

# **St. Gaspar Bertoni: The Nuptial Theme in the Spiritual Life**



Painting of the Holy Espousals of Mary and Joseph in the Church of the Stigmata  
[*Stimate*] in Verona, Italy

## **Theological Reflections**

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**For the Feast of the Holy Espousals, 2008**

## ABBREVIATIONS, QUOTATIONS AND NOTES USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

Abbreviation or Quotation	Meaning
+	The “+” sign in the Jerusalem Bible is an indication meaning that there is much more information that can be obtained in its footnotes at that text.
AA	Document of Vatican II on the Laity: <i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> .
AG	Document of Vatican II on the Missions - the Document is entitled: <u>AD GENTES</u> , meaning "To the Nations"
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
cf.	Confer
CF	Constitutions of the Founder
D-S	Denzinger-Schoenmetzer – Summary of Dogmas
DS	Dictionnaire de Spiritualite – French dictionary of spirituality
f. (ff.)	Follow page(s) or verse(s)
Ep	Epistolario [Letters] of St. Gaspar (or, when referring to the Bible, this is the abbreviation for the Epistle to the Ephesians)
Ibi (or “ib”)	It is an abbreviation of the Latin “ <i>ibidem</i> ”, and is an editorial short-cut, which means: there; in the same place.
Id	"Id." is a writer's tool meaning “idem”, in the same place, or book
LG	Document of Vatican II on the Church: <i>Lumen Gentium</i>
Lib.	‘Lib’ is Latin for <i>Liber</i> , what means: <i>Book</i> .
Magisterium	Teaching authority of the Catholic Church
Mss B	Manoscritti Bertoniani [Writings of St. Gaspar, 5 volumes]
n. (nn,)	Number(s)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
p. (pp.)	Page(s)
Pastores Vobis	Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Priesthood
ss.	Follow pages (or verses) [from the Italian <i>seguenti</i> ]
v. (vv.)	Verse(s) of the Sacred Scripture
Vulg.	Latin Vulgate – translation attributed to St. Jerome

Notes	Meaning
<b>Footnotes</b>	Author’s complementary notes regarding terms and ideas used in this document
<b>Endnotes</b>	Author’s complementary notes offering further clarification regarding terms used in this document

## St. Gaspar Bertoni and The Feast of the Holy Espousals

In the long history of the Church, many devotions have come and gone, and some of these reappear with some popularity with the passing of time. The immediate occasion of the Stigmatine observance of the Feast of the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, on January 23<sup>rd</sup> each year, could easily have stemmed from the fact that St. Gaspar Bertoni [October 9, 1777- June 12, 1853] found the classical painting of the Holy Spouses hanging over the main altar, of a little Church in Verona, Italy, dedicated to the Stigmata of St. Francis. The Marriage of Mary and Joseph, in the Franciscan tradition, was a festival that inspired much devotion, also due to St. Francis' commitment to his 'marriage' with Lady Poverty.

On a deeper level, however, St. Gaspar Bertoni seems to have been moved toward this devotion by what had happened in his own personal life. As the Founder [on November 4, 1816] of the 'Stigmatine' Congregation of Priests, Brothers and Students he had experienced his share of the Crosses of life, and indeed understood well St. Paul's statement to the Galatians: ... **with Christ, I am nailed to the Cross. And I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me...** [cf. Ga 2:19, f.]. In recent years, the Church canonized Fr. Pio, to whom was attributed a manifestation of the Stigmata of Christ in his own body, as his Founder did, St. Francis of Assisi, 7 centuries earlier. The technical term for this is 'stigmatist'.

A remarkable feature of St. Gaspar Bertoni's life of 75 years, 9 months and three days, was that he seemed to take his own sufferings in life and translate them as a service he rendered to God and his neighbor – either through devotion, or through Apostolic service. He seemed convinced that by the Lord's wounds, all of ours will be healed [cf. Is 53:5; 1 P 2:21, ff.]. These are some of the 'crosses' of his life:

- the deaths of loved ones in his own home in his early teen years – including a three year old sister, Matilda;
- the separation of his parents;
- the experience of real poverty for the saint's mother and himself, due to the financial errors of his estranged father;
- life long illness, due to a general constitutional weakening of his general health, the result of early bouts with 'miliary' fever [a form of tuberculosis?];
- struggles in his founding of the Stigmatine community.

Along with his establishing a religious community of men for the service of the Church through her Bishops, in any ministry of the Word of God whatsoever - St.

Gaspar also developed Devotions to the Sacred Stigmata of the Lord Jesus Christ, both Sorrowful and Glorious, and the Espousals of Mary and Joseph. In our own time, this mystery of the Nuptials of Mary – having been studied by St. Augustine, then followed by St. Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup> - is beautifully presented by the late Pope John Paul II, in his reflection on St. Joseph, an Apostolic Constitution [August 15, 1989] ***The Guardian of the Redeemer.***

However, along with these happenings in his life, the long Church tradition of the 'nuptial metaphor' – which greatly flourished in theological and monastic circles – provided a deep impact on the spirituality of St. Gaspar Bertoni. The Catholic Church understood this 'nuptial metaphor' in a wide variety of ways:

- mystical: a human being united in spirit with God [cf. 1 Co 6:17];
- ecclesial: the Church as the Spouse of Christ, born from His open side [cf. Gn 2:21, f; Vatican II: LG 3; SC 5];
- Eucharistic: Cana of Galilee [Jn 2:1-11] and the Last Supper biblically united: we are His People and He is our God;
- Martyrdom and Virginity, espousals with Christ;
- Religious Consecration: as noted in Canon Law 607 § 1]: ... *consecration of the whole person ... a wonderful marriage ... a sacrifice offered to God...*
- eschatology, the after-life: the new Jerusalem, dressed as a bride for her husband [cf. Rv 21].

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].***

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<sup>1</sup> III, q. 29.

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 5:6,12].

*... 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 of 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 19:6, ff.].

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

The Stigmatine Founder often referred to the Nuptial Metaphor in his voluminous writings as a means of describing the total self-giving of those called by the Lord. Taking an idea from St. Thomas Aquinas, Fr. Bertoni taught<sup>2</sup>:

... true devotion essentially consists in a will of **giving oneself to God**, and of **being dedicated to what pertains the more to His service**. Now, while it is true that God calls all to serve Him, and in fact, all can indeed do this - and it is fitting that all should aspire to be sanctified in their particular state - it would be wrong to think that God wishes to be served by all in one and the same manner. There has been established by Divine Providence a difference in the states of life to which all have been called....

Fr. Joseph Stofella has offered this witness:

... the Mystery of this virginal Espousals was embraced by Fr. Bertoni, not partially, nor as a simple addition to some other mystery. Rather, he chose it precisely for itself, and as it is, in all its doctrinal, devotional and practical integrity. There is also the further reason that in this he could contemplate the example - that is beyond all comparison - the example that is the most perfect of what constitutes the very core of his own spirituality: the spirit of holy abandonment... The Holy Espousals is the most fitting devotion to draw believers to a total union with Him. This mystery is the most attractive and eloquent example of a **total service of God**<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>St. Thomas, *Summa*, II-II, q/ 82, a. 1,c.

<sup>3</sup>cf. G. Stofella, *ib.*, pp. 361, ff.

In General: there are these three quotes from his early preaching: even in this 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...<sup>4</sup>.

**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]<sup>5</sup>.

**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 like a King, as Chrysostom would say<sup>6</sup>, **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

<sup>4</sup> cf. *Manoscritti Bertoni*, # 583.

<sup>5</sup> cf. *ib.*, # 584.

<sup>6</sup> In Ps 5, 2, t. 5, 19 4 D, ff.

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<sup>a</sup>. 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...<sup>7</sup>

4. The classic text, though, is found in the Stigmatine Founder's Letter to Mother Naudet, dated October 26, 1813<sup>8</sup> for the practice of Holy Abandonment to the Will of God:

...This is the way it all 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<sup>b</sup>, 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.

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<sup>7</sup> *Mss B*, # 588.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Letter 38, *Ep*, p. 99

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...

**5. The Wounded Heart of Jesus seeks His Spouse, the Church:** Fr. Bertoni preached for the Feast of the Sacred Heart. Among his thoughts, we find the following:

...The humanity of Jesus Christ is not adored separately and for itself; but always as united to the divine Person, and because of this; the Incarnate Word receives with his flesh, a single and identical adoration...

The object of the Feast of the Sacred Heart consists in that wonderful and truly divine union of realities, formed both of that human and **wounded heart of Jesus**, as well as of His most holy soul, through which His heart lives, and also by the Person of the Divine word... His heart is the symbol and the seat of those sufferings and the anguish endured by that heart...

**The prudent and most wise Spouse of Christ, the Church, made ingenious by her love, most ardently yearns to see her Spouse adored and loved and still seeks more universal and appealing means**, as well as simpler and more efficacious incentives to bring this about... such as the Infant in the Crib, the dying Christ on His Cross; but also His Blood, His name, His Wounds ... the Cross...It has never been the custom of the Church to solemnize with a proper Mass and Office the divine attributes, the interior virtues and abstract perfections of Christ - but, only under some sensible object that would clearly represent these, or some fact evident to the senses, or some mystery that would impress itself the more vividly. For example, **the Church does not venerate the patience<sup>c</sup> of Christ without a symbol, or mystery: as Wounds, the Passion, the Cross...**

Jesus' love is much better symbolized by His Divine Heart ... The open side, even after His death, customarily shows us that Heart, the same Heart wounded by the lance, that wound preserved in His glorious body make of it such an appealing, evident, divine symbol, that it is impossible to venerate **the wounded heart without remembering and venerating His immense love... The Abyss of misery calls out to the Abyss of Mercy...**<sup>9</sup> .

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<sup>9</sup> cf. Gaspare Bertoni, *Sacro Cuore*.. June 5, 1812, in: *Mss B* Vol. II, ## 1755-1778. For the Italian, cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, CSS, *Vita e pensiero del Beato Gaspare Bertoni agli albori del'800 veronese [1800-1816]*. Roma: Postulazione Generale degli Stigmatini 1977, pp. 387, ff.



This is a very rich thought that bears much prayerful attention:

a. To be “One with the Lord” is *Agape*<sup>d</sup>, Trinity, Church, Community: the *agape*<sup>e</sup> 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*<sup>e</sup> 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*<sup>e</sup> 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*<sup>e</sup> ;
- this is the Church;
- this is Community.

b. 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”<sup>f</sup>. 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.

c. 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*<sup>e</sup>, and by His passion and death, He bestows on the *agape*<sup>e</sup> His ultimate triumph.

d. 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 espousals, 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<sup>b</sup> 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<sup>h</sup> 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 the former "Second Nocturne" of Matins<sup>i</sup> 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"<sup>j</sup> 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 [indicating **union** with the Head], then appears to us as His "Spouse" [the **loving choice** of the Husband]. 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<sup>10</sup>]: 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, through the Word which is entrusted to her, in which it is Christ who speaks<sup>11</sup>, 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<sup>12</sup>.

c.] The Following of Christ: A great modern theologian [Fr. von Balthasar] has taught that within the Trinity, the divine Persons are constituted by their self-giving – a ‘Person’ within the Trinity is One Who gives of Himself to the

<sup>10</sup> *Santa Chiesa - Saggi ecclesiologici*. Brescia: Morcelliana 1967, pp. 65-98

<sup>11</sup> cf. SC 7; Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, September 3, 1965

<sup>12</sup> cf. S. Tromp, SJ, *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia*. pp. 35, ff., “*Ecclesia ut Sponsa*”.

Others. Jesus' Stigmata is the culmination of His Self-giving on earth - and enables Him to be the Immolated Lamb of the special marriage noted near the end of Sacred Scripture: there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth. Forever, ***He will be our God and we will be His People*** – a nuptial formula. He will wipe away all tears from our eyes - there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more separation, no more sadness! [cf. Rv 21:1, ff.] – the Church will be all dressed up as a Bride with the good deeds of the Saints for her Espousals with the Immolated Lamb! Fr. Bertoni uses phrases from the Song of Songs to describe [with St. Gregory] this mysterious attraction for the Eternal Espousals:

**Med. 7: 5004: Prelude 3.** *Draw me after You [Ct 1:3] You draw, O Lord, Your Spouse by Your right hand, and we will run after You to the odor of Your ointments: ibi, and the teachings of the Church in words and deeds and disciplines: in “the odor of Your ointments” this is the fruit of Your grace. To the odor of Your ointments [Ct 1:3]. And if we cannot follow you with a strong love of a Spouse already adult in the school of holy love draw me ibi. We will follow you with the first-fruits of the most tender, nascent and youthful fervor.*

## CONCLUSION

[1] In Sacred Scripture, there is a goodly number of texts which some interpreters see as 'hinting at' sacramental character:

“,,, do not touch anyone with a **cross** on his forehead...” [cf. Ezk 9:6]

“...circumcision was a **sign and guarantee** of his faith ...” [cf. Rm 4:11].

“...Remember it is God himself who assures us all, and you, of our standing in Christ, and has anointed us, marking us with his **seal** and giving us **the pledge, the Spirit**, that we carry in our hearts...” [cf. 2 Co 1:21-22].

“...you, too, have been stamped with **the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, the pledge** of our inheritance which brings freedom for those whom God has taken for his own to make his glory praised.... [cf. Ep 1:13-14].

“...otherwise you will only be grieving **the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with his seal** for you to be set free when the day comes...” [cf. Ep 4:30].

“...You have in you a **spiritual gift** which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of elders laid their hands on you...” [cf. I Tm 4:14 +].

“... That is why I am reminding you to **fan into flame the gift that God gave you** when I laid my hands on you...” [cf. 2 Tm 1:6 ]

“... Then I saw another angel rising where the sun rises, carrying **the seal of the living God...**” [cf. Rv 7:2, ff.]

“...they were forbidden to harm any fields or crops or trees and told only to attack any men who were without **God’s seal** on their foreheads..” [cf. Rv 9:4]

“...Next I saw in my vision Mount Zion and standing on it a Lamb who had with him 144,000 people, all with his name and **his Father’s name written on their foreheads...**” [cf. Rv 14:1].

**[2] The Vatican II era** spiritually nourished the late Pope John Paul II who restored to sacramental theology reflections on the Sacramental Characters infused with Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. The nature of this Character is often stated to be a **relationship**:

**Magisterium**<sup>13</sup>: **teaching on three sacraments**:

**# 1308**: Among these sacraments, there are three - baptism, confirmation and Order, which imprint on the soul an indelible character, that is a certain spiritual sign distinguishing [the recipient] from others. Hence, these are not repeated for the same person. The other four, however, do not imprint a character and may be repeated” [cf. Florence, Decree for the Armenians, 1439].

**# 1319** [cf. CF p.372]: “If anyone says that in three sacraments, namely, baptism, confirmation and Order, a character is not imprinted on the soul, that is, a kind of indelible spiritual sign by reason of which these sacraments cannot be repeated, *anathema sit*<sup>k</sup>. [cf. Trent, Canons on the Sacraments].

**# 1710** [cf. CF p. 497]: “But since in the sacrament of order, as also in baptism and confirmation, a character is imprinted [cf. # 1717, which can neither be erased nor taken away, the Holy Council justly condemns the opinion of those who say that priests of the NT have only a temporary power, and that those who have once been rightly ordained can again become laymen if they do not exercise the ministry of the word of God [cf. # 1714]. And if anyone should assert that all Christians are without distinction priests of the NT, or that all are equally endowed with the same spiritual power, he seems to be doing nothing else than upset the Church’s hierarchy which is ‘like an army with banners’ [Sgs 6:3’ - cf. # 1719] as if contrary to the teaching of St. Paul, all were apostles, all prophets, all evangelists, all pastors, all doctors [cf. 1 Co 12:39; Ep 4:11].” [ Trent, 23rd Session - 1563].

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<sup>13</sup> cf. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. Edited by J. Neuner, SJ & J. Dupuis, S.J., Revised Edition. NY: Alba 1981.

## Vatican II

### LG 11

“It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation. Incorporated into the Church through baptism, the faithful are consecrated by the baptismal character to the **exercise of the cult of the Christian religion**. Reborn as children of God, they must confess before others the faith they have received from God through the Church. Bound more intimately to the Church by the sacrament of Confirmation, they are endowed by the Holy Spirit with special strength. Hence they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ...”

### AA 3:

“The laity have the right and duty with respect to the apostolate from their union with Christ their Head. Incorporated into Christ’s Mystical Body through baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself. They are consecrated into **a royal priesthood and a holy people** [cf. 1 P 2:4-10] in order that they **may offer spiritual sacrifices through everything they do**, and may witness to Christ throughout the world. For their part, the sacraments, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate.

### **[3] Pope John Paul II, Pastores Dabo Vobis :**

“...In this way, **the fundamentally ‘relational’ dimension of priestly identity** can be understood. Through the **priesthood** which arises from the depths of the ineffable mystery of God, that is, from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit’s gift of unity, the priest sacramentally enters into communion with the bishop and the other priests, in order to serve the People of God who are the Church and to draw all mankind to Christ in accordance with the Lord’s prayer: ‘Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one ... even as you Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’ [Jn 17:11, 21]. Consequently the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be **defined except through this multiple and rich interconnection of relationships** which arise from the **Blessed Trinity** and are prolonged in the communion of the Church, as **a sign and instrument of Christ, of communion with God and of the unity of all humanity...**” [PDV 12 c]

**# 14:** “...Jesus thus established a **close relationship between the ministry entrusted to the apostles, and His own Mission**: ‘He who receives you, receives me, and he who receives me, receives him who sent me’ [cf. Mt 10:40]. He who hears you, hears me - and he who rejects you, rejects me, and he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me’ [Lk 10:16]. Indeed in the light of the Paschal event, of the death and resurrection, the Fourth Gospel affirms this with great force and clarity: ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’ [Jn 20:21; cf. 13:20; 17:18]. Just as Jesus has a **Mission** which comes to Him directly from God and makes present the very authority of God [cf. Mt 7:29; 21:23; Mk 1:27; 11:28; Lk 20:2; 24:19]. So, too, the apostles have a **mission** which comes to them from Jesus...”

**# 16:** “The priest’s **fundamental relationship is to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd**. Indeed, the priest **participates** in a specific and authoritative way in the **consecration/anointing** and in the mission of Christ [cf. Lk4:18-19]. But, intimately linked to this **relationship** is the priest’s **relationship** with the Church. It is not a question of ‘**relations**’ which are merely juxtaposed, but rather of ones which are **interiorly united in a kind of mutual immanence**. The priest’s **relation** to the Church is inscribed in the very **relation** that the priest has to Christ such that the **sacramental representation** to Christ serves as the basis and inspiration for the **relation** of the priest to the Church...”

“...The **relation** of the priest to Jesus Christ and in Him, to His Church, is found in the **very being of the priest** by virtue of his **sacramental anointing** and in his activity, i.e., in his mission, or ministry. In particular: ‘the priest minister is the servant of Christ present in the Church as mystery, communion and mission. In virtue of his **participation**, in the **anointing and mission** of Christ, the priest can continue Christ’s prayer, word, sacrifice and salvific action in the Church.

- In this way, the priest is a servant of the Church as mystery, because he actualizes the Church’s sacramental signs of the presence of the Risen Christ.

- He is a servant of the priest as communion, because in union with the bishop, he is closely related to the presbyterate - he builds up the unity of the Church community in the harmony of diverse vocations, charisms and services.

- Finally the priest is a servant of the Church as Mission, because he makes community a herald and witness to the gospel...”

#### [4] The Catechism of the Catholic Church

**# 1272:** “**Incorporated** into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is **configured** to Christ. Baptism **seals** the Christian with the indelible spiritual **mark** [*character*] of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if

sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation [DS 1609-1619]. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.

**# 1273:** “**Incorporated** into the Church by Baptism, the faithful have received the **sacramental character** that **consecrates** them for Christian religious worship [LG 11] The baptismal **seal** enables and commits Christians to serve God by a vital participation in the holy liturgy of the Church and to exercise their baptismal priesthood by the witness of holy lives and practical charity [LG 10].

**# 1274:** “**The Holy Spirit has marked us with the seal of the Lord** [***Dominicus character***] ‘for the day of redemption’. Baptism indeed is **the seal of eternal life**. The faithful Christian who has ‘kept the seal’ will be able to depart this life **marked with the sign of faith** with his baptismal faith in expectation of the blessed vision of God - the consummation of faith - and in the hope of resurrection.

**# 1280:** “Baptism imprints on the soul **an indelible spiritual sign**, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Because of the character, Baptism cannot be repeated [cf. DS 1609; 1624].

**# 2769:** “In Baptism and Confirmation, the handing on [***traditio***] of the Lord’s Prayer signifies a new birth into the divine life. Since Christian prayer is our speaking to God with the very word of God, those who are ‘born anew... through the living and abiding word of God’ [I P 1:23], learn to invoke their Father by the one Word he always hears. They can henceforth do so, for the **seal** of the Holy Spirit’s anointing is indelibly placed on their hearts, ears, lips, indeed **their whole filial being**. This is why most of the patristic commentaries on the Our Father are addressed to catechumens and neophytes. When the Church prays the Lord’s Prayer, it is always the people made up of the ‘new-born’ who pray and obtain mercy [cf. I P 2: 1-10].

**[5]** For Fr. Bertoni, St. Francis was a living image of the Crucified, with the Five Wounds of the Savior, almost totally transformed into Christ. The following of Christ, **sequela Christi** manifests in every vocation various aspects of this progress that is so characteristic to the Stigmatine Founder: not only to be near, but along-side; not only close, but in union - not only united, but transformed: do not look for Christ’s gifts, but for Christ Himself: this is the plan. In this sense, Fr. Bertoni offers an extraordinary **nuptial, Espousals Principle** for the following of Christ:



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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Endnotes

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<sup>a</sup> When a prince marries a poor girl, she often experiences temporary ‘confusion.’

<sup>b</sup> St. Gaspar Bertoni does not want to come across as too dogmatic, or too sure of himself - it is as though he were presenting his own personal opinion in great humility.

<sup>c</sup> The patience of Christ is a virtue we also practice – it is accepting the Cross of difficulties controlling anger or becoming nervous. We cannot have a feast for the faith of Christ nor for His charity – we celebrate the patience of Christ by celebrating the Holy Crss, the Sacred Heart, the Five Wounds.

<sup>d</sup> Agape’ is a Greek word and means ‘Charity’ – there is EROS [physical love or sensual love] – there is PHILOS [Philadelphia] brotherly love. Agape’ means unselfish, totally self-giving love – this is what Jesus brought to this world.

<sup>e</sup> Anawim means ‘the poor of the Lord’ – it is the Hebrew plural of the word Anaw, being bent over with excessive weight. It has come to mean the Poor Whom the Lord loves. If Jesus spoke Hebrew when He said: ‘Blessed are the Poor’ – he would have used Anawim.

<sup>f</sup> Like with St. Gaspar, there were no more siblings in that line of the Bertoni family. The idea is: that when ‘Israel’ rejected God, the ‘Family of God’ had no one else being born – this was changed by Christ’s Espousals to God’s People through His Bride, the Church. The Apocalypse almost ends with an invitation to the eternal espousals of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church.

<sup>g</sup> This is a principle from St. Thomas Aquinas - all that exists outside of God, He created – therefore, all ‘being’ pertains to Him – all activity outside of God, is in some way, initiated by God – a great mystery here: but all activity naturally pertains in some way to God – our task is to develop the relationship that is ours from being and acting with God’s help.

<sup>h</sup> **Origen**, or Origen Adamantius, ca. 185 – ca. 254) was an early Christian scholar, theologian, and one of the most distinguished of the early fathers of the Christian Church. According to tradition, he is held to have been an Egyptian who taught in Alexandria, reviving the Catechetical School of Alexandria where Clement had taught. The patriarch of Alexandria at first supported Origen but later expelled him for being ordained without the patriarch's permission. He relocated to Caesarea Maritima and died there after being tortured during a persecution.

His writings are important as one of the first intellectual attempts to describe Christianity. He espoused a Platonic view of eternal souls achieving perfection while escaping the temporary, imperfect material world. He imagined even demons being reunited with God. His views of a hierarchical structure in the Trinity, the temporality of matter, "the fabulous preexistence of souls," and "the monstrous restoration which follows from it" were declared anathema in the 6th century.

*Source: Wikipedia*

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<sup>i</sup> Before Vatican II, the Liturgy of Readings was made up of Three Nocturnes: each made up of three Psalms and a reading or two. Now, the Liturgy of readings [which the monks used to call: MATINS] is now reduced to three Psalms and two readings.

<sup>j</sup> This means all of God's People are His Spouse – with Origen more and more the nuptial theme became applied to the individual level, like each human soul [Mystical Nuptials].

<sup>k</sup> This is Latin used by the Council of Trent – this is a direct quote from the printed translation. It means: *let him be anathema, i.e., no longer a member of the Church.*

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