to Christ, based on the data of divine revelation ⁴².

4. The Church genuinely “experiences” Christ: the experience in the Church is the baptismal, sacramental experience of Jesus Christ - in that the meditation of the Church of each age is to render actual, in time, the mediation of Jesus Himself. Christ is the “Way”, in that by means of Him, as presented through the Church, we accede to the Father.

II. A Gradual Formation of the Charism of St. Gaspar Bertoni

A. Centered on Jesus Christ

1. Abandonment into the Hands of the Father: the spirituality of Fr. Bertoni developed in an atmosphere of total abandonment into the hands of God, and total availability to the Church. The fundamental example of his daily life was Jesus Christ. Fr. Bertoni experienced this consciousness of his own nothingness resulting from the concept of creation: all was in the hands of God, having originally flowed from the Creator. From this basic attitude of faith, Fr. Bertoni gradually developed a very solid spiritual life, totally imbued with a reverential fear, or profound respect, tender love and confident hope.

a. Follow God, not Precede Him: Fr. Marani, who was his first successor, stated:

..‘We ought to follow God, and not go ahead of Him’ - my most beloved Founder and Father repeated so often through his life...⁴³.

‘...Let us leave room for God to act - He knows what to do, and how to do it... Let us leave it up to the Lord, He Who has disposed all things well!...

⁴² cf. J. Morroux, *L’esperienza cristiana - Introduzione a una teologia*. Brescia: Morcelliana 1956, pp. 117, ff.

⁴³ cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Il Modello di S. Abbandono*, p. 210.

These are basic principles in the spirituality of Fr. Bertoni, found in his letters to Mother Naudet.

b. Fr. Bertoni's 'experienced' Stigmata: during the more critical moments of his life, he remained within the serenity of abandonment into the hands of God. He never received the stigmata, of course, as did St. Francis of Assisi, but perhaps various painful moments of his life could be considered as the great wounds, or his vivid experience of Jesus Christ. This would be the type "lived Stigmata" :

- deaths that visited the Bertoni home during his formative years, from about 9 years of age until he was 14;
- the separation of his father and mother;
- the life-long illnesses that he endured - a veritable martyrdom;
- the slow development of the Congregation that he founded - on the day of Fr. Bertoni's Beatification, Pope Paul VI made reference to the "second miracle" being the Congregation itself!
- his extreme apostolic limitations brought on by his confinement, always adapting to do whatever he could - with some ministries perhaps, humanly speaking, having failed.

These rather painful lived experiences of his routine existence continually offered the matter for his daily holocaust, and, at the same time, they afforded the opportunity of adapting his Apostolic Missionary response.

2. Heroic Faith, Hope and Charity in lived Events: these various elements formed a specific spirit, an attitude of his life of heroic faith, hope and charity. Fr. Bertoni received great hope from the spiritual direction and education that he received - but the events of his life offered him the foundation for this life of Holy Abandonment.

3. His Boy-hood Sonnet: "Wounds of Love" and the Nuptial Theme: Indications of his charism which was taking shape may be found at various periods, dispersed throughout his life of which we have some written record, often in his own hand - as well as what others close to him said about him. There is an extraordinary sonnet attributed to him about the time of his First Communion - which shows a level of Italian which to any non-Italian might seem extraordinarily advanced. In this composition there are fused the elements of the nuptials together with wounds of love, perhaps taken from the Dominican-Carmelite Tradition noted above [cf. pages 22-26 of these notes above]. There follows here an "approximate translation of this poem:

...From that day in a hidden distinct valley,
 Seated on the banks of a small lake reflecting like a mirror,
 That I gave myself over to contemplating the beautiful visage of love itself;
 I suffer from a wound that cannot be medicated ⁴⁴,
 Since I no longer saw it again; all that remained was
 The burning arrow which had penetrated my heart
 O, my poor heart! separated from my soul,
 What kind of life could you ever expect to live in that state?
 I groaned trying to hide my suffering from my soul
 Which no one could ever heal, except for the One Who had wounded me.
 Who could ever believe this?
 To medicate my wound, it was sufficient to see that
 Today, a long procession of pierced hearts,
 Follows the love that triumphs ⁴⁵.

4. Parallels with St. John of the Cross and his *Spiritual Canticle* : the lamentations of the “Spouse” in the “*Spiritual Canticle*” of St. John of the Cross seems to be expressed in this Sonnet that has remained among the papers of Fr. Bertoni. It would seem to those not familiar with the Italian education system of two centuries ago that this was a later composition than the period of his First Holy Communion. He expresses himself as languishing from the wound that cannot be medicated, from what he was able to contemplate as in a mirror, the most beautiful visage of love. With his heart seemingly separated from his soul, because of that flaming arrow that had pierced it, he was unable to explain to anyone his suffering, because no one could ever have medicated it, except the One Who had wounded him. This concept is found in a variety of places in Scripture:

Pity me, Yahweh, I have no strength left, heal me! [cf. Ps 6:2]
 Yahweh, the Restorer of Jerusalem. He brought back Israel’s exiles, healing
 their
 broken hearts [cf. Ps 147:3].
 He has torn us to pieces, but He will heal us... He will bandage our wounds....
 [cf.
 Ho 6:2].

5. Fr. Bertoni’s Jesuit Models: “Indirect” Imitation of Christ: in this same poem, one can see a characteristic of the Stigmatine Founder: his repeated choices of

⁴⁴ cf. St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza I, n. 2

⁴⁵ cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *La Gioventù*, p. 253, cf. also Ps 41:4; 38:3; Rm 12:15].

models to follow in life. In his early years, as a young man, his model was the Jesuit saint, St. Aloysius Gonzaga. The concept of "imitation" was not reduced to an imitation of exterior acts, but it was rather a consistent quest of this way of life which governed his activities and attitudes. It was an indirect imitation of Christ. Therefore, the "Best Man", or "Cupid", who arranges the marriage, as St. Paul [cf. 2 Co 11:2], arranging the marriage between the Corinthians and Christ, from the "heavenly star" to draw the soul to the most chaste embraces of the Chaste Spouse of the soul.

6. A Kind of Apostolic, Missionary "Marriage Attendant": from the almost physical description of the gentle Spouse, the "Best Man", or "Cupid" arranging the marriage, takes the next step to issue the formal invitation to the marriage with the sole condition of leaving everything else behind:

If you want to see Him, you will look for Him in vain,
If first you do not love Him.
Just remember this: that He speaks to the heart -
But, gently and slowly - Keep your ear attuned.
Therefore, if the noise of this world deafens you,
Go out from your land, leave your fatherland, your home -
And forget your own people and home [cf. Gn 12:1, ff.; Ps 45]:
The King loves you and He gives Himself to you;
Because that Love, that Beauty, that Breast,
All this is the reward and crown of outstanding virtue.

It seems clear from this Poem that the invitation to leave his own home took root in him from his deep desire for union with God, to listen to his own contemplation the whispered voice of the Divine Master, far from the chaos of the world ⁴⁶.

7. The Gift of Fear brings Abandonment to its Height with Hope: developing the spirit of abandonment into the hands of God, the Gift of the Holy Spirit of Filial Fear pushes to its highest possible level the movement of one's hope in God. When one is truly "in the hands of God", one is in the best disposition to await with strength and really to receive the help of God. This total abandonment to God, which Hope accomplishes only little by little [*a piccole gocce*], and never perfectly, the Gift of Fear brings the highest level, under the direct impulse of the Holy Spirit ⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *La giovinezza*, pp. 253, ff.

⁴⁷ cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, CSS, *Modello di S. Abbandono*, p. 76.

8. **Meditation on "First Kings": Wait for God!**: in one of his Meditation on 1 K, Fr. Bertoni stated:

... A man of prayer takes what comes as though from the hands of Providence. Such a one does not precede God, nor anticipates Him: all is in order, he is at peace. He is not hasty, not precipitous. He awaits the right time, and the proper circumstances. He does all that waiting for God.

a. **Not knowing how to wait, impedes development:** in these few words, according to Fr. Dalle Vedove ⁴⁸, it can be said that we have Fr. Bertoni's essential thought concerning Holy Abandonment. Holy Abandonment is certainly encountering all that happens as disposed by Divine Providence is that of not knowing how to wait when the divine plan is not all that clear. So often, one compromises the execution of the Divine Will by an inordinate propensity to action.

b. **Hope helps One await the Lord:** Fr. Bertoni had recourse to the state of Abandonment as that which guaranteed the most tranquil, but yet the most sure state of expectancy. Precisely speaking, it is hope that gives assurance to our waiting for the future life, and for all that leads to final union with god. Hope is based on that unshakable rock of divine omnipotence placed at our disposition for our assistance, cooperation.

c. **For Fr. Bertoni, Holy Abandonment is the Supreme Exercise of Hope:** The classical authors who treated Holy Abandonment ⁴⁹ have left unsolved the matter of its theological foundation. Fr. Bertoni seems to have placed "abandonment" as the highest form of the virtue of hope. St. Francis de Sales and others saw Holy Abandonment as a superior form of love - DeCaussade ⁵⁰ states that the state of abandonment is a living to the full of pure faith, pure hope and total love. Many spiritual writers have made of Abandonment a synthesis of all the theological virtues, and also of all the moral virtues: it is simply considered to be the height of the Christian life.

9. **Abandonment as Hope does not eliminate Faith and Charity:** in choosing hope as the central point of the state of Abandonment, of course, the virtues of faith and charity are not excluded. However, following Fr. Bertoni's thought, one would

⁴⁸ cf. l.c., pp. 199, ff.

⁴⁹ cf. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite'*, Vol. I

⁵⁰ cf. J ean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Doubleday: Image New York.

remove the indistinct, or imprecise conception which would result if it were considered as a simple conformity to the Will of God.

a. **Conformity with Christ is Christian Perfection:** it is generally agreed that conformity to Christ is the most direct way to reach perfection in the spiritual life which does conform our will with that of God, whenever the Will of God is incorporated in some specific precept: and that is then called “obedience”.

b. **[Fr. Feuillet]: Christ emphasized Union of Will:** a modern exegete has noted, however, that there are only two texts in all of St. John’s Gospel on love where the Son of God explicitly states that He loves the Father - and both of these texts are found in the discourse of the Last Supper, just before His Passion and Death:

...the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me... [cf. Jn 14:31].

...If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept the Father’s Commandments and remain in His love [cf. Jn 15:10].

In these texts, and in so many other texts from the Fourth Gospel [cf. 4:34; 5:1, 9, 30, 43; 6:38; 8:28; 10:18, f.; 12:49, f.; 15:10, 15], the love of Jesus for the Father has as its synonym His unconditional attachment to the Father’s will - an attachment that will lead to Calvary for the redemption of humanity .⁵¹

c. **Abandonment is Particular Imitation of Jesus on the Cross:** St. Francis de Sales represents Christ as a “Model of Holy Abandonment” in the various stages of His mortal life - but, especially, during all His sufferings ⁵².

d. **Sin is a rejection of the Divine Will:** whenever the Divine Will is considered in itself, or, at least, as not expressed in some specific commandment, that is quite clear, then conforming oneself to it still remains a general obligation, and being in opposition to it is one of the generic elements that is included in the traditional theology of sin.

e. **Conformity to the Divine Will is trust in His Mercy:** such a dedication to the Divine Will is based upon the conviction of the infinite power and mercy of God

⁵¹ cf. A. Feuillet, *Le mystere de l’amour divin dans la theologie johannique*. Paris: Gabalda 1972, pp. 69, ff.

⁵² cf. *Love of God*, Bk IX, c. 15 - cf. DS I, Col. 6].

which, in full accord with the divine promises, gives us security for the present as well as for the unknown future, far more than if any human being were to place full confidence in his/her own resources.

f. This Hope reinforced by Knowledge: this great knowledge of Divine Providence is supplied by faith, leading toward charity. It enables one, with God's grace, to choose to accept these principles:

...Nothing ever happens that God has not foreseen, or willed, or at least permitted.

God does not will anything, or permit anything, except for the manifestation of His goodness and infinite perfections, for the glory of His Son, and the ultimate Good of those who love Him.

St. Thomas Aquinas called this reinforced hope by the name of con-fidence. Holy Abandonment is the traditional Christian spirituality, gives assurance even when human supports are taken away.

B. The Espousals of Mary and Joseph: A Mirror of Christ

These unique, but authentic nuptials, seem to mirror the abandonment, the *obsequium* of Jesus to His heavenly Father. They exemplify the human nature of Jesus serving as the "instrument" of the divine Person - and they seem to reflect this total trust in God.

Fr. Bertoni has a spirituality of abandonment: on the personal, ascetical level, as well as in the apostolic choices and, as a consequence, a type of "geographic" abandonment. It was the total commitment of an entire Congregation, and of every member in it [abandonment of the personnel, or a personal abandonment], each according to his talents, or ecclesial service, in any form of the Ministry of the Word of God whatsoever ["apostolic" abandonment].

C. The Views of Fr. Anthony Rosmini

He seems to have applied perhaps "Ignatian Abandonment" to his apostolic choices:

... The sole principle, my dear brothers [i.e., those pronouncing their first vows], from which are deduced all of our duties, is charity. Other Holy Founders have chosen as the essential end of the of their Congregation, one or more

determined external ministries, useful to their neighbor and to the Church: as, for example, preaching, teaching, or something else.

... However, our Congregation seeks to find in justice alone its sole essential regulation, and its only essential scope; so much so that whoever makes profession in this community, with the sole quest of a perfect justice, not stably tied to any determined good work, obtains all that the Institute has proposed for itself, and fully carries out its vocation ... The faithful followers of this Institute are not limited either in the affections of their hearts, or in the work of their hands to any special ministry, or to any special work of charity. The members of this Congregation, thus offer themselves to the Divine Providence of their heavenly Father, and they must be ready to assume all those ministries and those works in which grater acquisition of justice and holiness might be expected by divine grace.⁵³

Well over seven years later [on October 10, 1851], Fr. Rosmini, in another Profession Ceremony, described the four qualities of charity, as he saw them: breadth, length, height, and depth. He went on to say that the depths of love could be seen in the intensity of suffering that one would endure. He saw the Cross as an “august sign” of this love, and stated:

...May this august sign, my beloved brothers, remain always impressed on the minds and hearts of all of us, as a kind of brief formula which synthesizes the entire sublime message of Charity; may it also be profoundly impressed in our hearts and in all the faculties of our souls, with its strength, bring about those chaste and faithful ones to Him Who has espoused us with His blood, and bring those tireless imitators of the works of His Charity. And finally, may this most glorious sign of the Cross of Jesus Christ, the instrument and symbol of such Charity, be also the authentic seal of this, my oration, or marriage message: that the Cross is more than anything else, a matrimonial poem for your happy nuptials, my beloved brothers - because truly with the religious profession that today you make in the Institute of Charity unites your virginal souls to the Divine Spouse with a new, perpetual, indissoluble, most happy and fruitful bond...⁵⁴

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⁵³ This was Fr. Rosmini’s homily for the Profession Ceremony of the Institute of Charity on the Feast of the Annunciation on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, at Sacro Monte Calvario, Domodossola, 1844. cf. *Discorsi sulla Crita’*. ed. Paoline. Ut innotescant, 48, Pescara 1963, pp. 55-57/

⁵⁴ cf. o.c., pp. 181-183.

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Section 4

St. Gaspar Bertoni more influenced by the Carmelite-Dominican-Ignatian Nuptial Theme

I. Not influenced much by the Franciscan Nuptials with Lady Poverty - more by the Stigmata:

a. **A Christological and Apostolic Emphasis on Poverty, Stigmata:** while Fr. Bertoni did have a most developed concept of holy poverty, it does not seem that he was moved by the Franciscan nuptial theme of poverty. Limiting this reflection for the time being to his *Memoriale Privato*, with the help of Fr. Joseph Stofella's commentary on it, we do read some insights into the Stigmatine Founder's understanding and living of poverty. It seems that he identified its practice with the person of Jesus Christ:

September 25, 1808: The Kingdom of Christ. There was a strong sentiment to follow the Lord closely, even at the cost of my life through poverty and ignominy.

b. **His Idea is rooted in the Person of Jesus Christ:** this "strong motion", Fr. Stofella explains, seems to have been some kind of an inspiration towards that which St. Ignatius had intended as the ultimate purpose of this Meditation on *The Kingdom of Christ*. Fr. Bertoni feels himself to be inspired to be among those whom Ignatius called "generous", those who are called to give their all": those religious, whose entire talent, following the example of the martyred Apostles, is to attend not only to their own salvation and perfection, but also to the well-being of their fellow human beings - and they profess themselves to be in the fullest sense of the terms: "Companions of Jesus" in this undertaking.

1.] **This is St. Ignatius' Ideal in His Spiritual Diary:** there was a very similar thought expressed in St. Ignatius' diary, under the date of February 24, 1544:

...While preparing the altar for Mass, while thinking about Jesus, there came a strong motion to follow Him, and it seemed to me internally, since He is the head and leader of the Company. To me, this seemed to be the strongest argument to assume in the Company, a total poverty. this argument carries more weight than all other human reasons to elect it - even though it seemed to me that all these other reasons that I had thought of in this election of poverty militated in the same direction...

2.] The “Election” of the Same Poverty as that of Jesus Christ:

these lines are written in that period of St. Ignatius’s life when he dedicated 40 full days of prayer to the “Election” of poverty for the “Company of Jesus” that he had founded. Of all the motives that passed through his head, the one of the Imitation of Christ seems always the most convincing.

3.] The Stigmatine Founder continues in his Spiritual Diary:

October 22, 1808: A desire to imitate Christ in His poverty and in the hardships of poverty...

This brief note detached from what went before under the same date, seems to depend much on the word “desire.” It seems to have sprung from his lived situation. It very well could be that Fr. Bertoni was thinking here of the great Patriarch, St. Francis of Assisi. Earlier in this same month, Fr. Bertoni had delivered one of his most beautiful sermons on the Stigmata of St. Francis, in which he states that Francis was the most perfect over and imitator of Christ. In the course of this panegyric, St. Francis is presented as quoting St. Paul: “... Be imitators of me as I am of Christ...” [cf. Ph 3:17]. Clearly, the Stigmatine Founder had poured much effort into this sermon, and it seems to reflect many of his own personal spiritual characteristics.

4.] The Lord’s Own Example: in this matter of poverty, Fr. Bertoni seems much closer to the Ignatian ideal than that of St. Francis of Assisi. Another note from his diary is this one:

...March 13, 1809: If in this world, these were the true goods, then Our Lord Jesus Christ would not have given us the example [of poverty]. The goods of this world are like medicines. Jesus Christ from His birth, has us see in Himself supreme poverty, supreme suffering, and supreme rejection. Therefore, these are the true and only goods...

a.] The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis: the words of the Stigmatine Founder in this instance are the echo of those of the spiritual classic, attributed to Thomas a Kempis, in its last number of the Second Book:

...Nothing is more acceptable to God, nothing more salutary for thee in this world, than to suffer willingly for Christ. If indeed there had been anything

better and more beneficial to man's salvation than suffering, Christ certainly would have showed it by word and example... ⁵⁵.

b.] A Jesuit Classic, by Fr. da Ponte: the spiritual cross of Jesus Christ, says the Jesuit Classic by Fr. daPonte, is made up of the three prices paid for our redemption: poverty, disdain, suffering ⁵⁶.

5.] Fr. Bertoni's Meditations to the Seminarians of Verona: a few years later, Fr. Bertoni offered this Meditation:

... Meditation on the End of Man:

Why do you not love poverty, ignominy, which you praise do nightly in the Gospels? It seems that there is some embarrassment in imitating Christ in our times. St. Teresa cries out that it is impossible to want to enjoy the honors of heaven with Jesus Christ, without sharing here on earth in His dishonors....

6.] In making our spiritual budget, Poverty comes first: this text is from Fr. Bertoni's *Memoriale Privato*: in making out the budget, the first value that is necessary is this poverty; and then all the other virtues [July 23, 1809]:

a.] Lk's Gospel [14:28., f.]. Jesus' Formula :

...And indeed which of you here, intending to build a tower ... or marching out to war ... would not first sit down and consider what it would cost..."

[This became, then, St. Ignatius *Formula.*]

b.] To follow Jesus demands renunciation: Fr. Bertoni's thought here is that the necessary capital to build a spiritual edifice is poverty. In his Ignatian Meditation to the Seminarians of Verona at the end of 1810, Fr. Bertoni stated:

...[Many] would like to follow Christ, but they would not like to renounce all things: none of you can be My disciple unless he gives up all his possessions [cf. Lk 14:33]. To follow Christ is the end: the means would be the renunciation of all things.

⁵⁵ cf. *Imitation of Christ*, Bk II, c. 14.

⁵⁶ cf. DaPonte, Part III, Medi. VII, 2nd Point.

7.] **Fr. Bertoni’s “Little Company” of Jesus in 1811:** the “undertakings” that Fr. Bertoni has in mind here would be precisely that organization of a perfect following of Jesus, in a “Little Company” of Jesus. The idea of founding a copy of the “Company of Jesus” was forming in his mind at this time, Fr. Stofella points out to us. Fr. Bertoni was gradually forming the charism to found his Congregation clearly along Ignatian lines:

a.] **His Words on Retreat: September 15, 1808:** during his annual retreat in 1808, this idea took more definite shape, as can be noted from his visit to the Altar of St. Ignites, with a few of his own companions, as he noted in his diary of September 15th that year. In his preaching to the Seminarians, perhaps here and there, some further insight into the charism that was being formed, might be had.

b.] **Fr. Bertoni’s Ideal in 1811:** in his reflections on the First Book of Kings to the Seminarians [Meditation 15] some Stigmatine interpreters read further insights into his developing charism. Fr. Stofella tells us that in these meditations the Stigmatine Founder’s thought was geared to the formation of a “Little Company.”

Summary

So, in his plan, poverty was meant to have an important role. Fr. Bertoni’s idea of poverty comes more directly from St. Ignatius - whose Spiritual Diary traces his long “Election” of poverty for the Company of Jesus. In formulating his plan, St. Ignatius spent a good 40 days of prayer, which are described for us in his Diary from February 2, 1554 until March 12, 1544. St. Ignatius had defined poverty as the “bulwark of religious life”, and it must be considered as “very dear” and be maintained in its purity in so far as this will be possible with divine grace.

Fr. Marani states that for Fr. Bertoni poverty was the book of our Founder - and he referred to it as “our mother”⁵⁷. There might be a slight hint here of the Franciscan tradition, but it would seem that Fr. Bertoni was more directly inspired from St. Ignatius in the matter of poverty - at least, in that he does not seem to have been deeply influenced by the Franciscan idea of spiritual nuptials with Lady Poverty⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ cf. CS IV, pp. 15,2, ff.

⁵⁸ cf. Stigmatine Publications: Archivio Storico Bertoniano. Serie III: Prediche, n. 2: *Discorsi su S. Francesco [1808-1851]*. Verona 1994. cf. also n. 3, *Discorsi delle Stimmate di S. Francesco [1823-1849]*. Vrona 1994

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II. Fr. Bertoni more influenced by Jesus Christ as Spouse of the Soul

A. In General: three quotes from early preaching: even in his early preaching, Fr. Bertoni seemed much taken by this thought: that there was such a union between God and each person and that this could be considered as a supreme form of Nuptials. In a Sermon delivered on December 13, 1801 [which lasted 38 minutes!], Fr. Bertoni referred to this theme repeatedly, commenting on 1 Co 3:16; 6:20:

1. Most chaste, sublime Nuptials:

“What greater honor could there be than being the Temples of God?” [cf. 1 Co 3:16], of glorifying and carrying God in our mortal bodies according to the expression of the Apostle [ib 6:20]? If so much honor is due to the churches for the simple reason that they are material temples of the Majesty of God, then how much more honor will there not be shown both by the angels and by human beings for a living temple, all splendid, and interior - in which are celebrated those most chaste and sublime nuptials between God and the individual I will espouse you to Myself - He has already stated this through His Prophets [cf. Ho 2:19] - I will espouse you in faith, in justice, in charity - as these are the three most precious gems with which He adorns such a person...⁵⁹.

2. The Beauty of the One Chosen to be the Lord’s Spouse:

‘Put on the Lord Jesus Christ as a garment’ [cf. Rm 13:14]. And what beauty can ever be compared to that of a person whom God forms to make His Spouse? I just do not have the colors to paint such a picture, I can only tell you, using the very words of the Apostle, that such a person is united to God with such an intimate union that the individual becomes by a loving transformation one and the same Spirit with Him [cf. 1 Co 6:17] ⁶⁰.

3. The Lord comes Himself for His Spouse:

Do such things, accomplished in a sinner, surprise you? I am surprised even more in seeing that He was not content in just having spoken to us of His love through His servants and prophets, but that He Himself has come down from heaven, put on the vesture of a human being, to run after us in person; much

⁵⁹ cf. *Manoscritti Bertoni*, # 583.

⁶⁰ cf. ib., # 584.

like a King, as Chrysostom would say ⁶¹, like a king who had fallen in love with a shepherd girl who had resolved to take her from her shepherd's tent to the royal palace to make her His own wife. He was not content to send illustrious ambassadors to her, but He Himself descends from His Throne, and having put off all glory, as though He were afraid of frightening her with His overwhelming splendor, and of reducing her simplicity to confusion. So, He dressed up as a lowly shepherd, and imitating the lowly and simple manners of the shepherds to be able to approach her, so that He could directly speak to her of His love...⁶²

B. The Example of St. Francis of Assisi [Panegyric of 1808]:

This same idea of the individual as the Spouse of Christ is found some years later in his beautiful panegyric of October 4, 1808, for the Feast of St. Francis. St. Gaspar Bertoni stated:

1. The Spouse of the Canticles:

Francis would say in the words of the Song of Songs: 'Draw me' [Sgs 1:3], and he would say this in a most singular way, because the level of his love with which he followed after Christ is indeed very singular... He, therefore, could indeed say with the Spouse of the Canticles: 'Draw me', and he could say together with her: 'Your name is like oil poured out, and that is why we run after you.' [cf. Sgs 1:3]. That is why he could also say in common with so many of his sons, who in both number and splendor equal the stars, either those who shine gloriously in perpetual eternity [cf. Dn 12:3], making with Him a triumphant crown there in heaven, or those, who still alive, shed so much light of their virtue in the dense darkness of this world in which we live...⁶³.

2. Christ to be imitated, to be followed:

In this Panegyric, Fr. Bertoni stresses so much the example of Christ to be imitated, and that each one is united to Him on the Cross: this constitutes a "kind of nuptials." We are on the same Cross as Jesus Christ, "as though grafted onto the tree of the Cross, planted there with Christ, to have in common with the tree, the sap and the life, .e., grace and charity ⁶⁴.

⁶¹ In Ps 5:, 2, t. 5, 19 4 D, ff.

⁶² *Mss B*, # 588.

⁶³ cf. *Mss B* # 1873.

⁶⁴ cf. *ib.*, # 1862.

3. Mutual Adherence, Assiduous Reflection: Fr. Bertoni lists four effects of this compassionate and transforming love: the first is union, then mutual inherence, the third is assiduous reflection, and finally ecstasy, being imprinted with the Stigmata ⁶⁵.

4. The “Espousals Principle”: Fr. Bertoni offers a graded approach to the various ways in which one might follow Jesus Christ: “very many” follow Christ for the reward [cf. Mt 6:2]; “many” follow Christ as slaves, but the slave does not know what the Master does [cf. Jn 15:15]; “some” follow Jesus as sons, but they are more interested in the inheritance [cf. Is 1:2]. “A few” may follow Jesus as friends, and base their whole relationship on the communication of Goods, but not be willing to share in His hardships, as the Apostles at first [cf. Mt 26:56; Ph 2:21] ⁶⁶. Then, the Stigmatine Founder adds:

a.] Very, very few follow Him as Lovers:

...whom in their youthful fire of their tender love follow Christ wherever He might go, either to Tabor, or on Calvary ... But, the Spouse, the adult in the school of love, is not drawn by the pleasant odor, but is drawn by the right hand of the Spouse: ‘Draw me’ [cf. Sgs 1:3], and by this strong right arm, they are embraced and find support from His strength, so that they keep pace with Him, and do not merely run with Him, but even fly ... ‘Who is this leaning on her Beloved?’ [cf. Sgs 8:5].

b.] Following means Union:

This is how Francis followed Christ: ‘... and follow Me’ [cf. Mt 16:34]. This is not merely a close following, but at His side; it is not merely being near to Him, but it means being united to Him; and not only united, but being transformed: Francis did not seek the consolations, but the delights of the gifts of Christ: but he sought Christ Himself: ‘If only I can have Christ’ [cf. Ph 3:8]. It was the Christ, nude on the Cross... in the ignominies of poverty ...’ I have come to consider all the advantages I had as disadvantages...’ [cf. Ph 3:7, ff.]

c.] We must be wounded as Christ:

⁶⁵ cf. ib., # 1863, ff.

⁶⁶ cf. ib., ## 1865-1867.

And oh, how Francis followed Him, until he even arrived at being with Christ as but one and the same spirit, so that he could really say: 'I now live, not I, but Christ lives in me.' [cf. Ga 2:20], by means of an entire, perfect transformation of love... by losing his entire self, to find himself totally in Christ: so much so that one can no longer find Francis if not with Christ: disdained as Christ, poor as Christ, wounded as Christ:

1.] From the generic 'man' to the 'very, very few': It seems that Fr. Bertoni offers a near gradation of those who follow Christ. Beginning with the "very many", then, the "many", "some", to a "few" - and finally, "very, very few" who follow Jesus as lovers, spouses. Transforming love will mean to take on the wounds of Christ.

2.] Suffering is the 'School of God': the 'Following of Christ' that Fr. Bertoni presents as the ideal is that of Transforming Love, intimate imitation, most faithful following. Christ is looked upon as the "Teacher" in this extraordinary School of God. We are familiar with Fr. Bertoni's idea of 'suffering as the school of God' as noted in his Letter to Mother Naudet ⁶⁷:

...I am getting better little by little. Please pray for me so that I may drive some fruit from this school where the Lord has decided to place me, so that I might be disposed to serve him ...

Fr. Stofella's note is that this is a capital thought of Fr. Bertoni - suffering is the "school of God."

a.] Jesus is the 'Master': there are some notes among Fr. Bertoni's papers in which he was preparing a sermon on *Jesus as the Teacher*, or *Master*, based on Paul's Letter to Titus:

....You see, God's grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us what we have to do - to give up everything that does not lead to God and all our worldly ambitions ... while we are waiting in hope...[cf. Tt 2:11-13].

b.] Never without Instruction: in these notes, Fr. Bertoni states that he does not feel prepared to speak on the theme, and so he will

⁶⁷cf. Letter 45, *Ep*, p. 109.

have to trust that the Lord will not ever leave us without instruction ⁶⁸. He suggests that his listeners look at this Master who comes to teach us, citing Psalm 94:

...Happy the man whom you instruct, the man whom You teach through your law... [cf. Ps 94:12].

Jesus is a Master Who teaches by deeds, and then has these teachings brought to life ⁶⁹.

c.] Lessons for Imitation: In his Panegyric on St. Francis, Fr. Bertoni states that the Poor Man of Assisi learned his lessons from the eminent knowledge of Jesus Christ [cf. Ph 3:8] - this was a learning that was not acquired at the school of philosophers, but from that of Christ Himself - a school and a knowledge by far surpasses all others ⁷⁰. The lessons of this school are mean for imitation ⁷¹. This is a seraphic charity, in a wayfarer, which transforms one into Christ in some way, through the most exact and literal fulfilling of His every word, and through the most minute and vivid copy of His every action - this is the perfection that is characteristic of the humble Patriarch of the poor Franciscans ⁷².

d.] Union through Imitation, Following: while Fr. Bertoni may not have made much mention of Francis' tradition of the Espousals with Lady Poverty, the thought of the union of the individual with Christ through imitation stands out. This is a "school" whose teachings are not only to be admired, but is one which must be imitated.

e.] Fr. Marani: the Holy Spouses are our Teachers: Fr. Marani, at the conclusion of his presentation of the Congregation to the Holy See, compiled in Rome in 1854, looks on the Holy Spouses as Teachers and Models of the following:

...The Apostolic Missionaries are under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, his Spouse. Whoever gives his name to this Congregation always must have before his eyes the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, to learn from them:

⁶⁸ cf. **Mss B** # 1781.

⁶⁹ cf. ib., # 1782.

⁷⁰ cf. ib., # 1851.

⁷¹ cf. ib., # 1797.

⁷² cf. ib., # 1798.

1. Love of Poverty
2. Application to Prayer and Meditation
3. The promptness of obedience, even in the difficult things and those that are contrary to nature.
4. Charity toward God, to whose glory he must aim for totally.
5. Charity towards one's neighbor, whose spiritual good he is obliged even at the cost of his own life ⁷³.

f.] **This School of God teaches Union:** in his 26th Letter, dated January 26, 1813, near the Feast of the Espousals ⁷⁴, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Naudet:

...But where does one learn this prudence, which is not merely human, but is of heaven? Who could ever give such laws and teachings? This is the school, and this is the teacher, as Sacred Scripture points out: 'The King has brought me into his rooms...how right it is to love you' [cf. Sgs 1:3]. It is necessary to allow ourselves to be introduced by this King who calls out, who invites, and who even waits until we enter the wine cellar of His love expressing those beautiful words: 'Listen, daughter, pay careful attention forget your nation and your ancestral home, then the King will fall in love with your beauty' [cf. Ps 45:10, ff.]. IT is here, he adds, that the soul, to its very great fortune, is inebriated with the wine of His charity. This precious wine rejoices, fortifies, transports the individual outside of him/herself, and being united to God, is oriented most perfectly: 'how right it is to love you ...' Then a light is lit in the intellect, one of admirable wisdom and divine prudence, to judge all that has relationship to God as the effect, or, as the means to be achieved in the future, to glorify Him in the present...

C. **The Espousals: Transforming Love - the Stigmata: the Sign of Transformation**

1. **The Soul is gradually transformed, espoused: the Stigmata is the Eternal Seal:**
the Stigmatine devotions seem to come together in this thought:

⁷³ cf. Founder's Constitutions, Introduction 38, f. - CS I, pp. 363, ff.

⁷⁴ cf. *Ep* , pp. 56, ff.

...the soul, as the Spouse of Christ, is gradually, painfully transformed into Jesus Christ - and the Stigmata [at least, that of St. Francis of Assisi] seems to be presented as the external seal impressed on his body to indicate his union with Christ. Fr. Bertoni states that St. Francis indeed was a living image of the crucified, with the five wounds [*piaghe*] of the Savior, as though he were totally transformed into Christ...⁷⁵..

2. Fr. Bertoni's Notes in preparing his Sermon: in some sheets of paper included in this folder of the Panegyric of St. Francis, Fr. Bertoni had some lines in Latin as a kind of rough draft of his sermon. [This is usually indicative in the Saint's writings of his copying from some other source]. Among these notes we find such ideas as:

a. Christ gave Francis the Stigmata as a Witness to the Saint's imitation of his Lord:

...From all that has been said it might be deduced that evangelical perfection is that conformity of the wayfarer to Jesus Christ. In this mystery, Christ signed Francis with the Sacred Stigmata in witness to his evangelical imitation and perfection ⁷⁶.

b. Francis' Deep Desire to imitate Jesus Christ: at the mere mention of the love of God, or the deeds and sufferings of Jesus Christ, Francis experienced a most ardent desire of close imitation ⁷⁷.

c. His share in the Stigmata was Christ's Seal of approval:

...Therefore, Jesus impressed His own Sacred Stigmata upon this Poor Man of Assisi, St. Francis, who had observed and taught profoundly the perfection of the Gospel, in a seraphic vision, as a seal of His approval. Jesus did this to show to us, still on the way to perfection, a sign [against the dangerous darkness of the last times], by which we would be led back to Jesus Christ, the Exemplar of perfect virtue and our last end ⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ cf. *Mss B* # 1790

⁷⁶ cf. ib., # 1807.

⁷⁷ cf. ib., # 1807.

⁷⁸ cf. ib., # 1826.

3. A Similar Thought, 35 Years Later: the Canonization of St. Veronica Giuliani [December 29, 1839]: the idea of the Sacred Stigmata being a seal of the union of transforming love is brought out many years later in a sermon that Fr. Marani delivered for the ailing Fr. Bertoni. We are told that the work of composition was that of the Stigmatine Founder himself. The reason for this Panegyric was the Canonization of St. Veronica Giuliani, and the date of the delivery was December 29, 1839. The following are some of the thoughts from this composition:

a. She was favored with the Stigmata, the Espousals:

For anyone elevated to this greatness of hers, it would almost be another miracle not to take glory in such gifts, and even to forget about one's own natural poverty. But, this is precisely the prodigy of the humility of Veronica. She was not one to glory in her supernatural gifts, those *gratis datae*, common witness to holiness:

prophecies, miracles, cures;

nor those gifts ordered to one's holiness: visions, revelations, ecstasies, raptures throughout all her life;

nor, in those special gifts that she personally received: the impression of the Cross on her heart, the chalice of Jesus Christ, the crowning with thorns, the wound in her side with the flowing blood, the Stigmata, the formal Espousals with Jesus Christ, communion from the hand of Angels, the Blessed Mother, the visible sufferings of the entire Passion, and experience of purgatory..⁷⁹.

b. A Series of Divine Gifts from God: in the Panegyric, Fr. Bertoni [Marani] then went on to offer new reflections on these "special gifts" received by the new saint, Veronica Giuliani:

1.] Divine Espousals: Union, with Signs:

...This is a certain, most intimate union between the soul and God, by means of a most perfect charity. The Lord has been pleased to bestow this on certain great souls and to manifest by visible signs and with certain formalities that are practiced in human marriages, as in the life of St. Catherine of Siena, and a few other saints of the first rank. To dispose her better for such an honor, God bestowed on her many graces and visions: of Jesus Christ, Who comforted her and practically stipulated her approaching nuptials... teaching her ... showing

⁷⁹ cf. ib, # 1340.

her the wedding ring... giving her a new rule of life, worthy of her Spouse... The Espousals were set for Easter Sunday...⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ cf. ib., # 2136.

2.] Espousals at Holy Communion:

...At the Communion time, in which the Espousals were carried out, she heard the Angels sing: 'Come, Spouse of Christ...'81.

3.] Nuptial Ring from Christ's Wounded Side:

...she was given a wedding dress. Jesus took the ring from His own side ... in the new rule of life she received, it was written that she would now have to live totally crucified...she was to receive the Stigmata and the renewal of these many times...82.

4.] Divine Espousals from Redemptive Suffering:

...her greatest consolations had among them the Divine Espousals, which was the result of pure suffering...83.

5.] Essential Aspect: Conformity of Will

...In all her sufferings in preparation for her Espousals, she protested that she did not want anything else other than His will and good pleasure ... Before receiving the Stigmata promised to her by Christ, He asked her if there was anything she wanted, and she responded: Just the fulfillment of Your will...84.

4. The Fusion of the Espousals and the Stigmata and Abandonment to God: this fusion of these mysteries seems to lead to, or flow from, the basic attitude of "Nuptials" with the Church, a total abandonment to the changing needs of the Church. In the Stigmatine Mission one notices any form of the ministry of the Word of God whatsoever, anywhere in the world, by all the members of the Congregation, each according to his service.

81 cf. ib., # 2137.

82 cf. ib., # 2139.

83 cf. ib., # 2156.

84 cf. ib., ## 2165, 2166.

III. **St. Gaspar Bertoni’s Total Service [obsequium] to the Spouse of Christ:**

A. **A Competent, Total Service of the Church**

1. **The Church Herself is a Model of Holy Abandonment:** this entire “Bertonian Spirituality” and his ideal of intellectual competence are meant to be placed totally, unreservedly at the service of the Church. Fr. Bertoni saw the Church herself as the great model of Holy Abandonment. In some rather sketchy notes for a Sermon on the Sacred Heart, we read:

2. **Carnale Vulnus, Vulnus Spirituale ostendit:**

...The prudent and most wise Spouse of Christ, the Church, which has been made most judicious by His love, most ardently desires to see her Spouse loved and adored. Thus, His Spouse, the Church, studies still the most gentle and universal means, as well as the most simple and efficacious means to bring that about. And since humanity, composed of reason and also the senses, is not moved a great deal by purely spiritual things, the Church makes use of the following visible things to have human beings fall in love with sublime and invisible things: such as the Infant in the Crib, Christ dying on the Cross: but, also just His blood, His name, His wounds, the thorns, the lance, the cross...⁸⁵

B. **Mother Naudet’s Work prepares a Garment for the Nuptials of the Church [cf. Rv 19:8]**

- “... His Bride is ready, and she has been able to dress herself in dazzling white linen, because her linen is made up of the good deeds of the saints...” In his Letters to Mother Naudet, this reference to the Church as Spouse appears every now and then⁸⁶. On the occasion noted here, Fr. Bertoni is congratulating Mother Naudet for her work in compiling her Constitutions, and the Stigmatine Founder states:

... This is indeed one thread ... and in its time, the Lord will use it as part of a beautiful garment with which to dress the Church for the day of her Nuptials. May God be praised for what h has taught you to write, of what He Himself will bring about...

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⁸⁵ cf. ib, # 1768.

⁸⁶ cf., for example, Letter 28, without date, in: *Ep* p. 81.

SUMMARY

[1] The classic text, though, is found in the Stigmatine Founder's Letter to Mother Naudet, dated October 26, 1813 ⁸⁷:

... This is the way it proceeds, according to the order to which St. Gregory alludes, taking a step where one sees the way clearly, and waiting to take the second, until little by little the clarity increases.

The hope which the Lord gives, the attestation of His charity, in a word, the divine consolation - if we are still in the dark on what to do - will sustain us while we wait for the moment of light to set to the task: if we already see our way clear, then this same Divine Consolation animates its execution.

This seems to be the practice of His Spouse, which is the Church. As the Church has been promised the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit, it never gives up seeking light for its activity: either in the defense of the Truth entrusted to it, or of Discipline. And when the Church does see her way clearly, she does not give up working and studying and consulting to proceed further in the light and in its activity.

And in both these procedures, the Church is always uniform in her abandonment to God. This, if I am not mistaken, is the perfect Model of our abandonment to the Lord...

When we are not able to proceed ourselves, to be abandoned into the Omnipotent arms of Divine Providence is indeed a beautiful virtue; but, it is even a more perfect and consummate virtue when we indeed can and ought to proceed by our own efforts - according to the order established by Divine Providence. It is at this time that abandonment is so excellent when we do not cease to be equally and totally abandoned into His hands.

This is what the person was, who said these words: 'I live [and therefore, I work] no longer I, but Christ who lives [and therefore, works] in me' [cf. Ga 2:20] - and if you are the speaker, speak words that come from God...

[2] It seems that there is a very intimate historical connection in the Stigmatine Devotions to the Sacred Stigmata and to the Most Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph.

[3] Fr. Bertoni had a Christological charism. It seems that he saw the figure of Jesus Christ as a Suffering Servant, but One Who eventually would be exalted by His

⁸⁷ cf. Letter 38, *Ep*, p. 99

Father through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus Himself has been sent by His heavenly Father in a very varied mission - and, as Jesus then sent the Apostles in that very moment when He confirmed their faith and joy through the manifestation of His Glorious Stigmata of Easter night [cf. Jn 20: 21, ff.] - in this way, the modern Stigmatines are “sent” by the Bishops “anywhere in the Diocese and the world”, in accord with the changing needs of the Church, “anywhere in the world.” The “availability” of Jesus Christ to His Father for His Mission is the Stigmatine inspiration.

[4] The Stigmatine Founder stands out in his following/imitation/putting on the mind of Christ Jesus. Through the “special grace” of his vocation, Fr. Bertoni was elevated to the level of transforming union. His life was an extended imitation of the sorrowful Stigmata - supported, however, by the fortified hope of Holy Abandonment, in the patient waiting of the healing through the Glorious Wounds.

[5] There is a sublime sense of Abandonment in the Festival of the Holy Spouses: Mary’s relationship to Joseph reflects that of Jesus to His Father, and to His parents. Therefore, Mary and Joseph are privileged teachers and models of Holy Abandonment.

[6] There is great hope implicit in the concept of the nuptial union: Christ is always united to His Church - and is always present to anyone struggling in prayer, suffering, temptation, joy and mission.

[7] The charism of the Stigmatine Founder is a complex reality: composed of Trinitarian, Christological, Mariological and Ecclesial elements. The espousals seems to be a Christological element of a loving, intimate, lasting experience of God - and a dedicated persevering service to the Church, the Spouse of Jesus Christ, abandoned to Him.

[8] St. Gaspar Bertoni also contemplated Jesus as “Spouse” - of the individual, as well as of the Church. As “Spouse of the mind and heart” and as “Spouse of the Church” we find in Jesus Christ inspiration for the ideal of a “contemplative inaction”: to give in the Apostolic Mission what has been contemplated in prayer:

Contemplata aliis tradere.

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The End