

St. GASPAR BERTONI:



2nd CENTENARY of his STIGMATINE CONGREGATION

**A TRILOGY in Honor of his
'Model'**

by

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A Church-centered Priest: Blessed Gaspar Bertoni

Cornelio FABRO

[I] FAITHFUL SERVICE OF WITNESS FOR THE CHURCH

[titolo: Un sacerdote ecclesiale: Beato Gaspare Bertoni
fonte: *MOMENTI DELLO SPIRITO*, Vol 1°,
EDIZIONI SALA FRANCESCANI DI CULTURA "P. Antonio Giorgi",
Collana "REPARA DOMUM MEAM",
Assisi, San Damiano 1982, p. 327 ss.]

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1. His Times: Revolution and Restoration

The times of Gaspar Bertoni's life and activity were not like our times: under many aspects his epoch was at the opposite pole of our own. It was an era of absolutism rather than democracy – an agricultural society as opposed to an industrial one – a society with separate classes of citizens rigidly maintained, as contrasted with a society placed in crisis by the French Revolution, which comes across history as a time of 'perpetual motion' – all of this cast civilization without oars into the turbulent sea of total 'liberty'.

It was in the city of Verona, at that time, during the first half of the 19th century, in which Fr. Bertoni's priestly activity was exercised. He was born in 1777, ordained a priest in 1800 and died in 1853. For all practical purposes this City was the geographical point of friction between the old and the new, among the troops of Napoleon: first there was a republican administration in orientation, and then imperial. On the one side were the French armies - and the armies defending the Austrian Empire on the other. These factors served for some years as the line of division even within the city itself. The French occupied the one side, and the Austrians were in charge of the other side across the Adige.

Fr. Bertoni was born on the far side within the parish confines of St. Paul's located in the Campo Mario sector, while he lived the greater part of his life on the near side, in the Convent of the Stimmate. This was situated a few steps from the Palace of the Patriot, Carlo Montanari. He was put to death by the Austrian forces on the gallows in Mantua.

Verona is an ancient city, and truly noble for its art and culture. It is likewise known for the both meek and festive character of its populace, but also as the occasion might warrant, being most decisive and vigorous in hastening to the defense of its freedoms: the ordeal of the 'Veronese Easter' has remained famous in her history – echoes from this are noted in the "Sicilian Vespers" and the Five Days in

Milan. It was in Verona that Fascism came to an end with the execution of some of its most noted representatives at the foot of the bastions of Sarmicheli. Much different from the more splendid and emblazoned Venice, orientated ingloriously towards its sunset in the dampness of its lagoon, Verona at the onset of the 19th century, Verona was a furnace of new ideas and enterprises, both politically and also on the religious front.

It is likewise very true that also in Verona secret societies flourished such as Freemasonry and the *Carbonari* – groups totally committed by any means whatsoever to Italian independence. There were also mixed in with this political struggle against the foreign occupancy of the throne, uprisings against the altar as well, which rejected all public expressions of religion, its institutions and activities. Simultaneously, troubling maneuvers developed in Austria, for the defense of its power. She proved to be jealous of her role, and diffident to any and all attempts at the vindication of their own freedom that rose up from the oppressed people.

Fr. Bertoni, while remaining deferential toward constituted authority throughout his entire life, often deplored the local situation openly - in a special manner in his correspondence with the Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family - Leopoldina Naudet. In this above noted political climate permeated with suspicion and repression, there was evidence a clear indication of Sartre's idea of an 'evil conscience'. Truly these were difficult times – but is there as well any such reality as 'simpler times' for the unfolding of the human adventure? – For Fr. Bertoni, as for all the servants of God of all time, he looked on his own times as the 'opportune moment' [his *kairos*] for service of the Church and the faithful, as his call to give witness to holiness and to the commitment in action.

2. Fr. Bertoni and the 'Religious Renaissance' [*Risorgimento*] in Verona of the 19th Century

As a result, while all around him the passions of a political *Risorgimento* raged, Fr. Bertoni worked in humility and a hidden manner for the religious resurgence of the faithful, much like Saints Cottolengo, Cafasso, Don Bosco... in Turin – and Saints Gaspar del Bufalo and Vincent Pallotti in Rome and also as was realized in so many other of the hundred or so cities of Italy.

Among this generalized reference to other centers of activity, St. Gaspar Bertoni's commitment may not be considered as limited for one activity and single form of apostolic commitment, from which to penetrate those demands of his time, and in order to contribute to its spiritual direction: he showed himself ready and

'available' – as is said today – for the apostolate in response to even the hints and suggestions of his superiors¹.

Terms such as dedication and detachment are used to describe the horizons of his apostolic activity: he showed himself disposed to commit himself with all his strength, as he was committed to leave behind all else, whenever obedience or the secret voice of God suggested to him to take on some other form of the apostolate [as occurred, as it seems] he did in assuming the spiritual direction of the gifted soul already noted above, Leopoldina Naudet.

There was hardly any undertaking on behalf of religion and spiritual assistance in Verona in that early 19th century Verona, that would not find Fr. Bertoni committed to it: the education of young girls, as initiated by Blessed Madeline di Canossa, with whom Leopoldina Naudet collaborated in the beginning of the undertaking – the assistance offered to the sick in the hospitals as developed by Fr. Peter Leonardi and Blessed Fr. Carlo Steeb – prison ministry – the scholastic assistance offered to the poor young children of the time under the leadership of Fr. Nicholas Mazza – the new community being planned by Teodora Campostrini, the Foundress of the 'Least Sisters [known as *Minime*] of Charity' – Fr. Bertoni worked also with Fr. Anthony Provolo and his Institute for the speech and hearing impaired – the help he offered to Fr. Camillo Cesare Bresciani and the return to Verona by the Ministers to the Infirm [*Camillians*], which gave rise to the restoration of that religious community.

Fr. Bertoni ardently desired and worked for the return of the Jesuits to Verona, whom he had earlier as teachers of wisdom and the lessons of life, in his attendance to the public schools they conducted at St. Sebastian's. Fr. Bertoni had as one of his teachers, Fr. Luigi Fortis, who would become the first Father General of the reconstituted Company of Jesus, who held the Chair of Philosophy following the much developed academic system, authored by the Abbot Condillac, [who is mentioned in the letters of Fr. Bertoni to the Venerable Naudet].

Very soon, his counsels were so much appreciated as well by Fr. Anthony Rosmini in the development of his ideas for his "Institute of Charity" and in the revision of its Constitutions. This is expressly remembered in the new edition of the *Life* of the great philosopher of Rovereto [Trent]².

Fr. Bertoni came to be a much sought after and esteemed Counselor also of the Bishops of Verona. By the mid century of his priestly activity, these Bishops entrusted to him a number of important duties. Among these were the formation of

¹ Translator's Note: Fr. Fabro here describes a very broad understanding of St. Gaspar Bertoni's Apostolic Mission – as did Fr. Lenotti. He saw the Stigmatines as a 'copy' of the Company of Jesus. It was likewise referred to as that "outstanding Model" for the Stigmatines.

² Edited under the care of Pagani-Bozzetti-Rossi [Rovereto 1959, t. II, pp. 631, ff.].

the clergy, the Diocesan Scrutineer of Vocations to the service of the Church. He also came to serve the Diocese as the 'Definitor' Theologian, the examiner of books. In all this, he exercised extreme discretion and far-sightedness knowing how to discern clearly in that period of such turbulence and confusion, the material from the spiritual, the contingent from the eternal, what was secondary from the substantial. With that penetration that is proper to those spirits who mature in the recollection provided by prayer, and in his total detachment in his absolute purity of intentions, he offered his views as requested. He grasped well how to ponder the passing 'phenomena' in order to go back to their causes and to suggest an opportune remedy. Today, after the Second Vatican Council, one justly speaks of the duty of every Christian to come to know how to grasp 'the signs of the times'. [Fr. Bertoni would put it this way: *God speaks to us in events...*]. However, only the genuine saints are able to decipher the message, under the illumination of the spirit of God, of every disturbing enigma.

3. The Founder of the 'Apostolic Missionaries' [the Stigmatines]

From his years as a seminarian and right after his ordination as a priest, Fr. Bertoni found himself entrusted by his Pastor of St. Paul's parish, with the Apostolate of the Youth – a task which instituted him as the 'Missionary of the Children'. This proved to be the first spark, truly the prophetic sign, from which very soon he developed the idea of the Marian Oratories, as undertaken a half a century earlier by Don Bosco. Fr. Bertoni developed them on the level of the ordinary people and workers' families with both a spiritual and recreational scope at one and the same time. Through these, he achieved in the city and throughout the diocese, an authentic religious transformation, of which there remain to this day rather strong indications. He organized them in accord with the style of the times with a kind of a military structure, as a "Marian Cohort", divided into squadrons, platoons, companies, regiments, battalions and divisions. This structure entrusted to the young men their own government, as would be done today. In a way, these organizations anticipated today's "City of Youth", but with an unthinkable boldness for that day and age.

St. Gaspar and his collaborators took care of the Christian formation of the youth through preaching and sacramental preparation but also them in their work and studies. In all this activity, the Fathers offered counsel in their difficulties and trials of life, with a kind of intuition that was both gentle but strong, that only the exercise of a spiritual paternity would be able to bring to the fore in their changing circumstances. The corner-stone of this entire edifice was the imparting of the Christian Doctrine, or Catechism lessons: the over-all goal was the re-building of a Christian consciousness from the ashes of the real evil which became rampant after

the French Revolution. This event was everywhere transformative and especially so in Italy with the French troops bivouacked all over the peninsula.

While he was still a young priest, on the occasion of a Mission preached in St. Firmus Major Parish [from May 4 to the 16th of May 1816] by the celebrated preacher, Msgr. Pacifico Pacetti of 'Fermo', was assisted by Fr. Bertoni and other collaborators. That parish mission met with extraordinary success due to a genuine Christian review of the listeners' lives and conversions. However, it was suddenly suspended by the local civil authorities on the second day of the triduum of thanksgiving, as Canon Pacetti himself wrote. This fact was also recorded by Fr. Giulio Sommacampagna, a renowned local historian.

It was there at Sr. Firmus' that Fr. Gaspar received a first solid inspiration for his Congregation. He wanted them to be known as the 'Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops.' This title at first sight proved to be the least original and definite in the wonderful concert of religious families. However, it was indeed the most apropos to the urgency and suffering in which ecclesial life is so often made topsy-turvy. In his composing his Constitutions, he was directly inspired by 'that outstanding model' which is the Company of Jesus'. As for its ministries he did not exclude any: "To go anywhere in the Diocese or the world"³ – he further developed the title he envisioned for his community. As a result his sons hastened everywhere that the voice of the Church summoned them: in various forms of preaching, teaching school, missions in Italy and beyond, and now in Asia, in America, in Africa ...

While it is most true that the over-all dimensions of this enterprise remained reduced, without large numbers of adherents with high sounding names, who presented themselves – the community truly tried to be present everywhere [*quocumque*]. They came to serve in humble parishes among the people, as well as in high Church positions.

Toward the end of the 19th century, and the first 20 years of the new, Fr. Richard Tabarelli was a master of sacred theology at the Apollinaris University. It was from this experience that the future Popes, Pius XII and John XXIII, spoke personally about him as their former Professor, to the undersigned author of this reflection. They considered Fr. Tabarelli to have been of a solid timber as a theologian and yet one very open to their modern times. [Fr. Tabarelli was a good philosopher and he knew the German language. Thus he was able to follow directly and perhaps was the only one then in Rome, the disturbing but stimulating out-put of German theology from the end of the 19th century].

³ Translator's Note: once again as above, Fr. Fabro seems to espouse the broader idea for the 'Apostolic Mission' of St. Gaspar Bertoni.

There was also a Fr. Giulio Zambiasi, a true master of the physics of sound. At the University of Rome, he studied profoundly the phenomena of sound through the internationally known authority, Jules Antoine Lissajous. There was also a Fr. Louis Morando, who died as the Archbishop of Brindisi, who had earlier been dedicated to the priestly formation of the young men of the Roman Seminary.

While Fr. Bertoni was still alive, Fr. Luigi Bragato was called to the Imperial Courts of Vienna and Prague as Confessors and Almoner of the Empress. Fr. Tabarelli, noted above, worked on the Papal Encyclical, *Tametsi Futura*, which presents Christ as ‘the Way, Truth and Life, “Teacher of souls”’.

[In this regard, as a young cleric, the Venerable James Alberione, drew from this document, as he himself noted – the inspiration for his own Institute which has since permeated the world with his apostolates. To this very day, this Institute is on the front line in the responsibility of the announcement of salvation in fidelity to the Gospel of Christ].

This is what Leo XIII addressed to the entire world and to all of humanity as his hope for a peace bringing about a climate of justice. Fr. Tabarelli, was called by St. Pius X, to very challenging missions, especially in northern Europe, and for the redaction of the Catechism which for a half a century offered to the world a new image of Christian commitment to consciences which Modernism was shattering.

Msgr. Tarcisio Martina, who won the gold medal in the First World War, was also drawn to the Congregation. Then, as a foreign Missionary and the Vicar Apostolic of Yishien in China, he spent more than six years in harsh imprisonment in the Communist jails. He came to be esteemed and loved even by his guards for his truly likable humanity and for the profound knowledge of his spirit and of the Chinese culture.

To these outstanding personalities, there must be added Archbishop Charles DeFerrari, at first, Bishop of Carpi, and then as the Archbishop of Trent, who taught from the Chair of St. Vigilio, in the turmoil of the last years of the imperial regime. These led to the savage outbreak of the horrors of the Second World War and to the difficulties and turbulence in the immediate post-war period.

Today the Congregation has several bishops among its members dispersed throughout Brazil in a service of charity, which demands even more than those primitive Christian communities may have. The men are committed to those missions the most remote from civilization, due to their need and desolation.

4. The Dynamism of his Spiritual Life

There remains only – and this is an assignment that is both fascinating and arduous - to synthesize the spiritual physiognomy of Fr. Bertoni by which his sons above all, have been guided and to which they still refer. This is a spirituality that for all appearances is simple, as one manifesting a spirit which has made the radical choice of its inherent freedom, placing it integrally at the service of the Cause of God. His writings that have come down to us are almost all of a spiritual character and comprise a few thousand pages: there are texts and outlines for sermons, the spiritual exercises, missions and retreats, various letters and an enormous mass of material [more than 2000 pages] in defense of the Papacy.

As a young priest, he kept a *Private Memorial* [his own personal spiritual diary] of which but a fragment [it seems] has come down to us. This text opens in July 1808 [Fr. Bertoni had been ordained in 1800] - and then this was discontinued in 1813 [and no one knows why]. This document brings to the fore a text that is fragmentary and discontinuous - he notes rapidly – sometimes leaving in suspension the sentences and even in the midst of words – his inspirations moments of fervor, gifts and sufferings of his spirit. There are recorded his experiences above all in the celebration of Holy Mass, in the praying of his Breviary [Liturgy of Hours [and his own personal prayer. All of it is in his hand-writing, and it unfolds at times, through mere hints expressions of interior concerns, which often manifest a direct mystical experience. We will offer here some indications of this:

For the Feast of the Sacred Heart of 1803 [July 3rd] he wrote: “During Mass, in the Consecration and Communion, full of gratitude, many tears of compunction, and affection: in a particular manner at Communion, I had the experience of my spirit being detached from every creature for the deferential service of its Creator.”

A few days later [on July 5th] there follows an observation that dismays us for its tragic pointedness: “During the Repetition of the Meditation in the Garden, I observed the Disciples were sleeping while Jesus agonized and sweat blood for them: even John, who earlier had rested on his breast - and even though He had warned them: ‘Watch and Pray.’ ”

This same thought occurred again more in a pastoral setting in his Spiritual Exercises of 1810, in expressions that almost echo those found in Pascal’s *Mystère de Jesus*: “... meanwhile, the Apostles fell asleep. To sleep, even though Jesus is suffering in his members: this is our conduct, o Priests!”

Particularly penetrating are also his ascetical observations: “Seek God alone, see God in all things, this is making oneself superior to all merely human matters.” And on the same day, Fr. Bertoni, with a flash of consummate psychology, noted the

following: “Everything depends on forming the resolution of wanting to serve God at any cost. It is necessary to guard against mere wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is discerned from a decisive will in its effects: the former gives in at the onset of difficulties, and withdraws: the latter hangs on, sets itself up, and solidifies.

And Fr. Bertoni also indicates a Model to follow: ‘In prayer, one begins with Christ and His Passion, and then lets his spirit run free, if God draws him.’”

The Saint also offers his insight into the supreme Mystery of our faith: “This evening, on seeing an image of the Most Holy Trinity, I experienced great reverence and love for the three Persons. The eternal Father stood with His arms opened and this explained to me His mercy and His ready communication of His gifts”. This is also a thought that returned to him in 1809: “We need to draw a portrait of Jesus Christ in ourselves”. And then further: We need to make known to the divine Father in ourselves an image of His Divine Son.”

We often read of his tears and special illuminations during the celebration of the sacred sacrifice of the Mass, which was the font of his spiritual life. It would suffice to read this text under the date of October 9, 1808, entitled: “St. Dennis and the Maternity of Mary the Virgin”. [This was his 31st birthday]:

“During Mass, at the Secret prayers regarding the remembrance, it was much like the opening up of my intellect to know just Who it is with Whom I was speaking. There was like a great intensity of charity in praying. Then followed certain heartfelt thrusts toward God, and like a certain impetus of spirit toward God, much as though becoming overwhelmed by a very dear friend who had not been seen for a very long time. It was as though at the first sight of the old friend, there came the yearning to run and greet him to embrace him.

Then a desire developed that this encounter might be prolonged, and this led to the impetus of being really able to attain the Supreme Good; however, as I feared experiencing a bit of vanity since I was in public I had recourse to the consideration of very grave sins. Then there increased both the cognition of good and love which dissolved into truly sweet emotion and this lasted until even after Holy Communion. Meanwhile faith, confidence intensified greatly, together with humility and loving reverence.

Finally at Communion, I experienced very sublime devotion and a sentiment like that of my First Holy Communion received as a child, and which I do not remember ever experiencing again afterwards; the recollection lasted afterwards for about an hour, and remained all the afternoon.”

On another day in 1809, Fr. Gaspar noted:

“During Mass and at the Consecration, I experienced a rather vivid sentiment at the presence of Christ, much like one dear friend would speak with another: and again of the Presence of the Father. And again in a mysterious manner I also experienced the distinction of these divine Persons in one sole nature. There followed great reverence and love this lasted even after the recollection, but not the sentiment so much.”

The Stigmatine tradition is that the Founder, even though he was afflicted by continuous tribulations, he remained [like a good citizen of Verona!] a joyful person. The fact is that he achieved this serenity at the source of undeniable joy:

“Joy according to this world is impure, unstable unworthy and harmful. While the joy according to God is pure, stable, worthy, wholesome: it is wholesome because it overcomes the world, the flesh and the devil.”

For Fr. Bertoni, too, a ‘great means’ for obtaining the salvation of the soul, as it was for St. Alphonsus, is prayer:

“The present world is alike a huge Hospital full of sick people: all are groaning: no one is cured even though the antidote is readily available. This medicine is prayer. Prayer is either not offered at all, or it is done poorly: *or it either seeks what is bad, or evils, or poorly done: or it is bad or poorly done: or it is not offered for oneself, and not firstly for the reign of God, it is not pious nor persevering.*”

Therefore, this is a mysticism that is illuminated and penetrating, a realistic and robust asceticism.

Perhaps the most precious jewel is an extended text under the date of May 30, 1812, where his spirit takes its flight towards the complete abandonment into Infinite Good:

“While offering prayer before Mass, I was overtaken by a bit of sleepiness and I heard the Crucifix speak to me in a cordial way: ‘Look at this, My Heart.’ This expression immediately conferred on me a marvelous light into my intellect, a great and sudden fervor of heart. From this it seemed that I could see the lovable Object just indicated to me.

And I felt course through my body a kind of tremble, and I found my eyes and mouth both closed but my soul was wide awake and full of joy. It seemed to me that my soul would have liked to separate from my body; it seemed as though I was dying, but at the same time rejoicing.

And once again this was repeated like the act of turning toward the One Who was speaking, once again the shiver occurred and it was like the effect of a sweet but difficult death. Hence my soul remained uncertain as to what it ought to do, since it seemed that if it would have continued along this path, it would either lead to death or that there would be taken away communion with the body. However, being

therefore impeded, all remained with joy in the hands of the Lord, having discovered much quiet as if at that instant death would come: and then in an instant it was noted that all was restored in the use of my senses as before.

The effect of all this was a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, and an intense affection in the Holy Mass. The soul also expressed itself in sweet tears in the Holy Communion. And after all this there remained great recollection and sweetness for the whole day with an increase of the theological virtues.”

This is an outstanding passage of mystical theology and at the same time it is revelatory of a consummate spirituality in a priest not even yet 40 years of age, and one almost overwhelmed by apostolic commitments, fatigue and tribulations of all kinds.

Even more varied and covering much more time, is Fr. Bertoni's *Epistolario* with Leopoldina Naudet. What has come down to us were those years first from 1811 until 1819, when she lived more directly under his immediate spiritual direction. However, this correspondence continued up until the death of this most pious and good woman [this happened on August 17, 1834]. These Letters, especially those covering that period of her spiritual direction, are much like an enchanting anthology for the liveliness and incisiveness of spiritual wisdom that still needs to be more studied by some expert in ascetical and mystical theology.

However, in these Letters Fr. Bertoni responds to all kinds of questions that his pious correspondent presented to him: there were questions about vocation, domestic matters, the procedure to follow connected with the approbation of her Institute, language, literary, juridical, philosophical matters and even questions about engineering... There was covered the entire range of human existence which he took up with a strong hand, but one that was immersed in humanity and Christianity. It is precisely here that there comes to the fore in complete evidence that which to me seems to be the genuine characteristic of Fr. Bertoni's spirituality, *his mystical realism*: he was a man with both feet on the ground, attentive to the multiple and contrasting aspects of reality and above all those of the human heart – all the while remaining riveted in God.

This spirit circulates above all in those early letters where often hints of the joys of paradise emerge, that thirst of his for the “love of God both active and committed” [5th Letter]. He expressed his convictions that “whatever God does, is always the best. O most holy hands they are, and how much more they accomplish in a hidden manner” [Letter 7]. The foundation of it all divine grace:

“... And so for this end in view, God has shared his divine nature, so that we might not live nor act any more according just to our own human nature: as a result we should no longer measure our strength, but only by the second. This is communicated to us by the grace of adoption as God’s children...” [Letter 21].

And then the mystic in him speaks:

“... The internal sentiment and that of recollection betters the intellect. In the first case scenario, the intellect, without discoursing by reasoning, sees in the blink of an eye. And without straying from one object to another, it finds its rest in the principal object. And without going further, one is above all drawn backward through the will, which has accompanied this and at times takes over the entire process: this remains, together with the help of God, in our own hands. Working through our agreed assent, all depends on God. This first step is customary to human beings on this earth - the continuing step is more like that which we will do perfectly in heaven...” [Letter 25].

Particularly, the earlier letters flourish with such outbursts and enraptures behind the mystery of light and darkness which is the Christian life on this earth. There is one exemplar:

“... One should never forget this divine word – indeed, were would do well, as the holy Apostle Peter reminds us to attend to it as to a shining light in a very dark place. This tells us that He, Whose delights are to remain with us for the singular love that he has for us – *My delights are to be with the children of men...*”

“With His loving Providence he plays with those souls He loves, “... *playing with those in this world...*” It is not at all surprising that He hides Himself – and at one and the same time - He makes Himself known much like a ray of light of His presence: this is our Beloved Savior of our souls: “... *behold he stands behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices...* ” believe me, Reverend Mother, that if we desire to see his face unveiled even in this world – i.e. to obtain some clear experience of Him and of His goodness and of His Providence concerning us – He, too, ardently yearns to see our face, as the text of the Canticles itself states in c. 2: “*Show me your face. And while we wish to hear his voice ...*’ He even more desires to hear ours: *Let your voice sound in my ears: for your voice is sweet and your face comely...*” [v. 14],

“O admirable secrets of the Divine Love! O profound abysses of His Charity! When we will it be that we will become so ship-wrecked and abandoned in this immense sea, that we will no longer look for the shores of this wretched earth of ours? Blessed, in the final analysis, blessed is that person who hopes in God: “...*Blessed is the one who hopes in God...*” [Letter 3].

The model in this spirituality as in the Gospel, is the baby in the arms of its mother which Fr. Gaspar offers to his worthy penitent:

“... The mother sometimes shows to her little child an apple in her hand. This, her little child, responds immediately in festivity and joy, on just seeing the beauty of this fruit, in imagining its sweetness; but very soon its joy transforms itself into sadness, its happiness into tears, as he is unable to reach the fruit, no matter how far he raises his little hands, the mother holds it just out of reach, playing with the child. What does he have to do in order to have the fruit? He clings closely to the mother and never ceases asking her for it. This is how he obtains it. [And after he has exhorted his penitent to seek in all things” God alone and His divine Glory”, and he continues with his theme:]

“Do not be afraid, Reverend Mother! However as long as we are on this earth there are days and night which follow one another. Follow after Him, Mother, and follow in His path; even at night the Lord makes some stars shine out. And so if on some stormy night you should hold back a bit, or if you should turn your face away a bit in order to seek on your own, but in vain, seeking out some direction from creatures there will thus cease every light from heaven. And so to put it better: if while walking on the waters, one turns his eyes a little to look down at the threatening waves, this is not a receding from life, but an indication of one who has become a bit afraid. And the Lord will reprove you to some extent as He would say: “...O, you of little faith, why did your doubt...?” However, in that very act He sustains you with his right arm and you will find yourself in the hand of God. Therefore, may the Lord be blessed!...” [Letter 4]

Unfortunately, these letters of his maturity were almost totally destroyed that were addressed to his own beloved disciple, Fr. Luigi Bragato: the few fragments that were saved from the fire, speak to us of the gravity of our loss which unfortunately is irreparable.

Therefore, Fr. Bertoni was a “Mystic of Activity” as every Gospel worker should be with his eyes riveted on the Divine Model on the Cross, which tore Him away. We read of this mentality in Fr. Bertoni’s spiritual diary: in which he expresses desires of “... union and association in the sufferings and shame of Christ.” – even to the desire and petition also of Martyrdom [September 27-28, 1808].

However, it would be necessary to take up that spiritual doctrine which permeates through the entire ‘*corpus*’ of his writings. This would be an undertaking that would be quite difficult, and so we leave it to the specialists who are up to date in matters pertaining to the Christian life and to the religious conflicts of his era. In this connection, it would suffice to think of two cases of rather outstanding personality: Lamennais and Rosmini. The first of these two in the beginning was profoundly admired by Fr. Bertoni, and then later he was filled with apprehension concerning him. His is a direct and precise writer, and always luminous and robust -

both in his style, which was always admired by the great Italian purist, Antonio Cesari – as well as in his concepts always orientated toward indicating real life situations. It might even be said that his work offers a ‘prose of ideas’, without any frivolous additions and useless tinsel which render much less clear the religious production of the time.

5. His Path of Humility and the Way of the Cross

The heroic sanctity of Fr. Bertoni has already been approved after the close scrutiny of the Church. However, the characteristic of this life of his, while it was likewise sublimely operative, yet remains enveloped in the hiddenness of deliberations without any wavering. It is not in any shape or form a simple matter even for his sons to approach his rather complex figure, even though now all have the possibility of acceding directly to his original texts. To some extent, this can also be due to the fact that such a reflection is too profound because of the ambience in which he lived and worked, and for the collaborators with whom he worked. It seems very well to be the reason, that of his humility that so many of his contemporaries, while they did indeed advert to the powerful light and dynamism of his endeavors but they did not dare to plumb the depths its secret origin.

The physical portrait, managed to be handed down at all through the tradition, presents him as a man of middle height, and a thin physique, with penetrating eyes and a somewhat serious comportment. His spiritual master-piece is found in his uninterrupted fidelity from his infancy through his rather advanced age, all was centered on those hints that came to him from the heavenly Father: there were no spectacular prodigies nor unusual comportment. Even after his death while he is presented as particularly generous in coming to the aid of the suffering human beings who invoke him, it seems that even he has personally committed himself to keep hidden the traces of his merciful interventions, demanding of his Postulators a task comparable to a Sisyphean challenge!

Already well along in years, Fr. Bertoni confided to his first companion and successor, Fr. John Marani, that he had heard as a child a call to holiness. Without exaggerating through any cloying, overly orchestrated writing style, it can be said that his entire life had been passed in unshakable fidelity to this invitation. About him, it can be stated without any excessive amplification that which Manzoni had written of the youth, Federigo Borromeo: “... his life was like a little brook of water, that burst out in limpid condition, through the rocky soil without ever becoming stagnant or turbid, throughout a long course and across diverse terrains, it flowed ever forward and cast itself into the River... ” [c. XXII].

More striking and perhaps more pleasing are those saints who experienced a clamorous conversion – who enjoyed a universal sway of influence, and were geniuses in religious organization and social activity. Fr. Bertoni, however, was nothing like any of these, or at least does not seem cut from the same cloth. The incisive motto that he had heard from his old teacher and benefactor, Fr. Nicholas Galvani, and which he often repeated [from the old Veronese dialect]: *busetà e taneta* [live as in a little den, an unnoticed lair]. This dialectic turn of phrase would be a rendition of St. Paul's description: *the hidden life with Christ in God* [Col 3:3].

A contemporary author has written of him with some intuition that he had been attracted by the contemplative life of Fr. Bertoni as this comes across the pages of his personal spiritual diary and his letters to L. Naudet:

"... The true greatness of God's work in him is often not revealed externally, as one that would shine through the success of his undertakings, or in the importance of the Institute which came to light through him. God certainly does not deceive but works most especially in the depths of his soul and perhaps made of him one of the greatest saints of the past century..."⁴

This was a life, that of Fr. Bertoni, about half of which was spent on the Cross, with his long and painful illnesses, "... *under the irons and the knives of the doctors...*" as he himself often preferred to write, in a joking manner, especially to Fr. Bragato. This seems to demonstrate a capacity of endurance that amazed and moved even to tears the surgeons themselves. The documents speak of some 300 inflictions of deep lancing and incisions on his flesh in order to diminish a kind of cancerous growth which had invaded his right leg.

This piercing of his flesh which afflicted him debilitated him noticeably as he got older even up until his death. The medical specialist who in our own times, is required under the direction of the ecclesiastical superiors, was present for the recognition of his body [as part of the process of canonization]. He noted a pronounced curvature, and a severe calcification of the vertebrae in his spinal column. This phenomenon must have cost him – in the judgment of the specialist who examined his exhumed body - spasms of considerable pain.

And it was from his bed of pain, in which he had been confined for long months and even entire years, he continued his teaching by example and offering counsel to those souls who had recourse to him: bishops would seek him out, prelates, princes, members of noble families, priests as well as the humble and simple people of his time. He also continued to give courses of spiritual exercises and conferences. He continued to study and to write – and especially did he suffer and pray during the many interminable nights of insomnia, very often meditating for an

⁴ Divo Barsotti, *Magistero dei Santi*, Roma: 1971, p. 17.

entire hour – as he once manifested - the words of the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the individual mysteries of the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross.

Through all this, the question arose as to whether or not he had reached the level of infused prayer. Would it have been that his soul had advanced with giant steps forward along the mysterious paths of active and passive purification? That which is certain that in approaching Fr. Bertoni, this constituted for all a special experience as of finding a solid footing in a world of certainties and of supreme hope. The very sight of his person, even prior to hearing the comfort of his word, placed one in tranquility and in greater harmony with the will of God, and enkindled in so many a genuine love for the Cross of Christ.

6. A Model of Holy Abandonment

The most recent scholars, attentive to the life and spirit of this man, attended to assembling the required definitive documentation for His Cause of Beatification. These men were Fr. Joseph Fiorio, Fr. Joseph Stofella and the present occupant of the post of Postulator General of the Cause, Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove. They all referred to Fr. Bertoni as a 'Model of Holy Abandonment', justly emphasizing the mystical moment in this exceptional personality and combatant in the spiritual life, a dedicated apostle.

Fr. Bertoni had found in Leopoldina Naudet a twin soul, most avid for the interior life, that of totally giving of herself into the full conformity to the divine good pleasure. He found her to be most docile in the practice of Holy Abandonment.

We owe further to Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, the fact of finding this fact in the spiritual diary of this Servant of God, precisely in that period of time in which she went to Fr. Bertoni for spiritual direction, most especially in her notes of March and April of 1811. Thus, for example, on March 24th that year, she wrote:

“Accompanying me this morning in that sentiment of abandonment in God ... “ For this end she noted the ‘greater detachment from myself’ - for the purpose of being able ‘to taste the benefit of losing myself so in Him, that I would not find anything other than Him...”

She backed up her writing by the way she lived. A witness of this is her own ‘Act of Abandonment’ which she wrote when Fr. Bertoni in 1819 decided to interrupt his spiritual direction of her. And this humble spiritual daughter of his, saw so many of her attempts to change Fr. Bertoni’s mind to be in vain for her. So, in her sense of consternation and much sorrowing, she directed herself to God. This is what she wrote:

“... How confused I am, o my Lord, to find myself distanced from that abandonment in you that You wish from me. I ask of you a thousand pardons and from this moment on for ever I abandon all of my own interests into your hands...”

Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove justly wrote for the second centenary of the birth of Fr. Bertoni, observing that this Act of Abandonment “...can be compared to that which had been offered as a Victim to the Merciful Love of St.. Therese of the Child Jesus and to that prayer in which Elizabeth of the Trinity synthesizes her Trinitarian doctrine...” He also observes that this is a matter of the traditional doctrine which can be noted in St. Francis de Sales [especially in his *Theotimus*, Books VIII & IX].

Bossuet had already written a *Discours sur l’acte d’abandon a Dieu*, in which the author takes his inspiration the classic on the doctrine of the abandonment which is that of DeCaussade: but one can also remember the great Fenelon, who was well known to Fr. Bertoni, in which he recalls precisely the image of the baby in its mother’s arms, as Fr. Stofella also noted.

In fact, Fr. Bertoni had recommended to Leopoldina Naudet:

“... Blessed is the one who would lose himself in this abyss! The one who would cast himself courageously and ship-wrecked into this great ocean! A child is never more secure as when asleep holding on to its mother’s neck, he abandons every other thought and concern for himself. The infant does not see, nor hear nor does he speak. But the Mother sees for him, hears and speaks and works. And whenever she wants to, she may awaken the child, and remain nearby...”

Fr. Bertoni’s beloved disciple, Fr. Marani states: “... We must always go behind God and never ahead of him... my most beloved Father and Founder said this frequently and constantly practiced it...” Fr. Gaspar’s first biographer, Fr. Giacobbe, who remained close to him in his last years, noted: “... This practice of allowing all to God and nothing to man, was something in him that was so ordinary and habitual that it might be said ... that this was like the identification card and norm for all of his thoughts and affections, as it was of his every operation and plan...”⁵

And Fr. Bertoni wrote further to L. Naudet:

“... What a blessed virtue abandoning oneself is, when we cannot act we entrust ourselves to the omnipotent arms of divine Providence: but it is a more perfect and consummate virtue when indeed we can, and in fact we are called upon to do something [according to the order established by Divine Providence] – and yet never cease to be equally and totally abandoned into His ...” [Letter 38].

⁵ cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono*. Verona 1951, pp, 210, ff.

This is a doctrine, that of holy abandonment, which finds its way back to the probable source in the Ignatian spirituality in that complete indifference presented in the *Doctrine spirituelle*, of Fr. Lallemand and of the Jesuits of his kind. But one would have to seek from sources prior to that of the Benedictine Abbot, Dom Columba Marmion, confessor of Cardinal Mercier. This has come to the fore again in the publishing of his master-piece, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk* [c.13], and also in the Italian edition of his *Letters of Spiritual Direction* [p. 161] .

Another noted Benedictine, Fr. Eugene Vandeur, has written a commentary on the Lord's Prayer, with the title: *L'abandon a' Dieu*. There is nothing in this doctrine - which is the sum of ascetical mortification of nature, and the elevation of the soul, to the point of mystical death, through the active and passive purifications - that would bespeak of fatalism, or Eastern, or Protestant or pantheistic quietism. What this ideal means is a participation in the abandonment of Jesus Christ to the Will of His Father in Garden of Gethsemane [*"not My will be done, but Yours!"* – Lk 22:42] – even to the His invocation on the Cross [*"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!"* – Lk 23:46]. This is that total turning upside down of life, like the transferal, one might say, of human freedom into the total subjection to God according to that incisive expression of Bossuet: "... If there is anything that is capable of rendering free a heart and to place it completely at free, it is the perfect abandonment to God and to His will..."⁶

The characteristic or the authentic originality of Fr. Bertoni's grasp of this seems to be that of being more lived than theorized. It seems to spring from that unconditional self-emptying of his soul into the Mystery of the Incarnation. This derives from that interior thrust of his of transcending every adherence to creatures, which is at the same time, as a placing of himself at the total disposition of the will of God for the salvation of his brothers and sisters, in every occasion and at all times.

If it may be permitted to an obstinate reader and translator of Soren Kierkegaard, a contemporary of Fr. Bertoni, in discerning a certain consonance here with the mystical life of abandonment. In his *Great Diary*, Kierkegaard observes that in the life of the Spirit, it is not so much a matter of becoming 'adults', as happens in natural life, but that of becoming children once again, and to "pray like children". This demands considering oneself less than nothing before God but as babies. Obviously, the terms 'baby, children' here do not indicate that bio-psychological infancy but rather that of the spirit which consists in the total self-giving of one's own freedom to God and with all the strength of one's soul. In a commentary on Ga 1:7, Kierkegaard observes:

⁶ This is a text from the classic by the Cistercian, V. Lehodey, *Le saint Abandon*. Tr. It. Firenze 1954, p. 520.

“... For us, to progress in the interiority of our relationship to God, this is manifested as a kind of proceeding backward. In other words, one does not approach God directly but if only if one comes to grasp ever more profoundly our infinite distance from Him...”

“As a result, one does not begin to become ever more like children, so that then one might be more confident with increasing age: in order to then to become [spiritual]children. It is not this one simply becomes more child-like [Diary, Ital. N. 2722]. In an earlier text, which seems to be a kind of poetic compendium of the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of Grace, he wrote: “... It is like when we give something to a child: and, in order to make the child content, we suppose that it is really he who instead is giving to us that which we have given to him and therefore it is ours. Thus, our relationship really is not like this, because God at the same is the One Who is giving the complement. Therefore it must always be when a father or a mother have helped the child to write a little letter of well-wishes for one’s birthday, and then they accept this as his gift for that day...” [n. 1533].

A stronger expression of his is of a metaphysical nature, from a text of 1850: In the context of sensible and exterior realities, the object is something other than the manner: there are several manners to do something – and a person might succeed in finding the best possible manner.... In relationship to God, the ‘how’ is the ‘what’. Whoever does not place himself on relationship in the manner of the most absolute abandonment does not place himself in relationship with God. With respect to God one cannot use as his principle only to try ‘up to a given point’ because God is precisely the negation of all that is ‘up to the certain point’. The text begins with the affirmation: “...To place oneself in relationship with God, to be genuinely religious without ever experiencing a wound – and I confess that I find this inexplicable...” [n. 2936].

There is, then this consonance of Kirkegaard with Fr. Bertoni which goes back to their common font, the New Testament. Furthermore there are traces of common readings of Catholic mystics, such as *The Imitation of Christ*, St. Therese, St. John of the Cross, Fenelon, St. Alphonsus de Liguori...⁷

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⁷ Translator’s Note: in these last few paragraphs, Fr. Fabro offers a real theological presentation of Holy Abandonment, and provides excellent sources for further reflection.

Conclusion:

A Life totally for the Church

The actuality of the figure and the undertakings of Fr. Bertoni can be summarized in two simple phrases: ... *A Man totally Evangelical and totally ecclesial*. His was a soul permeated with the spirit of the Gospel, and devoured by his zeal for without boundaries. We learn from Fr. Lenotti that his principal study was Sacred Scripture, of which he knew much by memory. As a result his ordinary manner of speaking was fully scriptural. In the nearly iconoclastic fury which has attacked the sacred text on the part of some modern criticism, the docility of the Saints to the Word of God from which they drew for the light to overcome the arduous trials of spirit and to develop their grand enterprises for the glory of God.

It was from the sacred text that Fr. Bertoni traced also that basic imperative, or that Christian distinctive characteristic of contrast with this world: “... *I have chosen you out of this world...*!” In explaining this passage in the Spiritual Exercises he preached to the clergy, he applied to the priest that which Bourdaloue had directed to religious:

“... he [the priest] has to be detached from and crucified to the world, one needs to repeat that which the Apostle St. Paul writes; ‘...*The world is crucified to me and I to the world...*!’ For since I am a priest, if the world does not permit coming in harmony with my principles - and I very easily find agreement with its maxims, then I am a priest only in name. “... *If I should please men, I am not Christ’s servant...*!” “In order to be as priest indeed, and in truth, it is required that I should be in the world as in a state of suffering. It is necessary that the world should be my Cross, as I will infallibly be a cross to this world. The reason is due to the contrariety of sentiments and of principles that will be found between the world and me, as long as I want to comport myself as a genuine priest ...”⁸

These are sublime words, especially for today.

Fr. Bertoni’s times, as was stated at the outset, were quite different from ours. However, the sufferings of humanity, the crisis of faith, the situation of the Christian on this world ... seem to intensify all the more as these realities impact every age, at every turn of human progress. The manners of thinking change, and also the prospects of civility: the trajectory of life towards the gulf of death, and being overwhelmed by the same enigmas, no matter what the number and the qualities of elements that work in its mutating arch.

⁸ R. P. Bourdaloue, *Ritiramento spirituale ad uso delle comunita’ religiose*, presso Niccolo’ Pezzana 1742, p. 28.

Today hope is much magnified and this is good: however, for us, it has to be a Christian hope, it needs to address believers upward toward those immutable goods and yearn for that Augustinian Sabbath that will never end. Therefore hope must be nourished by faith, and must flow forth within its certainties', and not get diverted into the earthly swamps rivet itself in some kind of a "foolish flight." This needs to be a hope which enkindles one toward the elevation toward God and in the service of one's neighbor.

Fr. Bertoni was one who was malleable, but firm at the same time. He knew how to ponder the signs of his times, he read and had others read the daily newspapers as something most useful from which one might draw new avenues for the apostolate. However, he observed in his Diary: "... *It is necessary to enter into the house of another in a manner so that what we might learn then to lead others to ours.*" This is a rule of realism and of boldness, it seems to us and not just another form of *aggiornamento* of the Church in this world, or some other format of 'dialogue with this world', which have often amounted tactics of equivocal compromises. What needs to be concluded from all this is a service of fidelity to the salvific Truth with respect to the mystery of freedom.

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GASPAR BERTONI

HEROIC WITNESS OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT 'MODEL-PRINCIPLE'

Cornelio FABRO

THE WITNESS OF THE "MODEL"

[MIRROR – COPY – FOLLOWING - IMITATION - EXAMPLE] OF GOD, JESUS, APOSTLE,
MARTYR

[Titolo: Gaspare Bertoni, testimone del soprannaturale
Fonte: volume unico "SYMPOSIUM BERTONIANUM",
Pontificia Universitas ANGELICUM, 28 ottobre 1989,
Ed. Stimmgraf, Verona 1990, pp. 36-60]

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INTRODUCTION

Perfection and Imitation

[1] 'Witness is a term, both anthropological and privileged, that permeates and is of interest to the most elevated and constitutive levels of conscience, beginning with its first manifestations of being in the world. It reaches even to the depths of those movements of the *Ego*, in order to be brought to the heights of human relationships with God, both on the natural level, as well as that on the supernatural in the Magisterium of God with Revelation. This is especially applicable with redemption, through that grace merited for us, by Christ with His Passion and Death.

[2] A witness is one who attests [through one's own proper and direct knowledge] the reality of a fact, the truth of a principle, and commits to this attestation the dignity of one's own person within the social life. Thus, 'testimony' is the most valid existential support in the affirmation of the truth in the individual and social life. It attains its exterior guarantee of morality and of honor when it is accompanied, as happens in legal processes, by the pronouncing of an oath which is the social seal of the truth of the testimony. Its first and absolute foundation is its reference to God, the Prime and Absolute Truth: the modern States which have abolished God in their Constitutions, as has Italy, entrust to the personal honor of the citizen, who only with the greatest difficulty can become inclined to testify against himself – i.e., to recognize one's own errors to the harm of one's own interests.

[3] Only in the sphere of the Christian religion is truth guaranteed by 'witness' its double aspect, both objective and subjective, i.e., as far as the reality of the reality and of the object are concerned, and dependent on the sincerity of the fact because the Christian is committed to tell the truth before God. He is the Truth by essence,

from which nothing escapes, and Who one day will render His judgment. The Christian, therefore, makes a 'leap' of quality because each recognizes as Judge the Man-God. This Incarnate Truth has appeared in time in order to redeem humanity from sin: to Him is reserved the final act of history.

[4] Thus, Christ has become, through the Incarnation, the first Witness of the Father to humanity and for the salvation of all, the sole Savior from sin, Advocate and Judge at the same time: He is the essential Witness because He is the eternal Truth, before the beginnings of history, and who is as Truth in time, because He is the Author of the salvation of humanity immersed in history.

[5] It is an obvious statement, in that it is a daily observation, that every being of nature tends toward its own perfection, in order to acquire it, to conserve it, to propagate it, to augment it whenever this is possible. All of nature itself [mineral and living, material and spiritual] is a concert of many voices for the triumph of that life which has filled it, in the most disparate of forms, while alternating, and often in chaotic fashion – but at other times, it is almost a melody of life and death, of harmony and catastrophe. Civilizations come and go, as Aristotle had noted⁹, one after another without any apparent order. As soon as one, having exhausted [and no one knows how] its cycle, adds itself on the others that have passed in the flight of the centuries.

[6] They all alternate in a relentless disturbance of reality which science attempts to investigate and dominate, in order to satisfy human curiosity, each strives to exploit always to its advantage. This so-called nature, the visible world in which humanity busies itself with ever renewed instruments and with and always discontented. And there is also an invisible world of an infinite of galaxies which surround us in a frantic race of light years. And in all this, creation as the witness, which contains it on the stand, at ease and terrified before the mystery of being, which is at one and the same time both obvious and intricate.

[7] Being is contained and sustained by the metaphysical entity, totally and always in act, which is the universal Creator God whether of the bodies launched into space that entangles us in the flight of time, as well as of those spirits which He keeps with Himself due to their dignity of nature: the fact is "we are truly progeny of His, since in Him we have life, movement and being. This is how *"we are His progeny."*¹⁰

⁹ *Methap.* XII, 8, 1074 b 8 ss.

¹⁰ *Act.* 17,28 s. The Apostle seems to be referring to the poet Arato [*Phaen.*5 – Zorelli] (*Phaen.* 5 - Zorell) but this was already the teaching of the Stoics.

[8] In fact, God has associated humanity, also due to its corporeal nature, in that each one is born and dies, in His own life and He has chosen to be loved and even followed and 'imitated'. This is not for Himself, as He is Life and Happiness in His essence, Infinity always in act. Since, if in the first creation, He has launched the stars to traverse across the immensity of space, in the creation of humanity He has shared with each one the freedom to form him/ herself. And He has given Himself as the Model, of the Way, the Truth and the Life, in the paradigm of descent and ascent, sharing with humanity His own freedom in the immeasurable gift of the redemption. This is the key of interpretation of that "Mystery hidden for centuries in God."¹¹

[9] The Mystery which God Himself has revealed and realized in Jesus Christ, is the real presence of God in history for the liberation of humanity into the form and figure of the essential Model. If the fall into sin represents the descent for condemnation, the raising up with the Redeemer Model manifests the ascent with Grace: thus, descent and ascent occur in stages that are corresponding and surprising.

A. THE STAGES OF THE DESCENT

The descent, given the infinite distance, departs from God, Who is the Incomprehensible, but He is also the One and Only from Whom the initiative might finds its beginning.

1. The first Model is God Himself: *Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect!* [Mt 5; 48] And it is this which to the light of reason is the least comprehensible and possible but here it is proposed as the source of exuberance of good and good itself, the doing of good, as the context states and is available to all. He is the Model of effusion and profusion.

2. The second Model is presented in the first Person, and He is the Word made flesh: *I have given you the example so that as I have done for you, you will do for one another* [Jn 13:15]. The hypostatic union provides the guarantee of the accessible reality of the invitation of the One who has fallen into temporal reality can lift on high, even to God Himself, this reality and to transfigure it in an act of love.

3. The third Model is the Apostle himself who received from Christ Himself the message of truth and has fulfilled it even to the sacrifice of his life: *martyr*, i. e., the witness of choice united to Christ in the reality of life and death. In fact he states: *I beg you to become imitators of me as I am of Christ* [1 Co 4:16]¹².

¹¹ *Eph.* 3,9. Also *Coloss.* 1,26; 3, 3 e *1 Cor* 2,7.

¹² «Indeed, you know how necessary it is that you imitate us.» (2 *Thess.* 3,7). And our remaining among you is so that we might give to you the form to imitate [???] (2 *Thess.* 3,9).

Therefore, are there are three models: God, the Word Incarnate and the Apostles? The answer is 'no', at least on the existential level – but rather three moments in the elevation towards the ultimate foundation, and three stages in the descending-ascending transformation of the Model in solidarity with God in Christ, thanks to the preaching of the Apostle-'Martyr', *par excellence*.

The "Model" demands conformity, imitation, repetition... on the level of the freedom of love ... However, this is lacking for the absolute emergence in quality between the Creator and the Creature, between the Savior and the sinner, by reason of the distance between the two extremes is infinite since it is a difference of quality – Creator and creature, Holy and sinner – which interrupts every bond and rejects every affinity...it is an abyss: but over this Abyss which is God Himself according to the repeated affirmations of St. Catherine of Siena. He has set up a "bridge" which is the Incarnate Word¹³. It is on the principle of this bridge that the 'Principal of Model' functions.

Now the conformity with the Model is the 'practice' of love that God wills and awaits from His creature and which the Word realizes with grace. And as the Word 'repeats' in fullness the Truth of the Father and the Spirit repeats to the full the mutual love of God for humanity, and that ineffable thrust of love of humanity for God. 'Belonging' is a static word which within the existential sphere of freedom can be said to be 'repetition' in the strong sense of ascent of the creature to the high point with God and with the transformation of the sinner into an [adoptive] child of God.

B. THE ASCENT: TOWARD THE MODEL

[Renewal-Perfection-Contemporaneity] – Epicurus-Seneca – Kierkegaard [Imitation - Conformation -Assimilation]

1] Epicurus-Seneca: here is a source that seeks to provide the real operating foundation of the going up, or the 'ascent' of a human being to God, which is the project of a historical period for human salvation. The more proper word would be 'Renewal', the 'Resumption' in the philological and at the same time, the eschatological sense of the 'ascent' to the Source. This is a reparation of what has been disrupted and that reaching out toward the End which 'draws and urges' from the depths of our matter, from the abyss of our own misery. In this, the 'Model-Principle' transcends every relationship and finite confrontation and moves one to the paradox of the [possible] demand of essential Love, of the total truth and of that complete happiness.

¹³ *Dialogo*, La dottrina del ponte, 26-28, ed. Cavallini, Roma 1968: pp. 57 ss.

This is precisely the task of the Mercy of God for each human being, or rather in those words suggested by Eudemea, the 'good fortune' for each one, superior to all expectancy and representation, the shore of salvation and the island of felicity, it is that light that never would be enkindled in the heart of man [1Co 2:4] [??]

[2] In other words this is the 'transcendental metamorphosis' and this in two stages: from run to reparation and from reparation to transfiguration, when God will be all things in Christ [1 Co 15:28], in the restoration of the universal order.' 'Renewal' is a term that is understood in the biblical sense: it is more than 'repetition' in the ordinary sense which occurs on the horizontal level. It is also even more than 'Revolution' that crushes opposition and creates disorder and victims. 'Repetition' is precisely the 'Renewal' on the part of God, of His Plan of Salvation and includes newness, surpassing the past... as a projection beyond time into a light that does not know of setting. *Behold, I will make new all things.* [Rv 21:5].

[3] Does the principle of 'Model' for Fr. Bertoni have an Epicurean source?

The Model precedes us, animates us, urges us onward, ahead and above.

The theological models just indicated, transcend us: God, Christ, the Apostle, they all leave us at an insuperable distance because they attain, on different levels, the Infinite. And further, they have their orientation toward us, they have descended to us to make us walk along with them and thus they become our Models: rather, they are models in an intensive sense, in so far as they grasp us and welcome us into the center of the life of the spirit, which is that active, critical moment' of freedom, or the commitment of imitation

And here the dimensions of existence develop into the infinite as the tensions of the spirit, between doing and not doing, and of doing this action or that other one: here there is placed the radical choice which is the responsibility of every individual. Here the Model presents itself which the Gospel proposes for the re-establishment of the reign of God¹⁴. Fr. Bertoni lived the demand of Model even to the extreme extent of the 'Heroicity of Virtues", as recognized by the Church. This is the ultimate characteristic of perfection that the believer might attain here on earth in "The Imitation of Christ", and thus to be transfigured into the life of God in Christ.

For this arduous journey of the soul there is needed a guide which for the baptized - and others could not be - as has been seen - and this is no one other than

¹⁴ The Middle Ages have provided an original exposition of the work, in the *De imitatione Christi*. It is thought today, with valid arguments to support the idea, that this was composed by John Gerson (cf. crit. ed. di Tiburso Lupo, Città del Vaticano 1982. It was presented as "the master-piece of Christian asceticism and mysticism", p. VIII s.). One might point out that in this work the complete absence of the Mother of God, while one might indeed savor the Eucharistic material in Book IV.

the Incarnate Word Himself, Who is the Model in His essence. As God, He guarantees the infinity of perfection - and as Man, He traverses for us that pathway of grace in order to reach with robust love the supreme summit of the Cross.

Fr. Bertoni experienced this from the very dawn of his priesthood with extraordinary rays of light and love which reached ecstasy. This is of interest to us now, the beginning of the first steps up this 'delightful mountain' which he expressly indicates to us with His 'Model-Principle.' He emphasized the humble but faithful practice of the examination of conscience which is typical exercise of his realistic anthropology of Ignatian inspiration, which embraces the entire life-project¹⁵, as a totality.

[4] The Model-Principle thus becomes, in Fr. Bertoni's text, the "Mirror-Principle" to be applied with power realism of movement – and this, certainly in such a context – from on high to the depths, i.e., finds its beginning from God and from Christ, the Divine Model. This takes into consideration from our lowly condition of our daily concrete actions the circumstances and situation of new life. And that attentive visit, routine and loyal, into the garden of one's own soul. Each one needs to pause without giving in to the indulgence of that hurly-burly situation of one's chaotic life, disordered and sometimes disheartening – much like the chaotic vine of Renzo's vine in the classic, *Promessi Sposi*¹⁶.

One's resolution ought to be concrete and adhering to the reality and one can only offer his own life in this way, if he is truly a person who has had first made his way on the same pathway set out for us now. When he jotted the text of July 30, 1808 in his spiritual diary, Fr. Bertoni was just about 31 years of age. He was in the full blossoming of his youth aflame with zeal and totally immersed in his own self-giving to that essential Love for his God and for Christ. He experienced this with his perennial joy as the fortunate minister. This text at this stage he was already a master of Ignatian asceticism, which goes back to the ancient cenobites, the practice of the examination of conscience.

Let us read now that 'principal' text in this regard of Fr. Bertoni¹⁷:

¹⁵ S. Teresa suggests this through individual actions, e.g., prayer, while eating, praying before undertaking any action. (*Obras Completas*, B.A.C., 8 ed. Madrid 1986, s. v. p. 1466 b).

¹⁶ Let us give a hint here for the delight of those interested in botany: : «It was a filthy mess of stinging nettles, of ferns, of tares, of weeds, of wheat powder, of wild oats, of green poke-weeds, of dandelions, of sour vinegar, of dried panic-grass, and many other plants; such, as I would like to say, that the peasant of every land made of it all something important each in his own manner, giving the name of the mess to be that of his very own herbs, or something similar» (c. 33, ed. Bacchelli-Scarpa, Milano 1934, p. 527 s.). This description continues and should be read in its entirety.

¹⁷ *Memoriale privato*, ed. G. Stofella, Roma 1962, p. 28.

... In order to make the examination, it is necessary to take a saint of the same vocation as a mirror: then one would discern that he would have enough to confess every day: all that is lacking from that perfection is a defect...

This text is simple in its context and leads one to think that Fr. Bertoni would go to confession every day, as other Saints did - and among these is St. Gemma Galgani¹⁸. These saints desired to make spiritual progress within the limits of the possible, and they also practiced this out of their hunger induced by grace and that burning aspiration for interior purity. This self-comparison with a Saint is always available and is the first small step for one's rising up and ascending from below to on high. The Saint fore-chosen as one's 'Model', stands by the aspirant to holiness in order to urge each one onward, and also stands on high in order to offer some judgment – but not only this but also to comfort us, console us... and therefore never to leave us alone in the spiritual combat and so also stands along-side us, and goes on ahead of us with the light of the spirit, in order to wrap us, according to the circumstances, with those most subtle bonds of grace.

Therefore, as Christ is the means of the reconciliation of humanity with God by delivering us from sin and introducing us into the life of grace, so, the Holy 'Model' of one's own vocation, attracts us to Himself and commits us with the grace of the essential Model Who is Christ Himself, to live in Him, i.e., in His imitation, and to live in Him through a Covenant of love.

In this discussion of the ascent of a person to God, it needs to be kept in mind that this is one's call to be totally immersed in the knowledge of the ideal in the real practice of virtue. Not a few pagan philosophers have worked out a conception of life which might be said to be, with good reason, a certain *evangelical preparation*. At the head of this list might be placed Epicurus. This is so despite his surprising appearance in this theme as up until our time, for reasons totally unknown why this author has been somewhat outlawed by the Greek morality, as not part of the ideal which is typified by their *Kalocaqathon*.

This is also due to a principle brought forward by Pythagoras and continued, along a different path, by Plato and Aristotle, in order to be dedicated by a certain *anekoo-apekou* of the Stoics. The text of Epicurus has been handed on to us only by Seneca and it is therefore redacted into Latin. However to interpret this, it would have been necessary to keep before one's eyes the original Greek which seems to have been lost. Seneca sent this to a former student of his, named Lucilius, in his 11th Letter of Book I, as the fundamental norm for a moral life:

¹⁸ For a documented analysis of this, consult our work: *Gemma Galgani: testimone del soprannaturale*, ed. CIPI, Roma 1986.

... By now, this letter seeks a conclusion. Take hold of it. Take the letter as useful and salutary, which I want to imprint upon your spirit:

‘We ought to choose [as our model] a good man, and keep him always before our eyes so that we would live as if we were in his presence and let us do of everything as though he would see us.’

“This, my Lucilius, is what Epicurus ordered: he gives us a guardian, a pedagogue, and not without good reason. A great quantity of sins is avoided, if as many who were about to sin, were in the company of a perceive.”

“A person in quest of perfection would have to find one whom he would hold in veneration, whose authority would also render even more holy his unseen life. How happy is the man who would emend his own life and not only when another was present, but also by just thinking about him! How happy is the one who could venerate someone in this manner, that only the memory of him would suffice to compose and re-order his conduct! One who is so capable of venerating another, is also, he, too, immediately worthy of admiration. So, chose Cato: if he should seem too rigid for you, chose the man Lelius. Choose one whose life has pleased you, and as does conversing with him, is himself already the reflected visage of a lofty spirit: place such a one always before you as a guardian and example. We need, I mean, someone with whom to correct ourselves and our practices: if you do not want to follow a perverse rule...¹⁹”

A similar [Epicurean] text is also quoted in Latin from Seneca and has remained only in the Latin rendition. It is found in Epictetus, that is true, but it is interesting to note that there is an idea rather common in Greek thought, i.e. a certain relationship or affinity of human beings with God²⁰. An English specialist hints in a rather vague manner, at the dependence on Seneca: ‘Seneca, in many of his writings quotes Epicurus, especially in his Moral Letters, and often with approval [as in our present case], and he in his translations seems more accurate than Cicero – but his citations are almost entirely confined to the ethical aspect of the system²¹.

¹⁹ *Epist. ad Lucilium*, lib. I, lett. X, & 8; ed. critica di A. Beltrami, Brixiae 1916, p. 30, f.- Beltrami, with good texts, has chosen as did Usener, the reading of the Latin word «*diligendus*», while others have chosen a similar Latin word, «*eligendus*». This is the reading I have chosen because it seems more adherent to the moralistic context and also because for at two other times towards the end of the text, Seneca states: «*eligendus*» (p. 31 l. 3 e 5). «*Eligendus*» is also found in the earlier edition ed. di F. Haase, G.B. Teubner, Lipsiae 1853, p. 22. Cfr. also: H. Usener, *Epicuri fragmenta*, nr. 210, which is quoted by C. Diano, *Epicuri Ethica*, In Aed. Sansonianis, Florentiae 1956, p. 22, this agrees with Usener and adds: “So do everything as though Epicurus was looking at you.”- «*Eligendus*» is also the reading founded in the latest French Edition of *Belles Lettres*; the English edition retains the reading: «*diligendus*».

²⁰ *Le Diatribe e i frammenti*, I, 9; letal. Tr. of R. Laurenti, Bari 1960, p. 26 s.

²¹ C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, Oxford 1928, p. 230.- The author does not seem to know of the text presented by Seneca (Cfr. Index III, p. 618, where there is lacking in Seneca the citation from Letter XI, of Book I. I).

And this is indeed true and however, in this theoretical consideration of 'Model', it interests us the more. The recent Italian editor quotes, even though broken up, the fragment from Letter XI of Seneca, but without any comment and with still another reading – *deligendus*²² - for me, this is new – and there is no indication of its source.

The 'Model-Principle' is recalled without any dependence on Epicurus, but with the reference to Scipio, also by Cicero²³. Petracus [in his 2nd Book of *Rerum memorandarum* however, cites Epicurus, but for the sake of criticizing his moral teaching. Yet the ideal was to follow the example of Cicero and Seneca in their exhortation to follow nature rather than the opinions of men²⁴.

Recent critics recognize that Epicurus, too, as not a few philosophers of his time, admitted the man, through knowledge, obtained a close 'likeness' [*omoiosis*] with the divinity in which human happiness is found [*endaimonia*], and that the Sages became 'friends of the gods'²⁵. However, the classic Model was in a horizontal line, confined in immanence in general -while the Christian ideal of a 'Model' is rigorously vertical of the vocation of a single person toward likeness with God in Christ, even if the text of Fr. Bertoni is lacking any explicit indication in that direction.

5. The Contemporaneity, or Imitation as the Principle of Christian 'Model' according to Kierkegaard: this is the 'Single' person before God and Christ

Here the reflection is on the strictly Christological principle: the Christian ought to become a *contemporary* in life with Christ, and each one ought to witness this against the 'Mob' [*Maengde*] who condemned Christ. The Christian must be the 'Single' person, in opposition to the 'others' and to the 'Mass' [crowd] and to being a 'number'²⁶.

However, this concept is also in real contrast with Stirner's idea of the 'Unique' or the 'Superman' of Nietzsche which truly are at odds with the principle of immanence [all of the same nature] with the pride of dominion and disdain. The

²² Epicuro, *Opere* a cura di G. Aldrighetti, Torino 1960, p. 512, nota 29.- He cites Letter 11 of Epicurus, but omits the 18 of 'Model' C. Marchesi (*Seneca*, Messina-Milano 1934, p. 224).

²³ *Pro Lael.* 27, 102.: Nec mihi tantum (virtus Scipionis) soli versatur ante oculos, qui illam semper in mente in manibus habui; sed etiam posteris erit clara et insignis. Nemo unquam animo aut spe maiora suscipiat qui sibi non illius memoriam atque imaginem proponendam putet»

²⁴ cf. G Radetti, *L'Epicureismo nel pensiero umanistico del Quattrocento*. Grande Antologia filosofica, Milano 1964, Vol VI, p. 840.

²⁵ W. Schneid, *Epicur*, in «Reallexikon f. Antike-u Christentum», Stuttgart 1962 Vol. V, col. 370ss. However, this has a meaning that is surely negative, and the Ironic expression of Horace: Epicuri de grege porCUS» (*Epist.* Y,4, 16), also followed by some of the fathers of the Church (Cfr. W. Schmid, *AKF. cit.* del Reallexikon ... , vol. cit., col. 811 ss.).

²⁶ On the existential level, these are all synonyms. (Cfr. N.J. Cappelorn, *Index dei «Papirer»*, Copenhagen 1976, Bd. XV, pp. 234b - 235a, 312a - 315a.

'Mob', or the Crowd' for Kierkegaard is chosen anonymity, the sundering any sense of responsibility – like the ones who derided Christ and spit on Him. The 'Mob', 'Crowd' thus incorporates the metaphysical principle of that evil that wishes to corrupt the 'Single' person, who alone would not have the spirit to rage in violence against the Holy ... Therefore, also Christ Who was crucified, and it had been the unruly 'Mob', Crowd to cry out to Pilate: *Crucify Him, let Him be crucified!* [Mt 27:23, f.]

The 'Mob' is, in human life, the principle of evil. The 'Single' person turns toward the Crowd in order to break it up, to reduce it to 'Singles', and their communication is for the 'Single' person²⁷. To hold on to the Mob as valid, is to deny God. The 'Single' can [and should] be every person – this is the Christian principle and to the 'Singles', was dedicated, the '*Edifying Discourses*', the only writings that Kierkegaard published in his own name. It is the 'Single' person who in the masses, constitutes the qualitative difference'. For this reason, Kierkegaard admires and esteems in the Catholic Church the worship of the Saints [those glorious men and women, *de Hellege*]. They are the ones who provide the exact criterion of that which the New Testament Christianity really is. It is for this reason, that merely mortal humanity would like to put them to death [4056]²⁸.

But if we want to save ourselves, we have to live as they [2144] followed Christ, the Model, *par excellence*. By now, in Protestantism, the time for saints has already passed, the ascetics, the martyrs are no longer chosen as Models but it is the Philistines who are being canonized. It has been affirmed that in the 'established Church', in dependence on the State, virginity is combatted as well as is the cloistered life. This began with Luther, who in the end [in the very last place, in Kierkegaard's] the real person responsible for the degeneration of Christianity [4413]. And his cry is digestible: Listen to me, o Pope! [2145, 3054].

The cause of such a great catastrophe has been the abandonment of the 'Model-Principle', or the 'imitation' of Christ, which Kierkegaard, with an expression that is particularly original, he calls 'contemporaneity' [*Samtidighed*], which recalls 'as though present' from the text of Epicurus cited by Seneca.

The master-piece that Kierkegaard has dedicated to contemporaneity with the 'Model', is the *exercise of Christianity*, of Anti-Climacus [1849], and truly expresses the reality in act of the Imitation as this is then emphasized continuously in his *Papirer*.

²⁷ *Det Enkelte*.

²⁸ These bracketed numbers refer to the Italian Edition, 3rd ed. Of the *Papirer* (Brescia 1981 ss.).

This is the decisive Christian category [1809] and consists in seeing, and accepting this 'Single' Person, Jesus Christ, and the Son of God and it is therefore in the acceptance of the 'essential paradox' [853, 2805].

This is the martyrdom of the spirit suffered first by Mary and then by the Apostles [2573, 3649, 2967, 3833] As a result, 'contemporaneity' is the sole relationship of spirit what can be had with the greatness and therefore with Christ, Who is the essential Model since this implies the transformation of one's own "I" into Christ:

- a) through a continuous comparison [as Fr. Bertoni also wanted] between my own life with that of Jesus Christ the Model [1924],
- b) to make experienced the need of having recourse to the Model so that He might have Mercy and grant His grace.

'Contemporaneity' is therefore the expression of the authentic life of the Christian, directed toward the Model and consists in seeing the presence of Christ in the sick, in the poor, in the victims of injustice, in the suffering of every type... This is therefore a duty and a grace of Christ that one has when he expresses readiness to 'be crucified along-side Him' [1983, 2074].

It is not therefore to eliminate suffering, but to achieve with it the imitation of the Model [3076]: it is therefore that 'situation which demands the supreme effort' during the life of Christ [1836] When Christ was crucified, all the Apostles fled, the only 'contemporary' of Christ at that moment has been the Good Thief [Lk 23; 28, ff], crucified along-side Him.

Protestantism has eliminated the requirement of the 'Model' with the pretext of grace, and has contributed to producing the proletariat [2509]: 'Luther is therefore contrary to an apostle because instead of preaching Christianity in the interests of God, He has bent it – as later would likewise do Goethe, Hegel, Mynster ... – in the interests of humanity [3910, 4129]. And so, Protestant Christianity has been reduced to 'rigmarole', as has Catholicism [3780]: it continues to make bandits trust in grace. [3613].

6. The Christian "Model-Principle"

Abraham and Mary: the 'models of faith and of total dedication to God.

Thus, the dialectic of the Model becomes the authentic life of the freedom of the Christian, but in the opposite sense willed especially in the end, by Luther, in collusion with secular principles and those enjoying them. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, does not pay heed to the Epicurus-Seneca idea of 'Model', but sees the

advance of the life of faith according to the *way of the Cross* and looks constantly to the example of the saints.

However, beyond all the Saints and of the corresponding extraordinary 'Single' person, stands the Model of the Virgin Mary, whom he could approach even to his reading of *The Glories of Mary*, of St. Alphonsus de Liguori – in sharp contrast with the Protestant tradition. Mary, the Virgin Mother is the sublime Mother of God [113], the pure Virgin from whom Christ was born [121]. She conceived in time, overshadowed as she was by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God [205]. Mary is the Model of religious silence who conserves the secret of God also with her Spouse, Joseph [1531]. Mary is especially the example of fortitude, in her following of Christ, when the Prophet Simeon [Lk 2: 25, ff.] announced that her soul was to be pierced by a sword [2573, 3649]. And also as she stood by the Cross.

And Kierkegaard sees the example of Mary's faith following the path of the Patriarch, Abraham. He is our father in the faith – ready to sacrifice in obedience to God his son [cf. Gn 21]. This heritage leads her to exclaim a prophetic hymn honoring the Virgin Mary: *Who in this world was ever as great as the Full of Grace!* [Lk 1:28], the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary?"

There follows then his moving admiration²⁹: 'And yet, how is she spoken of?' Kierkegaard seems to be thinking here of the Protestant conception: 'Her greatness, he comments, does not derive from the fact of her being [proclaimed] 'blessed among women'... Certainly Mary brought into this world her Infant; yet this marvelous reality was accomplished in her in the manner of other women and that [as Kierkegaard reasons] was a time of anguish, suffering, of paradox but of all this, other men and women knew nothing and would have come to their judgment by appearances, as the phenomenon would have founded their judgment of the reality. Her situation is incomprehensible for all for all: "The Angel of the Annunciation] was certainly a serving manner, but he certainly was not a servile servant – as the common grasp of this mystery might wish – that the knowledge of all this was brought to the other women of Israel in order to say to them: 'Do not disdain Mary, for that which is accomplished in her – this 'extraordinary happening' – is the work of the Holy Spirit. If indeed that Angel had come solely to Mary and no one would have been in a position to comprehend it...Mary does not need the world's comprehension, just as Abraham did not require tears. She was not a heroine, nor was he a hero. However, both became even greater than heroes and heroines by not fleeing from suffering and pain, rather it all took place through these.'

²⁹ Cfr.: *Fear and Trembling*, Problematika I, s.v. III: « Can there ever be a suspension of ethics?», p. 117ss. (tr. it. Milano, Rizzoli 1986, p. 92 ss.).

And such, but even on a still superior level was the Model, Christ in His time: would there be such thing as be in in terror when one sat down to table with Him? There was not anything so easy as to become an Apostle!

Therefore, there is in this situation of Mary and, even before that of Abraham, with all respect to the 'contemporaries', an abyss of distance. There was not anything so easy as to become an Apostle! And yet, they remain Models of the faith. Let us say, though, that this was a bit of difference for the Apostle [Peter] who was scandalized at the prophecy of the passion and this provokes the tremendous correction from Christ: '*Get behind Me, Satan, you are a scandal to Me! Because you do not judge as God does, but more like men do!*' [Mt 16:22, f.]

Here the paradigm of classical Model is left behind at an infinite distance. For this reason, Paul could say and with more right not only of Abraham, but along-side Mary: '*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*' [1 Co 4:16; 11:1]. After the Incarnation, in fact the means of the relationship of humanity with God is not just anyone, but rather the Virgin Mary and the Apostle to whom, God, and through Him Christ Himself, has entrusted the presentation of the Model who needs to ascend even into the Heart of the Beloved to exclaim: 'I die because I do not die!³⁰ And the unknown Doctor of Love had preceded him, the Pseudo-Dennis who says of his Disciple, Hierotheus that he had not only known the divine realities, but experienced them.³¹

And this is the high point of the divine instruction of God with the soul and St. Thomas Aquinas comments:

... Just as if some virtuous person, out of the habit of virtue which he/she has in affection, is perfected to rightly judging those matters which pertain to virtue - so, too, the person engaged in the divine realities, receives divinely the right judgment concerning the divine. And therefore, such a person is subject out of compassion for the divine, i.e., from all that which by loving divine realities, this person became joined to them [and so if the union of delectation might be called 'com-passion' it is at the same time a passion]. Thus, Hierotheus is *most perfect*, i.e., he is instituted into that union of faith regarding these matters, i.e., as that which he says about these, he is joined by that union of faith; I mean; the *un-teachable*, i.e., that which cannot be taught by any human magisterium; this is *mystical*, i.e., hidden, because it exceeds any natural conjunction. [And now follows a theological explanation:] – And so, as in only a few can we understand the many and blessed visions, i.e., those divine revelations of *powerful deliberation*, i.e., of that virtuous discussion of that Hierotheus, even

³⁰ St. John of the Cross, *Opere*, Roma 1963, p. 1043.

³¹ Hierotheus is not only learning about the divine, but in suffering them. (*De div. nom.* l, 9; P.G. 3, 648. Cfr S. *Theol.* q. l, a.6 ad 3 e *Comm. S. Thomae*, n. 19).

though on many other matters has he spoken, nonetheless these that follow, he says in praise of Jesus Christ³².

Therefore, even for the Aristotelian, St. Thomas, the final act of fruition of the Model is the work on the fruition of the Model this is the work of love:

... From those realities susceptible to the senses the name of *'fruitio'* seems to have been derived. Moreover 'fruit' as perceptible to the senses is the ultimate that is to be expected from the tree and is perceived with a certain sweetness. So, 'fruition' seems pertain to love or to delectation which someone has from something that is expected, which is the 'end'...

Of such is the 'circle of happiness':

I answer that, "Fruitio" [enjoyment] and "fructus" [fruit] seem to refer to the same, one being derived from the other; which from which, matters not for our purpose; though it seems probable that the one which is more clearly known, was first named. Now those things are most manifest to us which appeal most to the senses: wherefore it seems that the word "fruition" is derived from sensible fruits. But sensible fruit is that which we expect the tree to produce in the last place, and in which a certain sweetness is to be perceived. Hence fruition seems to have relation to love, or to the delight which one has in realizing the longed-for term, which is the end. Now the end and the good is the object of the appetitive power. Wherefore it is evident that fruition is the act of the appetitive power.

Reply to Objection 1: Nothing hinders one and the same thing from belonging, under different aspects, to different powers. Accordingly the vision of God, as vision, is an act of the intellect, but as a good and an end, is the object of the will. And as such is the fruition thereof: so that the intellect attains this end, as the executive power, but the will as the motive power, moving (the powers) towards the end and enjoying the end attained.

Reply to Objection 2: The perfection and end of every other power is contained in the object of the appetitive power, as the proper is contained in the common, as stated above (Question [9], Article [1]). Hence the perfection and end of each power, in so far as it is a good, belongs to the appetitive power. Wherefore the appetitive power moves the other powers to their ends; and itself realizes the end, when each of them reaches the end³³.

³² Hieroteus non modo discens sed etiam patiens divina» (*De div. nom.* I, 9; P.G. 3, 648. Cfr *S. Theol.* q. I, a.6 ad 3 e *Comm. S. Thomae*, n. 19).

³³ *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 11, a.1.; *S.Th.* I, q. V, a. 4 ad 3. The citation is from St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 1,32 (P.L. 34, 32).

The motions of the spirit come above all, from love, both on the part of God, as the Principle, and on the part of the creature, in the return he offers to the Model.

Also St. John of the Cross when he describes the ultimate transformation of the Cross, too, into the Model, which is God: This Flame of Love is the “Spirit” of his Spouse which is the Holy Spirit, Whom the soul experiences already in itself not only burns within one’s soul, but casts about the flame of His love. These then, are sprayed throughout the soul of the glory and tempered with the divine life.³⁴ This pertains to the experience of his early priestly maturity.

7. The ‘Model Principle’ in Fr. Bertoni’s Spiritual Diary [July 1808-June 1813]:

The text of Fr. Bertoni which the most closely reveals ‘the following of Christ’ seems to be that brief note-book that has come down us with the title, *Memoriale Privato*. This runs from July 1808 until June of 1813³⁵, and that pertains to that experience of his early priestly maturity.

The original text was a note book of much discontinuity and quite varied in style for his personal use and it gathers, more by means of hints than by systematic developments. It includes thoughts and impressions which enflamed and illumined his spirit. The writing style does not present any concerted effort at continuity, and his themes seem to show their any connection with what he lived on any given day. It can be derived in this text of Fr. Bertoni that the theme he jotted down would have resulted from his reflection at the moment, as with the examination of conscience [or his “Model-Principle”] that we have tried to analyze in presenting some insights in similar texts from Seneca-Epicurus.

The similarity of these texts is quite evident, but the distance of the experiences derived are experiences of an infinite distance. This derives from the horizon, of that life both on the human level and that of God. Furthermore; Fr. Bertoni’s texts seem to ignore the gradualism of the divine communications described by the spiritual masters. The young priest was *living* directly this reality and was immediately lifted to a sublime level, which seems to be that of ecstasy with a total and immediate participation. A few passages of his would suffice:

³⁴ St. John of the Cross, *OPERE*, tr. it., Roma 1963, p. 793.

³⁵ This Note-book has since been published, in an integral edition, with historic-ascetical notes, under the care of Fr. J. Stofella in: «*Collectanea Stigmatina*», vol. IV. fasc. I, Roma 1962.- The most abundant texts are those that go from July 1808 until May 1809; the most abundant single text is that of May 1810; from January 1811 to its closing in 1813, there is emphasized particularly the text of May 30, 1812 (p. 183): he notes his a before the Crucifix, a scene of most sublime elevation.

C. Mystical Experiences:

1. “The Feast of the Sacred Heart:

“During Mass, at the consecration, Communion and during the thanksgiving afterward, there were many tears of compunction and affection: in particular, at Communion I experienced for a moment, as though my spirit was detached³⁶ from every creature in deferential service [*ossequio*] of its Creator.” [p. 207]

There seems clear here that the phenomenon of ecstasy had occurred.

2. “After Mass, during the thanksgiving, I experienced a most vivid sense of faith in the presence of our Lord and much confidence: there was further a sentiment of offering with Him some disturbances for Him and with Him” [p. 108].

Does this mean further that the great ‘Enemy’ did not leave him in peace: is this the only hint of this possibility? There are also other texts where Fr. Bertoni speaks of vexation’.

3. “At St. Joseph’s Convent. At the base of one’s own nothingness, one finds God. Experiencing some sublime reflections, there came over me a profound self-knowledge. In the evening, on seeing an image of the Most Blessed Trinity, there was much reverence for the three Divine Persons. The eternal Father, Who stood there with open arms explained His mercy to me, and the ready communication of his gifts, etc.... [pp. 211,f.]³⁷.

4. Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises. In a visit with my companions to the altar of St. Ignatius, I experienced much devotion and recollection and some tears, even though it was a short visit. It seemed to me that the Saint gave us a warm welcome and invited us to promote the greater glory of God as he had accomplished, and by same paths, even though not trying to undertake all those manners that he was able to employ. It seemed to me that he had wanted to say [could this have been an interior locution?]: Onward, soldiers of Christ, gird yourselves with fortitude, take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, *and fight with the ancient serpent*. Make come alive once more my spirit in you and in others through you [p. 213]...

This seems to have been the first motion toward founding the Congregation.

³⁶ «Ec-stasy’ is that term of mystical theology in the sense of separation, detachment from every created reality in order to concentrate on God and in the meditation - contemplation of the divine mysteries of the faith.

³⁷ The 9th of October is in the same context – his 31st birthday; however, he writes with depth and seven greater emotion: : During Mass, at the Secret prayers at the *memento* for the living , I experienced a kind of opening of my intellect and a coming to know just to Whom it was I was speaking. I noted a deep affection and an intensification of charity in praying. Then there were certain thrusts of my heart toward God, as those these were imposed by the Spirit in God. The experience was like that of a person who suddenly runs into a dear friend who had not been seen for years At the first sight of him the desire was to greet him with great affection... Then, ...”

5. Meditation. Death. The past no longer exists. The Future has not yet come.

Only the Present is here and it is in my power. To live from day to day, even from the morning until noon, and from noontime until the evening, and to do everything with the greatest possible perfection. Perhaps there will be no other time to glorify God.”[p. 214]

This is a profound declaration on the precariousness of existence.

6. Meditation. The Kingdom of God. I experienced a strong movement to follow closely our Lord even at the cost of life, through poverty and shame’

And he continues on the same day³⁸: “The celebration of Mass was very recollected with sentiments of reverence. And I taught Catechism with much zeal and persuasion, and even some eloquence. The Lord began first to come to me by having me remember that His Divine Son preached in Jerusalem totally fasting, and then He returned only in the evening to Bethany. This moved me much to love and to my work; and while explaining these matters as a kind of preamble opened up for me, all the ways were open to me for an even more persuasive discourse.” [September 17, 1808, pp. 214, ff.].

There is in these lines an indication of his intimacy of life with the ‘Divine Model.’

7. The following entry is for ten days later: “Meditation. Incarnation. Sentiments of gratitude to the Blessed Trinity and a yearning for correspondence to Jesus Christ. I was already obliged to love God even before He became man: how much more so now!” [ib.] [Fr. Bertoni seems to be experiencing an intensifying penetration of the mystery of the Incarnation.

8. [On the following day, he noted:] Meditation and afterward. A desire and humble petition for martyrdom, and a great internal exhortation.’ [Still further:] “In the evening, feelings of pardon. There was a sentiment of intense love for the most Holy Trinity in giving to us the Son. I experienced great tenderness towards this mystery and at the same time a vibrant faith and desire for union and for an association in His, with a petition of sufferings and shame, with a petition for the grace of suffering, and of being disdained for Him.” [p. 215]

There seems to be an increasing desire of greater depth on his participation in the life of his model.

^{38 bis} September 25th., still in the year 1808, p. 414. – he is speaking here about the teaching and careful explanation of Catechism to adults on the truths of Faith.

9. [There follows in this same rhythm on September 29th:] “There came a deep knowledge of what it means to suffer something out of love for God. *‘Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice’ sake. Blessed are they who are cursed and abused and as others reject your name as so evil, and they speak all kinds of calumny against you, falsely on my account Rejoice in that day, for your reward will be great in heaven!*’ [This is a relatively ‘free’ rendition of Mt 5:11-12].

[He seems to be alluding here to contrasts and opposition to his ministry, and might there have been also some calumny? However, the Lord comes soon to console him].

10. In fact, on October 9th, his birthday, celebrated on the Feast of the Maternity of Mary, he experienced much and needed increased space for his spiritual life: in pages that are resplendent with graces received, are all mixed in with sufferings for sins, the divine touch of what was received on his First Holy Communion, all come together in the total plan of life:

a] “During Mass, during the Secret’ prayers, at the ‘*Memento*’, I experienced an opening up of my intellect to come to know just Who with Whom I was speaking, with an intensified affection and expansion of my heart in praying. Then, there were certain thrusts of my heart toward God, under the impetus of the Spirit into God. It was much like the sudden appearance of a person who had not been seen for a long time, and at the first sight of this old friend there the desire to cast myself into his welcoming embrace.”

b] Second stage: ‘There came then the desire to prolong the visit³⁹ and the impetus to be able to reach the Supreme Good. However, feeling some fear of vanity, since I was in public, I had recourse to the consideration of the gravest of sins⁴⁰, and so there increased both the desire for goodness and a love that dissolved into tears that were very sweet and that lasted even until after Communion. And meanwhile there was a great growth in faith, confidence, at the same time, with humility and loving reverence.’

c] Third Stage: “Finally at Holy Communion I experienced very intense devotion and sentiments like those I experienced on my First Holy Communion day when I was a child – and I do not remember any such experience since then. This recollection lasted about an hour even after Mass, and remained until evening.”

³⁹ This seems to have been the experienced of an ecstasy as an action of perceptible immediacy.

⁴⁰ There is noted here that motion of deep love among the saints who considered themselves to be the greatest sinners, the beginning with St. Paul (I Tim 1, 15). However, it is surprising that this situation is repeated in those as Saints whose way of life is considered to have been totally innocent. (On this matter of the depths of supernatural love, cf. C. Fabro, *Gemma Galgani: testimone del soprannaturale*, Roma 1987).

This recollection from his boy-hood days is both wonderful and significant. Would this imply that as a boy he had an experience of an ecstasy of vocation and total consecration to the love of union with the Incarnate Word?

[This experience was repeated with an interior voice on October 24th:] While making the way of the Cross, at the First Station I came to understand: If I allow myself to condemn the innocent One, why do you – so guilty of thousand fault – want with such solicitude to be among those who justify themselves in everything?” [p. 219]

Let us then encounter also that transforming experience of Hierotheus noted above, that we have taken under consideration with the reflections of St. Thomas as our Guide. The scene, or back-drop for Fr. Bertoni’s note, is that *privileged place* of the Holy Mass: “During Mass, I experienced brief insights, but quite vivid, a deep sentiment of the divine Presence, trust, love and the desire to transform myself into Him, and that Jesus might live in me, and no longer just myself. After Mass, this grace of union did not last. But, it did return as I was making my way along the street, tending to some family matters, must as it was when I was in Church.⁴¹” [p. 219]

[D] MORAL EVALUATIONS:

These flow almost spontaneously along the same lines as the contemplation of the mysteries and they are often inter-twined with it almost as though he were in conversation with his invisible Host, and this always centered on the theme of the following of God: a psychological examination of this happening would be rewarding.

1. **[Handicapped obedience]:** “ Some obey not out of love for this virtue, but purely in order to quiet themselves in their fears: and so it is that in those matters in which they may have some expertise, they rebel against their Superiors. “ [p.207].
2. **[The importance of the connection of the virtues]:** It is never necessary, in order that some undertaking not suffer some harm, to side-step, or, to offend other virtues. Many are in this deception: experience shows that if the undertaking succeeds despite this damage, it is really a destruction: wherever one takes care always of virtue from God, such a person draws protection for it and the endeavor is conformed and increases all the more” [pp. 207, ff.].
3. **[Balance of Soul]:** “Those who are inclined excessively toward action, have to reduce that in behalf of prayer: and those who are excessively attached to prayer, it is fitting that they be moved to action” [p. 208].

⁴¹ On October 27, he noted almost in passing, his being almost in ecstasy: in the first point of the Examen at noon, i.e., during his thanksgiving *prostrate on earth with the sight of heaven* [the Author’s italics]: intense sentiments of the divine presence toward love and self-giving.” (p. 219).

4. [The wonders of God]: “The ways of God of which one may make use often and the most tenuous means, and the most thin strains to sustain the soul, and to draw one back from a precipice, on which a person may be tottering, in His service, are admirable and they form the object of the most sweet contemplation.” [p. 209].

[Commitment in serving God – from St. Augustine]: ‘He who has good will, has all; but that will is not good when it does not accomplish what it could.’ – “A task is completed when it is done out of a strong will – not just any kind, or ordinary will, but one that is diligent, exquisite” [D. Chrysostom]. [The traps of the devil]: “Sometimes among Christians, to live in the Christian way is thought of being shameful [St. Bernard] – this is because they believe in the world, they believe in the Devil, they believe in the flesh, and it is only to God that there is not given the security of truth” [p. 239].

5. [The Necessity of the Divine Lights in order to progress]: “Do not do anything, if it is not accomplished for the glory of God and for His holy love from this principle, proceeds disdain for the world ... the proclamation of all vices!” [p. 234]

[War on one’s own defects]: ‘I can’t’ in the matter of mortifications, said by spiritual persons, sounds really bad: the reason is that in God, one can do all. If one would like to cover with the name of ‘cross’ that has come from heaven, as the lack of mortification, and under a false veil almost taking pleasure in a choice of one’s own will from heaven, one would take delight in his own faults.’ [p. 212].

[The advantage of some temptations]: “It is necessary to prepare oneself for greater temptations and in order to make reparation for defects already committed, means that one has arrived where God is calling us” [p. 213].

6. [To commit oneself to spiritual progress]: “I experienced the inspiration to combat the little defects and at other times, those that are greater: and to ascend toward virtue with all diligence because the time in which I am able to serve God constantly grows shorter, as it does to promote His glory, and to sanctify myself” [p. 216].

The desire to imitate Christ in poverty, and in the “pinch of poverty” [p. 218].

7. [The Example of the Laity]: “It is a great mystery to see such holiness among seculars, and so much imperfection and vices in a priest’ [pp. 221].

[Penalties of Pride]: “Pride and vainglory are one vice the deformity of which the just comprehend and they experience for it all the horror of the most tragic effects imaginable: as a result, even at the slightest appearance of this, and all the generosity of their spirit is as much weakened as one sees for the acquired virtues, or the stronger gratuitous gifts: living in dread as the rich do, and the wealthy even

more the rapacity of thieves, who would despoil them of their wealth, and would suddenly leave totally empty their spiritual cashbox." [p. 220].

You will experience a conversion of the mind: however, it is not that easy regarding the will."

8. [Interior purification]: "If one would consider how great an evil sin is, such a one would never commit even one of them." [p. 227 - "When one first does not make meditation well, it is not even possible to speak well of God" [p. 226] - "Any habitual sinner is in a bad state for the past, and even worse for the present, and most disastrous for the future" [p. 333]. - "Take on the spiritual path, which is a narrow one and one of penance. *'I will not remember your sins, and I will show you how it will be necessary for you to suffer for My name.'* "Very few are they who would understand that which God would do for them if He were not impeded in His plans by them." [pp. 240, f.]

9. [The Essence of the following of the Model]: "*Watch and pray!*" - In these words may be found all the teachings of Scripture and of the Gospel. - '*Watch!*' This means to be well equipped and strong: but without weapons. Such a one will not resist if attacked: such a person will be overcome."

'Pray!' This means to be well armed: but asleep: if one is assailed this persons will be despoiled of all weapons and killed through betrayal. - '*Watch and Pray!*' this is the well equipped and strong man, and one who is armed and thus cannot be conquered.' [p. 240].

10. [The Ecstasy of Love]: "While praying before Mass, I was overtaken a little by sleep and I heard it being said to me from the Crucifix: *Look at this, My heart!*" This message provided me with a marvelous insight to understanding, a great and unexpected ardor of soul, and thus ascending within to grasp the beloved object indicated. I experienced a kind of tremble run throughout my entire body. My eyes and mouth were closed but my soul seemed wide awake and full of joy. It seemed that my soul wanted to be separated from my body, and I seemed to be dying and rejoicing at the same time.

Turning again another time, as though the action of turning in desire toward the One Who was saying this, and the tremble was renewed within me and as the effect of a difficult death; after all this my spirit within me was uncertain as to what should be done, as it seemed that if I continued on in this experience I would be surely dead, or at least I would be removed from communion with my body, being then impeded. Joy remained in the hands of the Lord. I found much quiet as though in that moment I would die; and in an instant I felt that my soul had been restored for the use of my senses, as before" [pp. 241, ff.]. The effect of all this was a most tender

devotion to the Sacred Heart, much affection in the Holy Mass where my soul discovered sweet tears in Holy Communion and after deep recollection and sweetness that permeated the entire day with an experience of an increase of the theological virtues.” [pp. 251, f.]. [There seems to be described here the light, the amazement and the joy of an ecstasy].

With the transforming activity of divine grace and the consequent experience of the Indwelling in his soul of the three Divine Persons in which his soul delighted. His soul undertook his final journey to giving himself over completely to His Beloved. He seems here to be experiencing the rising above all earthly ties that would deviate him from casting himself without reserve into the Heart of Christ. In all this, the Divine Model remains always present to the eyes of the soul, and his following after his Model also in the pastoral activity of the moment, that of preaching - this continued as long as his health permitted him to do so.

However it is above all in the thirty years and more of his last illness, that Fr. Bertoni was ascending ‘the Ladder of Paradise’ which for him consisted in the total immolation of himself with his attention riveted continuously on his divine Model fixed to the Cross. Christ, the Incarnate and Crucified, drew him forward in ‘that thirst for suffering’. He, too, confined to his bed of real suffering for a thirty year period, he lived his mission in that segregation of love, day in and day out, engaged in ‘repeating’ and copying within himself the pathway of immolation and of similarity with his Divine Model. It is true, as is seen, that he had recommended, for the profit of his own soul, the choice of his Model’, which he found in ‘a saint of his own vocation’ and it seems that he had chosen above all through the admonition he experienced in ecstasy, at the altar of St. Ignatius, a model of universal commitment for Christ in building up and defending the Church from her enemies of yesterday and today, outside and within the Church.

But, Fr. Bertoni’s ‘witness’ has a special character, all his own. His recurring serious illnesses which took up almost the entire space of his long life, give testimony to this. During all this, he entertained visits from people in powerful positions, prelates, humble priests and people of the world ... none of these visits could interrupt the testimony of the Cross in his body lacerated as the ‘Suffering Servant of the Lord’, described by Isaiah. In all of this, he kept his attention riveted on the Martyr-Saints, whom he had proposed for himself that of imitating them with that fullness and totality of spirit, the amazes us. At the same time, this witness of his exalts us in filial joy and the special light that was shed on the mystery of the pilgrim Church in a *wicked world*.

The ‘Ladder to Paradise’ which is the Cross, is the throne of the immolation of the Word made flesh, in order to cancel the stain of the sins in this earthly life of so many Christians, whose bodies may still be listed in the Church, while they steadfastly

keep, yesterday and still today, their souls outside the Church, even though they may not be actively combatting her with her enemies. And so, the visible Church, which has become the stage of activity of that theater under the sway of the 'enemy', which the Devil is, and he seeks – and, at times, this still happens and it is that of suffocating and confounding the invisible dimensions of the church of the 'elect' [if such were possible]. For sure, during the slow unfolding of time of his painful illnesses, he felt often left quite alone with God in the solitude of his suffering. Fr Bertoni would often think of the lacerated Church, suffering under those instigations of the Evil One, horrified by so many betrayals, so much weakness, oscillations, flights, persecutions more or less disguised, but always going on in the Church herself.

The 19th Century was a great time for the witnesses for Christ but also of serious betrayals of Christ. Heresies in dogma, repeated giving in and shameless manifestations against morality, rampant materialism – yesterday just like today – in all circles. The political catastrophe, outside the Church, has caused a spiritual catastrophe inside, through the triumph – which is but a prevarication – of anti-Christian ideologies! Many of these were not only anti-Christian but – standing with the old principle of Seneca and Epicurus with which our reflections here began – many of these proved to be inhuman, totally anti-humanity, in that they were so opposed to the universal moral standing of which each one is moved to raise up one's contemporaries and to aspire toward the model.

So, what sense could a reflection such as this one have for today: a Witness for the Supernatural? The position yesterday and for always, takes place when the Church gives her authoritative judgment on the heroic practice [of following the 'Model'] regarding the life of the soul. The decision falls on the harmony ['the logical belonging of a predicate to the subject': i.e., the Church affirms that true fidelity, as that of our Father Bertoni, is lived in conformity to the precepts and the admirable examples of our Savior Jesus Christ. This authoritative judgment has already been given substantially in the Decree of Heroicity of his Virtue. He has further received a two-fold witness from God with the miracles required and approved for these definitive steps toward Beatification and Canonization. And so it is that it is God Himself Who works the miracles: in fact God is the sole creator of the universe, and he can insert Himself and can also interfere – i.e., by suspending, changing, intensifying – the comportment of the Laws that He Himself has conferred on nature.. And the Church, thanks to the research of the experts regarding the quality of experience, formulates the judgment on the reality and even on the 'fact' that has taken place in the miracle. And the miracle constitutes the 'testimony' on the part of God Himself, or His direct intervention to work out, for our edification and 'example', His Servant in the halo of light of the Church.

And it is to this which contributes on the foundation of the 'judgment on the fact and first obviously, on the heroicity of the virtues, the investigation and the decision of the Church. And it is therefore the point in which there are encountered, *de facto*, the finite and the infinite, time and eternity.

Merely to 'state' a fact is not necessarily 'to comprehend' the course of its becoming, but simply attests to what has already taken place. 'To affirm' [and deny] is a term in continual use and of obvious understanding in so far as it attains an historical reality understood in space, and placed within the time of our existence. 'To comprehend', on the other hand, invests a complex constellation of factors, antecedents and consequences of the event in question, the presence of which and its action, i.e., the factors of its presence and situations of action, escape us altogether. And this is true also in the order of the events that are simply natural: chemists, meteorologists, biologists, physiologists – as also [and perhaps above all?] those multiple relationships that they have among them and which constitute the very course of nature. It is not any accident that St. Augustine affirms that these constitute a manifestation of the omnipotence of God much more surprising than the 'exceptions' constituted by so-called 'miracles'.

However, we do not know the intrinsic 'how' of natural events, and there is not therefore any wonder if we do not know the 'how' of miracles which are facts which transcend the dynamism, i.e., the forces and the laws of nature. And it is this transcendence, when it is declared with authority [there is always a 'because', a reason behind such a declaration] therefore which passes the pertinent judgment rightly on the part of the Church. We can say that this stops at the *extrinsic* judgment regarding the fact, i.e., the holiness of the fact, and does not pretend, nor would it ever be able to do so, unless through a special revelation of God Himself, so make a pronouncement on the 'becoming' of the 'intimate being' of the transformation and transfiguration in to God and into Christ of a creature. In order to do this one would have to know, to penetrate, accompany, and contemplate from within ... the origin the operation of grace in the soul: this would be, in its own way, in the most sublime elevation of knowledge and of love, a participation in the very same blessed happiness which is the object and the term of that operation. This, in so far as it can be understood regarding the divine economy of salvation we can know this only 'in our eternal homeland' when we will be able to know – in order to rejoice and to thank God - the Plan of His divine mercy which has chosen us without any merit of our own, before the constitution of this world [Ep 1:4.]

Therefore, our distance from the supernatural is infinite and this is not only because God in His infinity remains inaccessible. But it is also due to the fact - and above all else - that the gift of Salvation that comes to us through the grace in the Blood of Christ, is completely gratuitous. This has in the creature - because of the

reality of sin and its existential consequences, namely, the corruption of the sensitive and spiritual powers - uniquely the weighty store of negative and sinful premises or tendencies. It can be that the explicit knowledge of this negative baggage flees from all knowledge, yet it is reality makes itself present to each one with the two-fold weight both of limitation and of anguish. Such is man. As with the direct experience of his greatness, emerging over the cosmos and over all the material reality that surrounds us, provides a counter-weight in the daily experience of evil, vice and defects. And from all this too often does dominion flee, from those sins which are derived from it.

However, this is a 'dialectic experience, or one that is a negative-positive which freedom can be addressed toward a two-fold result, toward both evil and good. This leads either to perversion or to the holiness to which the Gospel invites us, and toward which St. Paul does not cease to exhort his faithful. It is true that the final result *is hidden with Christ in God* [1 Co 2:7]. However the Saint knows well human misery from his own point of departure. At the same time he takes note of and distinguishes the grace which draws him toward God and moves him to abandon himself into mysterious – but, quite clearly noticed – impulses and motions like the bird who takes off in flight and ever yearning for more. This can all be said and recognized as the consciousness of the supernatural, always on the level of *because*. The *what* and the *how* [and this latter even more] these all remain hidden to the human being way-farer.

And the *because* is sufficient to present the Saint [and in a broad sense every soul in grace] as the *witness to the supernatural*. It is true: here the paradox returns. The supernatural "transcends" the capacity of nature, both in the senses as well as in the intellect. But also the holiness of the Saint transcends nature, it surpasses the capacity of the normal faculties with their perfection of acting and that heroism in suffering. It does so in the 'imitation' of the Divine Model that each holds before himself: the Saint thus becomes the continuous surpassing of the *nor is there ever anything further*, not only from the Stoic and Epicurean view, but also of the 'Heroic Virtue' remembered by Aristotle⁴².

As we stated from the outset, the 'Saint' repeats in him/ herself the divine life of an active repetition, and not purely that in some abstract paradigmatic sense, and neither is it purely out of some privilege and characteristic of nature. Holiness in a human life can only take place through the elevation of grace and through a conformity in act of one's own life with that of God in Christ. And it is this 'Model'

⁴² One can rather recall that 'divine instinct' (θείαδεμῆ) of the young Aristotle, which was accepted and developed to its height in the progress of the spiritual by St. Thomas (cf. C. Fabro, *Le «liber de bona fortuna» de l'Éthique à Eudème d'Aristote et la dialectique de la divine Providence chez Saint Thomas*, Revue Thomiste 1988, p. 566.

Fr. Bertoni proposes for us, and proposes it as the *'life in [of] Christ*. The life of a Saint, therefore, unfolds not only on a diverse level from the ordinary, but breathes the very atmosphere of God and enters into mystery, in the ineffable, incomprehensible end-result in human history which is the exemplary life of the Incarnate word [the Essential Model].

††

CONCLUSION

The 'Loving Experience of the Model' in the life of Fr. Bertoni.

At the outset we have recalled the comparison in the presentation Manzoni made of the life of the Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, with his enchantment of divine grace: *like a little brook... which flows limpidly and casts itself into the river* [c. 22]. The river of Fr. Bertoni's life and grace had been God, one and only, and totally in the lived Mirror of the Word. The texts of his Spiritual Diary authorize one to speak of spiritual, authentic experiences, but endowed with surprising characteristics. They did not follow some fixed trajectory, and they present themselves right away on a rather sublime level. And they flow along in fits and starts as sudden bursts of flames from a volcano. As these texts proceed along, rather than pausing to take delight in them, they seem to explode on the scene and at the end, even his very words seem to have been interrupted. Would this be the effect of the divine wave overflowing its banks into his spirit? And, as we have noted, divine communications pertain to a period that is relatively brief and they follow, as was pointed out, a clear trajectory of a clear expression.

For almost fifty years, Fr. Bertoni would hide in silence, the recurring phenomena of his interior life; it is true that this would burst forth in his sermons, in his correspondence, and in the guidance to souls of every age and social level – from the young men in the Oratory, to priests and bishops, from those condemned to death as well as the founders of religious families, including the great Anthony Rosmini. The last mentioned was able to declare that at the beginning of the foundation of his Institutes, he went to see Fr. Bertoni who: *... after having seen the rules, he provided me with a most efficacious encouragement, dissipating my every doubt. So it is that in some manner, this enterprise has also been born in their house*⁴³. For reasons such as this, Fr. Bertoni was called an 'angel of counsel.'

Such experiences were most vibrant, much like spurs and flames, which reached the depths of one's soul. In this, our conclusion to these reflections may serve as a kind of a confirmation, just a few brief hints would suffice: the characteristic is that they have as their center the Eucharistic mystery, was though his

⁴³ Written from Stresa, on the 28th of March 1846. Cfr. C. Fabro, *L'enigma Rosmini*, Napoli 1988, p. 68.

life something like an expansion, or indeed, an effect of the Real Presence. The forms of this 'divine contact' are many and varied. Here are some examples: "... many tears of compunction and affections" – 'a most vivid sentiment in the presence of our Lord [after Mass] and the sentiment further of offering myself to suffer with Him... experiencing very sublime reflections concerning God, but a profound recognition of myself.'

In ecstasy at the altar of St. Ignatius he wrote"... much devotion and recollection with a great internal sweetness and some tears..." – and this was followed by energetic references of invitation addressed to the Saint. He experienced a powerful stimulus to work with perfection and a vivid sentiment of the fragility of human existence. He wrote: "... I experienced a strong movement to follow more closely our Lord at the cost of my own life for His poverty and shame He endured. During his teaching of Catechism he felt that ... there were opened for him those paths even to being able to arrive at a persuasive lesson. This almost seems like the level of a rapture.

The visit to St. Ignatius' altar was decisive for the foundation of his Congregation: "...Onward soldiers of Christ, bind yourselves with boldness.' There follows then a powerful thought on death. His catechism experience of September was strong 'union with the divine Son.' As a kind of preamble there were opened for him very easily those paths even to providing a most persuasive lesson. There followed then certain thrusts of 'suffering and being rejected for Him'. And he experienced an understanding what a great gift it was to suffer something for the love of God.' The most intense, though, seems to be that of October 9th, which needs to be reread often in its entirety for the depths of his experience of the supernatural in this young priest already having reached a high point in loving contemplation.

Likewise, for the intensity of impression, these stimuli toward holiness inundated his soul even to the ultimate purification of consuming love. It is just something of a pity and a real loss and disappointment for us to find his very sudden interruption [actually in the middle of a word] of that 'Story of a Soul' of this excellent testimony of his, enraptured by grace toward that two – fold and contemporaneous giving of himself to the priestly ministries and to that union with his beloved Model.

Also the life of Fr. Bertoni, like that of not a few other Saints, followed on the supernatural destruction of that school of English deism and of French Illuminism, of the 17th-18th centuries. This life of this Saint is rather the source of much light and comfort for Catholic piety. It is particularly relevant today for the Church which is hemmed in on every side by blatant secularism, even of the most delicate fibers of theology and ascetical practice.

We can recollect the supernatural experience of our Founder in a few words, which he pronounced very close to his death and after an entire lifetime spent in a real laceration of his flesh, in a response he gave to the Infirmarian who was taking care of him: *I need to suffer!*⁴⁴

This remark implies a total conformity to Christ crucified. This is not simple acceptance, nor resignation, nor passive acceptance. This rather is an expression of his desire to suffer anew an increase, an intensification, to descend into the very depths of suffering and love for Christ Crucified. This is the supreme testimony on the part of a soul regarding the supernatural reality which, at its culmination, is the Folly of the Cross.

And here concludes our salutary, fragmentary analysis of the Saint from his own documents. This is certainly not self-seeking, reticent or vague comments – they are rather rich and splendid in character.

Fr. Bertoni can indeed say with the Apostle: And I make up for what is lacking to the passion of Christ [Col 1:24] - And this would be complemented by this other line, *our conversation is in heaven* [Ph 3:20]. These would be all part of that mysterious halo provided by that formula cited at the beginning, of Pseudo-Denis, for the disciple Hierotheus: ... 'He is taught not only by learning, but also suffering the divine realities...'⁴⁵

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the first manner, or form of divine wisdom, as a lived experience – which does not proceed through argumentations, but '... by means of inclination: just as one who has the habit of virtue, rightly judges about those matters which are in harmony with the virtue to be performed, to the extent that such a person is inclined toward these...' It is an Augustinian principle to maintain: my inclination, is my love – I am weighed down by that wherever I am borne.'

The supernatural which is presented to us and penetrates the consciousness of the saint is unveiled as an effect of the Gift of Wisdom, according to the Angelic Doctor through which while virtue '... is ordained simply toward operating well, the gifts are ordained to this that through them we confess Christ, principally in so far as He has suffered these things, because in His Passion the gifts of this kind have principally shone forth.' Therefore the gifts operate in the soul in so far as the soul is moved from on high and is moved by An 'instinct and motion of the Holy Spirit...'⁴⁶. So, while the theological virtues work *under the command of reason*, 'the gifts of the

⁴⁴ This particular is taken from the first biography of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni: : «Notizie biografiche intorno al sacerdote don Gaspare Bertoni» di don Gaetano Giacobbe » (Proc. Apost., vol. II, p. 644).

⁴⁵ S. Th. I-II, 68, a. 6 ad 3um; a. 2. This is the theological reflection on the texts from 'Etica Eudemea'.

⁴⁶ S. Th. I-II, q. 68, a. 3

Holy Spirit are indeed habits, by which a person is perfected to obeying promptly the Holy Spirit.'

This holds true in particular for the Gift of Wisdom through which '... a person is endowed with judgment through the Holy Spirit.'⁴⁷ And the soul of Fr. Bertoni seems to us as having been able at this stage of his life that to have been invaded from his childhood years and moved by the continuing and secret stimuli of this superior wisdom as the vital form of his thinking and acting.

In this way, it can be said that Fr. Bertoni's entire life had been a 'Witness to the Supernatural' which had been lived in a continual asceticism under the continuous and intensifying mystical graces. It amazes one, though, when it is noted that his direct witnesses who for almost a half a century had lived with him at the enclave of the House of the Stimate have not left any testimony whatsoever of the extraordinary charism of the Founder, as they shared with him the hidden way of such a sublime gift of God.

However, we can conclude that the testimony of the reality of the supernatural in Fr. Bertoni's entire life where it is objectively rather difficult to speak of 'stages': from the very outset of his apostolic beginnings, and going back to his First Holy Communion which left in his spirit the flaming sign of his special predestination. This he lived and breathed the supernatural in fullness as his life moved on. Perhaps it was not in fact in his First Holy Communion that he had experienced the divine shaking of his soul. And it is really unimportant whether the unveiling of the experience of the supernatural that Fr. Bertoni lived and was concentrated in the two great mysteries of the Faith: that of the Trinity and of the Incarnation and he maintained all the time, the centrality of the Eucharistic Mystery. For it was often during the Eucharistic celebration that his soul dilated, and proved to be deeply moved, that he became ever more opened to receiving the sublime communications.

For the reality of these conclusions it does not seem that there can be any doubts: his intellect and his will were moved to action, but so, too, was his delicate sensibility in so far as his consciousness of the divine comes directly to the forefront, as a real phenomenon of his real world. However, it does seem, and differently from so many others privileged in the life of the spirit, that this phenomenon was not transferred from this interior realm to the exterior. There were no apparitions of figures, with objective characteristics of colors and sounds.

It might also be said that the more these phenomena of exterior presence are evident, it is because of the intense interior presences in the form, if there may be

⁴⁷ S. Th. I-II, q. 68, a. 1.

permitted the expression: of 'attractions' of the possession of the human soul on the part of the Divine Host in the form of a singular penetration even to his taste for the ineffable sweetness. So, outside of the participation of the external senses - and indeed, with the explicit exclusion of them, such as ecstasies, both real and evident in the descriptions that have come down to us. His writings are indeed authentic Documents of the Supernatural.

For us, there remains a great empty space, which is the silence regarding his interior life maintained by his followers who lived with him for almost a half a century. This emptiness, however, in some way is filled for us from the record of the Calvary of his Martyrdom that was almost continual, harsh and even cruel, from those terrible maladies that he both supported and loved in the superior joy of his secret with God and of his total conformity with his crucified Savior.

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St. GASPAR BERTONI:**A LIFE ILLUMINED BY THE SUPERNATURAL⁴⁸**

Cornelio FABRO

III. AN 'EVERY-DAY' WITNESS ILLUMINED IN PRAYER]Titolo: *Gaspare Bertoni, Una vita illuminata dal soprannaturale*Fonte: Ed. Ta Stigmata,
Collaboratori Bertoniani,
Roma, ottobre 2009]

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Prologue

There is a declaration of Holiness which the Church in her pilgrimage through history makes regarding some of her sons and daughters. This is the most sublime recognition of the 'witnesses of the supernatural'. Here there are surpassed the limits of essence and existence in their dimensions and demands draw with anxiety and anguish always open in the life of men and women through time, that appears as a glimmer the Infinite. This can be the 'second transcendence': the first is that of the apparition to happiness which urges us on through the multiple paths of life with a continuous alternating of projects and hopes, of joy and bitterness, of enthusiasm and discouragement. In brief, this is the 'struggle of the contraries' according to one of the most ancient formulae of philosophy. The fact that it is a way of continuous tension, strong aspiration at least for those who seek to give a meaning to the adventure of

⁴⁸ Given the merely documentary nature, there is prescindend here in the exposition, from the discussion on the distinction of the Supernatural, *quoad substantiam*, [these would be the mysteries of faith as revealed on the life of God] – and the Supernatural *quoad modum*, [the preternatural gifts, prophecies, miracles ...]. For the classic of modern theology on the essence of the supernatural, cf. M.F. Schebeen [of a Roman formation], especially in his reflections: *Natur und Gnade e Die Herrlichkeiten de gottlichen Gnade*, , respectively of Gradmann e Gorsche, Freiburg i, Br.1941 [pp.11, f.; 21, ff., 60 ff.; 94, ff., 60, ff., 94, ff.: Theilhasbe]. The problem is taken up again with a direct adherence to the dogmas of Christianity, in his: *Due Misterien des Cristenetums: Wesen, Bedeutung und Zussammenhang dereselben nach der in ihrem ubernaturalichen Charakter gegebenen Perspektive*, hrsg. I Hofer, Freiburg i: Br 1941 [pp. 11, ff., 36, ff.; and cf. Sachregister, s.v., Ubernautur, Ubernauturlichkeit, pp 763. Schebeen may be considered the 'classic theologian of the supernatural' of the 19th century in the line of the Magisterium of Gregory XVI and Pius IX, who condemned the errors of Hermes [Denz.-S. 1818-31, 2833], Bautain [Denz.-S 2751-56, 2765-69], of rationalism [2775-81], A. Gunther [1282831, 2833], of ontologism [2841-47, Froschammer [2850-61], I. Dollinger [2875-80] - collected had condemned the errors regarding reason and faith [3021-3045], the nature of the Church and the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff [3055-, 3058, 3064, 3075].; It is the conflict of reason and faith that in the *Syllabus* of Pix IX [nn. 2901-2980]. Vatican I condemned the errors regarding the relationships of reason and faith [3021-3045], the nature of the Church and the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff [30553, 3058, 3064, 3075].It is the conflict of faith and reason that drags through the history of the 19th century and which is polarized in the principle of immanence with the modern thought [cf. C. Fabro, *Introduzione all'ateismo moderno*. II edition, Roma 1969]. It omits completely the problematic of the 19th century concluded with Vatican I and is limited to the discussion on the controversy of Baius in the context of St. Thomas – Blondel, the study of H. deLubac, *Surnaturel*. Paris 1945].

their own lives, to the marvelous inexhaustible interrogation of history, of poetry and above all of philosophy on the significance of the meaning and of the scope of one's freedom. This first transcendence has been interviewed and projected by philosophy 'from the beginning, is now and always' – seeking to respond to the question: 'what is being'⁴⁹?

Is there something beyond the phenomena, or is everything reduced to the immensity of those infinite spaces which brought horror to Pascal, or to the inexorable flight of time which overturns everything, and when deprived of senses, reduces human history to nothing more than an 'account made by an idiot?' Such pessimism, however, does not seem justified: while the records of human history are full of dark pages, yet at the same time, there are not lacking those that have been truly luminous. While it is true that the centuries succeed one another in wars and errors, it has also known dawns and non-times of light and beauty! Times of truth and heroism...: if the plant seems to be overcome by wayward winds yesterday as well as today - there are not lacking – even though so many of these have appeared scarcely as flashes of light - the intervening pauses of exultation and joy toward which every human being who believes in God and in the future life can collaborate⁵⁰.

One might find an example with a testimony left by Enrico Fermi. The reference here is to a brief writing dating from 1932. In a first article he analyzed the profound difference between the American mentality, both technological and pragmatic, with that Latin brand of spirituality presented by Dante and Manzoni⁵¹.

In his second article, "Faith in God" – "the Wisdom of the Simple" Fermi scours to the depths of the human spirit with an experience that was totally personal:

... "Many years have passed, but I remember this as though it were yesterday. I was a very young man, and I nourished the illusion that human intelligence can arrive at everything. And, therefore, I became engulfed in my studies beyond measure. The reading of many books was not enough for me, I spent half of the night mediating on these most abstruse matters."

"A very severe nervous exhaustion obliged me to set this all aside, and further, even to leave the city, full of temptations for my brain already exhausted and to take my refuge in a remote and shady countryside, I was reduced almost to a vegetative state, not even on the animal level. I scanned a bit some reading I prayed and I went for long walks in the midst of the flowering fields [it was the month of May], and I considered as blessed that dense terrain, the green secretions by the red poppies, the rows of poplars that were extended along the canals, the blue mountains which closed

⁴⁹ cf. *Metaphy.* VII, 1, 1028 b 2.

⁵⁰ This is the demonstration of the existence of a personal God [St. Eth., I, q. 11, a. 3].

⁵¹ This is based on the life of grace as this is merited by the Passion of Christ and communicated with the Sacraments of the Church.

the distant horizon, tee tranquil human endeavors gong on through the fields and the peasants huts.”

“One evening, actually it was already night, while I was awaiting sleep to overtake me, and it was slow at coming. I was seated on the green grass of a field, and I was listening to the pleasant conversations of some of the peasants who were near by. They spoke of many simple matters, but not vulgar, nor frivolous, as can so often happen among other groups of human beings. Our country-folk speak rarely and only break out in speech to say opportune things, well thought out, and often times, even in a sage manner. At last, all fell silent, as if the serene and solemn majesty of that Italian night, one bejeweled with stars, had turned toward those simple spirits with a mysterious enchantment.”

“The silence was broken, but not the enchantment, by the deep voice of a big farmer, rough in appearance. He remained stretched out on the grass with his eyes riveted toward the stars, and exclaimed as though in obedience to a profound aspiration: ‘How beautiful this is! - And yet, there are those who tell us that God does not exist!’ I repeat that phrase of the old peasant, in that place, at that hour. After months of the most arid studies, he touched my sprit in a profound way that I recall that simple scene as though it were yesterday, A very sublime Hebrew prophet put this to words perhaps three thousand years ago: *The heavens narrate the glory of God!*’. One of the most celebrated philosophers or these modern times has written: ‘Two realities fill my heart with admiration and reverence: the starry sky overhead, and the moral law in the human heart.’”

“That shaggy old peasant did not even know how to read. However, there was deep in his spirit, protected there by an honest hard-working life, a small angle into which the light of God penetrated with a power that was not much inferior to that of the ancient prophets, and perhaps superior to that of the philosophers...⁵²

This angle of the light of reason, comforted by the light of faith. From this witness of profound emotion that had shaken the consciousness of a genius of modern physics, that we can judge as ‘natural transcendence’. Let us pass over now to ‘supernatural transcendence’ to that which bears us from the disheartening events of time toward that security of heaven, from the darkness of impending death to the nascent brilliance of eternal life. And this is the Christian announcement and that space of the action of the Saints in which moves in that hiddenness as the Veronese dialect puts it: *^take to your dens, an unnoticed lair!*’

This is the epitome of the life of Fr. Bertoni, which on reflecting about him, his was a life full of mystery: in his infancy, adolescence, as a young seminarian and priest, in his life of apostle and spiritual director both in the seminary, as well as in religious communities, embedded in that marvelous constellation of 19th century Verona. In this

⁵² M. Micheli, *Enrico Fermi e Luigi Fantappie’*, Personal Reminiscences in: *^Responsabilita’ del sapere. XXXI 81979, Vol. 131-132, pp. 21-23.*

world would be included that major star, Anthony Rosmini, who has stated that his Institute was born at the Stimate. This *life hidden for centuries in God*, [Ep 3:9] is at the same time, most intense in its spiritual radiance. This could be said too be the essence, the compendium and more precisely the reality in act of his testimony to the supernatural⁵³.

1. The Emergence and the Evidence of the Problem of God

There is no doubt that in the situation of that simple peasant noted by Fermi, and in this great man himself, we are dealing with an authentic and powerful religious experience. We can call this a point of departure of reference of natural religion: the cosmos of God, However, the religious dimension pertains to the natural inclination of human consciousness as St. Thomas had also noted: ‘Man has a natural inclination to that which he knows about God’ [I-II, q. 94, a. 2]. This is the first genetic nucleus that successive experience and experience should develop, in collaboration and in the direction of the ‘radical existential choice’, i.e., from that toward good and happiness’ for this, also the modern history of religion is a conclusion commonly accepted that atheism is not a primary liberation, but a secondary one.

This means that the choice of atheism is not immediate, but a reflexive action. ‘Atheistic Peoples’ do not exist, nor have they ever existed. In some form, religion has been present from the very beginning s of human history The illuminist theory of man, before the world and in the course of its history, is as a ‘nude spirit’ , or endowed with an absolutely neutral conscience regarding the life of cultural and political societies. Such beings find life and strength in the contestations of the absolute criteria between the true and false, the good and evil, the just and the unjust. These have all been proclaimed by the religious consciousness of that which is referred to as the ‘common man’ of Kierkegaard⁵⁴. All the religious that are encountered in history go hand in hand

⁵³ The actuality of this theme is attested to by an illustrious Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome, who, in response to the homage of the volume: *Gemma Galgani: Testimone del Soprannaturale* (Roma 1987), wrote to me November 3, 1987 “ ... Your use in the title the word ‘supernatural, which the ‘Fathers’ of Vatican II did not, unfortunately, did not choose to do! This resulted in so much confusion! – In fact, the term in question is absent altogether from the Index of the *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, IX ed., Bologna 1971. - However, the term is present in abundance as was easily foreseeable and was well known in the [almost official] correction of the Denzinger-Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. XXXII, Herder 1963. (cf. "*supernaturalitas*", is lacking in the Alphabetical Index of Names and Items” p. 904 b9. Among the 40 propositions condemned from Rosmini, the 36th pertains to the supernatural order which is reduced to the manifestation of being “ in the fullness of his real form” (Denz-Sch. 3236). The proposition is taken from the *Filosofia del diritto*, Vol. II, Sez. II, C. 1, a. 2, ... 1: nn. 674-677 (ed. di Napoli 1845, p. 129 s.). However, the field of the testimony-experience of the supernatural has multiple forms, levels and manners and embraces the entire field of the Christian life even to those humble situations known only by God. Fr. Bertoni precedes us on this illumined path by the mysterious depths of grace.

⁵⁴ He is not to be confused with the concept of ‘just any person’ based on the journalistic terminology . Nor does it mean ‘the man of the street’ meaning one who is for all practical purposes ‘a persona bereft of ‘quality’ of Musil. The expression rather indicates the man who in the concrete situation of life distinguishes the true from

with the moral aberrations in an intertwining and mutual influx which is easy to discover in every civilization. St. Paul had pointed this out in his noted text in his Letter to the Romans⁵⁵.

The complexity of aberrations, both religious as well as moral, along through the centuries of civilizations, do not proceed at an equal step, but they are transferred into other fields of the activity of the human spirit, such as in the political life, sociology, art, in forming a kind of whirlwind of degeneration of ideas and tendencies against which only a few privileged consciences have been able to withstand. The complexity of such ideas and tendencies toward degeneration can be indicated with the term, *gnosi and gnosticism*. As is known, this has been present from the very first origins of Christianity and it embraces the entire gamut of heretical movements: this is true up through our own times, under the dominating influence of modern thought. This has all come to a head under the so-called 'principle of immanence' which has invaded these first decades of the post-Vatican II era, and also into Catholic theology. This has been called an 'anthropological shift' [*Antropologische Wendung*] of German vulgarization along the line of Lessing-Kant-Hegel-Rahner. However, sets out from the Cartesian *cogito*, in which there is already contained the essence of the refusal of transcendence, and the re-affirmation of the principle of Pythagoras: "Man is the measure of all things"⁵⁶.

Christianity pertains to natural transcendence, which is guaranteed by the emergence, or the primacy of the presence of being over one's personal activity and on the mortifications of conscience, adds the step to the passage – Kierkegaard calls this a 'leap' using a Hegelian term, but with an anti-Hegelian understanding – all this leads to the acceptance of the revealed doctrine taught by the faith, and, for us Catholics, one that is conserved and handed on by the living and continuous Magisterium of the Church. To the natural participation of the spiritual life, there is added divine benevolence, the supernatural participation of the grace of Christ through which man overcomes the obstacle of sin and enters into 'communion' with [the imitate life of] God: 'the Principle of the Image'; [Image-Principle] in the conception of the 'principal of participation' – or, communion with God in redemption, embraces the entire being of the real man⁵⁷.

the false, good from evil, the just and the unjust; he is one considered on the fundamental level of his rational nature from the very first use of reason and is therefore also in the infant.

⁵⁵ "In truth, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against every form of impiety, and every injustice of men which suffocate the truth in injustice, since that which is of God can be known and is manifest to them. In fact from the creation of the world His invisible perfections can be contemplated with the intellect from the works achieved by Him as His power and divinity." (*Rom.* 1, 18- 20). There follows then the denunciation of the aberration of paganism and of the vices to which pagans have handed themselves over.

⁵⁶ The Cf. 80 B1; Diels-Kranz, II, 263, 3-5 e 8-10. The two texts are identical: the first is taken from the 6th Empirical (*Adv. Math.* VII, 60) and the second is from Plato (*Theaeth.* 151 E-152 A).

⁵⁷ cf. *Gen.* 1,26; *II Pet.* 1,4.

Man, therefore, enters into relationship with God as a Creature to his Creator, but also and together with the human spirit to the divine Spirit. And this, too, was known to philosophers before Christ. The young Aristotle in his *Ethics to Eudemus*, in a text known also to the thinkers of the Middle Ages in the time of St. Thomas, who cites this for the first time in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* [III, 89]. However, he offers the complete text in his rather late work, *De sortibus*, which speaks of the universal action of divine providence.

The text is exemplary and fits our present discussion, i.e., it illumines the marvelous depths of the human consciousness from the side of the existential reality of individual human beings, some of whom had been fortunate and others less so:

“... From these, therefore, it is clear that the events of human deeds do not lie totally under human disposition, but also to the divine disposition. From this it happens that some achieve more ample goods that could ever have been thought possible, and these are called very fortunate: there are others, though, who make prudent dispositions of matters and yet are found less endowed and unexpected evils seek them out, and these are called unfortunate..”

There follows, then, a confirmation of the biblical test: *Direct me in your truth!* [Ps 24:5] – the supreme theologian makes a surprising declaration:

‘... Of these matters there is confirmation not only from divine authority, but it is evident also from the teachings of philosophers: for Aristotle in his book on ‘*On Good Fortune*’, says this: the principle is not only reason, but something even better.’ Then what could be better than science and knowledge other than God? And in accord with this, the very fortunate are called those in response to an impetus, they are directed above reason. They have as their principle that He is better than one’s own understanding and counsel. Aristotle begins with the statement that ‘in a certain manner that which moves all in us is a divine principle – and he concludes distinguishing a two fold species of fortune: one that is divine and the other that is natural. The former works – and is the expression that has particularly drawn the attention of St. Thomas – as ‘by instinct’. St. Thomas speaks expressly of a *divine instinct*, which the speculative principle suggests in order to offer his explanation for the action of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the soul in grace.’⁵⁸

All this is applicable from the beginning of the conscious life and therefore, also that in a baby, who lives in the bosom of the Church and whose soul has been elevated through Holy Baptism to the supernatural life: a brilliant ray of this life we have noted earlier in this reflection in that remark of the simple peasant and we will see it again, in

⁵⁸ cf. the Treatise on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas in *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 68, where St. Thomas also speaks of *instinct* and *divine instinct* (in art. 1 a good 4 times!), which he extends also to the uneducated and to children (cf. in this regard the commentary on Ps 8 [ed. Parm. 1863 t. XV, p. 168 a). Aristotle distinguishes two species of fortune’: one that is divine, and the other natural: the former is the second instinct: it is of this that the Thomistic term of divine instinct develops. The latter, though, is that ‘beyond instinct’, and both are beyond reason.

the end, in the episode of the child who gathers a bouquet of flowers to offer them to the Madonna. Furthermore and with even greater reason in a certain sense, we can say this in the life of the saints, those of whom the Church has proclaimed the practice of heroic virtues in which, therefore – and this we will contemplate in the life of the saint we are contemplating here, from the times of his infancy – the divine grace accompanies them constantly with the mysterious efficacious emotions of the Holy Spirit. And thus it is that they become ‘witnesses of the supernatural.’

2. The Existential Problem of Witness

‘Witness – testimony – to testify’ are among the ‘fortunate’ terms such as substance ... cause. On the juridical level, there have been assumed those strong movements and actions from the point of view of the spirit even to the attaining the very activity of the intimate life of God and that of the Incarnate Word, as the Bible attests to us and in particular, Christ Himself in the New Testament.

Since the testimony of the saint and of the person in grace is a participation in the divine witness, as its point of departure as well as that of arrival, will be opportune to hint at its structure in the realization of the ‘divine economy’ in the plan of salvation for humanity. ‘To testify’ to the truth or to the falsity expresses the fundamental relationship of conduct in human honesty⁵⁹.

a. In the Old Testament the People of God bore within itself for protection and for its appeal of fidelity toward God, the *Tabernacle of Witness*, protected by two Cherubim [Ex 25:22] and its fundamental moral project was and still remains: Do not bear false witness! [Mt 19:22]

b. Moses and the Prophets served as the bearers and guarantors of the divine testimonies often confirmed by signs and prodigies: outstanding among many possible incidents was that of Elijah with the priests of Baal [cf. I K 18:19, ff.]

c. In the New Testament, witness stands at the center of the relationship of man with God and yet is God Himself at the Baptism of Christ. Through the Voice from heaven, He attests: *This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased* [Mt 3:17]. Likewise in the Transfiguration there is heard a voice from the cloud which states: *This is my most dear Son, listen to Him*. [Mk 9:7].

⁵⁹ In Christian antiquity, the first object of veneration, along-side Christ, was the Martyr: “Der Martyrer ist die paradigmatische Kategorie für das was ein ‘Heiliger’ im katholischen Sinne ist” (E. Peterson, *Zeuge der Wahrheit*, in “Theologische Traktate”, München 1951, p. 221 nota 4). And in the intensive sense, the centrality of the position of the martyr in the life of the Church is in accord to Pauline theology: “Das Martyrium ist gleichsam das Siegel auf die Verkündigung des Evangelium, die Vollendung des Apostolischen Auftrags, die Bekräftigung der apostolischen Autorität, es ist das Ja, das Gott zu der Wirksamkeit seiner Heiligen spricht, die besonders Gnade, die Gott der Autorität der prävigender Kirche zuteil werden lässt” (E. Peterson, *Apostel und Zeuge Christi*, Auslegung der Philipperbriefs, Freiburg i Br. 1941, p. 4. cf. also pp. 19, f). Cfr.: S. Th. I-II q. 68, 1 e ad 3, ad 4.

d. In the 'Following of Christ' the 'witness' is one who endures persecutions, scourging and above all else, death for the profession of one's faith. The first worship of the ancient Church is that cult of Martyrs⁶⁰. However, the martyrs, through divine assistance, never failed and continue still today in the life of the Church, a pilgrim in this world and in expectancy of the coming of Christ as Judge and Savior.

e. Along-side these martyrs properly so called, the Church also recognizes the 'Witnesses of Christ'. This term would imply all of those children of hers who through the heroic practice of the theological and moral virtues, they show to the world the victory of divine grace over the passions and the errors of this world. Understood in this sense, the 'Witnesses' can be stated of all those Christians who direct their own lives according to the motions of the Holy Spirit. It is in this sense, that the Apostle, in writing to the faithful, calls them 'Saints'. The simple peasant of long ago referred to above could well belong to this humble, but no less noble, category of witnesses.

f. A section apart among these witnesses may be reserved for those Saints who were outstanding for extraordinary deeds, such as 'prophecies, miracles, ecstasies'. Such individuals manifest a particular intimacy of their relationship with God thanks to the comportment among their brothers and sisters in the faith. And it is within this existential category that Fr. Bertoni seems to us that he can be indicated and recognized, as a 'Witness of the Supernatural'. The frequent conversation in the post-Vatican II Church has been on the 'charisms' which might pertain to this type of reflection. These 'charisms' animate the supernatural life of Christians through the motions of grace and of their *divinus instinctus*, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as has been indicated.

g. There flows forth from the biography of Fr. Bertoni, when basing ourselves on the testimonies of the biographers and in the drawing up of his *Positio super Virtutibus*, we can immediately call to mind that which might be called the 'supernatural miracle worker or the wondrous events' abundant in other Saints. For example, we might remember in the first half of the 19th century, the holy Cure of Ars, and in the second half of the same century, that of St. John Bosco.

h. However, in wanting to indicate the Testimony of the Supernatural in Fr. Bertoni's life, we ought to turn toward that which might be called the 'ambit of the every day' – meaning the exercise of one's immediate relationship with God, which I think we can characterize in three points: (1) ecstasies and extraordinary spiritual phenomena; (2) the heroic bearing up under physical sufferings; (3) the practice of holy abandonment.

⁶⁰ In a. 2, the "*divinus instinctus*" of the Gift, in so far as it is distinguished from infused virtue, is that it leads to 'heroic and divine virtue' or rational ethics (Arist., *Etica Nic.* IX, 1, 1145 a 18, ff., with the citation of Homer for Hector).

i. The physical sufferings – or that ‘thorn in the flesh’, of which St. Paul speaks. Kierkegaard also offers his insights, in reference to serious illnesses, and some of these even mortal in nature. For Fr. Bertoni, the infection of his right leg obliged him to remain in bed for more than ten years, subjecting himself all the while with extreme patience and to the edification of even of his surgeon, to at least 300 episodes of lancing with the result of an almost the complete ‘de-fleshing’ of his limb. The practice of holy abandonment, then, in the last analysis, is the fundamental characteristic of his spirituality, which has already been studied in depth].

j. In this list, there only remains that there be presented some testimonies regarding the 1^o point above, i.e., on his ecstasies and extraordinary phenomena].⁶¹

Before passing over to a summary list of the most important such incidents, I would like to preface this with an elementary observation on that which can be said to be an ‘apprehension, or a ‘perception of the spiritual’. I would like to say that this pertains to the daily life of every normal conscience in its real framework, and this is:

1) The direct apprehension of the *distinction*, within that which can be said to be the phenomenological convergence, of one’s “I” and the world, including in the world this is nature as society in the arch of civic development.

2) The direct apprehension of the *originality* of the spiritual life like the activation of the intelligence and the will to which are considered as a *preparation* also the sensational functions and activities with regard to the outside world and above all to that internal realm of fantasy and of memory, as well as the sentiments which accompany all this.

3) The realization of *the autonomy of the freedom of each person* as a subject of responsibility and therefore of attribution of the choices of good and of evil, of the just and unjust in the ethical sphere.

In the existential analysis, which considers the profound dynamism of freedom, the very first place belongs to holy abandonment. With this, the creature, moved by grace and urged on by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, one places the totality of his/ her person with its affections and projects in the continuous and total dependence on God. IN this life, one needs always to remain in a fervent expectancy of any divine hint which is generally manifested above all in the will of superiors. This implies a complete mortification of one’s own “I”. This is that intimate martyrdom of tee soul which is the first and most radical in the soul for the creature. This invests and sustains in tee

⁶¹ In Catholic spirituality, there is always presupposed a certain personal relationship”, and therefore there is often some confusion with the extraordinary phenomena as described by the Lutheran theologian, Rudolf Otto in his original reflection: *Das Heilige* (München 1947 – the English translation is: *The Idea of the Holy...* Oxford 1926, re-printed)). This study was inspired by the Kantian work, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* ed alla *Gefühlstheologie* – in turn, this work found its inspiration in a Jacobi, Schleiermacher, Fries.

depths of one's own consciousness to be subjected to the divine will. This also includes the martyrdom of exceptional physical sufferings to which Fr. Bertoni responded and corresponded with increasing desire for even greater sufferings. This was evidenced even on his death-bed when, he was questioned by the Infirmarian if he needed anything, his response was; 'only to suffer!'

This under the extreme crucible of suffering, he was consumed by his life of conformity to Christ Crucified, of Whom, punctually, every Friday evening, in the Church of the Stimate in Verona, he meditated with the faithful on the august mystery of the Passion and Death of the Lord, also during the prolonged and more dolorous phases of his illness.

k.] One last observation of a speculative nature which pertains to the apprehension-consciousness of one's personal "I", as a free subject, which has remained a bit subdued in Christian spirituality itself. However, spirituality does make use of it and it is alive and well at every step. In Christian literature, one's "I" has been analyzed and described in an unsurpassed – and a perhaps in an insuperable manner in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. This is continuously called upon by the modern and contemporary narrative [in poems, novels, diaries...].⁶²

St. Thomas, in his polemic against the Latin Averroism which sustained a single intellect [separated] for all human beings - staunchly defended the evidence of the reality of this man understands - or, regarding each individual spiritual subject. However, perhaps he should have added, and I believe with great reason, also this: this man wills, loves, hates... The reason is that these intrinsically subjective actions, through which each one is communicating, or that these are the personal apparatus of each thinking being. While, in the other hand, to know is intrinsically objective and communicable.

And all this enters into play, as is obvious, above all in relationship with God, or in the individual exercise precisely of that freedom. Liberty, as is now maintained, is intrinsically and necessary individual – since it is expressed in that lived dialectic as I choose – I will not - indeed it is through such choices that one becomes either a Saint, or knave!

⁶² Among all authorities, for its richness and penetration of the analysis of the dynamics of one's "I", there emerges the complex work of S. Kierkegaard [1813-1855], in order to vindicate the realistic and Christian significance of his contestation of the *Cogito* and its harmful effects in modern thought.

3. The Problem of the Personal “I” and the Examination of Conscience

In virtue of the freedom of choice, the “I” is the first structuring and is therefore, the powerful principle of belonging, upon which is founded that masterpiece of the spiritual life which is the examination of Conscience. The text from Epicurus, cited by Seneca, is surprising to many who know if it.

Fr. Bertoni speaks of this personally and expressly in his *Memoriale Privato* [his own personal spiritual diary] making use of his “Model-Principle”. He writes: *In order to make the examen of conscience, it is necessary to find a Saint of the same vocation, as a Mirror: and then one finds matter to confess every day: all that is lacking to that perfection is a defect*’ [entry for July 30, 1808. Ed. G. Stofella, Roma 1962, P, 28].

This text seems, but it does not provide any indication of this, to take up almost literally a maxim [nonetheless!] of Epicurus, reported by Seneca, in his XIth Letter to Lucilius:

“... My Letter now seeks to close. Please accept this as useful and salutary, this with which I wish to fix in your spirit: ‘Some good person is to be elected [another family of texts holds here is to be loved] and always to be had before one’s eyes, so that we might live as though he was watching, and that all we would ever do, let it be as though he were seeing us’. This, my Lucilius, is what Epicurus commands.”⁶³

This in fact, supposes the constant presence, i.e., permanent, of the personal “I” to itself. However, this is a matter – and this observation seems decisive for the purposes of our research - to be of a permanence of the identical in the diverse where the identical and the personal “I” and this diversity includes those acts that succeed from it: however, since the succession takes place under the urging of the personal “I” itself – which chooses these acts, activates them, controls them, corrects them, changes them, approves them or disapproves of them [as in repentance]: it is therefore, this personal “I” which is configured in them without every remaining in them as a prisoner precisely because there remains ever present the openness of freedom.

Obviously, it is a matter of an opening which is infinite, i.e., undetermined on the formal level - if it were finite, it would be determined, as a distinct animal and there would no longer be true freedom - the fact that it is finite, or that it exercises itself for time to time, with finite choices, bearing on the concrete in the existential level. In fact, each one lives in *situations*, or is conditioned by external and internal

⁶³ Ed. A. Beltrami, Brixiae 1916, p. 30, 15-21. There follows Seneca’s comment, and he was the only one to report it. In the place of “eligendus” another family of Codices has “diligendus” which is followed by Beltrami: I have preferred “eligendus” as it seems more suited to the context.

factors, both physical and spiritual. The physical factors are naturally external and corporeity is internal, and both the one and the other is proper to each one: in fact, also is also like *being in the world*, is presented and is reflected diversely in different individuals, The internal or psychic factors are above a the character, the inclinations, the sympathies-antipathies, the attractions-repulsions ... of each one, or the constellation of factors which come to a head around the personal “I” in its dynamism. However, this “I” has to be recognized, while maintaining itself immobile in its formal identity, and in fact is a *perpetual movable*, and should be so due to the openness of one’s freedom.

4. The Bertonian experiences of the Supernatural

Therefore, this is – as a conclusion of the preceding observations- the moment or the point in which freedom and grace operate, keeping present the theological demand that freedom is sustained by grace, but also that grace, as expressly also St. Thomas recognizes, works through freedom.

The principal document in order to orientate us toward the ideal of Fr. Bertoni as a ‘Witness of the Supernatural’ would be his notes he jotted down throughout his *Memoriale Privato*. To this there may also be added, those more detached texts, in that they are directed toward other persons. Such would be his Collection of Letters [*Epistolario*], his Sermons, and various other notes⁶⁴ that have come down to us.

Notable, too, are those pages which bear on them the judgment of his examination of books, through the task asked of him by his Bishops – as well as those copious notes which seem to present a vast *apologia* projected by him on the papacy. There are then some further notes from his personal letters late in his life. For our purposes here, the task is to bring out the most significant characteristics of Fr. Bertoni’s soul, qualified by a competent theologian, Divo Barsotti who has preceded me with his comment that Fr. Bertoni was ‘one of the greatest mystics of the 19th century’⁶⁵. This idea seems to result from his *Memoriale privato*.

⁶⁴ The *Memoriale privato* has been edited as an *Appendix* to the new edition (a cura della Postulazione) of the *“Spirito del beato Gaspare Bertoni”*, [Verona 1977, pp. 207-242]. The critical edition with its ample commentary was compiled by Fr. Joseph Stofella, in the Stigmatine series, *“Collectanea Stigmatina”*, [vol. IV, fasc. 1 (Roma, Curia Generalizia 1962)]. The Compiler notes in his conclusion that: ... the source for an ulterior *Memoriale privato* is the epistolary correspondence of the Servant of God with the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet”. She was the Foundress of the *Sorelle della S. Famiglia*. He directed her spiritually in the years 1811-1819. To this may be added those hastily drawn notes found in the Correspondence with don Luigi Bragato, his beloved disciple, much loved and who served as the confessor of the Empress at the Court of Vienna and then at Prague. In all this there is reflected the spontaneous expression of the Servant of God in the period of the years 1835-1848 where Fr. Gaspar) presents unintentionally his own moral portrait (p. 189).

⁶⁵ Divo Barsotti, Magistero di Santi (*Saggi per una storia della spiritualità dell’Ottocento*, A.V.E., Roma 1971, p. 11 55.: *“Spiritualità di abbandono del Venerabile Bertoni”*, p. 11 ss.). His precise comment regarding Fr. Bertoni is the following: “In the History of Italian Spirituality he stands out in it as a figure of notable relief. He is perhaps the most interesting in his city (p. 12). On the following page, the Author qualifies him as a ‘master of notable

The exact expression of this scholar is the following: ... the *Memoriale privato* of Venerable Bertoni is one of the greatest documents of Italian spirituality in the 19th century' [p. 23], We, too, will begin here by calling to mind some of his texts, which directly interest us, in full accord with the ideas of the great theologian of the Saints quoted here, that Fr. Bertoni's ideal of 'conformation to Christ in His Passion is a characteristic that seems specifically Italian in his spirituality [p. 28]. Here we will present these texts in a chronological order in order to grasp the spontaneous order of his affections: the comments in italics indicate the immediacy of his original experience.

a. **The Feast of the Sacred Heart [July 2, 1808]**: "... at Mass, I shed many tears of compunction: in particular, at Communion *I experienced* as for a moment, as the spirit was detached from every creature..."

b. **July 11th**: "... After Mass, during the thanksgiving, I experienced a most vivid *sentiment* of faith in the presence of our Lord, and much confidence: there was also a sentiment to offer myself to suffer with Him, and for Him..." [This is the attraction of his of conformity to the suffering Christ, [I think] of the Franciscan school].

c. **July 24th**: "... During Mass I had from the Lord as a gift, an actual continuous oblation of my work to the Sacrifice, with *much sweetness*."

d. **August 24th**: "... while *experiencing* the most sublime realities of God, I received a profound self-knowledge ... that evening, on seeing an image of the Most Holy Trinity, I experienced much reverence toward the three Persons – the eternal Father who stood there with His arms opened. He seemed to explain to me His mercy, and the easy communication of His gifts." [The picture of the Father, with his arms opened, reminds us of the celebrated painting by Durer].

e. There was another Trinitarian experience on **September 27-28th**:

[27th] **A sentiment** of gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity and of correspondence to Jesus Christ.

[28th] **A desire and humble petition for martyrdom** [he would have this throughout his long and painful infirmities]. There was n intense internal exhortation. That evening, I experienced a sense of pardon [in visiting the Most Holy Sacrament], with a *sentiment* of intense love for the Most Holy Trinity, in giving us His Son, and *great tenderness* toward Him together with a most vivid faith, and an intense *desire* for union. This was accompanied with the yearning for an association in His sufferings,

greatness, even if not of notable originality.' His originality much more than in his doctrine, is in his tone. His greatness is in the power of his synthesis. While it is true that this is bit too schematic, it is yet one that reveals the simplicity and the security of his intuition of the faith' [p.13].

and shame: with a petition of graces in order to suffer and to be disdained as He was. [The illumination returns on the next day]

[29th] There was profound knowledge of the great good that it is to “suffer something for God...” [and there follows the citation from Mt 5:1012].

There was still a further experience of the Trinitarian mystery on December 11th: at the *Te Igitur*, of the Mass that day, Fr. Bertoni offers a text of intense emotion where there are distinct experiences first of sentiment and then of compunction.

f. September 15th: this important entry in his personal spiritual diary notes his visit to the altar of St Ignatius [this was once the Jesuit Church of St. Sebastian] with his companions that would seem to indicate a more explicit beginning of the Congregation: “...I experienced much devotion and recollection with an *intense internal sweetness and some tears*, even though the visit was a short one. It seemed to me [this strikes one like the onset of an ecstasy]” – “and the Saint offered us a good welcome.” “It seemed to me that he wanted to tell us ...” [This apparently indicates a type of immediate contact of spirit].

September 25th: While teaching Catechism, “... there was opened up for me all avenues to the point of offering a convincing lesson.”

g. October 9th [his birthday] - there is recorded here what is perhaps his most intense and revealing experience:

... “During the Mass, at the secret prayers, about the time of the *Memento*, there was a kind of deepening of my intellect to understand just to Whom it was that I was speaking. I experienced great affections and an intensification of charity in praying. Then, there were certain inspirations of my spirit toward God, as though they were an impulsion of my spirit toward God.

“It was much like a person who suddenly meets an old and dear friend, whom he had not seen for a long time. At the first sign of him, there was the impetus to cast my arms around him to embrace him. Then there came a desire that increased the view, and the impetus of being able to reach out toward the Supreme Good.

“However, all this while I was fearful of some vanity, being in public as I was. In this, I had recourse to the thought of very grave sins. All this, then, intensified as well as the knowledge of His goodness and His love that I dissolved into tears that were very sweet and which lasted even after the Communion. Meanwhile, faith and confidence increased al the more, together with humility and a loving reverence. Finally, during Communion, I experienced very intense devotion, and sentiments similar to those on my First Communion day as a boy, and I do not remember of ever having again. This recollection also lasted then for about an hour afterward, and remained throughout the afternoon.”

[This was certainly a memorable day, that birthday of his in 1808]!

h. The entire second half of October is simply full of such impressions. On the 13th, he quotes St. Thomas on the presence of God: ‘... He is therefore within us, and there is no need for us to go outside in order to search for Him... Having nourishment already in the house, one does badly when he goes outside to look for it ...[Then] I experienced an intense *sentiment* of this and deep recollection ... along with the deep desire to please His Divine Majesty...’ [On the 22nd, his desire for suffering increased]: ‘... There was joy in adversity, and in the consequences of real poverty and the offering for greater expressions of shame and of suffering, if He would have considered me worthy ...’ [This ardent spiritual climate of ecstasy continued through the 27th]: ‘...prostrate on earth in the sight of heaven...’

i. Leaping ahead to the new year we find his exceptional Trinitarian experience of January 11, 1809. This may be the vertex of his contact with the supernatural: ‘... During Mass, at the Consecration, I experienced a *sentiment* that was quite vivid of the presence of Christ like that of a friend who speaks to another friend, and likewise, of the presence of the Father. And feeling in a certain manner further the distinction of these divine Persons in one sole Nature, with intense reverence and love...’

j. The year 1811 proved to be somewhat scarce in his spiritual diary. However, during the year 1812, there is an entry that was more intense and revealing what might be divided into different moments [beginning – development – effect]:

1^o [The Beginning]: While praying before Mass, I was overcome by a bit of sleep, and I heard a voice from the Crucifix saying to my heart: ‘‘Look at this Heart of Mine!’’ this message immediately gave way to a marvelous enlightening of my intellect, along with profound ardor. Suddenly, there arose in my heart the spirit in order to see the lovable object that had been painted out to me. And I experienced running throughout my body a kind of *trembling*⁶⁶, and I realized that my eyes and mouth were closed, while my soul was much alive and full of joy.’’

2^o [Development]: ‘‘It seemed as though my soul wanted do be divided from my body [the ecstasy]; it seemed as though I were dying and at the same time, rejoicing [mystical death’’]; returning a second time, the act of directing myself with desire toward the One Who was speaking with me, there was renewed that *tremble* as the effect of a sweet and painful death. Hence, my soul was uncertain, as to just it ought to do, in that it seemed that if this

⁶⁶ ‘‘*Brividio*’’: this is the Italian word use to present this experience of an intense and prolonged *shiver, tremble* (Devoto-Oli, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Lemonnier, Firenze 1971, p. 322). There seems to be here a humble analogy of the *transverberation* recorded about St. Teresa of Avila and Padre Pio.

situation were to continue, my soul would be dead, or at least taken from communion with the body. At that time it seemed impeded and I committed myself with joy into the hands of the Lord. In this I experienced much quiet as though from that very moment my soul was dead.” [this seems to reflect St. Paul’s experience, *I desired to be dissolved* ... [Ph 1:23].

3º [Effect]: “... then I experienced a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart with intense affection during the Holy Mass where my soul **discovered also sweet tears in Holy Communion, and after intense recollection and sweetness all day, this resulted in an intensification of the three theological virtues...**” [this was clearly a day of much exultation and supernatural rapture].

These experiences, no less than those perhaps more spectacular than those of other saints, are exceptional witnesses of the supernatural. However, authentic testimonies and experiences in the form of powerful emotions are accessible to every believer in daily life: during prayer and religious ceremonies, the participation in Holy Mass, during the practice of the Way of the Cross and the Hour of Adoration, on the occasion of funerals and of particular events [such as religious vestition or profession, the first Holy Communion, as for our own St. Gaspar and for priests at their ordinations].

In all these as well as in other similar circumstances there can flourish for every believer such experiences and even the achieving of the witness of the supernatural. The fainting of St. Gemma before the Crucifix and the surprise at the emotion of the child Kierkegaard at the sight of the Crucifix in the window of the window of the second-hand book-store all mixed in with the heroes of history.

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CONCLUSION

Let us conclude these brief citations on this prime and extreme word: “Love”. This is also the joy of the truth that is possessed in that purity of soul in the desire for suffering. The ‘characteristics’ associated with Fr. Bertoni’s “Witness for the Supernatural” seem to be most sublime:

1] ... his was an experience that was sublimely Trinitarian and Christological: therefore, flowing from the very heart of the dogma, but a transfiguring realization of work on grace;

2] ... this was achieved primarily in a Eucharistic context, during the celebration of Holy Mass. There needs also to be noted his profound consciousness of sin, as the effect of the illumination of grace received through suffering;

3] ... with characteristics of ineffable immediacy, such as that of his often referred to *sentiment* [*experience*], which is proper to the mystics. In him, there is his recording of an elevated form of a mystical *tremble, shiver*, and he sometimes mentions breaking out in tears. One of these experiences occurred when he received the celestial beam of his recollections of his experience of his First Holy Communion day as a child.

He experienced this *tremble* in the intensive spiritual moments of his life, from his union with the beatifying presence of God. His soul experienced a kind of amazement and was nearly overcome in the fullness of joy that came to him, almost making him think that he was dying in the Lord. All this seems to be the vertex of mystical experience, in his recorded coincidence of opposites, of life and death. It seems to reflect the well known saying of St. John of the Cross: 'I die because I do not die!' The external world had disappeared for him and his soul seemed to dilate beyond all measure.

This 'sentiment' of Catholic mystics derives from the presence of faith, animated by charity of the revealed mystery [e.g., the most Holy Trinity, the Incarnate Word, the Eucharistic presence]. This stands at the opposite end of the Protestant *Gefühlstheologia* that Schleiermacher has theorized in his "sentiment of dependence", from his "Der Christliche Glaube", preceded by Jacobi and followed by Fries, Rudolf Otto with his school (Cr. C. Fabro, *L'uomo e il rischio di Dio*, Roma 1967, p. 172 s., 178 s., 390 ss.). The so-called "*anthropological shift*", diffused in the Post Vatican II era bespeaks the irrationality of this tendency.

One might also consider as a properly 'mystical' character and particular effect of grace the experience described by Pascal in his *Le Mystère de Jésus*. He refers to this his meditation on the Agony of Christ in the Garden⁶⁷. This was dated on November 23, 1654 [in the edition cited above, pp. 142, ff. This was the Feast of St. Clement as Pascal expressly noted. However, apart and different from modern aberrations, in Pascal there is noticeable the work of sanctifying grace, and of the supernatural motion of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I began these reflections with a testimony: 'Faith in God – The Faith of the Simple' of Enrico Fermi. He was truly a giant in modern Physics, but drawn into the orbit of the Christian faith by a rough and tumble simple peasant. I would like to conclude now with the testimony of a child of Tuscany met by John Papini, a converted

⁶⁷ Cr. *Pensées et Opuscules*, ed. Brunschvicg minor, Paris 1917, nr. 553, p. 574 ss.

believer and author of the marvelous, *storio di Cristo*, translated into all the modern languages. He was certainly a giant in contemporary literature.

This testimony was reported by his daughter, Viola, confidant of his final years of Calvary, paralyzed and practically mute. This piece is the last of the Volume: "The Wall of the Jasmines" and has for its title: "The 3rd of September". Papini recounts that while talking a walk along a little stream in the country-side, he met a young man who was fishing: "... he had the air about him of one dozing, who was not thinking at all of death" Some approached him and repeated a number of times, the same question: 'why are you doing this?'

The young man smiled at finally said 'To catch fish.'

'Why do you want to catch fish?'

'To sell them'

'And what will you do with the coins that you get for the fish?'

'I will buy bread, wine, oil, clothing, shoes and other things.'

'And why do you buy these things?'

The young man seemed a bit embarrassed, but after a while he responded: 'In order to live.'

But the pressing inquisitor asked further: 'but why do not want to live?'

'The young man tried to smile with some disdain: 'I live because I was born.'

'For what purposes do you live?'

'For what purposes? What is meant by 'purposes?'

'What I want to say is what is for you the most important aspect of life?'

'I understood; my purpose is this: to go fishing.'

'I kept silence, it was useless to follow up on this.'

Going on a bit further, he met a peasant who was working in a field. He drew near to him and asked his question: 'Why are you doing this?'

The farmer looked at him with his dark restless eyes, and responds: 'So that the grain might come to life.'

'And why do you want the grain to grow?'

'In order to make bread out of it?'

'And why do you need bread?'

'To keep on going.'

'But why do you want to live?'

At this question, the man lowered his head, and no longer responded in any way other than with 'dark glances.'

The text goes on.

There was a field near by, and in this field was a blond young girl, all dressed in red, bent over to pick the last flowers of the summer. As soon as I was along-side of her, the necessary question was repeated to her: 'Why are you doing this?'

The young girl did not ask for clarifications and responded immediately: 'In order to offer a bouquet to the Madonna.'

'And why do you want to give a bouquet to the Madonna?

'So that she will remember me.'

'But why do you want her to remember you?'

'So that she might prepare for me a place in Paradise, near to her, when I will be dead.'

This great writer, he, too, like Enrico Fermi, a member of the Academy of Italy and a world celebrity, comments and concludes: "It sufficed to translate into the absolute the words of the blond girl. Her words were a response that I had sought. Why did the girl dressed in red answer in that manner? In order to obtain Paradise. She lived, therefore, in order to prepare herself for death. This is one response⁶⁸."

This is a response which is also for us a new sparkling testimony of the supernatural. It is humble and perfumed as was the childhood of that young girl. This, too, however, was also on the same level, and perhaps even superior, for her candid splendor and her appeal to the Virgin – as was that of the honest, hard-working, illiterate farmer. Such a response, also, is quite close to that public and glorious response of the Saints, and of Fr. Bertoni. The reason is because both are streams from the same font and a ray of the same spirit [which is *at work in all* – 1 Co 12:16]. This response enkindles in us faith, hope and love in the One and Triune God – *to Whom may it lead us!*

I want to conclude as St. Thomas:

To this life everlasting may the Lord Jesus Christ, blessed God for ever,
bring us! Amen⁶⁹.

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⁶⁸ G. Papini, *Il muro dei gelsomini* [childhood recollections] S.E.I., a cura di Viola Paszkowski Papini, Torino 1965, pp. 173 ss.

⁶⁹ In *Symbolum Apostolorum Exposit.*, a. 12, nr. 1018 ed. Taur., p. 217 b.).