

A MODEL of HOLY ABANDONMENT



A Theological Reflection on the Spirituality of Father Gaspar Bertoni

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O admirable secrets of divine love! What profound depths of His charity! When will it be that we will as though shipwrecked and abandoned in this Immense Sea, so that we will no longer seek out the shores of our wretched earth!

Letter of St. Gaspar Bertoni to Mother Leopoldina Naudet –

November 26, 1812.

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Letter from Thesis Director

The *ANGELICUM*
Salita del Grillo, 1
Rome

May 19, 1951

Reverend Father,

It is with much interest that I have read your study on the Spirituality of Gaspar Bertoni, the Founder of your religious family. I was particularly struck by what you have stated concerning his humility and his abandonment to Divine Providence. I am pleased that you have insisted on what it is that distinguishes the infused moral virtues, and the acquired moral virtues. Likewise, you have done well in bringing out the importance of the passive purification of the senses and of the spirit. These chapters will serve, I hope, for the glorification of your [Venerable] father and Founder. This is a matter on which generally there is not enough insistence in the study of the heroicity of the Servants of God.

It is even said sometimes in the biographies of this, or that Servant of God, there are indeed some manifest signs of the heroicity of their virtues – but, unfortunately there are also two periods in their lives that have remained quite obscure. And very often, it is not known how they passed through these times. This constitutes a difficulty understanding their spirituality.

There are, in fact, often in the lives of Saints two obscure periods, like two dark ‘tunnels’. They are what St. John of the Cross calls *the Dark Night of the Senses* - or the Passive Purification of the Senses. This indicates the entrance into the Illuminative Way of the proficient. Then, there is *the Dark Night of the Spirit* - the Passive Purification of the Spirit, prior to the beginning of the Unitive Way of the Perfect.

It is clear that these Servants of God in their leaving the first tunnel- and even more so on their leaving of the second – have practiced virtues in an heroic manner. This is a sign that when they were going through these ‘tunnels’, they have not deviated from the path set out for them. If, though, they may have briefly done so – as St. Peter did during the Lord’s Passion – without delay they then returned to their ordeal. Furthermore, while passing through the ‘tunnels’, far from withdrawing from them, they have earned very great merits. This is so in particular for their heroic resistance to the temptations of the Devil – both against those virtues that are found in the sensitive part of the soul, and against the theological virtues. Thus, the obscurity that seemed to be an objection to the full understanding of their lives is rather a sign that they have truly passed through these two Dark Nights, with very great spiritual profit for themselves and for the souls entrusted to them.

Kindly accept my congratulations, Reverend and dear Father, and my sincerest best wishes in our Lord.

Fr, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP

Rev. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove
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INTRODUCTION

The Servant of God, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, was born in Verona, Italy, on October 9, 1777. For ten years, he was a student in the public schools of that city. Among his better known teachers of that period, he met a Fr. Louis Fortis - who much later would become the first Superior General of the reconstituted Company of Jesus. It was Fr. Fortis who, on taking young Bertoni as his spiritual son, noticed in him a decisive orientation toward Ignatian spirituality. This would remain one of Fr. Bertoni's characteristics for the rest of his life.

Young Bertoni entered the seminary in 1795. For the next five years, he attended the theological courses of the Seminary of Verona. He distinguished himself there for his particular love for the study of St. Thomas Aquinas. Although the ***Summa Theologica*** was not the text being taught, Bertoni studied it with its commentaries a good three times before his ordination (1800).

In 1802, he began his involvement with the Marian Recreational Oratories which he himself established. In a short time, these organizations spread throughout the entire Diocese of Verona. This won for Fr. Bertoni the title: "Father of the Veronese Youth".

In 1808, he was chosen as the first confessor of St. Joseph's Convent. At that time, St. Madeline di Canossa was founding her own Congregation which would be known as "the Daughters of Charity".

Fr. Bertoni also met here the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet. She was a much gifted woman, and at this time, was a resident at St. Joseph's as a guest and assistant to Mother Madeline di Canossa. Fr. Bertoni became Sister Leopoldina's spiritual director and confessor, guiding her along the path-way of Holy Abandonment. He continued in her direction up through her founding of her own Congregation, known as "the Sisters of the Holy Family".

In 1809, Fr. Bertoni was named by Bishop Liruti, OSB, as the "Definitor" of the theological cases that would come to the Chancery Office. Regular conferences were held at St. Nicholas'. In this task, Fr. Bertoni's reputation rapidly spread, and he came to be thought of as one profoundly versed in the writings and theology of St. Thomas. He was also a most valid adversary of the then rampant Jansenism.

In his own family home, Fr. Bertoni opened "a discussion group of the sacred sciences'. This meeting was for priests (and seminarians) who were desirous of perfecting themselves in the ecclesiastical sciences. His intention was to make St. Thomas better known, and to spread the knowledge of the teachings of St. Alphonsus Liguori. In that era, St. Alphonsus was actually considered by some as being too lax and excessively moderate as an author of moral theology.

The French government was then in ascendancy, and set itself to the disbanding of the Marian Oratories. When this happened, Fr. Bertoni committed himself then to the preaching and to the ministry of the word: he dedicated himself to the preaching of retreats and parish missions.

In 1810, Fr. Bertoni was named the Spiritual Father of the diocesan Seminary. Two years later, he was offered the role of Vice-rector, but he declined.

In 1812, he suffered a very serious illness, and never again for the rest of his life did he enjoy good health. Over the course of the next four years, Fr. Bertoni underwent 200 surgical operations on his leg. These were necessary due to a stubborn infection, or fistula, that refused to heal. With all the sickness that he endured over his long life, if the time were added up, it would mean that he spent more than 20 years of his life in confinement.

In the year 1816, he set about the founding of the Stigmatine family. This took place notwithstanding the civil laws of suppression of other religious families in vogue at the time. As a pretext to hide his real intention, he began teaching in a tuition-free school. He opened these schools for the children of the working classes of the city. He was given permission to take over a former church, named for the Stigmata of St. Francis. In this work, he was assisted by a few of his companions. There, in secret, was the birth of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all this time, he was most widely consulted as the “Angel of Counsel.” At his holy death, that took place on June 12, 1853, he was widely mourned as a saint.

†††

In 1855, the Stigmatine Congregation founded by him obtained the “Decree of Praise”, its first official recognition from the Holy See.

The Decree of the Introduction of the Cause of Beatification of the Servant of God was published in 1906.

†††

Fr. Bertoni’s spirituality developed in an atmosphere of perfect abandonment into the hands of God. Hence, it has seemed most logical to treat in the first part of this study the foundations of Holy Abandonment. We include this under the heading :

“The General Characteristics of Fr. Bertoni’s Spirituality”. We establish in this part that he arrived at a consciousness of his own nothingness through his reflections on Creation. Fr. Bertoni developed a solid construction of the spiritual life that was totally imbued with a reverential fear, tender love and confident trust.

In the asceticism that he practiced, we have stressed with greater emphasis his sense of absolute detachment from earthly things. Its specific element, though, was Holy Abandonment. In precise terms, this implies an indifference, and its originality is

constituted in his renunciation of his own thoughts, along with the surrender of his will.

This Servant of God has left behind a statement regarding some of his principles in his meditations preached to the seminarians as their spiritual director. In the light of these, his mysticism can be traced in a manner that is quite systematic. There is a particular reference to the general vocation to the highest levels of mystical union. In his view, this call to holiness is simply in the normal order of the development of grace.

Finally, we have studied the special part of Holy Abandonment. We have traced this through Fr. Bertoni's writings, and for him, it was a superior kind of confidence and hope in God. This is an abandonment that is quite far removed from every suspicion of Quietism. According to Fr. Bertoni's explicit intention, his was simply an imitation of the abandonment as lived by the Church. She offers a perfect model of it in the very manner in which she governs herself.

The difficulty of a study such as this is especially apparent because of Fr. Bertoni himself. He has set up, as it were, a barrier by his vigilant modesty. This has formed the hidden mystery of love between his soul and God alone. However, his letters, his instructions and his sermons, redound with his own personal warmth. This authorizes any student of his writings to use them as a kind of autobiography which he has left behind. This is all the more true with that single, slim notebook that is his Spiritual Diary (***Memoriale Privato***), that somehow escaped the flames. This thin volume demonstrates to us that in the Servant of God, a very sublime spiritual ascent was realized. This alone is superior to anything that could be deduced from his other teachings.

In the work that is here presented, there is the hope that we have succeeded, at least in part, in bringing his soul more into the light. Unfortunately, for far too long, he has remained in the shadows. Even more, it is hoped that his work will have a good effect on those who may read it.

PART I

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

of

Fr. GASPAR BERTONI'S SPIRITUALITY

CHAPTER 1

CREATURES FIND THEIR NATURAL RESTING PLACE IN THE ARMS OF THE CREATOR

1. *Humility and Abandonment are harmonized in the concept of Creation.*

Gaspar Bertoni spent his entire life in a most profoundly hidden manner. Because of this, his humility always seemed to be the most characteristic note of his spirituality to all who knew him. There are abundant testimonies to this. We will use a statement from his first biographer, as a kind of summary of many other possible witnesses:

... From the very first time that I met him, what I considered to be a true miracle in him was his profound humility..."¹

However, it needs to be pointed out that a person's interior attitudes in one's relationship with God, by their very nature, escape all observation from the outside. This intimate rapport does not become the object of scrutiny that can be trustworthy unless it can be confirmed by some confidences that might be called "autobiographical." In addition to his life-style, Fr. Bertoni reveals himself to us also in his writings. In all truth, these are writings that he composed at various occasions during his life. As a result, they lack any semblance of systematic composition. Nonetheless, in their totality they serve well to indicate to us some insight into his spirituality. These occasional writings make clear that Fr. Bertoni's spirituality has its center of gravitation in the state of a complete *Abandonment into the arms of Divine Providence*.

From what has been stated thus far there is no evident contradiction to this statement should there be any ambivalence it is at most, only apparent. It can indeed be said in a sense that is profoundly true that humility and abandonment become a part of one another, and are complementary to one another, in sublime harmony. This takes place without either of them losing its pre-eminence.

Fr. Bertoni chose to sound the depths of the poverty of his own created being. He did this so that he could experience the joy of feeling the extreme need of God in his life.² His was a mind that was logical to an outstanding degree. The Servant of God found nothing better adapted to express all this than that supreme axiom of the practical science of salvation. For Fr. Bertoni, this was constituted by the "Foundations" of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius.³

¹ *Summ. Add.*, Doc. XXVI, p. 349. In this same S.A., these testimonies are found: ...**He imitated Jesus in His humility of heart, in which practice he was most profound ...** [Doc. XVII, p. 98]. ...**It seems to me that a humility so simple and in one so worthy, only with difficulty could it be found exemplified in such an outstanding way as it was in Fr. Bertoni ...** [Doc. XXII, p. 215].

² In a sermon to recently approved confessors, he developed this point: ...**Return to God what is God's: then, nothing remains that is ours, other than nothing itself ...** [MssB # 17]

³ During his studies, both at Alcalá and at Paris, the Saint had heard Peter Lombard explained. According to the testimony of **Fr. Jerome Nadal**, he combined his writings in a definitive form, the parts of the *Spiritual Exercises*. [cf. Letters, Fr. J. Nadal, IV, p. 826]. The abstract form in which the *Foundations* are enunciated, reasonably brings one to think of the author's dependence on the *Book of Sentences*. The following is found in

It is difficult to assess the entire influence that Fr. Bertoni received from this small book.⁴ More in particular, he was deeply impressed by that brief statement placed at the very beginning of the work:

... Humanity is created to praise, revere and serve God, Our Lord...⁵

Fr. Bertoni developed his own rational explanation of this, basing his thought on that of St. Thomas Aquinas.

2. Being itself is a Gift of the Creator

In analyzing the reality of creation, Fr. Bertoni perceived the ultimate reason for his own being. He once wrote:

... Nothingness has no reason, or merit, for existing...⁶

If nature exists, without "being" pertaining to it as its constitutive principle of its very essence, then it is necessary to conclude that "being" is nothing more than a gift.⁷

If it is a "gift", then it presupposes a Giver. This would imply a Giver with a specific quality all His own meaning that all created "being" would require, at each and every instant, the creative intervention of its First Giver. Fr. Bertoni expressed this idea in these terms:

... what can be said to be the principle of divine benefits, do not think that you have received it only one single time... This is renewed for you every hour by the fact that you are conserved in being. And, since up to this very moment God has guarded the being that He has bestowed on you – at this very t it is as though once again, He is giving you being once again.. And just as in all the days, in all the hours, in all the minutes... He has sustained your very existence, so you must realize that every day, every hour, every minute, He has created you anew, just as though previously, you had not even existed...

Listen to St. Augustine:

'... He does not conserve things in being other than by continuously giving them being.

this book: ... *If it is asked why were rational creatures created, it will be answered: to praise God, to serve Him and to enjoy Him...* [cf. Book II, d. 1, c. III].

⁴ He copied the entire Book of the *Spiritual Exercises*, word for word. It was done in a hand-writing that was so neat and elegant that it seems as though it were done by machine. He then bound the pages in parchment, to insure their longer use. The finger marks that remain on the lower inside of the pages testify to the truth of a statement made by Fr. Lenotti. He noted that Fr. Bertoni had made a profound study of the *Spiritual Exercises* and those stains would indicate the frequent use he made of it. [SA, Doc. XX, p. 153]. To this study, Fr. Bertoni added not only the adaptation of his spirit, but also the very direction he imprinted on his own Congregation. In the Diocesan Process of his Cause of Canonization, Fr. Giacobbe testified: ... *He cultivated in his companions the exercise of the virtues. It was all an exact copy of the spirit of St. Ignatius...* [cf. *Positio super Introd. Causae. Summ. Super dubio: An sit assignanda ... etc.* [p. 29, § III a].

⁵ **... In ourselves, we cannot discern any reason for our existence in this world right now ...** [cf. Priests' Retreat, MssB n. 16].

⁶ l.c.

⁷ **...the foundation of all the gifts is certainly 'being' ...** [cf. PVC, p. 129].

Hence, if He were to withdraw His action, all things would be reduced to nothing...'⁸

All created "being", therefore, appeals for its conservation, crying out to those very same "Powerful Arms" that have drawn it up out of nothing.⁹ In point of fact, there can be only the "arms" of the Creator as the natural resting place, support, for all creatures. This is why Fr. Bertoni was able to draw that for him was the only logical conclusion: the total and absolute dependence of all creatures on God:

... O supreme and sublime Benefactor! Our being recognizes such dependence on your goodness! Just look at the care Your Providence exercises over us...!¹⁰

Even with this, we have hardly scratched the surface of his convictions. Every activity of a creature is nothing more than a prolongation of its "being." For every action, there is needed the intervention of the Creator:

... Your intellect could never have been able to direct you to think about even the least reality; nor, could your will have ever desired anything. This also means that your eye, or your hearing, or any one of your senses, could ever represent reality on their own. You could never even have moved your foot, or lifted your arm, stretched out your hand – unless He, at the same time, had not moved them, sustained them, and guided them. All this is simply that most necessary and certain dependence of creatures on the Creator, known also to philosophers. They teach that second causes have the entire reason of their being from the First, even in bringing about their own natural activities. This is why St. Paul states so very well: '... In Him, we live, move and have our being...' (cf. Ac 17:28)...¹¹

3. Grace places the Soul in a most intimate rapport with the Creator.

As wonderful and free gifts that "being" and activity are, they are surpassed by that gift that is even more free. This is the gift of grace, a participation in the intimate life of God. Grace establishes a divine filiation in the soul. While this does occur, it does not destroy the relationship of the creature to the Creator – but rather reinforces it. All creatures that can be diversified according to their manner of participating in "being" are caused by God.¹²

In the classification of creatures, according to the order of their dependence on God, it is necessary to place those that have a more perfect being in the first category. Their perfection, in fact, does not consist in greater autonomy with regard to their Creator. Perfection is rather to be found in the ever fuller participation in His Goodness and, therefore, in an ever stricter dependence on Him. In the situation of the human soul elevated to the supernatural order of grace, it is a question of a most perfect

⁸ Ib., p.130. The Italian text was translated from the Latin of the *Summa Theologica* [I-II, q. 9, a. 2 c]. The reference to St. Augustine was suggested by the words that follow this text: ... *As is clear in Augustine...* [cf. *Gen. ad litt.*, Book 4, c. 12].

⁹ ... **He has carried you thus far by the strength of His infinite power, and you have not even felt those arms that are so strong. They have sustained you...** cf. PVC, p. 130.

¹⁰ ib., p. 130.

¹¹ ib., p. 132.

¹² St. Thomas: I, q. 42, a. 2: ...It is necessary to state that all things have been created by God ...

generation in the supernatural order. It would be impossible to think of a more perfect generation than that of creation. As a result human beings could never experience any more sublime “filiation” than that with which they are gifted in regard to their Creator. Fr. Bertoni understood Paul’s thought in this sense¹³:

... For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them...¹⁴
... He has made us. We belong to Him Who made us... 'For you have been purchased at a price... (1 Co 6:20).

Through appropriation, the communication of grace is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Fr. Bertoni explained that He is called “the Spirit Creator” because He “creates out of nothing: the nothing of our merits, and of our own dispositions”.¹⁵ He creates “a new life with Christ in God”.¹⁶ When Fr. Bertoni pleaded for new infusions of grace, he addressed his appeal to the creative activity of God:

...Ah, my Creator! My true Principle, my God... Create for us a clean heart. Who is there who could ever make clean one who draws his very origin from uncleanness, if not You alone, my God? Rather, who is there who could ever produce from nothing – or call into a new being any reality – and I will not even mention here anything that is as sublime as grace, that cleanses, purifies and beautifies our hearts – if not You alone, my God? Indeed we do know that of ourselves, we are nothing: nothing by merit, and even less than nothing – if we can say this – because of our many sins. But You – precisely from such a horrid state of nothingness - You both can, and even choose – we hope – to constitute our hearts in a new state of being, according to grace. In bestowing our pardon, and in dispensing mercy, You are accustomed to manifesting Your omnipotence. When we become thus almost new creatures, we are then able to walk in this newness of life...¹⁷

4. The Grace of Priesthood is an Effect of Creative Omnipotence

In this same order of grace, the creative activity of God has an area where it manifests itself in a preferential way. Fr. Bertoni considered the vocation to the priesthood in this light:

... I have not found anyone whom God wished to exalt on this earth as much as His priests...¹⁸

With greater reason, then, he appealed also in this context to the concept of creation:

... 'The priest is created.' The divine words that indicate this creation are: 'It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you... (Jn 15:16) .

¹³ Sermon on the Obligation of corresponding to Inspirations – MssB n. 20.

¹⁴ Ep 2:10

¹⁵ Retreat to Priests – MssB n. 16.

¹⁶ Rm 6:5. Fr. Bertoni comments on this passage in PVC, pp. 294, f.

¹⁷ b., p.128.

¹⁸ ib., p. 183.

Fr. Bertoni added to this line a passage from St. Paul:

...By the grace of God I am what I am..." (1 Co 15:10). And indeed, if it is by grace, then it cannot be by merit.... To create is to make from nothing. We are nothing by our own merit, and nothing by our own dispositions... We have had perhaps many demerits, sins and imperfections...¹⁹

The thought of his own nothingness would always come back to him as the most logical conclusion of whatever impeded the creative intervention of God. He offered the following recommendation:

... Let us stand firm in the recognition of our own nothingness... nor should we ever permit ourselves, therefore, to think even for an instant on anything that might draw us away from this thought...²⁰

¹⁹ Retreat to Priests – MssB n 16.

²⁰ Cf. PVC, p. 144. In his Retreat to Priests, Fr. Bertoni stated: **...who am I? Nothing by reason of being ... Nothing by reason of merit, because this latter requires habitual grace, and actual grace ... which precedes, is concomitant and subsequent. Hence, the grace of final perseverance is required for merit. In Brief, nothing by reason of our being, and nothing by reason of acting - this is what I am in the natural realm. In the order of grace, I am nothing by reason of merit – rather, I am less than nothing, because of sin ... It would have been better if that man had not been born ... this is what I am!** [cf. MssB, n. 16].

CHAPTER 2 CREATURES ARE ORDAINED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

1. The Compelling Desire for the Glory of God

God not only creates and conserves, but He also governs all things, directing them toward their ultimate end. The order with which all pre-exists in the divine intellect constitutes Divine Providence. The last end toward which all things are directed is the manifestation of the Goodness of God.²¹ Throughout the entire universe, this resounds like a marvelous symphony that bespeaks the Creator's glory²². Fr. Bertoni explained this doctrine as follows:

...The Lord has made everything for his own ends...' (Pr 16:4). The holiness of God consists in this, since He does not have any noble end outside of Himself. Our holiness consists in this: in referring all that pertains to us, and our very selves, to the glory of God...²³

He presented the same teaching in a manner that was more directed to the understanding of priests:

... The Glory of God is like the weight (like the weights in a clock press down on the wheels, and move the entire mechanism) that ought to press down on us, and urge on the hearts of priests to carry out completely and exactly the duties of the priest. In fact, the ultimate goal and purpose of the priest is the glory of God...²⁴

It can be stated that Fr. Bertoni was almost overwhelmed in the thought of the beauty of this end to be attained, as it is so lofty²⁵. In his fear that the passing of time would impede him from the most complete fulfillment of it that was possible, he jotted down in his diary what his zeal dictated:

... The past no longer is: the future has not yet come: only the present is. It is within my power to live from day, to day, even from morning until noon, and from noon until evening – and to do everything as perfectly as possible. It could very well be that there will be no more time to glorify God...²⁶

... The time in which I can serve God and promote His glory and sanctify myself,

²¹ I, q. 22, a. 1.

²² To understand that the 'Word' resounds through Creation, the Holy Spirit infuses the Gift of Knowledge. Fr. Bertoni was so often influenced by this Gift, as when he wrote in his Spiritual Diary:

... I experienced the sentiment ... how every good, all knowledge, and every kindness that is in creatures, is entirely His: for which He alone ought to be praised and loved ... [SA, Doc. 35, p. 667].

²³ Retreat to Priests – MssB n. 16.

²⁴ ib.

²⁵ He once preached to Seminarians:

...Oh! if only more priests in our times would keep their attention riveted on this goal, this most noble end! Do you think that they would then so love this world ...? If only they would keep their eyes on the beauty of their end, how much less would they be desirous and curious to see the beauty of human bodies ... [ib].

²⁶ September 17, 1808 – SA, Doc. 35, p. 660.

grows shorter and shorter... ²⁷

... What occupation is sweeter?... (he would ask this in reference to this passage from St. 'Paul: **"...Do all for the glory of God..."** ²⁸ [Rm 10:31]²⁹.

2. Rational Beings are called to glorify God through knowledge and love

There is an aspect of the Divine Glory that does not enter into the sphere of our resolutions and of our efforts. This is called the "objective", or "fundamental" glory of God. This is rooted and inserted into the very nature of reality. All of creation bears within itself the "need" of manifesting the divine goodness. This is because all that has been created is a participation – albeit deficient – of the infinite perfection of God. The totality of all created reality constitutes a unity in the intelligible order³⁰, that is generally ex- pressed by the term: "the objective, or fundamental, glory of God."

However, God has set aside the most perfect aspect of glory, that deriving from rational creatures. This is the glory that is called "formal", i.e., the glory that is the fruit of conscious knowledge and love. From beings endowed with intelligence and goodness, the Creator has the right that they express a conscious and willing adherence to His infinite Goodness.

Human beings are called to recognize God as the fullness of Being, and the inexhaustible Font from which all entity and perfection are derived. In so doing, human beings come to discover that they are founded on God, and experience a sense of duty urging a response. In other words, believers come to experience the obligation of responding to such a sublime love, with a benevolence much like that of which each person has been the recipient. In this response, each one consciously tends toward the Divine Glory.

As a result, the object of each one's personal striving and effort will not be directly that which interests the promotion of the "objective" divine glory. This pertains solely to the government of Providence. What is being emphasized here are all those efforts for that "formal" Divine Glory, and this coincides with one's own spiritual perfection and that of all the members of mankind.

Through His Providence, God will surely realize a totality of the "objective" Divine Glory. This will be so general and complete that His "formal" Divine Glory will only be a part of this single plan.

The fact remains, however, that the objective and total glorification of God in the universe can be obtained by divine Providence under an infinity of forms. Hence, there is nothing that hinders the possibility of procuring God's greater, or less, formal glory, within those limits of the influence of human actions. It is clear that it would never be any defect on the 'part of human activity that could jeopardize the principal interest of

²⁷ October 8, 1808 – SA, Doc. 35, p. 661.

²⁸ Retreat to newly appointed Confessors – MssB, n.17.

²⁹ NB: Translator's note: an erroneous citation is offered here– might be: **1 Co 10:31**. Cf. Diary, Holy 14, 1809 – SA, Doc. 35, p. 667.

³⁰ cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, n. 72.

Divine Providence. This is evident because any failure on the part of human beings would require the intervention of either the divine justice, or the divine mercy. In either case, this would contribute to the total manifestation of God's glory.

One who truly loves, however, will feel called to bring about the maximum of the "formal" Divine Glory. Such a person will not rest until he/she has made fellow human beings as sharers in the knowledge and love of God, following an orderly procedure. In the very first place, the loving believer will glorify God in those spheres that interest him/ her the more personally, and those to which he/she is particularly bound, by well ordered charity. The faithful lover of God will begin to honor Him as much as possible in and for Himself, and through the medium of the present activity in which one is engaged.³¹

3. God's Glory Must First of all be Sought in Oneself

Fr. Bertoni stated this principle in this way:

... It is especially necessary, and in the very first place, before all else, to procure this divine glory in ourselves. That means that total victory over oneself must be obtained before one sets out to conquer the hearts of others...³²

Fr. Bertoni had embraced the Ignatian method of spiritual combat, with its insistence on "Particular" and "General Examen". These are to be renewed every hour of the day. This practice prepared in him a better condition and disposition to guarantee a beneficial activity in behalf of others³³. His zeal in his personal efforts for perfection was clearly expressed in a letter in which he was trying to direct his spiritual daughter, Mother Leopoldina Naudet, on this path. We will quote this letter here at some length. It is remarkable also because in this letter, Fr. Bertoni brings together St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Ignatius Loyola. He did this in order to encourage his spiritual daughter to continue making great strides along the path of perfection:

...It is fitting to recognize the admirable gift of divine grace that has elevated us above our own nature. Grace allows one to participate in the very nature of God. This places one in this supernatural and divine order and it is in accord with this, that we ought to respond with our spirit. We have to think it a very grave loss any descent, even for a very short period of time, from this most sublime order. It is truly harmful to revert even briefly to our natural manner of thinking and acting. The theological, or divine virtues, pertain precisely to this sublime order. This is the reason why St. Ignatius exercised such care, concern and zeal that the acts of these virtues should never cease, and that their habits should never diminish.

³¹ Cf. *Diet. Spir*, fasc. II, col. 673.

³² Letter 35 – Feast of St. Ignatius 1813. *Bertoniano* 19231, n. 4, p. 135.

³³ In his Spiritual Diary, July 30, 1808, the Vigil of St. Ignatius, he wrote: : **...In order to make the examination of conscience well, it is necessary to choose a saint who lived the same vocation, as a kind of mirror. Then, one would find something to accuse himself of every day. All that is lacking from such perfection is defective ...** [SA, Doc. 35, p. 658].

In a number of passages here, Fr. Bertoni traced out about 80 concise propositions of St. Ignatius' spirituality [cf. MssB, n. 34]. In comparing all this to Fr. Bertoni's spirituality, it can readily be seen how much help this particular examen was to him.

These virtues are centered on God: to know Him, in faith; to be supported by Him, in hope; and to adhere to Him, in charity. How much the less, then, will we think of, and find support in, or remain with creatures, as the more these beautiful virtues assume shape and strength. The doctrine of the Angelic Doctor can be recalled, here. His teaching is that in order to increase the habit of a virtue, it is required that the acts which comprise it should be the more intense in proportion to the intensity of the habit itself (I-II, q. 3). Therefore, a more refined and exquisite diligence is all the more necessary to conserve and to develop these theological virtues; This is a sublime and supernatural gift of God, through which 'we have intimate and truly familiar communication with His Divine Majesty...'³⁴

In attending to this first part of the divine glory, Fr. Bertoni urges one on to the furthest limits of this endeavor. While so doing, he does not permit any lessening of confidence in God, even in the event of some failure. Hence, he continues:

...How admirable, though, are His mercy and goodness. He might see us wavering at such heights, through our human weakness, and almost falling again, because of our innate loneliness. Then, like a loving Mother, He places His hand under His children, as Scripture says: '... By the Lord are the steps of a man made firm...' (Ps 37:23)...'³⁵ **He does this so that we do not experience any harm. He does this with such gentleness, and yet, with such firmness, that He is able to hold us up... Let us, then, exclaim with the Psalmist: 'But for me, to be near God is my good; to make the Lord God my refuge...'**

Hope and confidence in God in the work of our sanctification excludes the unjustified concern regarding it. There is never any need to yearn for a greater grace than the one sent for us by Providence for this present moment. Fr. Bertoni wrote to his friend, Fr. Bragato:

... Do not have any other care, any greater worry, than that of serving God right where He has called you...³⁶

This other suggestion that he once made is also fully in accord with the spirit of Holy Abandonment:

... Let us love God, then, and render to Him whatever service that we can. He has made each one of us for this. He has established each one in full accord with the spirit and grace bestowed on each. And the good God will be content with this...³⁷

4. Zeal for the Glory of God needs to be inserted in the Plan established by Divine Providence:

Fr. Bertoni adopted the Ignatian plan of battle. He made use of this not only in achieving victory over himself, but also in the apostolate. It seemed that St. Ignatius himself had chosen to give his own imprint to this disciple of his. In this regard, let us read from the saint's own Spiritual Diary:

³⁴ Letter 6, December 11, 1812. Cf. *Bertoniano*, 1929. Suppl. To n. 3, p. 185.

³⁵ *ib.*, p. 186.

³⁶ Fragment of a Letter to Fr. Bragato, November 18, 1835. [SA, Doc 35, p. 740].

³⁷ Bragato, December 1, 1837. [*ib.*, p. 743].

... In a visit to St. Ignatius' altar with my companions, there was much devotion and recollection. I experienced interior sweetness and sane tears, even though this visit was brief. It seemed to me that the Saint was welcoming us, and was inviting us to promote the greater glory of God, just as he had done. He seems to have suggested the same ways, even though it was not in every one of these ways that the Saint himself had been able to employ. It seems to me that he wanted to say:

'... Onward, soldiers of Christ! Gird yourselves with fortitude, put on the buckler of faith and the helmet of salvation. Take up the sword of the divine word, and fight with the ancient serpent. Make my spirit come alive in you and in others, by means of you...!'³⁸

In this kind of "investiture", not only the "weapons" were handed over, but also the program in the quest for the Glory of God. Fr. Bertoni demanded zeal for the Glory of God as an indispensable prerequisite in anyone who would set out on an ecclesiastical vocation³⁹. He would require an elevated degree of this in anyone who had been called to some more than ordinary undertaking. In Mother Leopoldina Naudet, whom he guided in her founding the Sisters of the Holy Family, he soon came to see that she was a truly gifted person. In his view, there had been entrusted to her the task of nothing less than building **a temple of His glory**.⁴⁰

The dispositions that he held out to her were those that would have to be without limit in the spiritual life. In that time while she was waiting to begin her undertaking, he encouraged her **to give expression to those holy desires that would be so pure, so inflamed with zeal for the divine glory**. This was asked of her so that these lofty ideals **would please God, as though to oblige the divine omnipotence to keep her project alive**. He saw all of this as the exercise of **the necessary virtue, those needed for such a project – to be sure - they had been acquired**. She was encouraged to exercise **the most powerful works of charity**.

In order to succeed in this interior preparation, she was encouraged **to imitate the prayer and the most holy desires of the Heart of Jesus... for the betterment of His Church**. During all this personal preparation of her own soul, she had the responsibility of preparing her companions. This challenge demanded of her nothing less than a heroicity of virtue. In his view, she had to support an **immense weight of the divine glory...**⁴¹. Even the slightest inspiration that the Lord would bestow "along her pathway of her undertaking for the divine glory" had to be scrupulously noted, because **in whatever pertains to God, everything is important...**⁴².

³⁸ *Spiritual Diary*, September 15, 1808. [SA Doc 35, pp. 659, f.].

³⁹ ... When a young man rejoices in God, or in whatever pertains to His glory – when in particular... he prays very fervently to God for the extension of His Glory ... he will notice within a level of joy. This is a great proof of the Holy Spirit that has been given to him. This is an indication of being very well disposed for an ecclesiastical vocation... [1 Kings, 8th Meditation. *MssB* p. 23].

⁴⁰ Letter 25, March 6, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, p. 475.

⁴¹ Letter 21, no date. *ib.*, p. 469.

⁴² Letter 25, *ib.*, p. 475.

For anything connected with the divine glory, Fr. Bertoni did not want any interference with the state of holy abandonment. This would occur should anyone attempt to go beyond whatever it was that God had foreordained. What God expects from us, and from our actions, is no more than this, than obedience to His signified will. When this is carried out, then we will have accomplished all that is required on our part.

So, we can never regret that there has not been entrusted to us the responsibility of bringing to completion the entire plan of divine glory. The Lord Himself will bring into His plan not only the most faithful obedience that we have been able to offer to His precepts, counsels and inspirations. But further, He will also call upon the abandonment to His divine good pleasure in which we have willingly placed ourselves.⁴³

Providence imposes on events its own inevitable movement that cannot be upset by the resistance of creatures. Once God has conceived a plan of action with His infinite wisdom, He carries it through to fruition through the intervention of His own omnipotence. Therefore, it could never be that a creature could ever suggest to God something that would be more perfect than His own plan. Nor would it ever be possible for any creature to perform with greater efficacy and care any - thing that God Himself could not perform on His own.

During an illness that impeded Fr. Bertoni from helping Mother Naudet in a rather delicate matter, he wrote to her:

... God exercises a care that is infinitely greater than our own for matters that pertain to His own glory. He would make even the minutes hurry by so that this miserable servant of His would be able to run, if He indeed wanted to make use of His services... Who could bring a greater concern to this matter, seeing that our Lord's is already so great '... Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God...' (Ph 4:6). And with that, it is enough: *neither the one who plants nor the...one who waters is anything, but only God who causes the growth...* ' (1 Co 3:6). O great God! how good You are, and how disposed out of love for us, miserable creatures that we are! When will it be that we will love you with all our heart, and when will we know you for what you truly are: 'my God and my All...' ⁴⁴

For anyone to come into the possession of the plan for the divine glory in the most perfect manner possible – and without bringing any detriment whatsoever to holy abandonment, it is necessary to open up one's heart. There is required that one possess to some degree that divine love with which God loves. Fr. Bertoni once wrote:

⁴³ For the theologians of Holy Abandonment, the Divine Will of Good Pleasure is the particular domain of a 'confident abandonment.' cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*. Book 8, c. 3; Book 9, c. 6. Cf, also Bossuet, *Etats d'Oraison*. I. Book 8, 9.

⁴⁴ Letter 24. January 21, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 4, p. 517.

... In proportion to the extent that one will open up his/her heart and mind... through charity in Christ Jesus, there will also be expanded and developed the magnificent design of His glory...⁴⁵ .

A most ardent love, one that is most lacking in self-interest – one that is most generous – will not allow itself to be stopped by any obstacle. A love of this intensity will not insert any impediment in the action of God⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Letter 25m no date. *Bertoniano* Suppl. To n. 2, pp. 429, ff.

⁴⁶ **...Reverend Mother, in all that is done for the divine glory of His most holy Spouse...Christ our Lord must never allow Himself to be impeded in any way by any person in this world. So, you should not stand in the way of whatever He might deign to do. For what He does is always so much the better, and so much the more necessary for His glory ... [cf. Letter 21. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, p. 471]. ... Crosses glorify God in a supreme manner, and the grateful person, even in the face of adversities, draws down even greater goods, since there is nothing that honors God more... [MssB n. 17].**

CHAPTER 3

THE QUEST FOR THE GLORY OF GOD IMPLIES THE EXERCISE OF THE MOST PERFECT LOVE

1. Love is based on Proportion, or Likeness

With St. Thomas⁴⁷, Fr. Bertoni recognized that **charity is a perfect friendship between us and God.**⁴⁸

Love is **“the movement of the will toward good”**⁴⁹. The attraction that a magnet has for iron is comparable to the action of good on the human will: there is an attraction for union. Fr. Bertoni observed in one of his homilies:

... It sometimes happens that a good that is all the more noble in itself – which would seem to give it all the greater power for attracting – yet, still does not move the will to any noticeable extent. There is even noted the contrary effect: that even a most sublime good repels the will from itself. The explanation for this is the fact that it is not because the good is so great, but rather because it is seen to be so disproportionate. Hence, the ancient Sage assigns proportion, or similarity, as the principal cause of love: ‘... every being is drawn to its own kind...’ (Si 13:15)...⁵⁰.

That which is the greatest distance between humanity and God is what can all the more easily be affirmed. While preparing the parishioners for Christmas, at that very time when he desired to excite their minds and hearts to receive the Lord with joy, Fr. Bertoni offered an “objection” to this legitimate joy filled expectancy. He stated:

...If we consider the first appearances of these two terms – namely, He Who is awaited, and then by whom He is expected – this might be better suited to give rise in us to a sense of despairing sadness, rather than one of comforting joy. He Who is awaited, is God – and those who await Him, we are the most wretched of creatures...⁵¹.

... And what fitness can we find between sin and holiness, between iniquity and justice, between supreme misery and supreme Beatitude...?⁵².

... I concede that we will only find ‘between God and ourselves, nothing but disproportion and unsuitableness. St. Augustine would put it this way (cf. *Ennar*, in Ps 41, n. 7) that God is not color, so He is not proportionate to our sight; He is not flavor, to be tasted by our palate; He is not sound, that could be heard by our ears. He is not anything natural, that would have even the least fitness for our other senses...⁵³

⁴⁷ II-II, q. 23, a. 1.

⁴⁸ *PVC*, p. 175

⁴⁹ *ib.*, p. 68.

⁵⁰ *ib.*, pp. 168, f.

⁵¹ *ib.*, p. 226.

⁵² *ib.*

⁵³ *ib.*, p. 169.

Therefore, in order to have some grasp on what is the necessary condition in order to understand the love of friendship between God and human beings, there will be a need to ponder the spiritual aspect of our nature. The human soul offers a number of titles of proportion and suitability with God. Fr. Bertoni offers a list of these: “our soul is “spiritual”, and God is Spirit; His being is most “simple”, “immutable” and “eternal” – and the essence of the soul is simple, incorruptible and immortal. God is Intellect and His Will is most free... God Himself is shown in the Scriptures as having understood that in the creation of the soul, He did nothing less than form His own image: ‘Let us make man in our own image and likeness...’ (Gn 1:26). Hence, the soul in the unity of its substance, represents the unity of the divine nature. In like manner, in its three distinct potencies, the most august Trinity of Persons is represented. This can be extended in an even more perfect manner, because just as God knows Himself, and loves Himself, is the most perfect Good, so the soul is capable of knowing God, and through this knowledge, one is able also to love Him. And would not so great a relationship of similarity be enough to arouse the most sensible affection of satisfaction and love...?”.⁵⁴

The classical explanation of the interior of the human person being made to the image of God⁵⁵ is still not enough to remove the infinite disproportion between finite being, endowed with limited faculties, and infinity. However, by affirming the spirituality of the human person, there is placed the foundation to bridge the infinite gap, in some way. The soul and its faculties can be perfected to an infinite degree. Fr. Bertoni stated:

... Our spiritual faculties have the marvelous capacity of being perfectible to an indeterminate level...⁵⁶.

All that would be required, then, would be to wait and see if indeed God wanted to perfect it to that level. So, Fr. Bertoni reasoned thus:

... You say that God is a supreme good. Therefore, I reply that He is able to communicate to a supreme degree. Even the Philosopher understood that the more perfect a good is, it is all the more diffusive’ of itself...⁵⁷.

To anyone who might experience more than all others his/her own inherent misery, Fr. Bertoni would say:

... What would be more fitting and more in accord with an infinite Goodness than it yearns – I would almost say, without limit – to communicate its perfection, than to find a person, just as capable of receiving as it is bereft and needy of all kinds of goodness...?⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ ib., pp. 169, f.

⁵⁵ St. Augustine, *De Gen. Contra Manich.*, Bk 1, c. 17: PL t. 34.

⁵⁶ PVC, p. 170.

⁵⁷ ib., p. 171.

⁵⁸ ib., p. 171.

Fr. Bertoni would go beyond all these above statements. He gives much assurance to anyone experiencing the most abject desolation that such a state would be the very reason why the Lord would intervene in a most benign manner, through the most abundant bestowal of His grace. He explains:

... I have touched on the deformity, and lack of similitude that appears ever the greater between us and God. Considered on the one hand, this cannot be truthfully denied. However, when it is the more intimately considered on the other hand, I want to point out that it achieves the most proximate suitability for the union of such disparate extremes. In fact, a supreme Goodness, such as God, is therefore inclined excessively to communicate Himself. He could not have any greater proportionality than to a creature that is needy to the extreme, and of all goods...⁵⁹.

For St. Thomas, this communication suffices to make possible the mutual benevolence that is proper to friends. **"Since there is, in fact, a certain communication of human beings to God, in that His beatitude is communicated to us it follows that a certain friendship has been established."**⁶⁰.

Once he has explained the friendship of human beings with God, Fr. Bertoni emphasizes the character of God's love for us:

... And right here I would like you to pay special attention to an important matter. Customarily we love only that in which we can see some appearance of the beautiful and the good. However, since in us there is nothing else other than what is evil and ugly – this would seemingly make it impossible for God to love us. It seems to us, then, that it would be an exaggeration to state that the Divine Word is an intense Lover of us. We do not understand how He brings us to these chaste and spiritual nuptials. But, every difficulty is solved whenever this difference between our love and God's is recognized. Our love is caused by the good that it finds in the object that is loved. This is why we can only love what is good existing in reality. God's love, though, is not caused by the good that there is in us. And this explains why God loves even those things that are not good - but, so that they might become good. He loves souls that are ugly and de- formed by sin, to adorn them again, and to reform them with His grace...⁶¹.

From this perspective, the entire record of God's love holds an indescribable fascination. God loves and He creates; God loves, and then He redeems. By contrast, on the part of the object of His love, there is either nothing, or an uninterrupted series of faults that weave a full web of ingratitude⁶².

⁵⁹ ib., p. 228.

⁶⁰ II-II, q. 23, a. 1.

⁶¹ PVC, p. 230.

⁶² ib., p. 173. cf. Apologetic Sermon on the Sacred Heart. MssB n. 15.

2. God's Love for Creatures is entirely without Self-interest.

God's love is presented as one that is without Self-interest. Love that is with self-interest, is called the "love of concupiscence", is one that goes out from the subject, reaches out to its object, and then returns on itself. The "Love of Benevolence", on the other hand, goes out from itself and through the likeness that the beloved object has with the one loving it, remains with it as "another self." Only in this sense does God love us, looking only after our interests. The benefit of divine love is totally that of human beings, and God reserves for Himself only the pleasure of having benefited humanity. Therefore, it is up to each person to bring about God's ever greater contentment, by each one's permitting him/ herself to be benefited by God, and as perfectly as possible⁶³.

We cannot fail to present here an entire page from Fr. Bertoni's sermons, concerning the love God exercise in behalf of creatures. This divine love is without Self-interest:

... It is proper for ardent lovers to love so strongly that no difficulty delays them, no danger disheartens them. Not even death itself is able to terrify them, even when it is so menacing in appearance. Such lovers are almost totally forgetful of themselves, and they do everything, they suffer everything, and they dare everything to please, to be united with the one they love.

And it also happens sometimes that love so blinds them that they do not even see those very defects that so foully vitiate the one they love. Sometimes this beloved object is so despicable to everyone else, other than to the lover.

It even happens that with the most crass ingratitude with which very often their love is returned not only does not dampen their ardor, like water on a strong fire – but even seems to enkindle it the more.

Jesus Christ is a lover of this type. God, just as He is, loved your soul, o my listeners, because in you He sees His own image. But, this image had become quite deformed by sin. And this dear soul, created by, Him, was sold into hell as a slave. His love therefore, was strongly opposed by divine justice that cannot tolerate sin being loved. And what do you think? Love will overcome every difficulty. A way is found to satisfy His justice, and content His love.

This would require, though, I would almost say – the humbling of the Divine Majesty and thus subject it in His human nature already assumed, to the most ignominious death. However, not even death – and a death such as His was – is capable of holding love back – because this love of this intensity, as the ancient Sage wrote is equally as strong as death.

It was not any corruptible gold or silver that this Lover used to pay the ransom price to gain back His beloved. Rather, the price was all of His Most Precious Blood. And it .could be that the beloved soul would return again to fell back into the hands of the infernal enemy, staining herself anew with sin. Should this

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happen, Jesus would again offer the same victim on the altars. He would wash His beloved over again with His Blood, of which He had opened an endless fountain in the bosom of His Church.

What is it that You intend, my Jesus, by so great a love?

Listen, listen to My words, or rather to the transports of My love. Only the person who loves me, consents to these My chaste nuptials...⁶⁴.

3. The Pure and True Love of a Creature for God is bereft of all personal Self-interest

The just return for love is simply the correspondence in friendship, of the beloved person. The response that a creature is called to give to God on the level of a relationship of friendship, is a love that is devoid of every form of self interest. Fr. Bertoni not only insisted on being careful not to seek one's own advantage, but also states that the absence of self-interest is **"the most proper and special characteristic of love."**⁶⁵.

In all his labors, he was intensely influenced by the final causality 'of God's formal glory. This mentality was habitual with him, and thus he exercised continual acts of pure love. The praise and glory of God, considered in themselves, could only of themselves be the expression of an imperfect love of benevolence. This is so because they are ordained rather to express admiration for God's greatness. But, if one should ponder on whatever implies the quest for God's glory, the only answer is this: it requires a service out of love, consisting in an absolute deference for the Creator's orders and desires. This means that one will have no hesitation in admitting that to seek the Glory of God is a true exercise of pure love. In this regard, Fr. Bertoni removes all doubt by the following most clear statements:

... Tomorrow I will be more diligent in doing everything out of pure love for God's good pleasure...⁶⁶.

... Seek only God, see God in all things... (this remained his constant intention)⁶⁷.

... Seek only God, and nothing else: not consolations, and not satisfactions...⁶⁸.

... there was a great desire to please His Divine Majesty in all things...⁶⁹.

... Lose the habit of doing your own will, and do everything as being moved by the will of God, to please and honor Him...⁷⁰.

⁶⁴ PVC, pp. 238, ff.

⁶⁵ ib, p. 176.

⁶⁶ **Spiritual Diary**, September 30, 1812. [SA Doc. 35, p. 671].

⁶⁷ ib., July 30, 1808., o.c., p. 658.

⁶⁸ ib., December 23, 1808. o.c., p. 655.

⁶⁹ ib., July 16, 1809. o.c., p. 667.

⁷⁰ ib., October 13, 1808. o.c., p. 662.

... I must not seek my own interests, and what is pleasing to me, but only the interests of God's glory and what is pleasing to Him...⁷¹ .

... Primarily one should keep his/her eye on God, and when His pleasure is realized, everything will proceed well...⁷² .

... Do whatever His prudence dictates to you in every case, and with freedom, trusting in the loving Providence of God. This leads to His glory and we ought to be sacrificed to Him, with all our interests and desires...⁷³ .

The expressions that Fr. Bertoni would employ to make known the main points of his advice right up to the end of his life would sound like these that follow:

... Be in accord with the pleasure of God...⁷⁴ .

... This is God's pleasure and it redounds the more to His glory...⁷⁵ .

... It is not simply to avoid being in opposition to the Lord's pleasure, but to strive to be much in conformity with it...⁷⁶ .

... In this way, He will be much glorified by your course of action...⁷⁷ .

The saint often considered God in His intrinsic loveliness. Through this, He sought to be loved beyond any thought of recompense:

... Who is God? He is Goodness, the Creator, the Conserver, the Redeemer. He is Beauty and intrinsic loveliness. Whoever comes to see Him, is necessitated to love Him. If the Demons were to see Him f they, too, would have to love Him. He surpasses all our ideas. What- ever manifestation of affection shown to Him, is as nothing in comparison to His merit. We were obliged to love Him for Himself...⁷⁸ .

From one of his sermons, we hear:

... If we only knew even slightly all that God truly is! And what an immense good there is for us in having so holy a Love! I know well that we should forget everything else, and even ourselves, so that all our thoughts and all our affections would be of God, and in God alone...⁷⁹ .

Human beings are not called to augment the goodness and the happiness of God. The human vocation is to acquiesce and to be happy that God is so infinitely perfect and holy in Himself. In one of his sermons, Fr. Bertoni preached:

⁷¹ ib., July 16, 1809. o.c., p. 667.

⁷² *Retreat to Priests*. MssB n. 16.

⁷³ Letter 27. June 4, 1814. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 324.

⁷⁴ Letter 72. December 1822. *Bertoniano* 1922, n. 1, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Letter 42. December 14, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 2, p. 267.

⁷⁶ ib. p. 268.

⁷⁷ Letter 43. No date. o.c., p. 269.

⁷⁸ Letter 21. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, p. 469.

⁷⁹ *Retreat to Priests*. MssB, n. 16.

... If we offer to God reverence and honor, it is not that God has need of our obeisance, or that some usefulness redounds to Him from our adoration. '... *You are my God, for You have no need of my goods* (cf. Ps 15:2, Vulgate). Yes, o my Lord, o my God, You are most perfect in Yourself ; You are every good, the Supreme Good. You do not have the slightest need of my goods, of my virtues, of my homage. And we ought to rejoice in Him always, for the felicity of our most high, and most lovable Creator, and again I say, we ought to rejoice in it, if we truly love Him...⁸⁰.

4. God's Will is lovable in Itself

The challenge for a believer is to rejoice in Him and to be satisfied with His pleasure. This ought to be verified when this infinite Wisdom and Goodness goes out from Itself, so to speak, to work lovingly among creatures. The divine will is the canal through which God communicates Himself . Looked at from this point of view – even when it is in opposition to our own personal plans, can only appear as holy and as equally lovable. Fr. Bertoni put it this way:

... God's Will is always better and the more useful: hence, it is to be praised and blessed now and forever...!⁸¹

Therefore, to prefer what is pleasing to the Divine Will remains for the believer its pledge throughout one's entire life, even in the most harsh trials. Fr. Bertoni used to say:

... The quest for God's pleasure ought to be maintained even when our activities and prayers are not pleasing to us. And everything ought to be fulfilled with calmness...⁸².

We are at the very apex of that love which is without self-interest. It is proper of the partner who followed her Spouse step by step, in the complete forgetfulness of herself. Fr. Bertoni explains:

... There are very many who follow Christ for a temporal reward. But the mercenary when he has reached the door, he is paid and remains excluded from the house: '... *You have received your reward* ...'⁸³

Many Follow Christ as slaves out of fear. Such as these fear Him more than they love Him. They do come into the house, but they remain in its lower part. They do follow, but from a distance. They follow from afar, and they are not let in on the service of their master. '... *The slave does not know what his master does* ...' (Jn 15:15)

⁸⁰ PVC, p. 173.

⁸¹ ib., p. 209, f.

⁸² Letter 12. January 12, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 2, p. 397.

⁸³ *Meditation on 1 Kings*. Med. 11. [MssB n. 26].

Some follow Christ as sons, but their love is somewhat interested in how much they will receive from the inheritance. Often times sons are more loved than they are loving in return. They even arrive at the point of disdaining the Father if He gives commands that are against their way of seeing things, even though they are reasonable, and for their benefit – but, such as prove themselves to be difficult and arduous. *'... Sons have I raised and reared, but they have disowned me ...'* (Is 1:2).

Only few are they who follow Christ as friends, who base their love in the mutual communication of goods. But, if, for some reason or other, flowing from Providence – and which is always a just reason – the sweet bestowal of these gifts should ever cease, and there should be the bitter participation of the friend's bad luck, then *'... all the disciples left Him and fled ...'* (Mt 26:56). And these were the very own whom Christ called His “friends. *'... All seek their own interests, and only few*” those of Jesus Christ ... *'* (Ph 20:22 “mistaken citation”)

Only very few follow Christ... wherever He goes, whether to Tabor or to Calvary...

⁸⁴.

Here Fr. Bertoni offers the example of young lovers as the model to follow:

... Out of love for the sweet smelling unction of spiritual consolations, they may run behind Him... but they are not up to keeping pace with Him.

The (faithful) Spouse, finally, has actually grown and matured in the school of love and is not attracted by the odor of her Spouse's fragrance. Rather, such a one is supported by His right hand, relies on His power. With His prowess, He strongly holds and supports her in His strength, and goes along step by step with Him. She does not run with Him, but flies ... '... leaning on her beloved....' (Sgs 8:5)⁸⁵.

Having reached this level, the believer relies on the mercy of the Spouse. Such a person carries out His divine will with that same solicitous attention with which it would look after its own interests.

⁸⁴ Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi. [MssB n. 26].

⁸⁵ ib.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTINUAL QUEST FOR THE GLORY OF GOD TRANSFORMS LIFE INTO AN ON-GOING ACT OF RELIGION

1. The Task of Religion in the Spiritual Life

The quest for the Glory of God already implies the exercise of a pure love. Understood in this way, this quest constitutes the formal motive of the virtue of religion, and, therefore, of our essential duties as creatures. From this point of view, it can be affirmed that the Ignatian spirituality is not any more religious than would be the Benedictine spirituality. The only difference is that Ignatian spirituality gives preference to the acts commanded by the virtue of religion, and performed by the other virtues. Benedictine spirituality stops at the proper and elicited acts of religion, such as adoration, prayer and the like.⁸⁶

Gaspar Bertoni wished that his sons would be like monks while at home – and apostles, missionaries while they were outside of it. He embraced the virtue of religion in all its extension. This virtue has an extraordinary importance for its central position that it holds in the organism of the spiritual life. Although it is inferior to the theological virtues, it holds the primacy among the moral virtues. It can be said that the virtue of religion is the point in which all the various schools of spirituality converge and meet. Citing St. Thomas, Fr. Bertoni stated:

... Religion is a virtue through which there is rendered to God as to a sovereign Lord and principle of all things, a supreme worship that is due Him. This worship is an attestation to divine excellence, and a submission of all of ourselves to God...⁸⁷

With religion, one enters fully into the field of justice. It is, in fact, a potential part of justice because it renders to God what is due to Him. It is not, however capable of doing this to the degree that God would merit. Surely, religion is not charity, but it is in no way true that with religion, one has to desert the field of charity. The virtue of religion has its formal motive that will remain irrevocably distinct from that of charity. Nevertheless, it will not be perfect if it is not motivated by charity. In its turn, charity will not be complete if it does not also express devotion, which the principal part of religion has as its end.

Love does not suppress the duties of justice that we have toward God. It places in our hearts a more ardent desire to render to God, our Friend, whatever we owe Him. Certainly when our faith has us recall to mind all the manifestations of divine love, we feel that we can only respond to God with a love that is carried to the extreme limit of all our strength, and all our capacities. But, it pertains precisely to the virtue of religion to be attentive in this love of ours to the aspect of debt and to pay it as the homage of respect and service.

⁸⁶ cf. Mennessier, *La Vie Spirituelle*. Feb. 1, 1932, p. 109.

⁸⁷ PVC, p. 207.

2. Devotion is the Principal Act of Religion

The one act in which the union of charity and religion is the better realized is the interior act of devotion. In this act, homage is offered interiorly, under the generous inspiration of love, in a total giving of the will that is presented to God and consigned entirely to Him. Still in the first year of his priesthood, Fr. Bertoni wished to explain to his listeners the elements of the devout life⁸⁸. In his discourse, there can easily be traced his dependence on the first chapters of the Introduction to the Devout Life of St. Francis de Sales. However, his own, personal thinking on these chapters is not without its own particular interest for us. He suggested the following:

... Devotion is considered under an aspect that is so delightful, so joyful and so lovable ..., that all even toward the most adverse aspects of the faith, the devout ought to run to embrace it, even with a certain anxiety...

All Christians are called “to approach even more closely to their God”, and “to serve Him with greater perfection in their state”. However, it sometimes happens that when the Lord sends illustrations to the mind, or inspirations to the human heart, some are upset by this, thinking that a more devout life is more an object of sadness, anguish, or even horror. It is necessary that such as these be persuaded that they are laboring under a false presumption. This can be done if it can be pointed out that devotion has a squadron of followers of all ages, sexes and conditions. Fr. Bertoni said:

... Therefore, it must be concluded that there is found in devotion what is beautiful, sweet, a richness, a joy, a glory that at first sight, we might not expect to discover. This is shown by the fact that so many have loved it, and loved it to such an extent that they preferred it to all the beauties, the delights, the treasures of this world...⁸⁹.

The deception lies in looking only at “the externals of devotion”, without keeping in mind “the interior consolation”, in which the true servants of God abound. This is all the more sweet, in so far as it is all the more secret. It is this interior aspect that merits consideration, because “the very soul ’of devotion is the heart”⁹⁰. And it is in the heart that will be found “that hidden manna that anyone who has not received it would never understand.” And there will be tasted “that perpetual banquet, which a soul enjoys in the security and peace of heart.” The soul will be engaged in “that conversation with uncreated Wisdom, from which is excluded all boredom and all sadness....”

Fr. Bertoni goes still further when he states that interior devotion is not only its principal part. It can also be completely disassociated from the external apparatus of rigor and authority, which it has had in some saints. He referred back to the definition of St. Thomas:

⁸⁸ b., pp. 200, ff.

⁸⁹ ib, p. 202.

⁹⁰ Ib., p.208.

...True devotion, that which is essential, consists in a will that is ready to give itself to God, and to be dedicated to all that pertains to His service...” (II-II, q. 82, a. 1). Now, it is true that God calls all to serve Him, and even more, so that all can. It is up to each one to aspire to be sanctified in their state. It is false, though, to say that God wants to be served by all in a single manner, when the differences in the states in which people are constituted by His same divine Providence are considered... Devotion is not contrary to any kind of a vocation: further, it would not be true devotion if it should even partially impede the duties of one’s state...⁹¹.

As it is a particular virtue, religion has a sphere that in the external aspect of worship, it is measured by diverse circumstances. These regulate the human acts, and in the internal form of devotion, it escapes all measure. Toward God, one could never exaggerate in internal devotion – i.e., in offering one’s own will, promptly disposed to be whatever is demanded by His service. Therefore, devotion is capable of penetrating any attitude in which a person may find him/ herself.

Certainly, it is charity and the entire sphere of the theological virtues – as we have said – that have the first place in the supernatural life. However, devotion as the servant of love, directed to the honor of God, not only allows itself to be inflamed by love; it also gives, in its turn, a new impulse for the exercise of the theological virtues, as the most perfect means of serving God. In the light of this doctrine, one of Fr. Bertoni’s most beautiful pages ought to be pondered. He maintained that it would no longer be authentic devotion if it in any way impeded one in the exercise of the duties proper to his/her state. He continued:

... Devotion has equally wings to fly to heaven and feet to walk on earth. While its hands are continually busy, it still knows how to rest tranquilly in God; It has eyes to keep vigil, and to supervise, to direct temporal matters; and it also has another, sharper vision of the mind.

By means of this latter, it never loses sight of its last end, to think over the divine good pleasure in its every action, and to direct all to His glory. It has a tongue with which to speak with human beings; and also secretly, in its soul, it opens as many interior mouths as it has faculties.

Hence, it never ceases to praise and bless God. It deals with the world, and retains its spirit in the heavens, in such a way that it emulates, so to speak, its Blessed Citizens. Through love, it is drawn to God, it finds Him within itself, and possesses Him in the abundance of peace, and enjoys even on earth, another Paradise.

Therefore, it is that admirable sweetness which it showers on all its actions, that unwavering uniformity of His Spirit. The world sees nothing in it that distinguishes it as outside of the ordinary in its practices, its acts, in the offices that are proper to its condition.

Therefore, the world is surprised at being constrained to love in devotion an inexplicable singularity, and divine element that it does not recognize. In prosperity, it does not exalt itself above miseries, and in adversities, it does not

⁹¹ ib., pp. 203, f.

give in to sadness. It rejoices in the happiness of others, as though it were its own. Despoiled of all its own particular tastes, it has a judicious compliance to the wishes of others, provided these are proper. It communicates with good spirit its own consolations, to anyone who is weighed down in the affliction of his/her own spirit. It is liberal with its friends and is generally generous with all of them, without any pretension. It awaits its recompense, only from God, Whose service is its pleasure. I could never finish speaking about so marvelous a virtue...⁹².

In these lines, we see a compendium of Fr. Bertoni's spiritual life. He was so imbued with supernatural unction that he was truly beloved to a large group of people, who would have recourse to him to obtain his counsel.

3. The Continual Presence of God:

He lived always in union with God, and not only through the continual exercise of the theological virtues!⁹³ These truly gave him uninterruptedly the sentiment of divine presence⁹⁴. He also exercised continually the virtue of religion, through which he was able to place himself in the presence of God, as needed⁹⁵. A number of testimonies from his life assure us that "he walked always in the presence of God"⁹⁶. Naturally, these witnesses could not infer from his attitude alone that he was practicing the virtue of religion to the heights that he did. It seemed unbelievable even to his parents that their young son was "always recollected, always pensive, and often with

⁹² MssB n. 9.

⁹³ In his Spiritual Journal, he wrote: ... **To work out of a purely natural instinct, even for a moment, is to impede God from working, and gives way to the operation of creatures ...** [July 15, 1809] [SA Doc. 35, p. 667].

⁹⁴ From a Commentary [erroneously] attributed to St. Gregory the Great, on *1 Kings*, Fr. Bertoni drew much spiritual fruit for himself and for Mother Naudet. He made use of this following passage, and recommended it to her for her particular examen, praising these thoughts:

... and he shall walk all days before My Anointed [2 K 2:35]. In fact, for each one of the elect, to walk before Christ is to consider oneself always in the redeemer's presence, and to do all that he knows to be in accord with His Good Pleasure. And further, one surely walks before Christ, who, in whatever he does, he will always look to Him and model his life on His, Whom he recognizes to have come to reform the image of the Elect, through His assumed humanity ... [In *1 Kings*, c. 2, n. 41, p. 78. Venetian Edition 1775].

Fr. Bertoni explained to Mother Naudet: ... **The Lord wishes that we be mindful of Him, and that we keep all our thoughts and affections perpetually firm and recollected in Him...** [Letter 38. August 31, 1813 – in: *Bertoniano* 1937, p. 275].

⁹⁵ Let it suffice to refer to the manner in which he disposed himself to recite the Divine Office, as appears from a card he kept as a marker in his Breviary:

1. Look at the *Ordo*.
2. Place the markers in order, also for the Psalms.
3. Compose your person in all its sentiments and posture.
4. Recite it standing, or kneeling down, or even sitting when necessary, without looking for support or being restless.
5. Recite it with sufficient pauses.
6. Pronounce the words distinctly, noting every time emphasis is not given.
7. Read with such attention so that you will not repeat any word.
8. Do not stop to grasp the meaning, as this can be done when the divine office is completed ...

His biographer adds that these rules of his were always fulfilled by the servant of God. [SA Doc. 26, p. 312].

⁹⁶ SA Doc 20, pp. 188, f.

his eyes raised to heaven...”⁹⁷.

As a seminarian, “his devotion was an example to all who witnessed it; he was so exact in the liturgical ceremonies, that he was admired as an angel”⁹⁸. He always offered “his reverence of adoration in whatever he saw, or whatever spoke to him about God”⁹⁹. Whenever he walked through the city, for several years he went without any hat, or biretta on his head, out of reverence for God, Who was present¹⁰⁰. In all that was within him, or outside of him, he saw only God, and God spoke to him in everything... he seemed always to be in the act of prayer, before the divine majesty. He saw and felt through that living faith of his this divine Majesty in every present duty and in all things. He revered and adored it everywhere in the fervor and humility of his heart¹⁰¹.

4. Religion suggests the Proper Attitude during Prayer

Humility, or reverent submission, is the fundamental disposition for one who stands before God. It pertains precisely to the virtue of religion to cultivate this reverence, and to practice this with humility. Religion makes use of humility especially when it wishes to practice its proper act, which is prayer. According to the precise meaning that St. Thomas gives to this term, prayer is the result of the consideration of one’s own incapacity, of being unable to achieve a given object or end, and of the possibility of obtaining it with God’s help. Therefore, prayer, according to the spirit of religion, holds us in an attitude of appeal, full of humble reverence, and confident desire¹⁰².

By way of giving an example, Fr. Bertoni compares the desired object to an apple that is in a mother’s hand. The impossibility of having it is because of the smallness of the little child who cannot reach it. The only possibility of his having it depends on his holding on to his mother, and endlessly pleading with her for it. He used this example in the particular situation of Mother Naudet’s obtaining the grace of a very elevated spiritual life. He compared it to an apple – that although the Lord showed it to her, He would only grant it to her after her insistent requests¹⁰³. She, however, had understood that the gift would be less the fruit of her own requests, but rather would be the reward of her uninterrupted prayer. This was the basis for her difficulty: how does one achieve a life of continual prayer?

⁹⁷ SA Doc. 26, p. 308.

⁹⁸ SA, Doc. 26, pp. 324, f.

⁹⁹ SA, Doc. 26, pp. 460, f.

¹⁰⁰ SA, Doc. 20, p.133.

¹⁰¹ SA, Doc. 26, p. 331.

¹⁰² In one of his manuscripts, Fr. Bertoni said of prayer:

... It is befitting to God, because in supplicating Him, we show that we consider Him for what He truly is, namely, the Font of all good. Prayer is also befitting to us: for in prayer, we exercise many virtues: faith, confidence, religion. Prayer is thirdly befitting the gifts we look forward to: by honoring them by anticipation, we, by desire, like adventurers, augment the price of the merchandise ... [Instruction to Priests, MssB n. 17].

St. Thomas says: ... Through prayer, a person shows reverence to God, i.e., in so far as one subjects him/herself to God, professes by praying that creatures need Him as the Author of His goods ... [II-II, q. 83, a. 3].

¹⁰³ Letter 4 to Mother Naudet. December 1, 1812. *Bertoniano* 1929, n. 3, pp. 100, f.

In Fr. Bertoni's response, we can see how he had understood that everything had to be pervaded by the spirit of the virtue of religion:

'... As for prayer.... and how it can always be offered, the same Holy Spirit responds: '.... Let nothing prevent the prompt payment of your (prayer)...' (Si 18:22 – vulgate). '... 'Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary... ' (Lk 18:1)....Pray without ceasing... ' (1 Th 5:17)...

... Therefore it seems to me that prayer helps prayer. Diligence brought to prayer will attract a greater abundance of the Spirit. And this Spirit helps our weakness (Rm 8:26) – that even here on earth, we can offer the perpetual and continual sacrifice, the holocaust that the Blessed Spirits and Saints offer of themselves in heaven before God. '... The fire on the altar is to be kept burning; it must not go out...' (Lev 6:5,f.).

...All the servants of God, exiles and pilgrims on earth, have done this. With that strength and aid that they had, we can have too, to do what they did. And since this pleases God and redounds to His glory, and He commands it of us, this should suffice that it can be done – so, let it be done. If anyone has need of wisdom, let him ask for it for He gives to all abundantly. Let him ask, though, with faith, and without any hesitation ..' (Jm 1:5)...¹⁰⁴

In conclusion, for Fr. Bertoni, **the devout life is realized by an incessant holocaust of oneself to God** – in an uninterrupted praise offered to the Divine Majesty and in a reverent carrying out of the Creator's every will.

¹⁰⁴ Letter5. No date. *Bertoniano* 1929, n. 4, p. 184.

CHAPTER 5 THE SPIRIT OF PIETY

1. The Gift of Piety inspires a Person with Tenderness toward the Heavenly Father.

The supernatural virtue of Religion, according to St. Thomas, finds its perfection in the Gift of Piety¹⁰⁵. This is because the worship due to God, the Creator, in so far as we are creatures, is perfected by a special motion of the Holy Spirit. This has us render to the heavenly Father the challenges of just not any kind of worship, but those of a filial worship:

... To give worship to God, in so far as He is Father, is even more excellent than to render worship to God as the Creator and Master...¹⁰⁶.

The virtue of Religion, permeated with love, is already Piety in a certain sense. For it to be piety in a more perfect manner, there is added to this Gift that which perfects in us the sentiment of tenderness toward the heavenly Father. It would be a distortion of Fr. Bertoni's characteristics if one were to judge him only as a respectful observer of the Lord's precepts.

In his Spiritual Diary that has come down to us, he alludes to gifts that are not ordinary. These special Gifts emphasize the experience of the divine presence. However, the effect of these gifts does not bring about only a more profound reverence and adoration of the infinite Majesty, but also an affectionate and confident tenderness. On the Feast of the Sacred Heart in 1808 during his Mass, he experienced **"for a moment, as though my spirit was suspended from every creature in homage to its Creator."** The effect of this in him was that of **"many tears of compunction and affection."**¹⁰⁷

On other occasions he wrote:

... Seeing an image of the Most Holy Trinity, there was much reverence and love for the three Divine Persons. The Eternal Father, Who stood with His arms opened, explained His mercy to me, and the ready communication of His gifts...¹⁰⁸.

... Sentiments of great love for the Most Holy Trinity in giving us His Son. There was great tenderness toward Him, at the same time, as a very lively faith and a great desire for union, and of association with His pains and ignominies...¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁵ II-II, q. 121, a.1.

¹⁰⁶ ib., ad 2 m.

¹⁰⁷ July 2, 1808. [SA, Doc. 35, p. 656].

¹⁰⁸ MP August 24, 1808. [ib., p. 659].

¹⁰⁹ MP, September 27, 1808. [ib., p. 660].

... There was a lively sentiment that was quite reverential and loving, of the presence of the Father at the '*Te igitur*' of the Mass. There was a lively confidence and love toward the Son...¹¹⁰.

The Divine Paternity appeared to Fr. Bertoni as a most lovable tenderness. This made it possible for him to realize to the full a life characterized by confident abandonment. His spiritual program gradually became more simplified until it was simply a lived realization of the "***Our Father***." He wrote once in his Spiritual Diary:

... It suffices to reflect and to see to it that the heart and the hand agree with the tongue that says: '*Our Father*...!'¹¹¹.

In God, there are present all the titles for a sublime paternity, and they can all be reduced to those of creation and redemption. Fr. Bertoni noted:

... There was a very lively recognition in prayer and afterwards, of the immense debt that binds everything to God under the title of creation and redemption...¹¹².

Because of these two titles alone, the divine paternity surpasses every other's, paternity. Before God Who is a Father to us in a most full and perfect meaning of that word, we feel like children¹¹³. This is experienced through a penetration of the Gift of Piety that is the more proper to it. By this Gift, we also understand the meaning of the gospel warning:

... Unless you become as children... (Mt 18:3)¹¹⁴.

2. Abandonment in the Arms of the Heavenly Father is proper to the Spirit of Holy Childhood

The Gift of Piety changes the spiritual life into a holy childhood. It gives the joy of recognizing in God a gentle Father. In our times, St. Therese of the Child Jesus was outstanding above all others in this practice. She was totally imbued with this Gift of the Holy Spirit. But, in Fr. Bertoni, there can be discovered traits that make one realize how the Gift of Piety had its own particular importance. It will be necessary to retrace the more beautiful highlights in that most intimate correspondence that he had with Fr. Louis Bragato. Unfortunately, only a very little of this correspondence has come down to us¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁰ MP, December 11, 1808. [ib., p. 664].

¹¹¹ MP, February 28, 1808 *Bertoniano*, 1932, n. 2, p. 279.

¹¹² MP, September 26, 1809. [SA, Doc. 35, p. 669].

¹¹³ Fr. Bertoni preached at the Seminary:

... It is necessary to correspond to the Providence of God and to the maternal care of the Church with the simplicity of children ... [1 Kings, Med. 7. MssB n. 23].

¹¹⁴ According to Fr. Bertoni, the Gospel depicts **the child of innocence, small in humility, an infant in silence, tender in charity ...** [MssB n. 17].

¹¹⁵ Only a few of these letters and fragments thereof escaped from the destruction ordered by Fr. Marani. This was done to remove all suspicion of communication with foreign courts, in the times of troubles when there was a complete confiscation of all the property and furnishings at the Stimate [1866].

Fr. Bragato was *missioned* from the Stimate in 1835 to fill in Vienna the most delicate office of Confessor to the Empress Maria Anna. The transition from the humble religious community to the Imperial Court in no way changed the dispositions of this most humble son of Fr. Bertoni. The Servant of God recalled for him that attitude suggested by the slogan often heard in the community: “**buseta e taneta**” (untranslatable, but meaning the little holes, or dens in which the lowly animals of the field take refuge)¹¹⁶. The idea behind this slogan was an identification with the Gospel words:

... Amen, I say to you unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven... (Mt 18:3).¹¹⁷

This identification gives to the spirit of childhood a prominent place in the life of Fr. Bertoni. This slogan of his, in the opinions of all, characterized him as a man of authentic humility, one who followed the hidden way. This implies, as he himself admitted, all that is included in the divine invitation to become “little.” He once wrote to Fr. Bragato:

... What tongue would 'be equal to praising God, as He merits to be praised, and to recount the love with which He loves us, and the most solicitous care that He has for all of us, that is greater than that of a mother for her children. Let us get well accustomed to this in this day of light, that God is consoled in revealing His loving face. This is so that we will trust Him totally for those times that He seems to hide. This is so like a mother who, in playing with her small children, enjoys seeing herself desired and called upon – with sighs, and even with tears...

0, our blessed Father! What will He not do for us in heaven when all trials have passed if even now He shows such great and such tender benevolence? '... Playing all the while before him... on the surface of this earth...' (Pr 8:30,f.).¹¹⁸

This last thought was repeated in a letter to Mother Naudet. In it, Fr. Bertoni speaks to her about the loving Providence that “plays with the souls it loves the more...” He then concluded:

¹¹⁶ These words are in the Veronese dialect. It seems that the expression could have originated as a kind of a refrain with which children would call out to the crickets in their hiding places. For Fr. Bertoni, the slogan served as the motto for humility.

¹¹⁷ The Stigmatine Founder would often recall this saying which was so much a part of the conversations with the Very Reverend Arch-Priest, Fr. Nicholas Galvani:

... The little hole and den...! And you should be quite grateful to the Lord. He has taken you from the lime-light, and has left you in obscurity. Truly this is what Christ, our Lord, has said and put into other words: ... Amen, Amen, I say unto you, that unless you become as children, you will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven... And since the Lord has given you the grace that is greater than any treasure, of assuming this littleness, humility and child-like simplicity, see to it that you remain in this beatitude: Blessed are the poor in spirit, since theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are the meek for they shall possess the land... [Mt 5:3, 4] Taken from a fragment of a letter written to Fr. Bragato, October 21, 1835.[SA, Doc. 35, p. 739].

¹¹⁸ August 27, 1840. [SA, p. 748].

... 0 admirable secrets of divine love! 0 profound abysses of His charity! When will it be that we will be so ship-wrecked and abandoned in this immense sea that we will no longer look to the shores of this, our wretched land...!¹¹⁹ .

Holy Abandonment remains as a complete delivery into the hands of God. If these Hands did not inspire filial confidence, then there could be no "abandonment" into them. But just as the love of God can be compared to an ocean, so abandonment is like being "ship-wrecked." Fr. Bertoni wrote:

... Blessed is anyone who loses himself in this abyss! anyone who throws himself into this ocean, bold and ship-'wrecked! He is no more secure than when a little baby sleeping in the arms of his mother, abandons every care and worry about himself. He does not see, nor hear nor speak. But the mother sees for him, she hears, she speaks and acts for him. And when she wants to, she both can and knows how to awaken him, by standing him up near to herself...¹²⁰ .

It should not be forgotten that the Gift of Piety is an extension of the virtue of religion. It is rather a pearl that gives it inestimable value.

3. The Spirit of Piety makes Union with God both easy and most palatable

The virtue of Religion regards the worship that is due to God. It regulates the times and the ways of such worship, even to the gestures of the body and the tone of the voice. All this requires the intervention of our good will, because it is all a matter of justice. However, it often becomes a wearisome duty, full of difficulty, without even mentioning a time of distractions, boredom and even negligence.

However, the Holy Spirit sometimes places in one's heart even just a little of the Spirit of Piety. This would be the spirit of that love and of that penetrating experience proper to a child for his/her good father. With this, everything becomes spontaneous and prayer becomes a sweet, intimate union with God.

Fr. Bertoni expressed the wish that this could be verified above all in priests. He considered them as among the closest associates of God¹²¹. For them, he adapted the divine admonition:

'Unless you become as little children...'

¹¹⁹ Letter 3, November 16, 1812. *Bertoniano* 1929, n. 3, p. 99.

¹²⁰ Letter 38, August 31, 1813. *ib.* p. 223.

¹²¹ **...Keep well in mind and put into practice that advice of St. Gregory the Great...**[In the *Later Rule*, Part I, c. 10]...**that a priest ought to enter the household and be in such familiarity with God to the extent that he would have the confidence, should there ever be the need, to bring God down to his place....**[Letter to Fr. Bragato, August 27, 1840. SA, Doc. 35, p. 748].

...St Gregory the Great says: **'No one is to presume the priesthood if he has not yet acquired in prayer such familiarity with God as to be able to bend Him to do his will, like Moses, Elias, etc...** [Retreat to Priests, 'The End of the Priest' – MssB n.16].

He would then picture the Child Jesus, in the Temple, attending solely to what pertained to His heavenly Father¹²². He further developed this thought with the statement that the priest “no longer has an earthly father...”¹²³. By this, Fr. Bertoni hoped that there would thus be accentuated in them the sentiment of a divine filiation.

From his own childhood, the Servant of God was much blessed in the affection of his mother. His father was far more involved in temporal matters, and he drove his wife to the point of having to live apart from him. He then moved out into the countryside, leaving the mother and young son to fend for themselves in the city. At the death of his mother, Fr. Bertoni chose to leave his father’s house, rather than live with him now that the elder Bertoni had returned to the city. He brought with him a serving woman. This bond did not seem to present the appearance of any kinship. This was a very sad time for Fr. Bertoni. At the same time, however, it was also decisive for a more marked orientation toward the way of Holy Abandonment into the arms of Divine Providence. His beloved friend, Fr. Mark Marchi, has left this following testimony:

... Together we assisted at the death of his mother. Afterwards in abandoning his father’s house, he acted as did St. Francis of Assisi, saying to God: ‘... Our Father, who art in heaven...’¹²⁴.

4. The Spirit of Piety inspires a Zeal for the Salvation of Others

The spirit of Piety has such an amplitude and depth that it reaches out to everything that pertains to the great family of the Heavenly Father. Especially the priest ought to be experienced in solidarity with all those who have been invested with grace, thereby making them children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. The priest should experience a supreme respect for these living images of the divine Father, for these members of the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head. Fr. Bertoni wrote:

... I pray, Father, that they all may be one...’ (Jn 17:21). Charity works by uniting. Better put, it makes a unity out of the multitude of brothers and sisters. We then arrive at the point where all become one in God, ‘even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may be one in us...’¹²⁵ (Jn 17:21).

In the souls of children, the Heavenly Father’s features are the more pronounced. Therefore, the conservation of these features of the Heavenly Father demands in the educator a more pronounced intervention of the Gift of Piety.

This Gift also occupied an important place in Fr. Bertoni’s personal life. He was truly “the father of the youth of Verona.” The Marian Oratories in the city and throughout the entire diocese were really the result of his endeavors. It can be said that he dedicated his entire life to the salvation of children, and the youth. He used to

¹²² Retreat to Priests: ‘The Private Life of Jesus Christ’. [MssB n.16].

¹²³ ib.

¹²⁴ SA, Doc. 20, p. 118.

¹²⁵ Letter 25. March 8, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3. P. 475.

say:

... Poor innocence! I do not know any other thought as moving, as deep and of such continual sorrow to my soul...!¹²⁶

His biographer was an eye witness to the immense good that this Servant of God did for youth. He left this testimony:

... Like another Eliseus, he spread himself to communicate his own spirit to youth, dead to God's grace. The prophet stretched out over the dead child, applying his mouth to the youth's, his hands and feet to the deceased. In like manner, Fr. Bertoni came down to their littleness. He would keep after them, encourage them in their studies and guide their inclinations. He then shared with them the spirit of his own life. He was thus able to reform them, as strong men, through the grace of Christ. In the proper time, this brought forth great results in their Christian lives...¹²⁷.

The divine features in souls are not only threatened by the spirit of this world, but they are also stained by sin. Fr. Bertoni used to feel the resonance of all this in his own heart – that of the compassionate Heart of the Divine Redeemer for souls. On his lips would so often resonate the most touching expressions, recalling young people to the life of grace.

...O sinner, o my brother/sister...!¹²⁸ [This he would often exclaim, addressing himself to the most reluctant, those who had not yet been converted. He used to say to those in sin]:

... I throw myself at your feet, and affectionately embracing them and I will not let go of them, nor will I stop my crying, nor will I cease praying, until you take pity on your own soul...!¹²⁹

The goal of leading all of God's children back to the embrace of their Heavenly Father was for Fr. Bertoni what fed his tireless apostolic zeal.

In the earlier biographies of Fr. Bertoni's life, there was generally a preference given to rigidity, the austerity attributed to him. There does not seem to be in these writings the same concern for completing his figure, by developing his more lovable aspects, those derived especially from the influence of the Gift of Piety. Regarding the Heavenly Father, the Servant of God considered His divine Will as most good. For Fr. Bertoni, the divine will is an expression of an infinite love, even when it presented trials. He once said to Mother Naudet in her hour of particular anguish:

¹²⁶ Sermon on the Manner of Speaking. II. [MssB n. 9].

¹²⁷ SA, Doc. 26, pp. 338, f.

¹²⁸ PVC - elsewhere in MssB n. 9.

¹²⁹ ib., pp. 46, f.

... God loves us – He truly loves us...¹³⁰

He wrote to Fr. Bragato :

... You must trust the Heart of Christ. He loves you more than a mother could love her child...¹³¹.

Thus, love is made tender through the Gift of Piety. It then becomes filial confidence and abandonment into the arms of the one who loves us more than any mother could.

¹³⁰ Letter 78, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 1, p. 20.

¹³¹ Letter to Fr. Bragato, May 29, 1840. [SA, Doc. 35, p. 747].

CHAPTER 6 THE GIFT OF FEAR

1. Fear is a valid Aid for Love and also for Piety

Whoever has had any experience with the Gift of Piety reflects on God to show that He is indeed a loving Father to any such believer. Such a person cannot forget that His Majesty is of an infinite greatness, and that His holiness makes demands that are without equal. Therefore, love – when it has reached the pinnacle of the most sublime degree – shows the confident abandonment of an infant in the arms of his/her father. Even then, it remains permeated with reverent fear. Fear becomes rather the most valid help of love and, in particular, of the very Gift of Piety.

The loving soul is thoroughly imbued with a sense of filial delicacy and trepidation, and this for a two-fold reason. One reason is that the demands of divine holiness appear in all their rigor. The second reason is that at every instant there is present the realization that each person has the terrible capacity of falling into sin that would separate one from God. Fr. Bertoni made his preaching debut as a priest on the “Fear of the Lord.”¹³² He excluded those fears that are not beneficial, and he listed these in his *Spiritual Diary*¹³³. He went on to clarify his subject:

... I speak of that fear by which a person is converted to God, or by which one is united more closely to God. And so, God can be feared in two ways: by fearing the most just penalty, either temporal or eternal. According to this, God stands ready to punish our faults; but then also our own faults can be feared, in so far as these can separate us from Him...¹³⁴

The first mentioned fear is “servile”, or initial fear, and is distinct from that fear that is “servile, but in a servile manner.” This is not yet perfect fear. “Perfect” fear is also called “filial” fear. Fr. Bertoni stated:

... If we turn to God, or come closer to God, out of fear of fault, this is filial fear, and it is properly a Gift of the Holy Spirit...¹³⁵

The long range scope of his sermon made him pass over what constitutes the specific nature of this Gift of the Holy Spirit. He considered only its necessity:

... If you do not hold fast to the Fear of the Lord in every instant, says the Holy Spirit (Si 1:28), very soon your house will be over-turned. Yes, it will fall, o just souls, this, your spiritual edifice. This is the edifice you have built up with so many efforts at fasting and mortification, in your long practice of the most difficult virtues. It will fall, even if you have its foundations on mountains of the most perfect holiness... I will say even further: if you do not hold fast to the Fear of the Lord, your house will fall, and it will fall soon, even if you have built it up as high

¹³² Sermon delivered in St. Paul’s Campo Marzio section of Verona, October 23, 1800 [PVC, p. 153].

¹³³ *Spiritual Diary*, March 10, 1809. Fear: 1. Natural; 2. Human; 3. Worldly; 4. Servile. [all these are evil and the world is full of them... [Bertoniano 1932, n. 2, p. 280].

¹³⁴ PVC, p. 154.

¹³⁵ ib., p. 154.

as Heaven...¹³⁶

According to St. Thomas, Fear consists in the flight from an imminent, present evil, that can be avoided only with difficulty. It implies an evil that in a certain sense has already taken possession of a person. It also implies an evil against which there is nothing one can do, because it exceeds the capacity of the person who fears it¹³⁷. Hence, a fault, in the formal sense, is not the object of Fear because it is not a future, difficult evil. It is not something that is difficult to avoid, coming from the outside, but sin always depends on one's own will, free choice. However, a fault is indeed the object of Fear because it involves a separation from God. This separation comes from Him in that He separates Himself from us because of sin. Such a disposition is contrary to the unifying inclination of charity, and therefore, it is the object of a chaste and filial fear. As charity increases, so also does chaste Fear, even if it diminishes the possibility of committing a sin.

The Gift of Fear has the following as its proper acts: a reverential subjection to God; flight from sin.

2. The Principal Act of Fear is Subjection to God

Subjection to God is the principal act of the Gift of Fear. God is considered "terrible" because of the demands of His ineffable Wisdom, Power and Goodness. The more that the directive Gift of Wisdom uncovers the divine attributes for our mind, so much the more does love for His Goodness not only become stronger in us, but so does the Fear of divine justice. Fr. Bertonni developed his thoughts on Fear with the most vivid insights, or examples that he experienced, precisely as the consequences of a chaste Fear of the Lord:

... At Mass, there were thanksgiving and reverential fear...¹³⁸

... On going to bed, I experienced compunction and fear of God...¹³⁹

... Humility and compunction and confidence in God...¹⁴⁰

... At the high Mass, at which I assisted as deacon, I experienced the sentiment of reverence...¹⁴¹

...At the first point of the noon examen, i.e., the thanksgiving prostrate on the ground, in the sight of heaven, there was a profound sentiment of the divine presence, of love and oblation...¹⁴²

... 0 divine justice, how little feared you are by man...¹⁴³

¹³⁶ ib, pp. 158, f.

¹³⁷ I-II, q. 42, aa. 2 & 3.

¹³⁸ **Spiritual Diary**, July 12, 1808. [SA, Doc. 35, p. 657].

¹³⁹ ib., December 4, 1809. o.c., p. 664.

¹⁴⁰ ib., September 3, 1809. o.c., p. 669.

¹⁴¹ Ib., July 30, 1809. o.c., p. 668.

¹⁴² ib, October 27, 1808. o.c., p. 668.

¹⁴³ **PVC**, p. 191.

... Divine Justice is a rod that is all eyes to keep watch over sinners, to count one by one all their evil deeds, and to observe minutely the manner, the time and the fine for their offence...¹⁴⁴.

However, Fr. Bertoni was not moved by the spirit of Fear only by the consideration of sins. The priestly dignity with which he was invested supplied him with sufficient motive for the strongest of fears¹⁴⁵. Any close analysis of the principal act of Fear of the Lord leads to this unavoidable conclusion. Reverent submission to God, in fact, supposes that we are quite far from Him in our nothingness, without even daring to approach Him. Thus, by recognizing our inferiority in comparison to God's infinite perfections, we honor His omnipotence and we attest to our absolute dependence on Him. This is precisely the attitude of a creature toward its Creator that we have noted in Fr. Bertoni from the very first chapter of this study.

St. Thomas considers this act of reverence as a virtuous "flight". We flee, not from God, but from comparing ourselves to God, by withdrawing ourselves in our misery, almost with trepidation in the presence of the divine Majesty. From the very fact of choosing toward God the attitude of a reverential subjection, we make it clear that we do not wish to think of ourselves as equal with Him. We "flee" from any such presumption, as from the greatest possible evil.

3. The Gift of Fear makes one tremble before the priestly dignity

In his desire to become a priest, Fr. Bertoni felt he experienced a certain kind of "presumption." This would be analogous to that which the Gift of Fear would have us avoid. Thus, it may be explained how Fr. Bertoni, notwithstanding his unquestionable yearning for the clerical life, did not decide to embrace it right away. He waited for his pastor's explicit invitation, and an appropriate course of the spiritual exercises. With this retreat, he would not obtain an end to his fears, but only the certainty of his divine calling¹⁴⁶. Years later he was explaining to the seminarians how the Holy Spirit leaves in the soul of the young elect the signs of a divine calling. He would point out that one of these signs:

... consisted in a deep knowledge and recognition of Christ, with admiration and stupor, because of His sovereign excellence. This is recognition with fear and reverence, for '... there is none holy as the Lord is... (1 Kings II: 2)...

He went on to develop this further:

... All this faith and recognition and admiration of Christ's sovereign excellence is a Gift of the Holy Spirit. As long as this Gift lasts, the soul of the young elect for the ecclesiastical state, experiences a profound reverence for the majesty of God, Who is so holy. He also experiences a great readiness to serve such a great

¹⁴⁴ 'Consequences of Sin'. **MssB**, n. 20.

¹⁴⁵ 'The Dignity of the Priest is terrifying ...' - **MP**, September 15, 1808. **SA**, Doc. 35, p. 660.

¹⁴⁶ **SA**, Doc. 26, pp. 321, ff.

Master. This reverence, or most holy Fear, and this readiness for devotion, are a great proof of one's disposition for a vocation to serve the Church...¹⁴⁷

Through a number of illustrating, clarifying gifts, the Lord ...

... unfolds before the eyes of His elect, the ministry which He calls awesome. He makes it 'awesome to the Angels, and also to human beings'¹⁴⁸. This is because they have to render an account to a Judge Who is so severe, One Who takes into account also the souls of others, and not only their own failures on a personal level. They must make this account even of their own negligence no matter how exalted their prayer life may seem to be, or how far advanced they are in knowledge and virtue. 'He was suspended above all others in contemplation, and beyond them in action.'¹⁴⁹

Fr. Bertoni was always accompanied by this spirit of holy Fear. Let us look rather closely at one of his statements in this regard:

... As for me, I do not hesitate to state that I would be very much afraid, and not only because of my negligence and tepidity. Under such a difficult responsibility, I am lost before such a Judge. He has made it quite clear that He will indeed hand down a most severe judgment on those very individuals that He has chosen to have responsibility over others because of their dignity. I say, I would be very much afraid, if the prayers of many good people did not go on ahead of me, to make me more acceptable and pleasing to Him. Surely, we are no more than very fragile fir trees, compared to so robust a cedar of Lebanon, as Paul the Apostle might put it... Pray, yes, pray to the Lord for all your priests... and do not ever forget this one, this useless minister, who is speaking to you now. He is the most needy of all, so that it will not happen that after his having preached to others, he himself may ' become a cast-off...¹⁵⁰

One time, while Fr. Bertoni was teaching catechism, he was surprised by a visit of the Bishop who ordered him to continue. In the confusion that he experienced at that moment, he found much on which to reflect. We believe that he would not be able: to do this, at such a time, unless this was his customary practice. He has left this following record of the incident:

... When the Bishop came in to visit ... the doctrine class while I was teaching the adults, he bade me to continue, But, my mind was all confused, and my thoughts fled, so that all that I was able to do was to re-capitulate what I had already taught. I did without hardly even knowing what I was saying. Meanwhile, I was thinking inside how my spirit would have been before the tribunal of Christ if I suddenly had to give an accounting of my priestly ministry! Even if I had lived with supreme innocence, and had done my duty entirely, oh! how much dejection and fear would be mine at that moment! However, one must be prepared to stand confidently before Christ, no longer as a Father, but as a Judge...¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ 1 Kings. [MssB, n. 23].

¹⁴⁸ ib.

¹⁴⁹ ib, ., Med. 17, l.c.

¹⁵⁰ 'Respect for Priests. MssB, n. 9.

¹⁵¹ *Spiritual Diary*, November 20, 1808. [SA, Doc. 335, pp. 663, f.].

To priests, he would often speak as follows:

... Rather than hold your heads high over the laity because you are priests.... weep and cry, and do penance...!¹⁵²

... How one must fear and tremble at the graces of God...! (When saints prepared for the priesthood) they did so with so much effort and they trembled so!

The habitual state of the priest, especially during the celebration of the sacred ministries ought to be that inspired also through the Gift of Fear. Fr. Bertoni explains:

... It is proper for good persons to fear sin even where it is not present. This is the result of their profound fear, inspired by that deep love they have for God. Therefore, do not even wish to see the shadow of sin, and such good people do not want even to hear it spoken of among themselves. With such sentiments, the truly good priest in celebrating Mass, does so in fear and trembling. This is especially so when he either witnesses, or hears about the tragic lapses among his fellow priests. While we are holding the Blessed Sacrament in our hands, we should always listen to these words, trembling: One of you will betray Me....' (Mt 26:21). And realizing that we are all most capable of doing this, we ought to say with humility: '... Is it I, Lord....? (ib.v. 21)...'¹⁵³

The frequent handling of holy things too often renders the priest somewhat irreverent before God. It is not rare that this phenomenon occurs that one might be led to think that some are acting without any faith. It is rather the absence of the Gift of Fear that needs to be recovered. Fr. Bertoni felt called to arouse priests and seminarians to devotion by exciting them to a holy Fear of the Lord. Through it, they would be rendered better prepared to burn with love¹⁵⁴.

4. The Secondary Act of Fear of the Lord is Flight from Sin.

As a secondary, but also essential act of the Gift of Fear, St. Thomas assigns flight from any fault that separates one from God¹⁵⁵. This flight is all the more intense depending on the depth of the idea that each may have regarding the evil of sin. The saints were most exemplary in this matter. For Fr. Bertoni, a simple allusion was sufficient to plumb the profound abyss of this evil. He was once heard to exclaim, as he actually broke down and wept: "... if people only realized what sin is...!"¹⁵⁶

In his manuscripts, he has left a variety of explanations for sin. He said:

¹⁵² Retreat to Priests. MssB, n.16.

¹⁵³ ib., 'The Last Supper'. [MssB, n. 16].

¹⁵⁴ **...Fear is the needle: the thread is love, so teaches St. Augustine. The modern saints [Jansenists] have learned a way to apply the thread without the needle. And they preach first of all a pure love, i.e., their own pride, and while they pretend to be seraphic, they are really like so many devils ...** [1 Kings, Med. 43] [MssB, n. 24].

¹⁵⁵ **...If anyone is converted to God, and adheres to Him, on account of Fear of some fault, this will be 'filial fear' – for it pertains to sons to fear offending their fathers ...** [II-II, q. 19, a. 2].

¹⁵⁶ Fr. Fedelini's testimony, in: SA, Doc. 20, p. 124.

... By sinning, on the one hand, God is burdened, and on the other hand, the creature is. Practically speaking, the sinner judges that a putrid creature is greater than God Himself. Can any more false judgment be even imagined? This is most fraudulent gain. No greater wrong can be done than what is perpetrated every day to God by sin. Only the absolute disdain would be an immense insult to God, but what about the comparative degree...?¹⁵⁷

Another time, the Servant of God stated:

... the dignity of a supreme master consists precisely in this: in his meriting that all creatures so inferior to him, should carry out his wishes, without any contrast. '... All that the Lord willed, he did on earth, and in 'all the abysses...' (Ps 113:3). To contradict this right, especially without having the power to do so, is a supreme insult. '... The good use the world and enjoy God: the evil want to use God and enjoy the world...' Here lies the insult. If God is not wounded in His nature, He is indeed wounded in His honor, that unfortunately, is quite extrinsic. Even though God is not wounded in His nature, this is not because anything the sinner tries to avoid. It is only because of the perfection of that nature. '... The evil of a fault of itself, would indeed be privative of a divine good – if, of itself this was possible. In like manner, the love of friendship toward God would be positive of a divine good, if this were possible...' (cf. Cajetan, in I, q. 19, a. 9)...¹⁵⁸

After an offence, or insult to God, there follows necessarily separation from Him. This is a breaking off of relationship, a detachment, enmity, hatred. God takes from us His benevolence,, and His love. He also takes away His grace. It is God's response to our offences. This was expressed by Fr. Bertoni in various ways. These express the consequences of an essential, infinite, eternal and unique hatred. This is what God has for sin¹⁵⁹.

Fr. Bertoni, taught by the Holy Spirit, instinctively felt the malaise associated with any offense against God. He feared this, and fled from it, with extreme horror. The Gift of Fear refined his conscience, rendering it delicate. This refined sense also communicated to him the capacity of a more exact discovery of the occasions of evil, and the very shadows where all that displeases God hides.

God does not fear sin, He only hates it. In us, the hatred of sin, also becomes fear for the simple reason that sin is an evil that is always possible in this life. We always have within us our own free choice, that terrible power of separating ourselves from God. Hence, we carry within ourselves the reason for remaining fearful. This trepidation takes a greater possession of our souls, the more one discovers other individuals, endowed with more talents and gifts than we may have, but who fall from their lofty positions. The possibility of our own falling is made even more evident than these tragic falls. Fr. Bertoni, for example, was initially a great admirer of LaMennais. When he learned of this great scholar's going astray, Pr. Bertoni found strong motivation to fear for himself:

¹⁵⁷ 3rd Sermon of the Triduum of Penance to St. Rocco, held in the Cathedral. The Triduum was a petition to be spared from cholera in 1831. [MssB, n. 33].

¹⁵⁸ ib., 1st Sermon.

¹⁵⁹ ib., especially Sermon 1.

... Concerning the Abbot La-Mennais – I have heard about his errors. This makes me very fearful, because if these columns crash down, what will happen to poor reeds? Now, I comfort myself, looking to Rome. May the Lord have pity on his soul, and restore the harm caused by this scandal. Meanwhile, we will cling to the earth, so that we will not fall if we even lift ourselves up a little over our dust: on whom will my spirit rest – on the one who is poor, and con- trite and trembling at my words...”(A rather free citation from Is 66:2) ¹⁶⁰.

5. Delicacy of Conscience is a Fruit of the Gift of Fear

In Fr. Bertoni, along with his Fear of the Lord, we find a great delicacy of conscience. He was as though permeated with a divine sensibility. This gave him dominion over even the slightest affections of his heart, and control over even the most hidden sentiments of his soul. Through the inspiration of the Gift of Fear, he adopted a most rigorous system of custody of all his senses, and a most energetic mortification of his body¹⁶¹. And all the while, he kept watch scrupulously over any feeling whatsoever of self-satisfaction that might spring up through inadvertence. He used to say:

... Placed in the highest perfection, it is necessary to fear all the more. The reason is because other vices feed on sinful acts, but pride uses for its fodder, and in a gluttonous manner, our very virtues, even the most sublime... See how necessary it is always to be fearful: ‘... *Blessed is the man who is always fearful* ...’ (Pr 28:14), even in pure love. It would be better to say ‘fearful love’, and ‘loving fear’, for this would be more in accord with the saying of the Apostle: ‘... Act with fear and trembling, so that through good works, you will have a certain election and vocation...”(A rather free citation from 1 P 1:10) ¹⁶².

Therefore, Fear of the Lord and delicacy of conscience are requirements to the level proposed by Ecclesiasticus: “He who fears God, neglects nothing...” (Si 7:19). Fr. Bertoni offered his own commentary on this:

... Do not neglect anything that is good, as superfluous. Do not disdain anything evil as only slightly so ... but, rather with utmost diligence, do all the things that are pleasing to God. Worldly men perform their services diligently, out of fear of losing the good graces of an earthly monarch. Since this is so, how much more diligently should those who fear losing the Heavenly King’s graces perform their duties... ¹⁶³

We note here a fact – or, better, some outstanding testimonies concerning Fr. Bertoni’s delicacy of conscience. On April 20, 1840, the Servant of God has recourse to the kindness of Pope Gregory XVI, for the following reasons:

¹⁶⁰ Letter 178, no dae. *Bertoniano* 1934, n. 1, p. 238.

¹⁶¹ **... He did not at the same time suspend exterior penance and bodily mortification. He practiced this all his life, regarding food and sleep, and also the privations and hardships that he endured. He did this to such an extent in order to show that his intention was to make use of them all himself, as so many occasions of very severe sufferings...** [SA, Doc. 26, pp. 520, f.].

¹⁶² 1 Kings. Med. 48, [MssB, n. 24].

¹⁶³ Retreat to the Acolytes. [MssB, n. 25].

1. to obtain the permission to sell, or exchange, certain accessories, annexed to the ecclesiastical estate of Sezano, already purchased from the finance office;
2. to be able to retain and use books of ecclesiastical right, acquired ownership, for the library of the Institute, not with any spirit of but hoping in the permission of the holy Church;
3. to ask permission to obtain others of the same source and for the same purpose...

This request encountered the obstacle of bureaucracy. As far as the accessories noted above were concerned, there was asked the opinion of experts in these matters. As far as the books were concerned, it was asked when and from whom they were obtained, and sold. As a result, this request was returned to Verona to the Ordinary, to hear any local rulings on the matter, and to obtain his opinion.

However, it so happened that even before receiving the information requested from the Diocesan Chancery Office, Cardinal Patrizi arranged for the granting the Rescript. Thus, there were eliminated all the intricacies of the usual red tape. This took place due to the intervention of Fr. Odescalchi. S.J., and his superiors. On coming to know the Servant of God as their friend, they brought their influence to bear on the former Cardinal (Odescalchi). They asked him to cut through all the red tape, without in any way interfering with the procedures of the Roman Curia. These friends of Fr. Bertoni asked Fr. Odescalchi to write to Cardinal Patrizi, who was his very close friend. The Cardinal responded promptly with the permission, and he concluded:

... And with this, the delicate conscience of this excellent priest should be at peace..." (Rome, May 28, 1840).

Even with the Cardinal's rescript, Fr. Bertoni's delicate conscience was not quieted. This was due to one of those formulae of the secretariat, thus described by Fr. Odescalchi:

... the wording in these permissions is bewildering, at times, especially for a person of such delicate conscience as Fr. Gaspar...

Hence, further recourse was had to one of these secretariats. Fr. Odescalchi hastened to write to Monsignor Traversi, who enjoyed almost daily contact with the Holy Father. The good Monsignor spoke directly with Pope Gregory XVI, and he responded to Fr. Odescalchi as follows:

... My venerated Father:

The Holy Father, to whom I supplied the most exact information on the merits of that excellent priest, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, and of his magnanimous undertakings – as well as the purpose of both his first and second petitions, has deigned to command me that through you, to make known to him, for the total peace of his conscience, that His Holiness benignly grants to him what he asked for in these petitions...¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ SA, Doc. 14, p. 68.

Only with all this was Fr. Bertoni's delicate conscience put to rest. Delicacy of conscience causes diligence which in its turn, excludes the obstacle to all divine action in souls. Fr. Bertoni explained:

... Very few are they who understand what God would do with them if He were not impeded by them in His plans. This is so not only in individuals, but also in the whole of society. There is needed an exquisite diligence to do all in our part of what is necessary not to impede what God can do, and wants to accomplish on His part. I considered thy works, and I feared... ', said David (From the Liturgy of Good Friday). We would see, in fact, if we were to walk with diligence, also having others proceed in harmony – results that are most magnificent. : These would go beyond on our wildest dreams, and would inspire admiration. '... o how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for those that fear Thee! ' (Ps 30:24).¹⁶⁵

Further, the Gift of Fear of the Lord leads to abandonment to God. This is because when all trust in oneself has been taken away, all hopes are placed in Him. Under the inspiration of the Gift of Fear, Fr. Bertoni phrased this petition to the Lord:

... Grant us diffidence in ourselves, and confidence in You...¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Letter 19, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930. Suppl. To n. 2, p. 436.

¹⁶⁶ 1 Kings. Med. 48. *MssB*, n. 24.

CHAPTER 7

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE AND HOLY ABANDONMENT

1. Hope that is reinforced by the Gift of Fear perfects the soul's Abandonment

It would be just impossible to speak of the connection between fear and hope - if, by fear, there was not understood clearly just precisely what the Gift of Fear is. In fact, between fear and hope, there is an insuperable antinomy, because of their objects and corresponding movement. For fear, it is an evil that is to be avoided, while hope is a good that is to be sought. This also applies to servile fear, that flees simply from penalty, or from the loss of a divine good, considered as our proper good, and which is loved with the love of concupiscence, of the virtue of hope. While, on the other hand, the more hope increases, so, too, does the confidence in obtaining the reward. With this, all the less does one fear to lose it, and not to obtain it. Fr. Bertoni wrote:

... Hope is so sure - but yet, it does not exclude fear...¹⁶⁷

By this, he intended to speak solely about the Gift of the Fear of the Lord, which does not have an evil for its object. It has rather a good, namely God Himself, to whom one submits with humble reverence. Therefore, there is no opposition between their objects. Hope is directed to God, and in that, it bases itself on the consideration of His benignity. Fear contracts within, due to its consideration of human weakness.

...Filial fear and hope cohere to one another and perfect each other...¹⁶⁸

According to St. Thomas, hope is a theological virtue, through which we await the eternal beatitude, which is God Himself. In this we find support, not on our own strength, but solely on the omnipotent help of God¹⁶⁹.

Because of its formal motive, hope is absolutely certain¹⁷⁰. However, it does leave, so to speak, an uncovered and vulnerable point. Through this, notwithstanding its certitude, a restiveness and doubt about one's salvation can enter into a person. In fact, the attainment of Paradise, no matter how sure it is from the part of God, can be compromised on the part of our weakness. Hope, therefore, has its prolongation and its ally in the Gift of Fear of the Lord. This seems to aim at, in so far as this is possible, even this last uncertainty.

¹⁶⁷ Letter 17 to Mother Naudet. January 31, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930. Suppl. Ton. 2, p. 434.

¹⁶⁸ II-II, q. 19, a. 9.

¹⁶⁹ II-II, q. 17, a. 1.

¹⁷⁰ II-II, q. 18, a. 4. In this regard Fr. Bertoni wrote:

...I am the Lord thy God, mighty and zealous! [Ex 20:5]. 'Mighty: this is the motive for our greatest confidence in Him ... I can do all things in Him Who comforts me... [Ph 4:13] ... The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, Whom shall I fear...? [Ps 26:1]... [Letter 5, to Mother Naudet, no date. *Bertoniano* 1929, n.4, p. 184].

In fact, with the Gift of Filial Fear that is directed by the Gift of Wisdom, a person reflects ever more on his/her own misery, inconstancy and weakness. The believer, though, does not only do this, but also directs his/her attention to the infinite greatness of God, and submits this basic human nothingness to the divine omnipotence. Through abhorrence of self, and fleeing from one's own strengths, with all the impetus of the Holy Spirit the one seeking perfect casts him/herself at the feet of God. One thus assumes an attitude of reverent subjection.

This sentiment that becomes all the more intense, urges a person to place his/her own weakness and inconstancy into the hands of the infinite power of God, abandoning oneself completely to Him. Distrusting self, and not finding any support within, the believer places all his/her confidence in the divine assistance. The fact is there is but a single recourse against self-sufficiency, and to overcome the inherent weaknesses of the human will, and to defeat all the allurements of sin. This simple recourse is to be abandoned completely to the merciful omnipotence of God, and to Him alone. It is precisely by exercising this abandonment of oneself into the hands of God that filial fear sublimates to the highest level the movement of hope towards Him. Being in the hands of God, we are in a better disposition to await firmly, and really to receive His help, to obtain Paradise¹⁷¹.

Thus, filial fear fulfills its office as a Gift, which is to remedy the inborn imperfection of the virtues. This total abandonment to God is achieved by hope only gradually, and never in a perfect manner. Fear carries it to its highest level, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

2. *Fear that impedes Hope is not Holy*

It is clear how Fr. Bertoni put this doctrine into practice, also in the spiritual direction of Mother Naudet. She had reached that grade of perfection that excludes all servile fear. He directed her to avoid those fears that do not serve to augment hope, and to reinforce holy abandonment. He once wrote to her :

...We have already understood that when clarity is not had considering these fears, they should not be followed. But, one should make use of the occasion to increase in hope... Meanwhile, let all be abandoned entirely to God...¹⁷²

Reverend Mother, do not fear when your soul trusts in God, but fear only being afraid... !¹⁷³

At that time, Mother Naudet's fear were caused by interior admonitions and her own self-reprimands. Fr. Bertoni would not then allow her trepidation to so take hold of her soul that it would exclude hope. He demanded rather an increase of loving confidence :

... When Peter heard that rebuke : '... O you of little faith, why did you doubt ... ?

¹⁷¹ Cf. Gardeil, 'Le don de Crainte', in: *La Vie Spirituelle*, XXXIII 1932, p. 229.

¹⁷² Letteer 25 to Mother Naudet, March 6, 1813. *Bertoniano* n. 3, p. 475.

¹⁷³ Letter 43 to Mother Naudet. December 14, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 2, p. 267.

(Mt. 14:31), he was not far away, nor was he even on the way of being separated from Christ. He was still near Him, and he was actually drawing nearer to Him, being drawn by His right hand, He was at that point that was so much desired by the spouse of the Sacred Canticles : ‘... *Draw me...* !’ (Sgs 1:3). O ! how lofty ought to be our hope in God ! Not only lofty, but is fitting that it be most sublime : ‘...*you have made the most high your refuge* ...’ (Ps 90:9). ‘... Those who hope in the Lord, take on the wings of an eagle and they will fly, and not fail you ...’ (A very free reference to Pr 23 :5). The effect of recognizing this blessed confidence is as follows : ‘... In peace, in the selfsame, I will sleep and I will rest ; for you, O Lord, have singularly settled me in hope...’ (Ps 4:9).

... The effect of those internal admonitions is precisely that most precious one that you point out, i.e., the strengthening of this hope. This is without doubt from the Holy Spirit. ‘... Blessed is the man whom you shall instruct, O Lord ; and shall teach him out of your Law...’ (Ps 93:12).¹⁷⁴

On another occasion, Mother Naudet believed that she had been rejected by God, because of her faults. Fr. Bertoni comforted her, saying.

... As for our defects, they are all very well known to the Lord, and were even before He called us. And if they are now becoming better known in our own eyes, then we must recognize ever the more His goodness and omnipotence. Therefore, it should be that together with humility, confidence should also increase. No one who has ever hoped in Him has remained confused. And whosoever finds support in the divine words, even though he may be most weak and afraid within, such a person will become indomitable and powerful. O how good is this Lord with those who are upright of heart ! But, the better part of this goodness of His is hidden to those who participate in it, that is, to those who fear Him. It will then be revealed, and we have His word as the guarantee of this...¹⁷⁵

2. The solicitous care of Providence renders unjustified any Anxiety whatsoever

Fr. Bertoni not only counseled confidence as inseparable from filial fear to others¹⁷⁶, but he also put it into this own spiritual program of abandonment to God. So that we will not anticipate the considerations that will follow in this study, we limit ourselves here to citing a passage from one of his letters. This can serve as the conclusion to this First part. At the time of writing this, Fr. Bertoni was confined to bed, and Mother Naudet expressed her urgent need of him regarding the founding of her Congregation. However, Providence had its own hidden plan. The result of it all is that there is never a reason to be preoccupied. This is what the Servant of God wrote :

... I will not fail, no matter how little I am able to do right now, being far from the altar these days, to pray to the Lord for your intentions. The time will come in which it will seem that there will be united also the strings of those matters that prudence teaches should be observed...

¹⁷⁴ Letter 1, November 16, 1812, ib., 1929, n. 2, p. 42.

¹⁷⁵ Letter 33, June 28, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1931, n. 3, p. 108.

¹⁷⁶ ...Meanwhile, it is fitting to have much confidence as we know that ‘He will do the will of them that fear Him...’ [Ps 144:19]. [Letter 48, June 5, 1814. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3. P. 326.

Divine Providence makes use of so much to protect that which He wills until the clouds pass. Meanwhile, blessed are they who put their hope in this Providence. They have nothing to fear, other than their being an obstacle, or in opposition to its plans. Providence sweetly and strongly goes about disposing everything for its own intended purposes.

And all things, favorable as well as adverse, the good as well as the perverse wills of human beings, equally serve Providence. ‘... *Whatsoever He willeth, He made in heaven and on earth ...*’ (Ps 113:3). ‘... *There is none that can resist Thy will, O Lord ...*’ (St 13 :9). ‘... *For those who love God, all things work together unto good ...*’ (Rom 8 :28).

If I did not have so many sins that make me tremble, I would now have a better view than ever. At the present, being unable to do almost anything, I can see all the more clearly that the Lord is doing. O ! how good He is, and how he surpasses all our praise !

However, we ought never to cease praising Him in so far as we can, because He merits this, and takes pleasure in being admired, loved and praised by wretched creatures. And we also have a very serious commandment to hope that our misery will one day be changed for a like amount of glory, and we will be like He is.

May He be thanked, blessed and loved forever ...!¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Letter 13, January 15, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930.

PART II

Fr. GASPAR BERTONI'S ASCETICISM

CHAPTER 1

Effective Poverty

1. The Asceticism of Abandonment demands Indifference with respect to the Goods of this World and the complete Renunciation of One's own Will.

Fr. Bertoni's spirituality developed in the atmosphere of a theologian. He had studied deeply the *Summa Theologica*, and it can be said that he possessed the analytical art of St. Thomas' articles. This is evident as he matured through the various states and elements of the ascent of his soul to God. At the same time, however, he constructed the spiritual synthesis of his life on the solid foundation of scientific and universal values. He was methodical in the traditional way, and was also somewhat schematic. On this foundation, he found the point of departure for that original movement that is characterized by Holy Abandonment. Hence, it is not without interest to follow Fr. Bertoni along the various stages of his spirituality. We will discover always his preferred model: that of a son in the arms of the Heavenly Father.

His asceticism manifests itself as characteristic of Holy Abandonment. Therefore, it will be noted by a progressive detachment from the goods of this earth that eventually becomes a complete indifference in their regard. It will also be noted for the complete detachment he lived from his own will, in order to embrace the divine will in a fuller manner.

We have already seen how the Servant of God had placed as the principle of his spiritual life the First Part of the Foundations of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. All that was the unifying thought of the Jesuit Founder became the central and perennially living value for Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. We should also add that he found quite clearly traced out for him the format of his asceticism of Abandonment. He discovered this in the indifference from all created reality, which is expressed in the Second Part of the Ignatian "Foundations":

... The other things that have been created on the earth have been created for man, and this is so that they will help in the attainment of the end for which he was created. Hence, it follows, that man should only use created objects in so far as these help him to reach his end. And man ought to get rid of any of them in so far as they may hinder him from his end. What is necessary is to make ourselves indifferent to all created objects in whatever is granted to the liberty of our free will and which is not prohibited.¹⁷⁸

Fr. Bertoni saw in these principles "the grand philosophy of the Christian". He said of these thoughts: "This is truly the reasonable life..."¹⁷⁹

2. Attachment to the Goods of the World is a Sad Wound for any Priest.

The most common and powerful attachment to the attainment of indifference is

¹⁷⁸ St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*. With a Preface by G. Papini. Florence, p. 95.

¹⁷⁹ Retreat to Priests, 'The End of Man'. *MssB* n. 16.

attachment to the goods of this earth. Fr. Bertoni noted with some sadness:

... Self-interest, and how it rules...!¹⁸⁰

This comment was inspired by the fact that so many priests in his day were totally pre-occupied with financial gain, and cared so little for the loss of souls¹⁸¹. He noted the “hardness and harshness” of priests in demanding revenues, as well as their “attachment and sordid avarice” in making use of them. He also mentioned that “after these had been accumulated”, there was scandal in allowing “worldly heirs to prey upon those things that had been consecrated for holy use”¹⁸². He remarked that the priests “at times, are more avaricious in those sums that are the more meager and dishonorable”¹⁸³. They are led along by their dishonesty and avarice, even right into the civil courts. This inflicts a very great scandal on souls who deduce from this the argument that what priests preach is all an imposture¹⁸⁴. However, it was even more painful for Fr. Bertoni to see so many priests performing their works of the ministry “bereft of zeal, through self-interest, or moved by their own vanity, scandalizing the people”¹⁸⁵. He considered them as so many sons of Elias, who are trapped by the three-toothed trinket, of “the concupiscence of clothing, horrors and pride.”¹⁸⁶ He felt that they were like the doctors of the law, who consented to the death of Jesus so that they would not lose the gains they amassed from the offerings of old. Fr. Bertoni noted with deep regret:

... we are in such times – pray, pray much for so many prelates...¹⁸⁷

This is how he considered such priests:

... What caricatures of pastors, or of fathers. They harshly sell their ministry, and any care they have for their children. In regard to their flock, such priests are hard, inexorable in collecting revenues,. and a priest of this sort is no more than an abject mercenary. They are unmoved over either the salvation or the loss of the flock, and their sole concern is the sordid and temporal gain derived from their ministry. The fact that their preaching is fruitless, that in one’s entire life, he may not even save a single soul. And yet, even before all this, such priests’ zeal

¹⁸⁰ Ib, ‘The End of the Priest’. [MssB, n. 16].

¹⁸¹ Instruction on Avarice. [MssB, n. 20].

¹⁸² ib.

¹⁸³ Retreat to Priests: ‘The Last Supper’ [MssB, n. 20].

¹⁸⁴ ... By Judas’ betrayal, there came to him a great dishonor. What a fine student he proved to be! And what a beautiful school he had attended! Even his enemies have to admit this. Everything is deception. A similar dishonor comes to him from the wicked priests of our own time: ... the Name of God is blasphemed through us among the People.’ [Rm 2:24]. Free citation]; and then they say: even the priests are avaricious and dishonest, even to the point of going into court!. All, then, is deceit...

¹⁸⁵ 1 Kings. Med. 11. [MssB, n. 23]. Also in his Retreat to Priests, he returned to this thought in his: ‘Private Life of Jesus Christ’: ...Of all that pertains to the temporal, very little thought needs to be given. And those priests who are interested in such things, are those who would not distribute Holy Communion without some stipend, nor would they preach, nor attend to their duties, etc... When they go to preach at the more expensive villas, they seek first the revenues, the lodging, and the fine fare... O, for the wonderful example of St. Cajetan of Thiene and his companions in Rome ... [cf. MssB, n. 16].

¹⁸⁶ 1 Kings. Med. 11. [MssB, n. 23].

¹⁸⁷ ib.

remains unperturbed. They have no regrets over the futility of their labors, and these thoughts never enter their minds. But should it ever happen that one's vile and wretched price that was expected does not result, this is the only sorrow that ensues. It is the stipend that excites such as these, this is what inspires one to fruitless ministry. They may soon begin to experience the displeasure of being a useless worker...¹⁸⁸.

Fr. Bertoni then went on to consider the harmful effects of all this to souls:

... If wounds such as these, and so many others like them, have been hidden in the secrecy of the sanctuary, we could cover them over, and keep them from sight. But, it is not so with such mercenary hardness. This scandalous behavior overshadows all our efforts, and the civil courts resound with the same of priests. Therefore, the priest and the Pastor have become odious and hateful to the flock. Religion in the souls of the uneducated masses has been reduced to a means of gain and business. '... Tend the flock of God which is among you... not for the sake of base gain.'.. (1 P 5:2).

... How will the people step beyond all that they see their leaders doing? In seeking always one's own rights, without any expressions of clemency, collecting revenues without compassion, one acts more like the olive press that does not stop until it has extracted the very last drop of oil from the olives. '... take heed and guard yourselves against covetousness..' (Lk 12:15), as from an adversary that is not stronger, but only quite sly...¹⁸⁹

In fact, the Devil's plan looks first of all to deceiving souls, through the insidious bonds of cupidity¹⁹⁰. Fr. Bertoni commented:

...It should be understood that the great string of attachment is fine clothing. So many priests are ensnared by this in a most singular fashion. A very fine string is self-centeredness that hides so well that it is hardly ever discerned by a priest...¹⁹¹

Sometimes diabolical cleverness hides this passion under the pretext of the "common good", the Church's interests and God's glory¹⁹². At other times, it passes itself off as a justification of the meager nature of one's incomes.¹⁹³ The display of a priest's clothing does not escape the notice of the faithful. It will serve them more as a convincing invitation to elegance than will the words of the priests, trying to persuade them to detachment from this world¹⁹⁴. Then, the carelessness with which the priests may handle sacred objects, flows always from the spirit of avarice. This leads to a loss of respect for all that is religion¹⁹⁵. When they have indeed ruined their own souls, and those entrusted to their care, priests affected by this vice, never achieve what they came to accomplish. The reason is because the Lord demands that His priests be

¹⁸⁸ 'Avarice' **MssB**, n. 20

¹⁸⁹ *ib.*

¹⁹⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*. Meditation on 'The Two Standards'. [**MssB**, n. 16].

¹⁹¹ Retreat to Priests. 'The Two Standards'. **MssB** n. 16].

¹⁹² 'Avarice'. [**MssB**, n. 20].

¹⁹³ *ib.*

¹⁹⁴ **MssB**, n. 17.

¹⁹⁵ *ib.*

poor, and He will bring them face to face with real need¹⁹⁶. Furthermore, they reach a level of unhappiness that is fitting for one who cannot experience joy, neither from the life of sacrifice and detachment = nor from all that the world has to offer¹⁹⁷. Fr. Bertoni remarked:

...0 priests, why do' you not love poverty, and the ignominy that you exalt in the Gospel....?¹⁹⁸

By God's inspiration, Fr. Bertoni would be placed as leader of a new movement of renewal. This would sink its roots into an absolute poverty, and would call for the gratuity of all its ministries and priestly duties.

3. The Apostle has to embrace Effective Poverty

The imitation of such a movement of radical renewal was motivated in a two-fold manner. There was the consideration of the inherent value annexed to the virtue of poverty for every Christian. In addition to this, there was his conviction that a true apostle could not be called such unless he had truly embraced an effective poverty. In all this, there, was present the influence of St. Ignatius. In his book of the Spiritual Exercises, there is out-lined a kind of battle plan that is totally inspired by the teachings of the Gospel.

In this book, poverty holds a place of prime importance. This is already clear in the meditation on the "Two Standards", as well as that on the "Kingdom." In the former, St. Ignatius represents Jesus Christ and Lucifer as two opposing captains. In their discourses, he presents them as giving a very concise summary that pertains to the directives assigned to each army. As Lucifer sets the first snare with cupidity – so, on the opposing side, Jesus Christ inculcates primarily the virtue of poverty.

However, Fr. Bertoni will be inspired by a greater attraction to walk the road of abnegation in the practical lessons that Christ will offer from the earliest stages of His life. The assimilation with Christ will give efficacy to his own priestly apostolate'. This is his conclusion of the Meditation on the Kingdom, in directing himself to Jesus Christ:

...It is my decision to follow You as closely as it is possible for me to do so. I resolve to imitate you in supporting every injury, and every insult, and every poverty, real as well as spiritual...¹⁹⁹

In the Meditation on the "Two Standards", Fr. Bertoni introduced the words of

¹⁹⁶ ib.

¹⁹⁷ Retreat to Priests. 'The End of Priests'. [MssB, n. 16].

¹⁹⁸ Retreat to Priests. 'The End of Man' [MssB, n. 20].

¹⁹⁹ On September 25, 1808, Fr. Bertoni had received a special invitation directly from his meditation on 'The Kingdom of Christ': **... A strong movement to follow Our Lord more closely, even at the cost of my life, in His poverty and ignominy...** [SA Doc. 35, p. 660]. The following month, he experienced the consolation of having been heard in his desire: **... Joy in adversities and the consequences of real poverty, with thanksgiving to the Lord – a share in His sufferings, if He should grant them to me. The desire to imitate Christ in His poverty, and in anguish of poverty ...** [ib., p. 662].

Jesus Christ with a solemn presentation²⁰⁰. The words on a real, lived poverty, were presented only on condition²⁰¹.

Gradually, as the **Exercises** proceeded, Fr. Bertonni became more exacting. Let us consider now what he says in the Meditation on the “Three Classes of Men” :

... The first class greatly desires to despoil its affection for acquired goods, to be able to be reconciled with God. However, in all the time of their lives, there is not put into practice, and operation the means to achieve this, and the first little steps that are required. They desire the end of their salvation without applying the means for the difficulties they experience in it.

... They would like to follow Christ, but they would not like to renounce all that is required to do so. '.. So, therefore, everyone of you who does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be My disciple...' (Lk 14:33). To follow Christ through to the end: the means are the renunciation of all things. '... For which of you, wishing to build a tower, does not sit down first and calculate the outlays that are necessary, whether he has the means to complete it...? (Lk 14:28). The tower to be built is to follow after Christ – or, as St. Thomas expresses it, '... by the building of the tower, there is signified the perfection of the Christian life. The denial of what is fitting for oneself is the outlay for the building of the tower...'202. Hence, the expense and the necessary materials to build the tower consist in renunciation..203.

... If those of the first class do desire to renounce all things, and to moderate their disordered affections, they do not take the necessary means to do this. They are like a sick man who does wish for health, but will take no medicine for the pain, the general upsetment, and the nausea that he suffers...

... People of this type have a disposition that is quite contrary to the divine vocation, and to the commandment of renouncing all things. They will never acquire health of spirit and eternal life, because these are not acquired by desires alone, but by deeds: '... Man is justified by his works...' (Free citation from Rm 4:2).

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²⁰⁰ ... That God speaks, He Who made heaven and earth. He speaks with that omnipotent voice that takes all things from nothing. God speaks, and creatures keep silence. He commands, every forehead bows, every intellect bows ... [Retreat to Priests, ‘The Two Standards’ [MssB, n. 16].

²⁰¹ ... The Elect first strive to become invested with the spiritual affection for poverty: ... *Blessed are the poor in spirit ...!* [Mt 5:3]. And then, if the reasons of divine homage and choice should lead in that direction, they will follow the same poverty in act: ... *If you wish to be perfect, sell what you have. And give to the poor, and come, follow Me...!* [Mt 19:21]. Retreat to Priests, ‘The Two Standards’. [MssB, n. 16].

²⁰² II-II, q. 189, a. 10 ad 3 um.

²⁰³ Retreat to Priests, ‘The Three Classes of Men. [MssB]. For the foundation of his own Congregation, we can see that Fr. Bertonni was most intent that his followers would procure the same ‘capital’: ... **To begin the Undertaking, it is necessary to have acquired heroic virtue: ... poverty is the necessary down-payment, and then all the other virtues...** [SA Doc. 35, p. 668]. Speaking instead of the signs of vocations, he listed the disposition to renounce also parents, fine clothing among these. He concluded: ... **And who does not see that these expenses are necessary to build the tower...** [1 Kings, Med. 15]. [MssB, n. 23].

²⁰⁴ Retreat to Priests. ‘The Three Classes of Men’ [MssB, n. 16].

These resolute words of Fr. Bertoni lead us to the question regarding the state of obligation of the evangelical counsels. Jesus Christ clearly intends to give a counsel, when He says: ***If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven, and come, follow Me...***²⁰⁵. St. Thomas teaches:

... The difference between a counsel and a precept is this: the precept implies obligation, while a counsel is left to the free choice of the one to whom it is given...²⁰⁶

According to St. Thomas' teaching there is for all the faithful the strict obligation to embrace spiritual poverty, under the penalty of eternal damnation²⁰⁷. Whoever would embrace actual, or real poverty, this is left to the freedom of all. But it is not left as something indifferent, because otherwise, Jesus Christ would not have given His counsel: ***... If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and follow Me..***²⁰⁸

There are those who have understood the absolute necessity of detaching their hearts, disordinately attached to riches. Some of these do not have recourse to the suitable means to obtain this. Such persons can be listed with those who pertain to the first category of human beings:

... This first class would prefer to leave the affection that they have acquired for things, in order to find our Lord in peace. They would want to achieve salvation, but not employ the means to do so, until the hour of death...²⁰⁹

In some cases, therefore, the suitable means can be effective poverty. Hence, St. Ignatius counsels that they ask "the Lord to grant actual poverty", when we feel a repugnance for it. This is because it would be a sign that there is not radiated in us any disordered affection for riches²¹⁰.

However, Fr. Bertoni goes beyond this when he proclaims for priests the requirement of a greater holiness than that for simple religious. Whatever pertains to the death of the three concupiscence, and the crucifixion to the world, included in the evangelical counsels, is an "elevated holiness". Fr. Bertoni went on to say:

²⁰⁵ Mt 19.21.

²⁰⁶ I-II, q. 108, a. 4.

²⁰⁷ The statement of Jesus Christ against the rich: ***... It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven...*** [Mt 19:24] – is directed against all who love riches disordinately, i.e., those who do not possess spiritual poverty. Of these, it is said in substances that it is impossible that they enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. This impossibility is absolute, and greater than anything that can be found in the order of nature. In this order there could be admitted miracles, by way of exception, as these stem from God's omnipotence. Hence, in the order of nature, by a miracle, a camel might indeed pass through the eye of a needle. But, for anyone who loves riches inordinately, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, is absolutely impossible. This is because it is repugnant to the eternal laws of divine wisdom and justice, that are inviolable by their very nature.

²⁰⁸ **... In fact, counsel makes use of what is more useful** – says St. Thomas in his little work, *Perfection of the Christian Life*, a. 2, # 1. Tr. Matteoni, in VC, a. 4, 1932, p. 482.

²⁰⁹ *Spiritual Exercises*, ed. cit.

²¹⁰ ib., Med. on: 'The Three Classes of Men', to embrace what is better.

... But I have the honor and, at the same time, the duty to tell you since I must propose to you the soundest of truths, that this is only the first part of our vocation. We do have in this, in some way, something in common with religious. For the monk, too, is called to holiness. And so is the priest. However, there is this difference, that the monk satisfies his vocation by aspiring for, and by tending toward holiness. The priest does not satisfy his unless by being truly perfect and holy. The former is on the way to holiness; the latter, the priest, is meant to be in the state of perfection.

There is also this other difference that the monk has so many means, in his solitude, in his vows, in his discipline, etc. The, priest has only dangers in the world and distractions from his ultimate purpose, and these are rather strong and insistent. This doctrine is irrefutable, as it is from the Angelic Doctor..." (II-II, q. 186, a. 1 ad 3^{um}; q. 184, a. 8).²¹¹

Therefore, Fr. Bertoni, who could not even imagine how a genuine priest could hold on to wealth, wished to bring to full realization his program of the evangelical counsels of a total renunciation.

4. An Absolute Gratuity for all the Ecclesiastical Ministries, and the Renunciation of Spontaneous Offerings.

Let us mention first of all the note of gratuity with which Fr. Bertoni wished to mark his entire undertaking. His whole endeavor could indeed have been defined as one great work of beneficence²¹². The school that Fr. Bertoni instituted at the Stimate in 1816, for the sons of the working class, was totally tuition-free. The various ministries, as the preaching of missions, the giving of retreats, the assistance offered to the various parishes and oratories of the city – were all gratuitous. The professorships that some of his sons filled at the Seminary, in the chairs of moral theology and church history, were also salary-free. He went so far as to wish that the position of Confessor to the Empress Maria Anna of Austria, at the Royal Court of Vienna, should also be gratuitous. This gesture was one of surprise to the Prime Minister, Metternich, and he opposed it²¹³.

This theme of the total lack of selflessness was evident also in the Church of the Stimate. In it, there were absolutely no collection boxes for ordinary alms. There was also a prohibition from taking up the offerings of the faithful during the sacred functions. Rather, any offering whatsoever was firmly refused, even to the point of returning to the home of any pious giver, to bring back the gift of gold that may have been left at the altar. Some pious believers would make their donations in this way, believing they could overcome the resistance of the Servant of God by so doing²¹⁴.

²¹¹ Retreat to Priests, 'The End of Priests'. [MssB, n. 16].

²¹² **Serve God and the Church absolutely gratuitously** - is one of the corner-stone of Fr. Bertoni's Congregation. [*Compendium rude*, # 3.

²¹³ SA Doc.20, p. 180; Doc. 17, pp. 579, ff.

²¹⁴ Another time, there was placed in the hand of the Servant of God the sum of '100 talleri', for the offering of a Mass. After a number of efforts to refuse it, he did agree to accept it, but only to pass it on to a holy religious who lived in dire circumstances [SA Doc. 26, p. 333]. Many times, the Empress, through Fr. Bragato, her Confessor,

We come now to what Fr. Sorio called “the seal of Fr. Bertoni’s extraordinary virtue.” This consisted. in having many times renounced a very large sum of money, to the great edification of all²¹⁵. We will note here a few facts:

... A very well-to-do gentleman was unable in any way whatsoever to succeed in having Fr. Bertoni accept his patrimony. It amounted to 60,000 Lira, and he really wanted to make Fr. Bertoni his heir...²¹⁶

... A woman, of very noble birth, one of his penitents, had bound him by her will, to an enormous sum. She was forthwith made to change her will, or she was, given the option of changing her confessor. Fr. Bertoni made it very clear to her that he did not want to hear her confession any more...²¹⁷

In 1823, he refused the offerings of a Teresa Gamba. He told her that in so doing, he simply desired to observe one of his “constant maxims”²¹⁸. In 1845, he refused two legacies left to him by a certain Teresa Borghetti. On a number of occasions, he also turned down the offerings of Monsignor Dionisi, the Vicar General of the Diocese²¹⁹.

However, so that we will not get too far afield, let us come to the best known case. One of his own spiritual sons. Fr. Francis Cartolari, was of a noble family. While he was dying, he left his entire estate to Fr. Bertoni. When this came to his attention, and knowing that it came to about three quarters of a million Lira, Fr. Bertoni declared: “I do not want a penny of it!” The other priests at the Stimmate who were also named in the will as co-heirs with Fr. Bertoni, in the eventuality that the one previously named had refused it, all gave the same response. Fr. Lenotti wrote about this incident:

... As soon as this community renunciation was made, and legally signed, Fr. Bertoni gathered all his sons in the domestic oratory. There, he had the candles lighted, and he delivered a short, but most expressive and fervent talk. His purpose was to have them all thank God for having given them the courage and the great grace to carry out that act. He inspired them to the love of poverty, to follow more closely the poor Jesus Christ. The ‘Te Deum’ was intoned to give thanks to the Lord...²²⁰.

This fact produced an enormous effect throughout the city, and even beyond. The press lauded the priests of the Stimmate to the skies²²¹.

would have wanted to offer him great sums. However, he graciously refused them all, including ‘an enormous sum of gold for 100 Masses he had offered to have celebrated for her, without receiving anything.’

²¹⁵ SA Doc. 17, p. 97.

²¹⁶ SA Doc. 26, p. 542.

²¹⁷ ib.

²¹⁸ ib., Doc. 17, pp. 579, ff.

²¹⁹ ib., Doc. 26, p. 542.

²²⁰ SA Doc. 27, pp. 584, ff.

²²¹ Fr. Lenotti continues: **...It cannot be said how much the world that does not understand at all this spirit of disdain for wealth, and the Gospel maxims, was astonished and amazed by all this. This act was lauded so highly as a magnanimous and heroic act of Christian liberality, and, at the same time, it edified so many. A number of newspapers and booklets printed at this time in Verona and elsewhere mentioned it. We will just note here the work entitled, *Che fare*, of Count J. B. Montanari. There was also another little work printed**

Thus, Fr. Bertoni had the satisfaction of seeing realized his old dream. He would ponder the dream of a squadron of men, dedicated to the gospel, who would embrace to the full the poor life of the apostles.

in Milan, with this title: 'two facts in honor of the Veronese Clergy' [cf. *Breve Cronaca della Congregazione*. Verona 1917, p. 12].

A German writer, Fr. L. Schlor, left this testimony about the priests at the Stimmate, whom he had visited: **... They live as very poor and mortified men ... They do not accept gifts from anyone at all. They are so lacking in self-interest, that has taken hold of so many priests, that this places these priests in great reverence in the minds of all. Truly I would not know what name would be more fitting to give them than that of 'the hidden pearl of the Veronese clergy'** [cf. SA Doc. 13, pp. 66, ff.].

CHAPTER 2 HOLY INDIFFERENCE

1. Holy Indifference is an Indispensable Element of Holy Abandonment

“Indifference” is the great single term in St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*²²². The various chapters that St. Francis de Sales has dedicated in his work to “Theotimus” have won for him the highest praise²²³. Monsignor Charles Gay²²⁴ sees in Indifference the term that could be used to express Abandonment, except that there has been accentuated in it the negative aspect, so to speak. The term would say more about the state of the soul in so far as it is disengaged from creation rather than its proper dedication to God. Nevertheless, “Indifference” always remains the indispensable element of Holy Abandonment, and we do not have to work very hard in order to find it in Fr. Bertoni. The following is one of his thoughts:

... All that is on the earth has relationship only to this earth. Whatever I may have, I ought to be indifferent to it, or rather, it ought to be as nothing to me.

In fact, the world is not more than a passage way: it is a river that flows by without stopping, and it hurries swiftly toward the sea. What interest should I take in whatever I see there? I see there much agitation, grandeur, pomp, fortunes, prosperity and splendor for which it is often mistaken. And I recall the response that St. Bernard’s younger brother gave to his brother when they were on the point of withdrawing from the world. They were leaving him with the rights of being the sole heir of their noble estate. He said: ‘... To me, is this land – whereas Heaven is yours! This is not a fair settlement! ‘In his own time, when he had abandoned everything, he, too, became a monk. About all this, I have to say only what a saint has said: ‘... All this is not God.’ Whatever is not God, is not my final end. Thus, before all this, I must be without feeling, and pay it no heed. In what innocence and freedom of heart would such a disposition hold me! I would live as a true priest, because I would live as a man dead to the world, or as those ‘of whom the world was not worthy..’ (Heb 11:38).... O happy soul of that priest, who, being detached from all things, lives solely for Heaven...’²²⁵.

There is a rational basis for this Indifference that Fr. Bertoni explains so clearly. It is found in the necessity of placing one’s soul in a state in which there is always guaranteed the choice of the most suitable means to obtain the maximum benefit for God’s glory and one’s own salvation.

²²² The Foundations of the *Spiritual Exercises* provides this idea:

... It is necessary to become indifferent to all that is created, in whatever is granted to the liberty of our free will, and that is not prohibited by it. In this way, as our part, we would not want health, rather than sickness; riches over poverty; honor instead of dishonor; a long life in place of a short one – and consequently, the same in all else. But, we desire only, and choose only what is more conducive to the end for which we are created ... [ed. cit.]

²²³ Fr. Bremond has defined in Chapter 9 and those following of the 9th Book, on *The Love of God*, ‘a masterpiece, or better, the master-piece of spiritual literature...’: [cf. *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, t. II, p. 89].

²²⁴ *Della vita e delle virtù cristiane*, v. 8, p. 135. Ed. S. Pieer. D’Arena, trad. In the 9th French ed.

²²⁵ Retreat to Priests. Med. on the Ascension of Jesus. [MssB n. 16].

2. The Extension of Indifference

The extension of Indifference is without limit. It does not exclude anything that pertains to God's service. St. Francis de Sales has noted in this regard:

... God very often inspires us with most lofty plans but does not will that they succeed. Then, just as we must confidently, courageously and constantly begin and pursue the work as long as possible, so also we must humbly and calmly acquiesce in whatever outcome God is p(leased to give the enterprise...²²⁶

And the saint, in the text immediately following, records a number of other examples of this. One that he notes is that of the learned and pious preacher of Andalusia, John of Avila. He had in mind to form a company of priests who would be dedicated to the advancement of God's glory. His plans were quite well along when he saw that the Jesuits were already serving this purpose. And so, he immediately gave up his own project with incomparable tranquility and humility²²⁷.

A similar renunciation took place in the life of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. In 1836, the civil authority in Verona invited the Jesuits to return to the city. There arose so much contrast and difficulty that it seemed as though the negotiations would not be successful. Fr. Bertoni feared that the Jesuits would go away, without any firm conclusion being reached. So, he offered them his own house at the **Stimate**, begging them to accept it, and asking them to continue there the schools that were being conducted on the property. He promised also to provide for their maintenance. However, in that same house it was not possible to conduct also a Novitiate. Hence, he offered them two other buildings for this purpose that he owned. He told them that they could select which of the two buildings would better serve for their purposes. One of these houses was called the "**Dereletti**", and was large enough to accommodate even immediately, and with some comfort about 40 persons. It had recently been renovated. The other place was an old Benedictine Monastery. It was spacious and beautiful, and constructed for religious life, with a huge garden on the property. By these gestures, there would have been verified a most beautiful act of detachment on his part, inspired by his sense of loving indifference. However, the Jesuits responded that he should continue the school that he and his companions had maintained now for so many years. The Jesuits were convinced that the men at the **Stimate** had done so much good for the youth and that the people were most satisfied with them²²⁸.

Since it is so that Indifference inspires one to such virtuous conduct, surely it cannot be considered as a natural, or acquired disposition of sensibility, or sensitivity. It should rather be looked on as a particular disposition of the will. Fr. Penard de la Boullaye defines it as follows:

²²⁶ *On the Love of God*, Book 9, c. 6, p. 111 [English translation].

²²⁷ *ib.*, p. 111.

²²⁸ *Breve Cronaca della Congregazione*, I, p. 54. Cf. also *Breve Storia della Provincia Veneta della Compagnia di Gesù, 1814-1914*. Venice, pp. 39, ff., and p. 311.

... the resolution of loving according to order. It is, therefore, a resolution to disengage oneself from self-interest, from all that truly ought to be considered, namely, from whatever has no relationship with one's last end. It is the resolution of making oneself insensible to those solicitations that do not have the right of inciting a rational being. It is the resolution to conduct oneself as indifferent, at least to the extent that another attitude would not demand the care of God's service, or that of eternal rewards...²²⁹.

Within human beings, there remains a repugnance for whatever pertains to privation and detachment. There is conserved rather, the desire, or the taste for created objects. Hence, there is a risk of rejecting the divine will, and even of not recognizing it, when it is presented. This is especially so when it is something contrary to certain inclinations that have not yet dominated completely. Therefore, it is necessary to learn and generally through patient and long, hard work, to abstain, to endure and not to pay attention to other entertainments. It involves a suffering to the point of eventually becoming totally indifferent²³⁰.

3. The Gifts of Knowledge and Wisdom lead to Indifference for whatever is not God.

First of all, Indifference is achieved in the order of estimation, through the particular Gift of Knowledge, i.e., by a special infusion of it. This permeates the soul with the conviction that creatures are nothing, and that God is everything. In the First Part, we have already seen how Fr. Bertoni was led to a preference for such ideals. Surely, when he called Fr. Cartolari's enormous heredity with the name of "garbage"²³¹, this was due to the insights gained through the infusion of the Gift of Knowledge. It was precisely this gift that led St. Paul to call "detriments" all that previously he had considered as "gain". Fr. Bertoni explained his thought thus:

...Because of the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ (Ph 3:8): this is knowledge that is not acquired in the school of philosophers, but only in that of Christ... It is an 'eminent' knowledge because it surpasses all knowledge that is not His. Furthermore, even among the knowledge that pertains to Him, that of renouncing everything is not ordinary, but is indeed 'eminent'...

²³².

The Gift of Knowledge, then, has as its complement the Gift of Wisdom. Their objects are distinct, because Knowledge refers to things – whereas Wisdom refers directly to God. Nevertheless, when the soul acts on the communications of the Gift of Wisdom, it sees and judges everything by the All that is God. St. Gaspar stated that those who are led by God to this "sublime communication" see reality quite clearly, as being illuminated more deeply by divine Wisdom, that judges reality from its highest causes²³³. There is added to this sublime estimation of reality a real disgust far

²²⁹ *Exercices spirituels selon la methode de S. Ignace*, t. I, p. 80. Ed. Beauchesne, Paris 1944.

²³⁰ This is a suggestion of Lehoucq, in: *Holy Abandonment*. Florence p. 50.

²³¹ cf. Florio, *Vita del Servo di Dio, D. G. Bertoni*. p. 249.

²³² Panagyric of St. Francis of Assisi. [Mss , n. 26].

²³³ 1 Kings. Med. 16. [MssB, n. 23].

whatever is not God. He once preached to the seminarians:

...One leaves the world behind, the pleasures of the flesh, the dominion over wealth, and in particular, the enjoyment of earthly glory. However, a soul visited by the Holy Spirit renews its recognition, and manner of considering reality. It considers it indifferently in itself, and no more than a means to an end, which is the glory of God and one's own salvation. Such a believer appreciates only Christ, and whatever Christ values, even in comparison to the glory and the usefulness and the sweetness of present consolation. Such a person not only abhors the things that the world loves, but also inherently casts it all aside, as material that is like rancid, old and mouldy. However, such a pious believer can no longer even allow others to speak of such things. One recalls having been deceived by so many, especially by those who place in them their happiness, their only achievement and their glory...²³⁴

4. Indifference implies the Total “Death” of a Person

As is evident, Indifference implies the complete death of a person. It brings one to place him/herself before the plan of God without any, possibility of opposing it, and the person is, therefore, “like a corpse”²³⁵. Fr. Bertoni returns insistently to the necessity of voluntarily being dead to anything whatsoever one will have to die to forcibly on the last day of one's earthly existence. Natural death is called “blessed” for the one who “does not lose anything, except that which he had already disdained.”²³⁶

The Beatitude: “... **Blessed are they who die in the Lord** ” (Rv 14:13) is the coronation of the beatitude: “**Blessed are the poor in spirit** ” (Mt 5:3).

Following St. Thomas, Fr. Bertoni distinguishes in the Beatitudes an order of merit, and a corresponding order of rewards. In the first place in the order of merits, there is found Poverty of Spirit:

... This can be understood both concerning the disdain of all riches, as well as the disregard of honors, whence humility springs forth...²³⁷ .

The authentic Beatitude of Poverty removes the impediment of the false beatitude of riches. The happiness that a person would look for “in temporal, transitory things”, through the Spirit of poverty, he would prefer to find this in God. Then, as a reward, he would have whatever corresponds to the abundance of exterior goods. This is the “Kingdom of heaven for which a person attains the excellence and abundance of

²³⁴ *Ib.*, Med. 9. [MssB, n. 23].

²³⁵ This is a well known saying of St. Ignatius, regarding Obedience: cf. *Constitutiones S.J.*, p. VI, c. 1, n. 1.

²³⁶ ... The Holy Spirit says: ... **Blessed are the dead, i.e., the mortified, and those dead to themselves, and to all the world and to all the creatures who died in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labors [Rv 14]13].** That is, it is time that they rest from their labors that they have engaged in for their mortification. Only these will have rest after death. Others, who have not tired themselves with voluntary violence for their mortification, will begin to be tried through a violent necessity in the fires of Purgatory. They will suffer much agony until they are indeed dead to every other love of themselves, to live only for that of God ... [cf. Letter 10 to Mother Naudet, January 9, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 2, p. 394].

²³⁷ PVC, p. 219.

goods in God.”²³⁸ This program is not involved only with future goods, off in the distance. But even in this life, one can be in possession of “most eminent goods”. The very first of these is the infusion of the Holy Spirit:

... Indeed, who would say that he does not possess a great treasure when he owns something whose price cannot even be measured? In comparison to this special treasure, gold and silver cannot even be brought in. ' .. This gift surpasses in value every single item that is esteemed and valued by human beings. Who would not be rich, possessing it'? This Gift is Wisdom. It is so proper to all those who in this state have received the Holy Spirit and the infusion of His Gifts, or the unction of this same Spirit, according to what St. John says: '... His anointing teaches you concerning all these things (1 Jn 2:27).'²³⁹

It is surely not a small matter that the perfect detachment from exterior goods is realized through Indifference. This disposes the soul to a complete docility to the interior Master.

²³⁸ ib., p. 221.

²³⁹ ib., p. 30.

CHAPTER 3

THE SACRIFICE OF THE INTELLIGENCE

1. The Renunciation of One's own Manner of Thinking

In his *Constitutions*, Fr. Bertoni adopted St. Benedict's thought and words in his Chapter on Humility:

To acquire such a virtue the confreres shall practice the twelve degrees of humility outlined by St. Benedict in his rule...²⁴⁰

The importance of this dependence can be understood from the extension of the content of this Seventh Chapter of the original Rule:

... The twelve degrees of humility exposed by St. Benedict, form a complexity that is admirably penetrating and harmonious. In it, there is clearly shown the inter-working of fear and confidence, obedience and fortitude, of recollection and charity, that ought to constitute the monk's attitude as he progresses in the spiritual life...²⁴¹

All that we have explained in the First Part of this study about Fr. Bertoni's fear and humility, makes it unnecessary to repeat it here. However, we cannot overlook the mention of the sacrifice that he made of his own manner of thinking. One's own personal thought constitutes for each person the most jealously guarded base of his/her human personality. There are those who hold as the supreme and absolute truth only what is thought by them²⁴². Without considering these, it cannot be denied that every person, no matter how modest, experiences satisfaction in coming across some truth, and looks forward to communicating it, as he/she has understood it.

It seems that Fr. Bertoni desired even to deprive himself of this most natural satisfaction. Therefore, there is no wonder that his biographer called Fr. Bertoni's humility more of a miracle than the power to work wonders²⁴³. We will not comment

²⁴⁰ *Constitutiones*, Part 7, Section 3, c. 1., n. 2 - CF # 121.

²⁴¹ D. J. Ryelandt, 'Essay on the Character or the Moral Physiognomy of St. Benedict in His Rule', in: *Revue Liturgique et Monastique* 1921, pp. 207, ff.

²⁴² Fr. Bertoni opposes the proud philosophers of his time. Among these, he did not hesitate to place the followers of Descartes. Suggesting a modification in a book that was given to him to review, he stated:

...And this, too –so that there will not be introduced into religion the Cartesian system that is indeed followed by many in the natural sciences. This begins with doubting everything: to place in the strength of one's own reasoning powers everything in being and in its proper category. The principle behind this is taking the truth in hand, and as at the discretion of the particular judgment of each one who reasons, and erecting in one's own head the tribunal. This subjective judgment is independent from all authority, and against it, there is no appeal. This system first gave way to Protestantism, and then to disbelief, as now it is known by the most illustrious philosophers and theologians ... [These are his observations on the 'Philosophical Study of religion'. MssB, n. 39]. [There is no other indication regarding the author, and the edition of the work examined].

²⁴³ **... I should point out the marvels and the prodigies of this, his favorite virtue, if I did not know that as many had the good fortune to deal and converse with him, did not have as many prodigies and marvels to**

on his brilliant showing as a student. He always attributed this fact to the extraordinary goodness of his teachers. Let us pause' instead on an important declaration of his. While the Servant of God was a Seminarian, he wrote the following at the end of his "Instruction on the manner of worthily receiving the Sacrament of Confession":

... I have undertaken this little work for the greater glory of God and for the edification of my brothers and sisters, by the order of the one who was in charge of my third year of theology. I have tried, with divine grace, and with much personal work, and a great deal of study, to compile this in a manner that seemed to me to be the most helpful, for the instruction of youth. Therefore, I chose the most useful method, the one most natural, to communicate my thoughts, and to introduce into the minds of others clear and distinct ideas. This is the analytical method. Experience has confirmed my judgment. I believe that through the grace of God that I have gathered even more fruit than I had hoped, while planting.

... If I have not always been fortunate in the application of this method, this has been due to my own lack of ability, and, at times due to the lack of time, which my other serious duties have caused. It would also be due sometimes from having to adapt myself to the habitual manner of thinking, prevalent among the young...

... Outside of method, in so far as this was possible to me, *I tried not to add anything that was my own.* Antoine, the Roman Catechism, Bellarmine's "Doctrine", my Dogma notes, the Council of Trent, St.. Francis de Sales, the practice of my church, the Ritual and St. Thomas – are the ones who are speaking in this Instruction. Often, it is their very words. This could be seen simply by taking these authors in hand.

... However, due to my own efforts, and to having taken counsel on almost everything, now that I have reached the end, I find that I have written some things with less precision. I see that I should reform the Instruction, primarily on Faith. The idea of suffering does not seem to be clear and exact. If God helps me, I hope to remedy also this, with more study, and with the counsel of others, to whom I am most indebted...²⁴⁴

In this long citation, there is revealed Fr. Bertoni's humble sentiment. His words have for us a value, by which he assures us that he had not placed only his own ideas in the text. It is this attitude of the renunciation of his own thought that can be seen in what follows .

In 1801, commenting on the Sunday Gospel, Matthew 13: 24-30, he stated:

tell about him. They said he was even too humble, and that he had such a disdain about himself, and how he considered everyone else in great account and respect ... [SA Doc. 26, p. 549].

... We have spoken of this elsewhere in treating of humility. This is the greatest of the miracles that we can admire. Those who justly evaluate his virtues are able to recognize how much effort he put into concerning them. This, in my opinion, is also the greatest of all the testimonies that speak most eloquently about his holiness ... [ib., p.576].

²⁴⁴ ib, pp.312, 315, 316.

... The parable of this holy Gospel (the good grain and the cockle) ... seems that it will allow of no other explanation than that already given to it by its divine Author. From His own mouth, He has explained it so distinctly to His disciples, as the Evangelist himself states. This arrangement is most pleasing to me. Hence, you can be most sure that nothing is said here that is mine. I beseech you, though, to accept my words into your hearts, as an instruction from the mouth of Christ. The instruction can also be accepted as taken from the teachings of the Holy Fathers and the Doctors of the Church. They have so wisely interpreted the Gospel, and in so short a time I have been able both to explain and consult them...²⁴⁵.

His familiarity with the Scriptures and with the Holy Fathers furnished Fr. Bertoni with a way to conceal his own thought every time he had to preach. This can be verified by his habit of copying various texts, and even entire books. These thoughts, then, formed the material of his preaching. He put it this way in his introduction to his Meditations on St. Matthew that he preached to the Seminarians:

... Venerable Bede is the only one who interpreted this divine book verse by verse. We can safely follow along behind him alone, when the fragments from others, or the commentaries, do not treat of a given matter. We have done this up to the present, so that we will not say what is merely our own...²⁴⁶

I believe that this is useful for you, and, therefore, the most worthwhile. Since – what good could come from us?

... Besides, this will save you from balancing and weighing my sentences and words, which you would certainly have to do, if they were mine. So, you will have your hearts absolutely free to nourish them with a doctrine that is heavenly...²⁴⁷.

Such a total renunciation of his own thought is a matter of regret to those who knew well the extraordinary talents of this saintly Servant of God:

... In the house, it used to be said that Fr. Bertoni was even too humble...²⁴⁸.

2. His Cleverness in hiding his own Talents

He would have recourse to the most ingenious cleverness to be all the more hidden in this respect. We are referring here to that astuteness that was suggested to him by St. Ignatius. A witness of his life has left the following testimony:

²⁴⁵ MssB, n. 3.

²⁴⁶ MssB, n. 9.

²⁴⁷ MssB, n. 21.

²⁴⁸ ... Great was his effort to hide his talents, and to keep them concealed. For this reason, in all his endeavors as well as those of his priests, he always shunned publicity. He never went public with his own achievements. There were not any advertisements, or promulgation of any kind. He would often repeat to his men that saying of the Arch-priest, Fr. Galvani: ‘... The animals of the fields have their little holes and dens...!’ He usually spoke in a low voice, and his external appearance indicated his humility of heart ... [SA Doc. 20, p. 67].

... In various undertakings, and in the foundations of Institutes for both men and women, he would collaborate in the negotiations right up to the accomplishment of the goal. Then, he would withdraw to leave to others the honor and the glory of the foundation...²⁴⁹.

Another clever maneuver of his was the one whereby he sought to hide the particular gifts of counsel with which he was endowed. To make sure that his opinion would not be the one to hold sway, because of the confidence his very person inspired, he would employ expressions such as:

“... I have read this...”, or I remember having heard from some authoritative source... Other such formulae he would use are: in the case that is before us, I knew someone who did this... or that, obtaining such and such a result...²⁵⁰.

A third strategy was the one he learned from the Commentary of I Kings, attributed to St. Gregory. It was included in the sentence:

... Holy Preachers, so that they will not be deceived by any false light, discuss in intimate contemplation the manner of the hidden revelation in the open truth of the Holy Scriptures...²⁵¹.

This was the teaching that led Fr. Bertoni not to pronounce any judgment regarding the spiritual direction of Mother Naudet, unless he found it backed up by some text of proof from Sacred Scripture. His entire *Epistolary* is a clear proof of this. There were indeed some exceptions in which the Servant of God was not able to overcome the impetus of his own interior ardor. At such times, it was shown on some pages of his own original beauty. He would immediately return within himself, to express himself as follows:²⁵²

...Please pardon my ineptness, and in your charity, pray that the Lord might pardon me my sins...²⁵³.

... Please pardon my foolishness, and I recommend myself to your holy prayers...²⁵⁴.

... Reverend Mother, have the goodness to excuse my smallness...²⁵⁵.

...In your charity, please pardon me, and correct wherever my temerity had to speak of things from which I am too far removed, and pray that I may catch up with them...²⁵⁶.

²⁴⁹ SA Doc. 20, p. 134.

²⁵⁰ Ib., Doc. 26, p.550: ... Sometimes, out of humility, he would send someone to some other person who would be well informed about a given matter, as one more capable and suitable than he considered himself to be ... [ib., Doc. 20, p. 184].

²⁵¹ St. Gregory, Book III, c. 1, n. 9. *In I Kings*. C. 1.

²⁵² Letter 3 to Mother Naudet. November 26, 1812. *Bertoniano* n. 3, p. 99.

²⁵³ Letter 4 to Mother Naudet, December 2, 1812. *Bertoniano* l.c., p. 101.

²⁵⁴ Letter 7, December 14, 1812. ib., 1929, n. 4, p. 188.

²⁵⁵ Letter 16 to Mother Naudet, January 26, 1813. ib., 930, suppl. N. 2, p. 433.

²⁵⁶ Letter 40, to Mother Naudet. October 26, 1813. ib., 1932, n. 1, p. 228.

It would not be easy to exhaust all the examples that Fr. Bertoni offers in his quest to lose his own personality. From a psychological stand-point, the observations made by his biographer regarding the protracted illnesses of the Servant of God has great value. Usually sufferings and the isolation which they enforce sharpen one's spiritual sensibility, and render him capable of profound considerations. In Fr. Bertoni, there was noted instead the absence of anything that could shed some light on his person. Fr. Giacobbe wrote:

... It can be said that his not manifesting anything singular, or extraordinary throughout his entire illness, was true humility. I refer to his not giving forth with unusual exclamations, or sententious sayings...²⁵⁷.

He was content simply with his unadorned suffering. Sufficient for him was the favored expression of Holy Abandonment: **... Thy Will be done...!**²⁵⁸.

²⁵⁷ SA, Doc. 26, p. 420.

²⁵⁸ ib., p. 425.

CHAPTER 4

THE SACRIFICE OF THE WILL

1. Obedience clears the last Obstacle from the Way that leads to Union with God

The third degree of humility, according to St. Benedict, prescribes a perfect subjection to authority: ... **Let each one be subject to his superior in obedience...**²⁵⁹. Whoever wishes to clear the way to arrive at intimate union with God, should not only remove the obstacles that exterior goods furnish, through poverty, for example. Nor is it enough to remove the unruly esteem of self, through humility. It is also required that each one immolate his own will through obedience. Then, the soul possesses nothing more of itself and God can do with the person as He chooses. Ordinarily the soul takes refuge in its own will, as in an unassailable fortress. It is the will that presents the obstacles to one's own progress, and to the attainment of that indifference that disposes one to Holy Abandonment. If one wishes truly to find him/herself in God, it is necessary to lose oneself.

In obedience, there is truly effected this loss of oneself, because the dominion of the whole person is resigned into the hands of Him Who commands us. At the same time, an immense acquisition is made, if our subjection is motivated by a supernatural reason. This is because there is gained an infinite good, which is that of the divine will. In fact, obedience does not have for its object the simple will of another human being. It has rather a will that has been assumed, so to speak, by the very will of God, for the realization of His Plans. It follows from this that obedience offers a good service to charity. This consists in uniting the will of a human being to that of God.

One of the most anguishing trials for Fr. Bertoni's spirit was his having to remain a spectator in his time, to a broad movement of emancipation from all authority, whether divine or human. The French Revolution had spread its poisonous influence throughout all of Europe. In Fr. Bertoni, it found one of those strong opponents who worked for the restoration of a new order.

Every authority as such, is divine – it comes from on high, and not from below. It cannot have its origin in just any human will, nor in any agreement, nor from some pretended popular right, nor from the votes of a majority. It could be that these factors have contributed exteriorly in the birth of some power in history, or in its constitution. Even if this is so, they do not give it its proper form. This is what constitutes a human being in the right of commanding others, and renders legitimate the acts of his government²⁶⁰.

Therefore, a pact, or social contract, cannot establish proper obedience. Fr. Bertoni stated:

²⁵⁹ St. Benedict's Rule, c. 12, 8.

²⁶⁰ *Della Vita delle virtu Cristiane*, Msgr. Gay. Book 2, p. 328.

... This is nothing more than a beautiful mirage of Jean Jacques Rousseau. This is what has produced all the revolutions. It is still causing them following the deceiving heads in the sway of that grand Seducer.

Experience needs to open its eyes to this. Humanity is found in society before having dreamed of any pact. Adam was the sovereign principle of all men, before men were in any position to make any contracts with him. He was their principle before they could impose on him constitutions to restrict his sovereign authority.

And so, each father is naturally the head and sovereign in his house before his children can make any contracts with him. So do we preachers of God, wish to renew the insanities and the frauds of the revolutionaries of liberty, equality and the imagined rights of man, and of a sovereign people?

It suffices to look at a baby as it comes into this world, and see how it lives for some years. Then it is that we see that if man is by nature independent. He is one whose mother has to give him milk and put food in his mouth. He is so little a sovereign in this world that he does not even know how to be.

In summary, there is no society without order, nor is there order without subordination, nor is there subordination without power, and 'all power is from God', shouts St. Paul (free citation from Rm 13:1). And for me, says divine wisdom (Pr 8:15), princes rule, not through contracts, nor through constitutions of people...²⁶¹.

As for the movement for Italian independence, Fr. Bertoni remained firm in his loyalty to legitimately constituted authority. He renounced every advantage whatsoever that could have come to his native land through revolution. He said:

... Revolution is one of the greatest sins, and even the greatest of all, because it contains in itself the consequences of all the others...²⁶².

The proper and formal motive of, obedience found Fr. Bertoni ready to obey, even inferiors, who might have had some degree of prominence²⁶³. In his conviction that obedience was the short-cut to heaven²⁶⁴, he resolved not to take a step outside of this path. He scrupulously made sure that **"his every action, his every duty, and every phase of his ministry was not motivated by anything else, nor by anyone else, but by the will of his Superiors."**²⁶⁵ From this it resulted that his life could indeed be defined as "a tribute of a perfect and constant abnegation of himself."²⁶⁶ Not only his life, but his entire endeavor remained sealed with the character of a universal subjection. He did this by that clause through which he wanted to base all of the

²⁶¹ Observations on the 'Philosophical Study of Religion'. **MssB**, n. 39.

²⁶² In the disorders of 1848, he maintained a balance in his thinking and speaking. He did not allow himself to be taken in by that giddiness and wild doctrines, by which so many unfortunately were taken. He kept before his mind the Catholic principles, and he remained faithful to his Sovereign. He watched in horror, and found fault with the intrigues of the sectarians and the rebels... [**SA**, Doc. 20, p. 173].

²⁶³ **SA** Doc. 26, p. 560.

²⁶⁴ **... Obedience is the short-cut to perfection ...** [Retreat to Priests. **MssB**, n. 16].

²⁶⁵ **SA**, Doc. 26, p. 560.

²⁶⁶ *ib.*

activity of his Institute: **for the assistance of Bishops.**²⁶⁷

2. Obedience to Superiors disposes one to Docility with God

To be able to recognize vocations for the service of the Church in young men, Fr. Bertoni required that they be filled with the Holy Spirit. However, the ultimate sign that will insure the presence of the Holy Spirit in a young man so called to the Church will be his obedience. Fr. Bertoni stated:

... A sign that confirms all the others is the fullness of the Holy Spirit. A sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is excelling humility. A sign of excelling humility is perfect obedience, which is the sign of signs, or rather, the seal of all testimonies...²⁶⁸ .

A vocation is a gratuitous gift of God, and is not the fruit of any personal effort. It will be necessary, therefore, that there be verified the total death of one's will that there be verified the total death of one's own will, that is to be coupled with the will of God:

... When a soul is so docile to superiors, even before its own judgment, then it securely is led by the Spirit of God...²⁶⁹ .

This is the manner in which Fr. Bertoni ties in obedience to Holy Abandonment. Holy Abandonment is reduced to only an extreme docility to God. His Good Pleasure is considered as the only good worthy of being accepted and loved. Docility to superiors through obedience disposes one very well for this. Fr. Bertoni preached to the Seminarians:

... 'Teach me to do thy will...' (Ps 142:10) . Samuel, obedient to the precepts of Elias, merited obedience to the lights of God. In order for God 'to teach', it is required that there be those who can indeed be taught by God (Jn 6:42). Obedience to superiors prepares one for this. It is always necessary to be meek: '... he will teach the meek his ways...' (Ps 24:9). One must not resist his commands
...²⁷⁰ .

Therefore, the virtue of obedience receives, according to Fr. Bertoni, a very broad meaning. This transcends even the ambit of observance, of piety and of religion itself²⁷¹, to be extended as far as love is extended. In fact, when the vow of obedience is made by one who is a superior, Fr. Bertoni concludes that this dependence ought to

²⁶⁷ from the *Compendium Rude* . This is like a prelude to the entire Rule. In n. 1, we read these words: **End: Apostolic Missionaries for the assistance of Bishops.** Fr. Lenotti, in his Instructions to the early Novices of the Congregation, commented:

... It is clear that Fr. Bertoni's intention was that of instituting a Congregation which would be like the Company of Jesus. This is in a special way directed and dedicated to the service and to the dispositions of the Roman Pontiff. He wanted his Congregation to be dedicated and determined in a special way and distinguished by its service and assistance of Bishops ... [SA Doc. 23, p 220].

²⁶⁸ 1 Kings. Med. 39. [MssB, n. 24].

²⁶⁹ ib.

²⁷⁰ ib.

²⁷¹ II-II, q. 104, a. 3 ad 1 um.

be placed directly in God. Naturally, here Fr. Bertoni is considering the spirit of obedience, rather than looking at its proper object that is constituted by a precept:

... The vow of obedience for him who has no superior, but who rather is a superior. binds his spirit to a total dependence on God in everything...²⁷².

And this came to be verified in his own life. This will be clear in that part we will dedicate to his abandonment to God.

²⁷² Spiritual Diary, December 23, 1808 [SA Doc. 35, p. 653].

PART III

Fr. GASPAR BERTONI'S MYSTICISM

CHAPTER 1

THE “CONSOLATION” OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AN INDICATION OF THE ELEVATED UNION WITH GOD

1. The Human Soul can be drawn by God even without any method

Fr. Bertoni understood in a penetrating manner the spirit of St. Ignatius' teaching. He became fully convinced that every method, no matter how perfect it might be, functions only as a means to an end. As soon as any method begins to become a hindrance to a freer union with God, it ought to be abandoned. This is the teaching that Fr. Bertoni imparted to Mother Leopoldina Naudet, as his spiritual daughter was preparing herself for a course of the Spiritual Exercises:

... It seems to me that the method on our part, of retiring for eight days, could not be better, since this is taken from the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius. I have said 'on our part', because on the part of God, our Lord, it would be better then to leave Him every liberty, without tying Him down, neither to hours, nor to themes, nor to any particular manner, or to days. What is important, in my opinion, is that any time a soul is not actually attracted by the Lord, the soul ought to be prepared. This is in accord with what is prescribed in St. Ignatius' authentic book. Then, it would be necessary to observe diligently the *horarium*, the manner, the theme, the order, and whatever else is expressed there. However, when the Lord attracts, it is not fitting to look elsewhere, but to follow Him for as far as His pleasure demands, and since this is His pleasure...²⁷³

Fr. Bertoni then specified in what consists departing from a method, saying this to his spiritual daughter:

... Be abandoned totally to God, in these days, as St. Ignatius wrote, not placing limits, nor demanding objects, nor times, from our Lord...²⁷⁴

With this, he agrees with the same words with the explanation that St. Francis de Sales gives to Frances Jeanne de Chantal, on the prayer of simplicity: “... a simple consignment to God...”²⁷⁵

This does not exclude preparation. Mother Naudet only poorly adapted herself to the complete renunciation of her own efforts in prayer, as she had been required to

²⁷³ Letter 24. March 4, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, [. 474.

²⁷⁴ Letter 25. March 6, 1813. *Ib.*, p. 475.

²⁷⁵ The Saint's precise expression is: *simple remise en Dieu* [March 1615, t. V, col. 961. 965]. Fr. Poulain comments on this expression as follows:

... It does not mean that we are presented in prayer without any preparation, and without doing anything on our part, while leaving the care of doing everything up to God. But, it does suppose that God acts, and that we abandon ourselves to His action. This is despite the natural tendency that we have of preferring our own agitated activity, that is more acceptable to the sensible faculties to His action ... [*Des graces d'Oraison*. II ed. O., I, c. a, a. 8, p. 12].

do by the passive state she had received²⁷⁶. She would have needed a more perfect preparation. She had heard that the “interior sentiment of reflection” would have been more pronounced than the works of her own intellect. Fr. Bertoni pointed this out for her:

... As for the preparation for meditation, the internal sentiment, and recollection of the intellect is better, as you Reverend Mother, call it. This is so even though both are actions of the intellect. In the first case, the intellect, without going through the steps of the reasoning process, sees in a flash, without going from one reality to another, and it stops at the principal Object. Without going ahead, it rather draws the will backward, and has it as its companion but sometimes, goes on ahead. This ‘intellect’ stays, with the help of God and is under our control; whereas, ‘the internal sentiment of recollection’ with our consent, depends on God²⁷⁷. The former, is used by men on earth; the latter is more like what we will do perfectly in heaven...²⁷⁸

Therefore, there was no freedom to choose the manner of preparation, unless the choice was made to place “one’s hands before God”²⁷⁹. Mystical prayer would have been the effort only of the divine action. St. Ignatius speaks of this in relation to spiritual consolation and desolation. Fr. Peeters says directly that Rules 3 and 4 of the First Week of the Exercises “are equivalent to a resume’ of the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross”.²⁸⁰

2. Spiritual Consolation corresponds to the Sweetness of the Fruits And to The Beatitude of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Fr. Bertoni found a way to apply this doctrine of consolation and desolation to the manifestations of the ecclesiastical vocation. Beyond the various requirements of the natural order, and of the common supernatural order, there is required more proximately in one’s choice for the priesthood, a complexity of virtues and gifts in proportion to so great a ministry.²⁸¹ In the examination of those requirements, Fr. Bertoni found a way of tracing out his own itinerary of the spiritual life, so to speak:

²⁷⁶ From the Mss. of the Venerable Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family, I have taken expressions of this type:

... The Lord wanted to stimulate me more to repose in Him. This was to oppose the fears that my nature experienced in that total loss of myself ...

... I have natural fears and they seem to me to be no better than nothing, in this drowsiness of everything within me...[Found in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, St. John’s in Vallam. Verona].

²⁷⁷ **... This contemplation that is infused, or passive in us, is without our deliberations, but not without us consenting ...** [Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, t. 1, p. 274, 7th ed.].

²⁷⁸ ib.

²⁷⁹ ib.

²⁸⁰ *Vers l’union par les Exercices de S. Ignace*. Louvain: Museum Lessianum, p. 152.

²⁸¹ On 1 Kings, med. 6, ff. [MssB, n. 23].

... A vocation has to be convalidated by the proofs of various spirits. First of all, this must be proven by the Good Spirit: "... These proofs and testimonies are given by the Good Spirit to our spirit, by means of consolation. The effects of this now begin with the divine favor to explain..."²⁸²

From the word 'consolation' we can say that we are already in the field of mysticism. In this matter, there are included here "peace", "interior quiet", "spiritual joy", "light" a clear knowledge of divine reality, the elevation of the mind to God, a hope fixed on God, an understanding of earthly things, the warmth of divine love, and similar effects of the Good Spirit."²⁸³

To clarify this further Bertoni stated:

... Consolation is not a habit , but it is almost a spiritual passion, that is spiritually given. Its nature is that when it is present, the acts of the virtues are exercised easily, even with delight, and there is the enkindling of the affections. On meeting it, it happens that the works of the flesh are insipid and bitter..."²⁸⁴

These expressions tell us how consolation can be compared to what is implied by the notions of fruit and beatitude. By analogy, in the order of nature, a "fruit" is the ultimate perfection of a tree. In the spiritual order, the "fruit" is the final product of grace in souls, and it is identified with those acts of virtue that possess a certain level of perfection and taste. The fruits of the Holy Spirit, therefore, are not habits, or permanent qualities, but they are acts. To merit the name of "fruit", the acts of virtue have to be accompanied by a certain sweetness.²⁸⁵

But, even greater is the sweetness of the Beatitudes that are acts produced, not by virtues, but by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁶ When Fr. Bertoni speaks of spiritual consolation, even without naming the Fruits and the Beatitudes, he can only be referring 'to these, as understood in classical theology. The above-mentioned consolation consists in fact, "in a joy of the heart, that is entirely of God, in God, and with God ".

... Through a certain elevation, strength, robustness of spirit, the soul feels itself almost elevated above itself. This is due to the abundant infusion of the virtues, of the Gifts and of grace that transform it in Christ. It draws one near to Him, and makes one like unto Him..."²⁸⁷

There is, then, a whole complexity of divine favors included in a single expression which is the "Consolation of the Holy Spirit." St. Teresa of Avila considered this was a distant degree of. prayer, the prayer of quiet. It has also been called by a name that is

²⁸² ib. med. 8.

²⁸³ ib.

²⁸⁴ ib.

²⁸⁵ **...By the Fruits of the Holy Spirit are understood all the acts of virtues that have reached a certain perfection in which man delights ... The Fruits are acts in which a person delights ...** [I-II, q. 70, a. 2].

²⁸⁶ The Beatitudes are distinguished from the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, because by delighting, as they do, they also have even more the advantage of perfecting whoever possesses them [cf. I-II, q. 70, a. 2].

²⁸⁷ 1 Kings, med. 8 [MssB, n. 23].

quite simple: prayer of divine delights.²⁸⁸

The fact that this point of the spiritual life is under the new influence of grace, appears very clearly in Fr. Bertoni's words:

... During this time that this illustrious visit of the Holy Spirit lasts, the spirit of the young elect will have a number of experiences. He will feel so confirmed and reassured from every internal and external temptation of its enemies. He will experience not only this, but he will also feel so free in his heart that he would be able to stand up to them. He will be able to confuse them, and put them to shame. '... *My mouth is enlarged over my enemies...*' (1 Kings, II, I). And all this will be so because his faith will be quite alive. It will almost make present those things that are only hoped for in the future. '...' *Faith is the substance of those things to be hoped for ...*' (Heb 9:1).

This will almost place under one's eyes that is invisible: '... the argument of things that do not appear...' It will so make the future object of eternal beatitude, that will appear almost as a present object, one of rejoicing, and joy. It will be present as ineffable joy to his heart that overflows onto his tongue, even in the midst of his enemies, and while confronting them. '... My mouth is enlarged, because I have rejoiced in thy salvation...' ²⁸⁹

Faith that is so intense is that illumined by the Gift of the Holy Spirit. By it, according to St. John of the Cross, one arrives at consummate union.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ *Interior Castle*, 4th Mansions, II, pp. 860, ff. ed. Milano.

²⁸⁹ 1 Kings, med. 8. [MssB, n. 23].

²⁹⁰ cf. Poulain, o.c., p. 237. N. 43: **... Thesaint often says that one arrives at consummate union by the path of faith... See, e.g., *Spiritual Canticle*, strophe 1, verse 1.**

CHAPTER 2

THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES AND OF THE SPIRIT CONSTITUTED BY DESOLATION

1. The Removal of Consolation and Permission of Trials:

St. Ignatius speaks of spiritual desolation in these words:

... I call 'desolation' whatever is contrary to the third rule: such as darkness of the soul, disturbance in it, movement toward base and earthly things, the upsetment of various agitations and temptations, moving toward diffidence, being without hope, without love, with the soul finding itself drawn, tepid, morose and the like, as one separated from its Creator and Lord...²⁹¹

Fr. Peeters asks a question concerning this:

... This apparent loss of faith and of hope, this feeling of abandonment, this dereliction of God – can these merit to be called the suffering of passive purifications? This darkening of the soul, is it not susceptible of being aggravated to the point of becoming the night of the senses, and the night of the spirit...?²⁹²

Fr. Bertoni speaking of the desolation, with the expressed intention of explaining the various proofs of a vocation, gives an affirmative response:

... After the trials of the Good Spirit, there remains, therefore, to see immediately with good order, the proofs of the bad Spirit. They are said to be trials of the bad spirit (which is love of ourselves that is both worldly and carnal, and the Devil) – not because he does not try souls by means of the withdrawal of His consolation. It is because when He withdraws His grace, usually the evil Spirit revolts...

... Thus, God sends trials both by withdrawal, and by His permission. In the removal, it is as though He alone was trying. In His permission of temptation, He makes use of the evil Spirit as an instrument, but always for good...²⁹³

In His withdrawal of consolation, "loving Providence" has a two-fold purpose. "It makes one recognize the gifts of God, and he does not make them his own..." God "abandons a person, almost to his/her own strength, but He infuses His grace in a hidden way, so that a person will consider all well..."²⁹⁴

... As a trial, and not because of any fault, there is withdrawn from a young man with a vocation, His heavenly consolations. Hence, there are lacking to him

²⁹¹ Rule 4, On the Discernment of Spirits.

²⁹² o. c., p. 152.

²⁹³ 1 Kings, Med. 11 [MssB n. 23].

²⁹⁴ ib.

sublime thoughts and insights whether in his prayer²⁹⁵, or in the study of Sacred Scripture. This increases humility in him, knowledge of himself, the recognition and the appreciation of God's gifts. He comes to know that the Lord thus better disposes him, and that he was worthy to be called to the ministry. In this ministry, He entrusts into the hands of His servants, the richest of the treasures of His grace to be dispensed to others. It is all the more necessary that they be faithful, so that they will not rob Him, by attributing to themselves, the glory of all this..."

²⁹⁶

2. The Effects of Desolation

Rather than delaying on the nature of this desolation, Fr. Bertoni considered immediately its effects. He concludes that with this trial, the Lord "disposes His chosen one". Surely, He disposes him to reach the priesthood, but this is not all. He also prepares him to receive the abundance of the gratuitous showering of heavenly gifts. This will be verified at the summit of mystical union, to which, as we shall see, all are remotely called.

Fr. Bertoni does not specify whether this is a question of the Night of the Senses, or of the spirit. He treated rather in a general way, of the travail that ordinarily precedes the passage from a lower degree of life to a higher one. He thereby included in a single point, elements that can be referred to either the Night of the Sense, or that of the spirit. Rather, we can say more precisely that it is not a question exclusively of the first Night of the Senses. This is because of the fact that the previous graces of consolation were so sublime that they do not allow that there was lacking a certain passive purification of the senses. If a preference is to be given, it is therefore in favor of the Night of the Spirit. This "Night" is characterized according to the expression of a Carmelite, "by two series of phenomena." In a certain manner, these are painful for each other. Nevertheless, they are so profoundly different that one series can be called its "terrible properties" – and the other series its "happy properties." The "terrible qualities" that would be the anguish experienced by the soul that feels immersed in a kind of psychological vacuum. It is anguished by the feeling of its own moral misery.²⁹⁷

Fr. Bertoni expressed this in explaining a phrase of Pseudo-Gregory. The reason why God is taken away from the soul is "that it might know just what it is, without His presence."²⁹⁸ This very aridity in which the soul is immersed ought to be valued as a special grace. This is because it serves to detach the soul from a lower

²⁹⁵ This is precisely Mother Naudet's situation. She was used to receiving an extraordinary abundance of light. In her moment of trial, she surely must have felt their absence very much. Fr. Bertoni wrote to her on December 4, 1812:

... Do not be afraid! In Paradise, it will always be a very clear day. You will no longer be able to lose the Lord from sight. But, as long as we are here on earth, there are days and nights that follow after each other. Follow His path; even by night, the Lord will have some stars shining ... [Letter 4, *Bertoniano* p. 101].

²⁹⁶ 1 Kings, Med. 11. [MssB, n. 23].

²⁹⁷ Fr. Louis of the Trinity. We have made use. Of the Report of Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene, in his: 'The Dark Night of St. John of the Cross', in: The Congress of Psychology, of Carmelite Studies', in: *Vita Cristiana.*, n. 2, pp. 185, ff.

²⁹⁸ 1 Kings, Med. 11., [MssB, n. 23].

degree of love, to introduce it to a higher order. It is the travail of love, bursting forth toward a higher degree. Even this love is in the state of anguish, because the soul suffers in not seeing satisfied its desire of union. Even though this is so, it can nevertheless be considered as the fulcrum of the “happy properties”, since they are the assurance of union.²⁹⁹

It is at this point that Fr. Bertoni comes to speak of that love that is without self-interest, of pure love. He speaks of that psychological upheaval that can be said to be already in act. This is because it inculcates “the striving to please God”, “even when our activities, our prayers, etc., are not pleasing to us”.³⁰⁰ In applying this to the matter of vocations, Fr. Bertoni said:

... A young man, proven by the withdrawal of the visits and consolations of the Good Spirit, might cooperate for this loving end of Divine Providence. He would insist on acting according to what he has heard internally, and expend such effort to please God. With this in mind, he thinks of the consolation as present, preservers, even though he is not pleasing himself. He is devoid of spiritual tastes, and has nothing else' in' mind, but God. Even though he is despoiled of His gifts, he shows that he is much disposed to that vocation. This vocation demands a practical knowledge of knowing well how to conduct himself in a time of abundance, and of want. He needs to say, with St. Paul: '...I know how to live in abundance and to suffer want...' (Ph 4:12).³⁰¹

There is reason, therefore, to consider this *Night* as a gift from God. It should also be thought of as a precious period in the spiritual life, during which one advances in love. ‘Divine grace acts toward us as a loving mother’³⁰², as one would act toward her tender baby. She warms him with the warmth of her bosom, and nourishes him with delicious milk. She feeds him with tasty food, holds him in her arms, smothers him with her caresses. But, when he begins to grow up, she takes away these delights, hiding her tender love. She anoints her tender breast with the most bitter aloes. Putting him down from her arms, she makes him walk on his feet. This is so he will lose the ways of a baby, and become used to bigger and more substantial things.³⁰³

²⁹⁹ ‘The Dark Night of St. John of the Cross’, in the Congress of Psychology’ of Carmelite Studies. *VC* 1939, p. 188.

³⁰⁰ 1 Kings, Med. 11. [MssB n. 23].

³⁰¹ ib.

³⁰² Fr. Bertoni wrote to Fr. Bragato, on August 27, 1840:

... What tongue could re-tell the love with which He loves us, and the most diligent care He takes of us? It is even greater than that which a mother has for her children. Let us get well used to the light during these days with which He consoles us. He reveals to us His loving face, to trust Him totally, even in those moments that He seems to be hiding. In this, He acts like a mother who amuses herself with her little children. She enjoys making herself wanted, and called with sighs and also with tears. O Blessed be this, our Father! What will He do, then, with us in heaven, when we will have passed through all the trials, if He now shows us such great and tender benevolence ...? [SA Doc. 35, p. 748].

³⁰³ Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, ‘Anguish of Love’, in *VC* 1936, p. 477.

3. Various Kinds of Trials and Temptations

... But, let us come to the second part of the meditation. During the removal of the consolation, temptations ordinarily take place. God allows this for the greater proof of his chosen ones, that they may be tried in' various ways by the evil spirit. '... The night was made: in it, all the beasts of the forest came out...' (Ps 103:10).³⁰⁴

In the last chapter of the Night of the Senses, St. John of the Cross "teaches that ordinarily, especially in the souls God calls to a sublime and intimate union, a number of trials and temptations occur. These happen to the soul, and they make it suffer, even bitterly."³⁰⁵ Fr. Bertoni continues:

... So, here it is to be considered how that to have a greater force, the spirit of the evil Demon tries to join up with the human and carnal spirit. This is Self- love, the desire for fancy clothing, for honors and pride...³⁰⁶

St. John of the Cross also discovered the influence of the capital vices, even in more advanced souls³⁰⁷. Fr. Bertoni stated:

...If the devil's' colleague finds a shred of this spirit in the soul of the one whom it wishes to tempt, a rather dangerous internal war breaks out...

But if it does not find there disordered love within, it is because the person has been thoroughly purged. He has cooperated valiantly with the early proofs of the Good Spirit in consolation, and also in the withdrawal of grace. The loving Providence of God withdraws its grace as a trial. When the evil spirit does not find the vices within a soul, it seeks them outside. It seeks the human spirit, the carnal, worldly, or proud spirit. In those persons it tries to see to it that the souls he wishes to try, are closer to himself, either because of their self-confidence or their sense of authority. Through reinforcing this attitude, and directing it, he maneuvers it under various guises. He musters all this against that soul ..."³⁰⁸

This is not to say how much the absence of a good spirit in superiors leads to the greater confusion in the inferiors. This is because what determines the most acute phase of the Night of the Spirit. This is especially so if bad example reaches the height it did in the period in which Fr. Bertoni lived. This refers to that time in which he was chosen the spiritual director of the Seminary of Verona³⁰⁹.

³⁰⁴ 1 Kings, Med. 11. [MssB, n. 23].

³⁰⁵ Art. Ci, in VC 1936, n. 5, p. 487.

³⁰⁶ 1 Kings, Med. 11. [MssB, n. 23].

³⁰⁷ Art. Cit., in: VC, 1936, n. 5, p. 476.

³⁰⁸ 1 Kings, Med. 11. [MssB, n. 23].

³⁰⁹ In 1812, Fr. Bertoni took over the assignment as Spiritual Director of the Seminary. This coincided with the efforts undertaken by Bishop Liruti, the Bishop of Verona, to restore the Seminary. At one and the same time, he wanted to renew both the studies and the discipline in the Seminary, together with the dignity of the clergy. The following is found in a Latin document of Sommacompagna:

'...In 1812, in the month of December, Liruti lovingly ordered a number of priests, living almost a lay life, to the Seminary. He did this so that they might receive correction and do penance, that they

The spectacle of bad examples on the part of those who should have instead been making progress in perfection, and in guiding others to it. This could not leave a young man indifferent, when he is about to fulfill the greatest and most important decision in his life. This terrible trial came “from the spirit of bad priests, men who were worldly and carnal. They were like the Israelites who knew Scripture, but they did not know Him Whom the Scriptures had promised. They did have knowledge, but they did not know the Spirit. They even took glory in the fact that they were not spiritual.”³¹⁰

A trial that is all the more severe occurs when “the weak spirit of bad priests comes near to the young man with a vocation. It may be that they even exercise authority in his regard, or they are confessors, pastors, directors, etc. They may be weak and failing in the exercise of the virtues, and in sustaining the true faith. It may be that they are too weak to uphold others, too weak to correct the defects of others.”³¹¹

Therefore, God does send interior trials by withdrawing His graces. Then, there are those trials that come from concupiscence, or from the bad example of those in authority. To all these, are to be added the persecutions of those who look down on the good works of the one chosen. Besides, there are the bodily infirmities, because of which, there is increased the difficulty of doing well. Even from this kind of trial, God has some profit to gather. This is because His intention of elevating souls to the highest grade of union, is always the same. And such profit will always be made clear when the storm of temptation has passed:

... This profit occurs, beginning right with the visit, or rather the consolation of the Good Spirit, that is to be manifested. Hence, it is as the Psalm says, that ‘... as the night has come, and all the beasts of the forest shall go about in it...’ – so, too, when ‘... the sun has arisen, and they shall all return to their dens...’” (Ps 103: 21, 23).³¹²

The Holy Spirit manifests above all, this “profit” that the elect made in the time of temptation, by remaining well founded in humility. In fact, the virtues are purified, and the soul proceeds with giant steps toward this transforming union.

might be restored to a better way of life. Some of them, subject to drunkenness, he forbade to say Mass for a time ... etc. [cf. Fr. J. Stofella’s citation, in: *Bertoniano* 1928, p. 77].

³¹⁰ Priests, by going every day to the Most Blessed sacrament of the altar, ought to have become ‘divine and spiritual men’. Instead, Fr Bertoni noted:

... We are not divine men, nor are we even spiritual. Rather, priests should feel ashamed of these titles. Nothing matters to them if they are not great orators, poets, philosophers, business men, people of vision and talent. In brief, they are worldly priests, priests of this world, and of the flesh... [Retreat to Priests, ‘The Last Supper’ (MssB, n. 16).

³¹¹ 1 Kings. Med. 12. [MssB, n. 23].

³¹² ib.

CHAPTER 3 THE PURIFICATION OF THE VIRTUES

1. Patience in Persecutions

We have by now considered the dark passage through which souls are called to pass to reach union with God. Following this, it is natural to ask whether Fr. Bertoni had in fact traveled this arduous pathway of the Passive Night of the Senses and of the spirit. It will also be seen whether his moral and theological virtues were proven at the infallible crucible of great temptations and sufferings. This is the manner of having been purified from every stain of imperfect motivation, to be founded solely on their formal motive. Fr. Lenotti, who lived for a number of years with the Servant of God, stated:

... Even in the misfortunes that he suffered in the course of his life (and there were many), he was a hero of patience. He only wanted that ' his great and strong heart would withstand them, and handle them. He truly, willed to be resigned to the Divine Good Pleasure in the silence of his sorrowing heart...³¹³

His biographer, in his turn, alluded to the criticism and censures that were directed against Fr. Bertoni's intentions, and the holiness of his undertaking. He was subject to insults both in the house, and also on the public streets for his spirit of enterprise, that was considered by some to be scheming for his own interests. He was the recipient of rudeness and persecutions of those who accused him of being too severe.³¹⁴

From the time that he was a young priest, he had to endure the trials and affronts leveled against him because of the Marian Oratories that he established.³¹⁵ Then, when he divulged his decision to withdraw with some companions to the **Stimmate**, the gossip directed his way was without limit.³¹⁶ Rumors accompanied him even after he had gone into the **Stimmate**, and they were of a violence worthy of a much more weighty cause. The echoes of these calumnies and detractions reached the ears of Bishop Liruti, Ordinary of Verona. Fr. Bertoni remained always unmoved in his Abandonment to God. In fact:

...he had an unshakable plan of leaving everything up to God and remitting everything, no matter how adverse and contrary that happened to him, up to the divine Good Pleasure. This made him so tranquil and secure, that it was as though the Lord was taking care of his case, and he was not to receive any penalty...³¹⁷

Even in such circumstances, the Lord shed light on the holiness of his

³¹³ SA, Doc. 20, p.144.

³¹⁴ ib., Doc. 26, p.531.

³¹⁵ ib., p. 532.

³¹⁶ When the differences that arose made him postpone the date of his entrance, he said:

... The delay seems good to us. Thus, God turns into good all that might have been bad. Meanwhile, the gossip is lessening, and tongues are being stopped ... [Letter 58, with no date but in 1816. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 239.

³¹⁷ SA, Doc. 26, p. 534.

intentions. The tuition - free schools for the sons of the working class were opened and conducted with so much abnegation and lack of self-interest. Not even his school was spared these contradictions, censures and calumnies. It was said repeatedly that his intention was to damage, and overcome the schools of others. The Servant of God wrote:

...We can only reject this, since we know that all the schools of the neighborhood are full. It is, however, necessary to pray and apply a certain dexterity, with much humility and patience. This is because it will always be true that 'whoever wants to live piously in Christ Jesus, will suffer persecution ...' (2 Tm 3:12).³¹⁸

Persecution and gossip of all kinds never gave any indication of lessening:

...Many are saying many things'; and we ought 'to pray always, and not lose heart ...' (Lk 18:1).³¹⁹

The highly developed Veronese sense of humor, that is usually so pleasant, must have at times degenerated into very biting sarcasm against the Servant of God. But, even these "digs" were blunted by his patience and humility. He wrote:

...In the various colors that they paint us, I would very much like to laugh. However, it is only a little more than three months since my Retreat. This gave me a stronger reason to weep for my sins. Then, there are many and grave thoughts from so much responsibility that tie me up. These always hold me back, so that I cannot spare even a moment, not even to enjoy myself outside...³²⁰

It can be said that his whole life was spent in a sea of troubles and trials and persecutions:

... I will not tell you of other tribulations that we have. They are not few in number, but I will keep silent about them, so that they will not excessively sadden your soul. But, we profit even in tribulations; for we know that tribulation produces tolerance, tolerance produces a proven virtue. Proven virtue produces hope and hope does not deceive, because divine love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who was given to us...' (Rm 5:3-5)³²¹

His biographer states that the Servant of God was never heard even to allude to the slightest wrong that he suffered. Furthermore, his calumniator enjoyed the benefit of being the first one remembered in his prayers.³²² There were days "without number" that the Servant of God had to taste the bitter chalice of adversity. These were always marked by a joy that was most particular³²³. We can read from his spiritual diary in this regard:

³¹⁸ Letter 69, no date. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 344.

³¹⁹ Letter 144, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 10-12. p. 179.

³²⁰ Letter 165, 1831. *Bertoniano* 1934, nn. 1-3, pp. 232, ff.

³²¹ SA, Doc. 35, p. 744 to Fr. Bragato, December 1, 1837.

³²² ib., Doc. 26, p. 531.

³²³ ib., p. 533.

...October 22, 1808: Joy in adversities, and in the consequences of real poverty, with thanksgiving to the Lord. There was the offering for even greater occasions of shame and suffering, should He consider me worthy..

... This mentality is the greatest gift of which I consider myself the most unworthy...³²⁴.

... July 22, 1808: In the Mass, I received from the Lord as a gift, an actual, continual offering of my endeavor to the Sacrifice, with much sweetness...

September 27, 1808: A feeling of great love for the Most Holy Trinity, in giving us the Son. Great tenderness toward Him, at the same time f with lively faith, and a deep desire for union, and for association with His suffering and ignominies. There was the petition for the grace of suffering and of being despised for Him...

... February 1, 1809: Frequent memories of Christ's life, with tender love of correspondence. During Mass, at the consecration, there was a sentiment of the presence of Christ, that was most vivid and affectionate. Disposition for the ignominies of Christ...

...September 29, 1808: Recognition of the great good that it is to suffer something for the love of God. Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Blesses are you when they outrage you, and lying, say all kinds of evil about you for my sake. Rejoice and exult, because great will be your reward in heaven...' (Mt 5:10-12)³²⁵.

2. Abandonment to God in Illness

St. Teresa of Avila places "grave infirmities" right after "gossip" as a means of purification³²⁶. We cannot at this point, omit a reference to Fr. Bertoni's most painful and lengthy illnesses, even though we will reserve an entire chapter for them. The years of his confinement can be computed to be about twenty. During these, his sufferings saw periods of excruciating martyrdom. We give here a description, left by Fr. Marani, concerning one of the outbreaks of the infection on his right leg:

... During the time of this illness, that lasted more than five years, he had to put up with very painful treatments and probing. These were most frequent lancing to open his flesh. Each one of these would cause a fever for about two or three days. These were terrible incisions (about 300), and some of these were longer than a span. In all these torments, in all these surgical operations, there never came out of his mouth a single word of lament, nor even one of unwillingness. He would always say: '... Let them do what must be done...'

During the very act of cutting, he would only recite prayers in a loud voice. He used to be afraid that he was not giving a very good example, and he would ask

³²⁴ To Mother Naudet, he wrote:

... Meanwhile, rejoice with me for the gift the Lord has bestowed. Give thanks in tribulations, because 'patience does a perfect work' [Jas 1:4]. A soul grateful in hardships attracts supreme goods on one, as there is nothing that honors God more... [Letter 179, December 30, 1831. *Bertoniano* 1934, nn. 1-3, p. 239].

³²⁵ SA Doc. 35, p. 662.

³²⁶ *Interior Castle*, p. 919.

pardon of his surgeons. They answered him almost in jest: '... say as many prayers as you want – just let us do our work.' He would then respond that they were the masters, and that they could do what they wanted.

When the operations would be over, at times, the surgeons would say: '... We have treated you rather badly, isn't that so....?' He would generally answer that it had not been all that bad. He thanked them for their prudence and kindness, saying that they abounded in both...³²⁷ .

As has been seen, Fr. Bertoni did not have only a speculative knowledge of suffering, if we may use such a term. He felt in act, all of its purifying efficacy. He used to say:

... Infirmity is the proof of the man. Remember that person who was so outstanding in time of health. He could reel off so many texts from spiritual books. But, when he had fallen ill, he was a scandal to all the rest in the house, with his impatience. When this was pointed, out to him, he said:,'... It is one thing to pray, and quite another to act...³²⁸ .

In all the various phases of his illness, the Servant of God abandoned himself into the arms of Providence, blessing it, and thanking God. He wrote:

...It seems that there is not much more to cut, just a little more, at most. I do see certain jokes of divine Providence, that make me most astonished. 'May God be praised for them!³²⁹

...I have returned to bed... May God be praised. '... I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall always be in my mouth... ' (P.s 33:2)³³⁰ .

... I believe that the cause of my weakening has been for being in bed for so long, and the getting up in this cold season. I feel that the warmth would do me much good; but, '... Thy will be done...³³¹ .

... I do say Mass, but, to tell the truth, I do not feel that I am getting much better. My legs are not responding well, and the sore right one, is swollen a bit. There is a dull pain that I would rather not heed. But, 'may Thy will be done...³³²

...The leg has swollen again, and these days that I am walking a bit more around the rooms, I find it hard to bear. And I would not want to end up by going back to bed later. But, 'Thy will be done...³³³

...Recommend me to the Lord, because again, they have made a good cut on my knee...³³⁴

³²⁷ SA, Doc. 20, p. 139.

³²⁸ Mss Benciolini. Archives Stimmate, Verona.

³²⁹ Letter 123, no date. *Bertoniano* 1934, nn. 7-9, p. 117.

³³⁰ l.c., 98, no date. Ib., 1933, nn. 4-6, p. 73.

³³¹ l.c., p. 128. February 1828. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 120.

³³² l.c., p. 129. March 9, 1828. *Bertoniano*, ib.

³³³ ib., p. 140. August 28, 1828, ib., p. 128.

³³⁴ ib., p. 157. No date, ib., 1933, nn. 10-12, p. 204.

... The Lord does help me at times, even against my merits, with the prayers of His faithful servants...³³⁵

Indeed, Fr. Bertoni's strength was attained in prayer. The Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family, had often interceded with a very holy priest. This Prince Alexander di Hohenlohe, has the reputation of being something of a wonder-worker. She had him make novenas for the ailing Fr. Bertoni:

...I am most sincerely grateful for your charity, Reverend Mother, for the new novena you have obtained from the holy prince. I am not worthy of it, but I do rely on it...³³⁶

When he would obtain some alleviation in his maladies, he would promptly recognize this blessing and would thank the one who had obtained it for him:

...It is really necessary to say that the Lord mortifies, and then He vivifies. When he has scourged one, even though he has merited it, He then arouses the charity of others. They intercede, and look for mediators, so that God might extend His omnipotent hand to heal the very wounds inflicted by His own hand. May His Holy Name be blessed, and Reverend Mother's charity be rewarded...³³⁷

But, his health was not completely restored. The Servant of God attributed to himself the blame, if the prayers of holy persons were not heard³³⁸:

... I give many thanks for your charity, through the Novena. I wanted to pray for this, but it seems that my little faith cuts a sad figure even for the saints. However, I cannot deny that the prayers of the holy prince have not helped me enough in overcoming the obstacles that I have placed in his way...³³⁹

Surely, God had His reasons for not granting complete health all at once. Meanwhile, Fr. Bertoni must have realized that his life was nothing but a continuing miracle:

... The Lord wishes to multiply His miracles, while making it look as though He is not doing them...³⁴⁰

But, most especially his patience achieved the highest degree of purification. That is the level that rejoices in suffering itself. He and his companions truly merited this self-description of their situation:

³³⁵ ib., 99. No date, ib., 1933, p. 82.

³³⁶ ib., 108, no date, ib., 1933, p. 82.

³³⁷ L.c., IInd Easter, 1828. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 121.

³³⁸ He recognized that it was a grace obtained with prayer if the malady did not worsen:

... I must thank your charity, reverend Mother, for the prayers you have said, and have had said, for my health. And even though the Lord did not answer them totally, because of His own sublime end, I must therefore say: *Thy will be done!* Nevertheless I retain the great confidence that I have in the power of prayer, and the divine goodness, that a greater danger has been avoided ...!

³³⁹ Letter 118, no date. *Bertoniano* p. 114.

³⁴⁰ ib.138, no date. *Bertoniano* p. 126.

... We are few in number, and almost all are drained of health. We do need some quiet...

... There is, though, an abundance of consolation, because of that copious fruit, at least in respect to our weaknesses. The Lord draws this and squeezes it out of our anguish and tribulations...³⁴¹

He invited the Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family not only to pray, but also to thank God, "because of the visits of His scourges are really very great favors..."³⁴²

3. Humility

After persecutions and serious illness, St. Teresa proceeds further to list other means of purification:

... What is to be said of interior pain? If it could be described exactly, how much would it sound like exterior suffering! But, to describe it just as it is felt, is absolutely impossible.³⁴³

This is exactly that suffering that Fr. Bertoni has expressed by the generic term "desolation." According to St. John of the Cross, this would proceed from the illustration of the Gift of Intelligence, for the purpose of submitting fully to the Spirit of God. Its purpose is also to purify humility and the theological virtues from sediment.³⁴⁴ God bestows a kind of compensation for the fatigue endured during the desolations of the Night. He communicates to the soul "a rather precious gift" – it is "profound humility, together with a very sublime life"³⁴⁵. Even beyond this "illustrious and rare gift", it makes the elect remain humble, not only in the midst of its virtues, but even in the midst of the very glory of the virtues".³⁴⁶ It suffices to note how Fr. Bertoni remained profoundly struck by his own wretchedness, when he received particular inspiration from heaven:

... While experiencing very sublime insights regarding God, there was also an accompanying understanding of myself...³⁴⁷.

It is precisely at the consideration of the riches that were gratuitously received that he felt the need of professing himself as the most wretched:

... One's own faults could be revealed throughout the neighborhood and the city, as are those of others right now. Then, it would be clear how all the more despicable they are, especially after so many graces and inspirations. If these same graces had been given to others, they would have become saints...³⁴⁸.

³⁴¹ ib., p. 133. April 30, 1828. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 123.

³⁴² Ib., 171. June 29, 1831, ib., 1934. Nn. 1-3, p. 235.

³⁴³ *Interior Castle*, 6th Mansion, c. 1, p. 920.

³⁴⁴ cf. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *Perfection Chretienne et Contemplation*, t. II, 7th ed., pp. 445, f.

³⁴⁵ 1 Kings, Med. 12. [MssB, n 23].

³⁴⁶ ib., Med. 13.

³⁴⁷ SA Doc. 35, p. 659.

³⁴⁸ ib. p. 658.

And after experiencing a gift that was like a rapture to him during his Mass, he proceeds in his spiritual diary:

... Very great tenderness and profound humility in holding Christ in my hands right after the consecration. This was supreme Goodness, joined to supreme malice; the most pure, to the most impure; the most holy, to the greatest sinner. The sentiment lasted until after Holy communion. Afterwards, there was compunction lasting until evening...³⁴⁹

This feeling about himself as nothing, as a great sinner, as an obstacle, and a hindrance to God, was habitual with him³⁵⁰. When he noted, or pointed out examples of virtue on the part of the laity, he would be overcome with his own unworthiness:

... It is a great misery to see such holiness among the laity, and so much imperfection and vice in a priest...!³⁵¹

... What reason for feeling shame, and for trembling, in seeing so many of the laity in the midst of the world, more deeply engaged in the quest for their perfection, than I am for mine. Hence, how much more perfect are they in their state of life than I am in mine! How much more mortified, more chaste, more humble, and more charitable they are than an infinity of priests! What testimony this is against me! And how I will be convicted when God in His judgment will place before my eyes these very examples! What confusion will be mine, after many years in the priesthood, on finding that instead of having increased holiness, I am more imperfect than I was as a seminarian, and even before I entered...!³⁵².

When he would hear about the fall of some fellow priest he would be terrified, and tremble for himself, seeing himself so close to the precipice.³⁵³ He would flee from praise and honors. It was for him like the announcement of a great disgrace, when the Vicar of the Diocese, Monsignor Dionisi, told him that he was to be chosen a Canon. Not only did he experience great pain in his soul from this, but he was also physically upset by it. As a result, he had to be assured that neither in the present, nor in the future, would any thought be given to confer any dignity on him. Only then, did his former calm return.³⁵⁴

Whenever he was visited by illustrious personalities, the feeling of his own unworthiness placed him in great confusion and discomfort. "Why is this happening to me?"³⁵⁵ – he would say, sometimes in tears. "It would bother him to believe, and he suffered even more on seeing that a Bishop, or a priest, or an Emperor would want to visit his poor and abject person"³⁵⁶. To cite one example, in the year 1829, the holy

³⁴⁹ ib., p. 664.

³⁵⁰ *Epistolario* to Naudet, *passim*.

³⁵¹ SA, Doc. 35, p. 664.

³⁵² Retreat to Priests, 'The End of the Priest'. [Mss, n. 23].

³⁵³ Note what he wrote on the apostasy of LaMennais. Letter 178, no date. *Bertoniano* 1934, n. 1, p. 238.

³⁵⁴ SA, Doc. 26, p. 547.

³⁵⁵ ib., p. 552.

³⁵⁶ ib.

Prince, Alexander Hohenlohe, who had such a concern for Fr. Bertoni's illnesses, came to Verona. At the time, Fr. Marani was also seriously ill, and the Servant of God wrote to Mother Naudet, as she was in contact with the Prince:

...When the holy Prince comes, I beg you, Reverend Mother, to humble him with my thanks. Please ask him, since we are not worthy to receive the Lord's servants in our home to visit us, to put in a good word for us with his Lord, and ours. Ask him also to pray for Fr. Marani, and my son will be healed...'. Please ask him to remember all us poor sinners that God might pardon us, and that we might serve Him just a little, the way He merits to be served...³⁵⁷.

The Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family was somewhat surprised that the Servant of God did not want to be visited by one to whom, in good part, he owed his cure. But, Fr. Bertoni clarified this:

...As for the holy Prince, it was really the sentiment of reverence that I have, which dictated the expression of my unworthiness to receive him. Nor would I want to inconvenience him, and it suffices that he put in a good word for me to the Lord. If, however, his charity were to move him to do even more, as placing his hands on the infirm, I must not refuse the gifts of God. I should accept them with gratitude. However, your prudence, Reverend Mother, will know what is best. Do not be vexed, O Lord...' I will say with the centurion...³⁵⁸

We have already seen previously the level of de-personalization to which Fr. Bertoni had arrived. His biographer found no better way to describe this profound humility than by calling it an "authentic miracle".³⁵⁹ To conclude this, we cite a page on which Fr. Bertoni explained the absolute necessity of a profound abasement, before constructing an elevated spiritual edifice:

...I will answer you, Reverend Mother, with St. Paul's words, but, first with those of Christ, Our Lord, to St. Paul: '...my grace is sufficient for thee ...' (2 Co 12:9). (This is true for any undertaking, or to hope for anything, and also to carry it through). ...For strength is made perfect in weakness ...' And the Apostle answered'... Therefore, gladly will I glory in my infirmities ... (these used to make me afraid), that the strength of Christ may dwell in me. For when I am weak, then I am strong ...'

Before the Lord raises a soul to any extent, it is fitting that He lower it in equal measure. God surely is no less a wise architect than those second rate builders. Even they know that it is necessary to excavate a foundation, whose depth is in proportion to the height they want to raise the building.

Let us pray to the Lord that He might increase His light in us, that by knowing our wretchedness better, we might come to the very bottom of the abyss. Then, it will happen that one abyss will call for another. Thus, the depth will correspond to the height of that building that our Lord has shown in design, like happened to Moses, and also to you, on the mountain³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁷ Letter 156, August 30, 1829. *Bertoniano* nn. 10-12, p. 203.

³⁵⁸ ib. no date [numbering not exact]. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 4-6, p. 80.

³⁵⁹ SA, Doc, 36, p. 549.

³⁶⁰ The 'mountain' on which Mother Naudet had the vision of her future institute is the one on which the Holy House of Loreto stands.

This is why He first made the deepest possible excavation so that you, Reverend Mother, might come to know the purpose of the divine action. Thus, you must not be disturbed by this, nor surprised how matters that are not seen, are handled. This is also so there would be no despair in seeing the reason for all of this, or its cause.

Thus, the wisdom of God is justified, even to our small minds. But, how much more there is still to be understood, since it is incomprehensible! And even if we will see it all one day unveiled, we still will not be able to comprehend it. '... Thy judgments are a great deep...' (Ps 35:70).

Let us adore so great and so sublime a Lord, and let us love Him Who has so lowered Himself, even to the point of loving us. And how, and to what level ought we be lowered, to respond and to imitate His abasement. By His, He descended and He still descends to be united with us. To Him, be eternal glory, that lives and reigns for all time...³⁶¹

4. Faith

Having assured the foundation with humility, the spiritual edifice is raised in force of the purification especially of the theological virtues. We will begin by seeing how the purification of faith took place in St. Gaspar Bertoni. In 1840, Fr. Louis Bragato was Confessor to the Empress Maria Anna of Austria. He was passing through one of those times of great darkness that are proper to the Passive Night of the spirit. Fr. Bragato took his former superior into his confidence concerning it. Fr. Bertoni not only suffered with him, but also encouraged him to the most complete confidence in God. Toward the middle of August, in the soul of poor Fr. Bragato, there finally reappeared the much sought after light. Fr. Bertoni was immediately informed about this, and rejoiced with him in these words:

...On Monday, I received at the same time, your letter of the 14th, and also another one of the 15th. This letter brought joy to my heart, that had been made to share in it by the Spirit of the Lord, Who was directing the mind and the pen of him who wrote it. Thus, our Most Loving Lord shows that it is not in vain that His servants say with great confidence, with holy Job: '...after the darkness, I hope for the light (Jb 17:12), and with holy David: '... the darkness thereof, and the light thereof, are alike...' (Ps 138:12). O! how much is God to be glorified, both in His gifts and in the humble faith of His servants...³⁶²

And he counseled that one should become so accustomed in the midst of the light, to place all his own confidence in God. This would be true also for those times in which the Lord, as a tender mother, would again hide, for the pleasure she would have in "being wanted and called, with sighs, and even with tears", by her small children.

Very often our faith, according to Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange³⁶³, stops at the formulae, at the letter, and at the external aspect of the mysteries, without sufficiently penetrating into them. Its formal motive, constituted by the authority of God revealing,

³⁶¹ Letter 36, no date. *Bertoniano*, n. 4, p. 177.

³⁶² To Fr. Bragato, August 27, 1840. *SA*, Doc. 35, p. 748.

³⁶³ Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, *De satisfactione Sacerdotis*. Marietti, p. 135.

is backed up also by other secondary reasons. These would be the general belief of society in the midst of which it is living, the agreement between the mysteries, and natural truths and our aspirations. If there should arise great difficulties, temptations and trials against the faith, and should all the secondary motives become weakened, then, faith is fortified and is purified in the one who remains evenly firm.

According to Fr. Bertoni, all the trials and temptations According to Fr. Bertoni, all the trials and temptations against the faith, proceed from these three sources: from ourselves, from others and the devil; and lastly (the trials, at least) from God.

a. The Purification of the Faith from one's own reasoning

In a sermon on Faith, Fr. Bertoni preached:

...The more that the glory of virtue increases, so much the greater will be difficulties opposed to their fulfillment. It will become all the harder for them to act, and to find the means to do so, and to be maintained and conserved for a long time.

With this established, if you say to me, that whoever observes temperance, or some other similar virtue, will have some needs. It : will be necessary for him to have much fortitude with which to repel desires, thoughts of impurity, or some other inordinate appetite. I respond to you that for a strong soul, and one that is quite brave, it is necessary that he believe deeply to fight off, and to put to flight thoughts and reasons to be unfaithful. This is not a simple, or slight matter, but it is a hard and dangerous matter to take on one's own reasoning.

All that God has revealed, and there is a great deal, and it is superior to our capacity, we ought to receive it from God in humility. Hence, Sirach says: '... For many things are shown to thee, above the understanding of men...' (Si 3:25). These truths, however, do .not have to be investigated by man with his reason.

Thus, we are forewarned by the same Ecclesiastics: '...seek not the things that are too high for thee...' (3:22) . Curiosity is to be excluded from all this, but equally so, ignorance. It is the glory of faith to spirit to the port of truth, safely through those crags, those so well known for their terrible ship-wrecks.

Faith holds in check the arrogance of men, trying to comprehend what is incomprehensible. Hence, his spirit is not overcome by its glory: '... the searcher of majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory...' (Pr 25:27).

Faith makes one, attentive, makes one go without sleep to study, to meditate on the mysteries revealed by God, so that he will not incur that threat: '... If anyone is ignorant, he shall be ignored...' (1 Co 14:32).³⁶⁴

It is rather easy to show how Fr. Bertoni had over- come his own reasoning process, from what has been said on the sacrifice of understanding. He was quite far removed from letting himself be seduced by the force of his own reasoning, in the face of

³⁶⁴ Incomplete Sermon on Faith [MssB, n. 10].

revelation. He said:

...One must submit his own reasoning, even to be ready to call something white which, to us, seems black...³⁶⁵

And he repeated this principle of St. Ignatius to the priests:

...to be in conformity, and in union with the Catholic Church, we ought to maintain as white what may appear black to our eyes, if it has been defined as black, and openly profess this. One must, in fact, believe that the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who governs us, and Who directs us to salvation, is none other, nor different from God. He is that same God, Who once published the precepts of the Decalogue, and in our day, Who instructs and governs the hierarchical Church...³⁶⁶

It should be noted that this thought was given by Fr. Bertoni as a remembrance of the ***Spiritual Exercises***. Therefore, it was proposed not as a passing reflection, but as a principle with which the life of a priest ought to be constantly imbued. We should add that Fr. Bertoni truly had an extraordinary love for the deposit of Revelation. He regarded the Sacred Scriptures' as the word of God – or, better, letters sent by the Heavenly Father to His children on earth...³⁶⁷ The Scriptures contain the treasures of truth so superior to all our dreams. They have a value and a variety and a fullness, that are impossible to estimate. Before the Scriptures, the best products of the human mind can only pale. Therefore, Fr. Bertoni gave to the sacred texts an infinite respect. When light was lacking to understand all these pages so immersed in the divine, then he would be silent, and would admire and adore the mystery. He would recommend to the seminarians:

...Humility in studying the sacred pages: admiration for their divine sublimity...³⁶⁸

...We have the Scriptures in which God speaks business, so what do worldly books have with us? In the Holy Scriptures, we have not only what is necessary, but also what is the most useful to know. In them, we learn what is good, and discern what is bad. We find the means to correct our ways, and to buoy up our spirit. What more is necessary? What else do we need to make us holy, and interested in every good work...?³⁶⁹

...The word of God in the Scriptures ought to be the rule of our thinking, of our acting, if we want to know the truth, and achieve salvation. The out- side systems are all different, and they are interwoven in the dangerous books of our world...³⁷⁰

³⁶⁵ 1 Kings, Med. 50. [MssB, n. 24].

³⁶⁶ Retreat to Priests. [MssB, n. 16]. Reflections taken from *Rules for Thinking with the Church* [n. 13, in: *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 365].

³⁶⁷ When Fr. Bertoni preached, he was looked upon as the one who had done this: ... **Do you believe, my people, that I have come here tonight to frighten you? No, I come to comfort you; this is my commission. I come to bring you a letter from your Judge. He is indeed angered, because of sin. But, He also loves you...** [Sermon without title, on the occasion of some Mission].

³⁶⁸ 1 Kings, Med. I. [MssB, n. 23].

³⁶⁹ PVC, p. 255.

³⁷⁰ ib.

The special study that he gave to the Word of God had as its scope: “to animate all his actions with the spirit of faith”³⁷¹. And he remained faithful in an absolute manner:

...For me, I keep myself to the truth and simplicity of the Gospel: ‘... *But let your speech be ‘Yes, No, No ...’* (Mt 5:37). This, I always counsel others, keeping St. Augustine’s saying, that in no case, not even to save one’s life, is it licit to lie - ... I do not know, nor do I want to know, any more than that...’³⁷²

...The Gospel text is clear and manifest. It is what I preface all my reasoning with, provided the church, or most clear arguments, do not make it clear to me, that I ought to explain something otherwise...’³⁷³

His attachment to the faith dictated to him various prayers, among which we will cite this one, as it truly is a gem!

...O Lord, close the ears of our hearts to the voices of the Serpent. Open our ears to the voice of Peter; whence, our senses are never corrupted, nor the purity of our faith squandered. We can then show our spirit as a chaste virgin to you, Who are the Spouse of faithful souls...’³⁷⁴

b. The Purification of the Faith in the Struggle against Heretics

Fr. Bertoni considered the second source of trials in the faith, after one’s own reasoning process, that of heresies, or of diabolical temptations:

... While interiorly, the various reasons struggle, on the outside, numberless adversaries are preparing for a horrible battle. It is necessary, St. Paul cried out, that there be heresies. This is so that those who are proven among you, be made known. ‘... *For there must be factions so that those who are approved, may be made manifest among you ...’* (1 Co 11:19). It could be that in this sentence of the Apostle, through its ultimate effects, some of the pious faithful will find some comfort. Even so, this does not take away the necessity of finding great and even stupendous dangers for many. However, such fears of falling, should not lead to being always afraid, scared stiff and overcome with terror. The most shameless wickedness runs counter to humble faith. With this impiety, there is not only the furor it causes, but usually there is also a kind of bullying brow-beating. These come together to oppress the weak. Then, there are wisdom and eloquence to confound, to seduce the fool-hardy, or there are cleverness and fraud to subvert the simple and to agitate such as these.

These are great enemies, but they are not yet the most terrible. This is because these appear just as they are, and let themselves be recognized for what they are. We do not have to struggle against flesh and blood, but against the spirits of iniquity. These are all around us, they occupy this space – I have in mind, the Demons. From them, are disseminated in a hidden way, in the field of the Catholic

³⁷¹ SA, Doc. 26, p. 461.

³⁷² Letter 165, January 19, 1830. *Bertoniano* 1924, nn. 1-3, p. 232.

³⁷³ Ib., 137. No date. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 125.

³⁷⁴ 1 Kings, Med. 35. [MssB, n. 24].

Church, the bad grain – heresies. From them also proceed, as from a bad source, other errors. By this means, they increase; illusions are promised, and deceptions are reinforced with such terrible harm...³⁷⁵

Fr. Bertoni did have the merit of having struggled fiercely against even forms of heresy in his time. His biographer wrote of him:

... From the very first years of his priesthood, he dedicated himself totally to investigating the subtleties and the circumlocutions of the Jansenistic errors. He studied most profoundly to untie and to combat their sophisms. He stayed up very many nights, and sometimes even with a fever. He would pour over again and again, huge volumes. He spared himself neither effort, nor fatigue, so that he would be ready at any hour, to fight off, to have triumph, the sole and supreme truth of the faith...³⁷⁶

He would find himself on the field of combat every time any form of heresy might appear, in a book, from a review, or in the statements of someone, unfortunate enough to have been taken into the nets of error. It was often that the Bishop would entrust him with the task of doing this. At such times, his resolute intervention would incite even more the fury of his adversaries.³⁷⁷

His biographer relates that a Jansenist took offense at the force of the convincing and pressing reasons that Fr. Bertoni directed against his sect. The Jansenist accosted him publicly, near the Church of St. Firmus Major, and spewed out against him the most insane invectives. So strong was his affront, that the Servant of God actually fell to the ground, without even saying even a single word³⁷⁸. Another event took place at the College for the Cases of Conscience, at St. Nicholas', as the historian Sommacompagna narrates³⁷⁹.

Fr. Bertoni would not relent, except when the expressed formulae were extremely clear, in the case of retractions. About May of 1826, there was presented to him for approval one of these formulae. This one did not make very clear that there was in it a complete renunciation of the Jansenistic error. His idea was to make it clear that the views expressed were displeasing to some. Leopoldina Naudet had heard some rumors regarding all this, and it gave her some apprehension for Fr. Bertoni. He wrote to her:

...I thank you for your charity, in your prayers for the good of all. In fact, I had this in mind, because my own personal good did not seem to me threatened in this matter. I am very grateful to you and glad for the freedom with which you, Reverend Mother, speak to me, in your charitable concern for me and my affairs. Please know that concerning my own conduct in the matter, there is nothing that upsets me.

³⁷⁵ Incomplete Sermon on Faith. [MssB, n. 10].

³⁷⁶ ib.

³⁷⁷ ib., p. 531.

³⁷⁸ ib., p. 532.

³⁷⁹ Articles proposed for testimonial proof in Ven. Bertoni's Cause of Beatification, by Fr. G. Pizzichella. Pavia 1907.

The reason is that I did not do it on my own, but I was requested, or rather, commanded by my Superior³⁸⁰. He ordered me to give my opinion, after mature consideration on the question, and the formula of the retraction. I thought it over, I prayed over it, and I took counsel . from others, and most especially, from Fr. Guerrerri³⁸¹.

In such matters, in addition to knowledge, he also has some experience, since in his own Order, he was on the Sacred Tribunal of the Inquisition. I have that counsel that before God, I believed should be given, as the most in accord with the rules of the Church, and to be the most useful for the Lord's interests. And had I not spoken as I did, I would not have been able to consider myself sure in my own conscience.

It is true that the Hon. Bongiovani³⁸² showed little persuasion from my reasoning. But, I was unable to give in to his view, that was only useful in appearance, and was less in accord with the general laws of the Church.

The whole matter has proven that by supporting myself as I should on these reasons with simplicity, as is what duty calls me to, I achieved a usefulness more than was expected. This retraction is a knife in the throat of anyone who would want to uphold that cause. One of its friends, and warmest defenders, allowed his weapons to fall from his hands, just as soon as he heard from me about the retraction.

The same thing happened to the Superiors regarding the others who were set to defend the iniquity. '*... Iniquity hath lied to itself ...*' (Ps 26:12). Hence, '*... for there must be factions, so that those who are approved may be made manifest among you ...*' (1 Co 11:19).

Reverend Mother, continue to pray, that we might be able to prove our faith before God, and so that infirm souls might not be troubled by these great dangers of seduction...³⁸³

Even when Fr. Bertoni went to preach the Spiritual Exercises to the Clergy of the Diocese of Mantua in 1816, he had to deal with Jansenists. He wrote:

...This diocese has many subjects who are outstanding in their example and knowledge. There are, however, some Jansenists, and one of them was even one of the Fathers of the Synod of Pistoia. All my preaching was to oppose it there, and it seems that the divine word was heard with much pleasure. May God grant that it was also done with fruit...³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ His Excellency, Bishop Liruti, Bishop of Verona.

³⁸¹ Well known Dominican Canonist of the time.

³⁸² Francis Bongiovani, '... most learned', says Fr. Cesari, 'in both laws...' [i.e. both canon and civil law]. He was Chancellor of the Canons.

³⁸³ Letter 98, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 4-6, pp. 73, f.

³⁸⁴ *ib.*, p. 57. October 11, 1816. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 338.

We can take a powerful profession of Fr. Bertoni's faith from a page written to Mother Naudet. This was occasioned by an article of the Archbishop of Paris, Archbishop Quelen, that appeared in the review: ***Ami de la Religion*** in 1829. Among other things, the Arch-bishop took a stand against the doctrine of those who, like LaMennais³⁸⁵, had asserted the subordination of the temporal power to that of the spiritual order. The Archbishop went on to say that such a doctrine is not founded on any solid proof. He went on to say that in their favor, no documents over the years, can be found that would support this view. These doctrines do not bear within themselves the character of universality that distinguishes the faith of the Church and her teaching from that of other sects. The article continues saying that all this was a question of one of those "doctrines that we have not received either from Jesus Christ, nor from the Apostles. Such doctrines do not have of themselves either the authority of the Scriptures, or that of tradition. Consequently, they are doctrines that we regret to hear mentioned, even when they are by the most capable writers, the greatest publisher, the finest mind and even if it is allowed to hold with St. Paul – if such teachings were mentioned by an Angel descended from heaven. These are teachings that we have struggled to stop, sometimes by our silence about them, and other times, by our public and repeated protests. They are doctrines that we reject with all the loyalty of a French heart, without believing thereby that we lose anything of the integrity of a catholic soul."³⁸⁶

LaMennais answered the Archbishop with a letter that was published in the ***Quotidienne*** on that March 4th. In it, he defended his own teachings. ***L'Ami***, in its response, among other things stated:

... This writer declares as a doctrine of the Church, a teaching that was able to be condemned with impunity, by the Sorbonne in 1626. It was declared new, false, erroneous, and contrary to God's word. It is a doctrine that our courts of justice have punished with severe arrests in 1595 and 1660, and many other times, even before 1682. Could this now be a doctrine of the Church, could it be one that the Church had tolerated, after having condemned it...?³⁸⁷

After Fr. Bertoni had understood how the review ***L'Ami*** had been infected with the error of Gallicanism, he wrote as follows to Mother Naudet:

... I find that the *L'Ami* has some unusual passages, written by His Excellency, the Archbishop. They ought to make him ashamed before God for having written them. These are no longer metaphysical, or political controversies that are being discussed. What we are dealing with here is the truth, that which we have to believe, and not on the authority of the Archbishop, nor of his *Ami*.

We believe in the authority of the Head of the Church, on whom this House of God is founded – the column and the firmament of truth. Rome is silent; and it is silent because it had already spoken, it had reproved, it had annulled, it had quashed all those doctrines. For they are no more than the opinions of men, even if one of

³⁸⁵ On the work, *Progres della revolution e de la guerre entre l'Eglise*.

³⁸⁶ *Ami de la religion*, vol. 29, p. 58.

³⁸⁷ *ib.*, p. 112.

them is Bossuet.

Rome is silent because if it speaks, after having already spoken through ten or twelve Pontiffs, there only remains excommunication. It delays, as does God, waiting for one to recognize his error, and for one to do penance.

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. But, rather be afraid of him who is able to destroy both soul and body...' Mt 10:28). Let us listen to Christ and His Vicar. And should we remain alone with Noah, who 'was alone against everyone' (Gn 7:23), the few of us, and only we who are inside the ark will be saved.

Here some words of St. Paul stand well and in their proper place. These are words quoted by the Archbishop, where they are out of place. He, too, to his disgrace, is also out of place, as perhaps are many others. These are the words : '... Even if an angel comes to preach to you a different doctrine from the one Peter teaches in his successors:' do not believe it. The penalty is eternal death, and separation from God.

Hence, since *L'Ami* has become an enemy, it plays the role of the serpent. This is because the Devil speaks in it from the very beginning. It is necessary to be very careful, and not allow yourself to be seduced, so that perhaps 'we might not be deceived in the simplicity of our heart.' We must close our ears with thorns, so that you will not hear the untruthful and evil tongue.

I counsel you, Reverend Mother, do not let anyone read these things, whether of the laity, or even an ecclesiastic. No one should be allowed unless he is supposed to, and is well instructed, and what is more, unless he is quite firm in his faith – i.e., the faith of the Gospels, and not of these times.

I say this so that you would not by accident cooperate in the seduction and ruin of some soul. I say, do not give these reviews out to be read, that speak differently from what the Pontiffs and the Teachers of the entire universal Church have said. Reverend Mother, read and re-read the book of the learned Count DeMaistre that was lent to me³⁸⁸. He, as a layman, makes us blush, and even worse, brings to judgment before Christ, many who, by their office, ought to be teaching the Lord's truth, and not the prejudices of men. And should the truth prove costly, it has cost Christ, our Lord, even more. The servant ought not to enjoy a better condition than his Master. "...The servant is not greater than his lord..." (Jn 13:18)³⁸⁹.

The love of truth, the humble and firm adherence to the See of Peter, brought Fr. Bertoni to the renunciation of noble friendships, as for example, with Fr. Rosmini. It led him to change his admiration, to a pious sense of compassion and fear, – as was

³⁸⁸ He is referring to the book, *Le Pape* :

... When Fr. Bertoni finished using it, he sent it to Mother Naudet, saying to her: '...I send you the two volumes about the Pope. It is a great work. I have reread and meditated on some of the chapters. But, months would be needed for it. DeMaistre, LaMennais and the Viscount Bonald are three great men sent by the Providence of God into this world to re-vivify it ...' [Letter 132, April 8, 1928. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 79,p. 122].

³⁸⁹ Ib. 106. No date. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 4-6, p. 89.

so for the unfortunate LaMennais. He was so convinced not to depart from the only Ark of Salvation that even if he were to remain alone with Peter, he would not in the least, have displaced his faith. His faith was founded, not in the argumentations of the great geniuses of humanity, but on the omnipotent and truthful word of God. He stated:

... The Roman faith is the faith of the Catholic Church. '... Where Peter is, there is the Church...' Where the head is, there is the entire body. A body without a head, is not a body, it is a trunk. The trunk does not have the spirit, but only the body does when it is united to the head. Whoever stands, supported by error, vacillates, totters and falls. He who stands on divine truth, is immovable and tranquil. Do not pay attention to anyone, neither doctor nor wise man, nor anyone else. The earthly powers were not those who established the Chair of Peter. It was not the Councils either, but the Word that created heaven and earth...³⁹⁰

c. Purification of the Faith in the Humble Subjection to the Divine excellence

Up until this point, only the less serious difficulties against the faith have been seen. Fr. Bertoni continued:

... We have not yet come to the greater difficulty. This is the one that a person might meet in his/her believing, and this is from the part of God Himself. However, it could happen that this will appear to many as a paradox. Further more, from this, glory is achieved, and crowned, as it were. And it happens from our faith in God. Hence, it is important, and there is still something else that I should explain about it...

It is necessary to draw on the teaching of the Angelic Doctor. It is something that is more certain, according to nature. However, as far as we are concerned, it is less evident because of the weakness of our intellects. When confronted with the most manifest truths of nature, our intellect is like the eye of a bat in the light of the sun. This is all so humiliating for human understanding, and so will not be very pleasing to the pride of the philosophers. However, they cannot refute it, because the holy Doctor took - it from a gentile philosopher. Here is the very reason why, in so many, there is doubt about the articles of the Holy Faith, even though these articles of themselves are most certain. This happens not because of the uncertainty in the matter, but because of the weakness of our intellects. Just like some by wanting to look too boldly into the sun, become blinded. This is not because of any defect in the sun, but because of the weakness of the pupils of the eye...

... Now God infinitely conquers our minds, with the brightness of His truth: '...Behold, God is great, exceeding our knowledge...' (Jb 36:26). He hides Himself with His own light: '... He dwells in light accessible...' (1 Tm 6:16).

What will be that grandiose eagle, with such powerful pupils, that he will withstand that impetuous flood of so much light? Who is there who will penetrate with a glance from within, to the depths of this inaccessible sea? '... Who knows the Spirit of the lord...? The Spirit of faith. '... For the Spirit searches all things,

³⁹⁰ 1 Kings. Med. 30. [MssB, n. 24].

even the deep things of God...’ (1 CD 2:10). It is from here that the faith takes its certitude, and wherein it surpasses all the sciences. The sciences, according to St. Thomas, have their certitude in the natural light of reason, which can err. But, faith has its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, that cannot be deceived...³⁹¹

With the infusion of the Gifts of Knowledge and Wisdom, Fr. Bertoni had to experience the ineffability of divine excellence, and the insufficiency of creatures to penetrate the divine splendor. However, in his profound humility, he was able to consolidate his faith, even when the Supreme truth appeared to him as enveloped in great darkness. It was his first biographer who noted the admirable coupling in him of humility and faith:

... This faith, and I am speaking of actual faith, proceeds together with his humility. He was even accustomed to say that the former, of necessity, could not stand without humility. Without excavating a hole, one could not even imagine putting in a foundation...³⁹²

So, Fr. Bertoni lived in a relationship with God much like a beggar, who was content with whatever was gratuitously given to him, without asking for anything more. He also found a means to be comforted, thinking that God was glorified in His gifts, as in the humble faith of His servants³⁹³. The alternating vicissitudes of nights and days in the spiritual life are beautifully reflected upon by Fr. Bertoni. He said that they were like the effects of “a loving Providence that plays with the soul It loves the more.” They have, as their ultimate purpose, that of revivifying our thirst for God. He wrote:

... We should never forget the. divine words – rather, we would do well, as the Holy Apostle Peter advises, to attend to them as to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 P 1 :19). This words says to us that His delights are to remain with us, due to the singular love that He has for us. ‘... My delight is to be with the children of men!’ (P 8:31). With His loving Providence, He plays with the souls that He loves the more. ‘... Playing in the world...’ And it is not surprising to me that He, being hidden, and, at the same time, He is unveiled, almost with a ray of His knowledge. The reason is that this Savior of souls ‘*standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices ...*’ (Ct 2:9).

But, you, too, Reverend Mother, believe that we might desire to see His face, unveiled also in this world. This would be to have clear knowledge concerning Him, and about His goodness, and His Providence about us. If we desire this, He surely ardently desires to see our face. Hence, He says in the same Canticle, chapter 2: ‘... Show me thy face...’ And if we yearn to hear His voice, He desires even more to hear ours: ‘... let thy voice sound in my ears; for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely...’” (Ct 2:14) (82).

Therefore, he would give this practical counsel to anyone who might find himself in this Night of the Spirit:

³⁹¹ Incomplete Sermon on Faith. **MssB**, n. 10.

³⁹² **SA**, Doc. 26, p. 463.

³⁹³ To Fr. Bragato. August 27, 1840. **SA**, Doc. 35, p. 748.

.... Let us live as poor beggars in the Lord's daily alms. Stay at His door, and your needs will be taken care of : and I will say also, remain at your exit. When He passes, you would not even have to knock, as He does this for you: '... Behold I stand at the door, and knock. If any man opens the door to me, ...'etc. When you have gone inside, He will have you taste and see how sweet your Lord is...³⁹⁴

Surely, Fr. Bertoni had experienced the sweetness of the divine banquet in those particular illustrations³⁹⁵. These were the ones that had him penetrate the sense of the mysteries, beyond any formula and every expression³⁹⁶. His faith was presented quite purified, strong and contemplative. His biographer says that "his lively faith could be seen in his face, and in the sparkling of his eyes..."³⁹⁷ And regarding the Eucharist:

... It seemed that he saw and felt in the Most Blessed Sacrament, the real presence of Jesus Christ. In fact in no other way can there be explained the entire nights of adoration he spent before the Blessed Sacrament. He did this frequently, even after tiring days of work. They could not be explained unless they were due to that lively faith that totally permeated him, and engulfed him in the Lord...³⁹⁸

5. HOPE

Hope is an infused virtue through which we await eternal life confidently, through divine help. The proper motive of this awaiting is the infinite mercy, and the assisting omnipotence. When the virtue is not perfect, then there is mixed in with this motive, some confidence in the human side, the assistance of protectors and friends. There would also be some reliance on one's own virtues, and on one's own works. The Lord has willed to take away one by one all those secondary motives on which Fr. Bertoni could have based his hopes, The Lord did this so that his trust would remain in Him alone. His biographer states:

... This, his hope in God, was placed under the most lengthy and harsh trials. Through these, the Lord ordinarily leads and purifies His elect. And, in truth, in the many and quite diverse happenings and adversities of his long life, it can be said that there were continual and frequent harsh times. These did not lessen his courage, nor his confidence in God, but rather strengthened them, and made them more lively...³⁹⁹

... With a mere' glance to heaven, he would be totally at ease again, and his spirit would be calmed. So great and so deep was his hope in the Lord, and in the reward He promised! All who knew him testify to this, and especially those who lived with him...⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁴ Letter 3, November 26, 1812. *Bertoniano* 1929, n. 3, pp. 98, f.

³⁹⁵ to Fr. Bragato. January 29, 18040. SA, Doc. 35, p. 746.

³⁹⁶ Spiritual Diary. SA, Doc. 35.

³⁹⁷ SA, Doc. 26, p. 461.

³⁹⁸ ib., p. 462.

³⁹⁹ ib., p. 471.

⁴⁰⁰ ib.

Hence, there remained excluded for Fr. Bertoni the confidence that he might have been able to derive from his virtues, and from what he accomplished. One day, finding himself greatly oppressed by his pain, the infirmarian tried to console him. He responded:

... You should fear nothing in view of all the good that you have done in your life... Fr. Gaspar at first, was silent for a few moments. He then spoke out in a voice that was rather strong for a man so sick: '... O Brother, please be silent, please. You do not know what a poor and wretched sinner I have been. If you wish me well, say no more, but pray much for me. Ask the Lord for me that He will pardon me, and use mercy in my behalf...' ⁴⁰¹

The appeal to the Lord's infinite mercy was always for Fr. Bertoni the most decisive argument:

... Pay attention to what you do mistrusting. Because you do a greater wrong to Him by not trusting Him than you do to Him when you sin! ⁴⁰².

... Look, my brothers, to where all the devil's arts open up. They would do anything to take away this blessed hope from your soul, since this can save you, no matter how far gone you are...' By hope, we have been saved...' (Rm 8:24). This is a sentence of the Apostle...

... o brothers! we think better about God after we have seen that He has not even spared His only begotten Son out of love for us... ⁴⁰³

His biographer adds:

... He often had on his lips that most consoling saying of St. John Chrysostom. That is, with hope we honor God in a way that is most eminent. By it, His divine goodness is pledged absolutely and has to favor us. This is . because the more we confide in God, that is to say, in His Power, in His promises, and in His goodness – so much the more closely do we come to treating Him as He is... ⁴⁰⁴

He was particularly sensitive even to the smallest failings in confidence:

... It is only my own fault if sometimes I find myself discouraged. I do have such a good Master, and may He be blessed forever. His goodness is a continual confusion to my wickedness... ⁴⁰⁵

The trials to which he was subjected, sometimes reached the extremes:

... If you only knew, my sons, the sufferings that I have, if you only knew. The anguish is such that it would lead to desperation, if the Lord, with His grace, did not help me... ⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ ib., p. 469.

⁴⁰² PVC, p. 39.

⁴⁰³ ib, p. 40.

⁴⁰⁴ SA, Doc. 26, p. 476.

⁴⁰⁵ Letter 25. March 6, 1813. *Bertoniano*, Suppl. N. 2, p. 437.

⁴⁰⁶ SA, Doc. 20, p. 143.

The anguish of every kind and his very lengthy illnesses would surely have shaken a spirit less matured for heroism than was that of Fr. Bertoni. He found his strength more and more in the virtue of hope. He used to say:

...To the Lord, everything is nothing – if we do not pray and have great confidence...⁴⁰⁷

...All that to men is not only difficult, but very often impossible, our good and omnipotent Master can do fully and very easily: rather, it is done as soon as He wills it...⁴⁰⁸

... He who hopes in God is never confused, nor does he ever know embarrassment. And, on the other hand, our Lord God sometimes makes things succeed by other ways than the one we have prepared. This is so that it will be known that '... unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...' (Ps 126:1).⁴⁰⁹

... Whoever trusts in Him, is not confused. Whoever serves God and knows Him, the Lord assists and has Him honored, also among men. And this is still nothing next to the glory that He reserves for heaven...⁴¹⁰

.... Pray for us because we are always in a sea of business, litigations and disputes. Nonetheless, so it goes and even though we are always in the dark, we hope that we are being led by the good Lord, Who directs all of it into the clear light, whenever it comes. '... This is my hope, laid up in my bosom (Jb 19:27), if my sins do not come between God and me. However, you would do well to pray that God, through His infinite mercy, will watch over me always...⁴¹¹

The Servant of God with these last words alludes to the storms that were buffeting his small Congregation. At one time, in fact, they were so furious that his work seemed to be ended. It was then, according to his biographer, that Fr. Bertoni "believed, hoping against hope." He wrote:

... He kept himself firm by the anchor of Christian hope, and trusted always. He would not permit himself to be overcome by difficulties and beaten back by dangers. He would not allow himself to be discouraged by those losses that seemed to take from him the principal and necessary support for his planned work...

Not for any of this did he cease, or relent at all from his activity, that he performed with admirable enthusiasm. Therefore, he continued his buildings, and persevered tirelessly in gathering books everywhere. He set up and organized his library and he dictated the rules and the discipline.

⁴⁰⁷ Letter 19, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, Suppl., n. 2. P. 437.

⁴⁰⁸ ib. 140. August 28, 1828. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 709, p. 128.

⁴⁰⁹ ib., 148. March 21, 1829. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 10-12, p. 199.

⁴¹⁰ Ib., 467. July 4, 1830. *Bertoniano* 1934, nn. 1-3, p. 233.

⁴¹¹ To Fr. Bragato. SA, Doc. 35, p. 753.

He took charge of everything and directed it in such a way that it seemed that his institute at that moment were really flourishing. He acted as though it was having its greatest increase, whereas actually it seemed to be disappearing. This is not to be wondered at, it was said, that even if he had known for sure that on the morrow the world would come to an end, he would have continued on today and would not give up a single one of his endeavors. So great was his most sure hope and filial confidence that he had of succeeding in a work that God Himself has inspired...⁴¹²

He inspired his sons, afflicted as they were by so many hardships, by saying:

...Courage, my dear sons, let us recall those very consoling words that Jesus Christ said to His Apostles: '... But you are they who have continued with me in my trials. And I appoint you to a kingdom ...' (Lk 22:28).⁴¹³

... Let us trust, my sons, let us have confidence in God. Let us leave it all up to Him, Who can do all things. If He is with us, '... who is against us ...?' (Rm 14:31). If He is our Protector '... when do we fear...?' (Ps 26:1). Let there be one thing only that is in our hearts, and let us ask Him for it confidently...: '... that we might dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of our life...' (Ps 26:4).⁴¹⁴

An evident sign that Fr. Bertoni wanted only to base his hope in God is his constant exclusion of all other support. For example:

... he would refuse many times the help and the human means that were freely offered to him, whether it was money, protection, or the recommendations of those in power, or distinguished by their authority...⁴¹⁵.

His biographer was convinced that Fr. Bertoni's trust

... had reached the level of heroism. He felt this because of the fact that the servant of God did not even want to profit in the slightest from the advantageous position of his spiritual son. Fr. Bragato had been admitted to the Court of Vienna, as the Confessor of the Empress. He even would not allow others to write to Fr. Bragato in his name, or receive recommendations on that account...⁴¹⁶

When the human supports were all gone, then Fr. Bertoni rejoiced in that security that results when the endeavors were all in God's hands. He said:

... The works of God have their proof when God alone shows His hand in directing them and conducting them to their end. By means of difficulties, He sees to it that the intervention of man is taken away. This gives way humbly to His Providence, from which it is clearly seen that the success and the maintenance of these works depends solely on Him. Hence, when it is night for us, it is the day for Him, Who knows what is to be done. And we ought to raise our hands to heaven whenever

⁴¹² SA, Doc. 26, p. 472.

⁴¹³ ib., p. 472.

⁴¹⁴ ib. p. 473.

⁴¹⁵ ib.

⁴¹⁶ ib.

we do not know where else to put them. And this is so since it is better to ask help from God: '... in the nights, lift up your hands to the holy places...' (Ps 133:2).

This is Latin that God understands from anyone who is in His school: '...And night shall be light as the day...' (Ps 138:12). And here is more Latin that our good Father has explained to us from the beginning. He takes light from darkness and what He would want in His goodness to make clear, He would do so, by turning the dark, in which He left our works, into the admirable splendor of His glory. '... Hope in the Lord', therefore, 'and do good...' (Ps 36:3).⁴¹⁷

When God undermines, so to speak, the human means, He has His purposes. '... He does this not to hold back His works, but He does it to better them.'⁴¹⁸ Fr. Bertoni was glad to find himself in those situations in which the most complete form of holy abandonment appeared.⁴¹⁹ His confident hope in God was so perfect that it seemed that "he was already living in heaven, and was enjoying an anticipated beatitude in God"⁴²⁰. All those noticed this in him whenever they came to him to receive comfort and relief from him in their own suffering. In Fr. Bertoni, there was noted specifically that gift of Communicating immediately to others, especially his own trust in God.⁴²¹

The following case was rather well known. A religious priest, after having apostasized, committed the heinous crime of killing one of his parents. He was condemned to death and was adamant in refusing all the comforts of religion. He would spew out the most unheard of blasphemies against anyone who came near him with the pious intention of having him repent. The Prefect of the Department of Verona, feeling badly about such a terrible scandal within the confines of his territory, asked the Vicar of the Diocese for help. He wanted the Vicar to select an opportune person who might remedy this situation. Monsignor Dionisi went straight to the **Stimmate** and directed Fr. Bertoni to go to the prison. However, since the hour was rather late, he told Fr. Bertoni to visit the condemned man on the following day. The Servant of God spent the entire night in prayer. Early the next day, he celebrated Mass and then he set out to fulfill his difficult mission. He reached the prison at the very moment the condemned man was rudely rejecting some priests who had not given up on his conversion. As soon as the unfortunate man noticed Fr. Bertoni coming through the cell block door, grace touched him. Being quite moved, he cried out: "This is the one, this is that blessed man, whom. God sends me for my salvation! Yes, it is you, please come, I beg you, You must be my comfort, my salvation. It is you who must reconcile me with God!"⁴²²

The Servant of God showed himself to be masterfully experienced in confidence and abandonment. This was especially clear in his spiritual direction of Leopoldina Naudet, Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family. In ten years, he led

⁴¹⁷ Letter 153, May 22, 1829. *Bertoniano* 1935, nn. 10-12, p. 201.

⁴¹⁸ *Ib.*, 140, August 28, 1828. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 128.

⁴¹⁹ cf. Part IV of this Thesis.

⁴²⁰ *SA*, Doc. 26, p. 473.

⁴²¹ *ib.*, p. 473.

⁴²² *ib.*, p. 486.

her to the highest peaks of holiness. At every difficulty, or withdrawal of human support Fr. Bertoni was quick to have her break forth into her canticle of the most trusting abandonment in God. He arrived at the point of even removing himself from her direction. He did this so that her soul might the more perfectly and more exclusively be abandoned to God. It would take too long to describe the Dark Night in which Mother Naudet; found herself when her spiritual director was taken away from her. She had always been able to go to him, saying: '... I did this, or that – was it good, or bad...?' She had been able to trust his judgment same time, she was receiving assistance in conscience, and, at the for her soul".⁴²³

The sole comfort that she could still have from Fr. Bertoni was to hear him repeat that this was the will of God. This would not allow him to take up again that direction, nor would it allow any of his sons to do so either. Fr. Bertoni wrote:

... The Lord is the Master, and we are the servants. It is not fitting for us to depart from His Will. Neither I, nor any of my priests can help you, except by the prayers that we always offer for you, and for the prosperity of your Institute. Thus, Reverend Mother, you will be helped by Him, Who is greater than all. I even believe that His Providence so determines this matter for the greater good of your Institute...⁴²⁴

... Hence, Reverend Mother, do not lament that you are alone When you are accompanied by Jesus, Mary and Joseph. '... He Who has begun the work, will bring it to completion ...' (Ph 1:6). You should rather recommend me, a sinner, to such good Tutors, and our most insignificant endeavor: '... pray for one another that you be saved ...' (Jas 5:16).⁴²⁵

We will bring this to a close with a prayer that Fr. Bertoni had written to inspire Mother Naudet with confidence. It concerned the particular case in which she needed light to compile that part of her Constitutions that had to deal with studies:

... Blessed are they who will have confided much in this most powerful and most loving Lord. No more is desired: '... He will give power...' (Ps 67: 36), as He has given the desire. What a beautiful reality this is, when the desire is not a step away from the deed: '... All that he willed (and in this, His will has also made us will), He did...' (Ps 113:3): (it is not that He has to do it, but He has already done it, because nothing resists His will. He has done it even before He has it carried out by us poor unfortunates). Therefore there is nothing lacking when confidence is not diminished. Talent, knowledge, strength, we will find all of this in Him with superabundance. '... God is the Lord of knowledge' (1 K 2:3). '... Blessed is the man who hopes in Him ...' (Ps 33:9)⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Letter of Mother Naudet to Fr. Bertoni, February 20, 1824. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family:

... I have present often the moment in which I will have to render an account to God, and to appear before His judgment, that will be terrible for all, but even more so for me. And in the order of Providence, at least ordinary, each one is directed in the ways of God. I tremble, thinking that at the last moment, I will be without any person in whom I have confidence ...

⁴²⁴ Letter 147. Septuagint 1829. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 10-12, p. 198.

⁴²⁵ ib., 135, May 18th, no year. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 124.

⁴²⁶ Ib., 128. No date. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 4, p. 517.

6. CHARITY

The purification of charity consists in despoiling the love of God and neighbor from every imperfection coming from self-love, from consolation, and from every form of utilitarianism. Perfect charity makes us love God for Himself, as a friend. It does this in the strength of His infinite goodness, that is lovable above all things. It makes us love our neighbor for the Lord, so that He will glorify God with us now and forever. The more that love advances and is strengthened, so much the more does it bring us to love the cross, and to be immolated in a life of separation for the conversion of sinners. Fr. Bertoni enunciated these truths clearly:

... Charity consists more in actions than in affections. '... *Whoever loves me, will keep my word ...*' (Jn 14:23). This is the charity that is 'diffused in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us...' (Rm 5:5) . Hence, He most excellently is called a 'Gift of God...'

Therefore, having been justified by faith... we exult in the hope of the glory of the sons of God...' (Rm 5:2).

But if charity is known by deeds: '... *who keeps them (my commandments) he it is who loves Me. But he who loves Me, will be loved by My Father, and we will come to him, and make our dwelling with him ...*' (Jn 14:21) – it is all the more significant by suffering. Because if 'the proof of love is deeds', sufferings manifest charity rooted and firm in one's heart: '... in a good and excellent heart... and they bring forth fruit in patience...'

And this is why St. Paul said: '... I will glory in my tribulations...' (Rm 5:3).

The Apostle not only grants, but praises this glorying 'in the hope of the glory of the sons of God.' He then adds almost a new degree of perfection to this glory that is good: '... not only this, and we glory in tribulations...' ⁴²⁷.

For Fr. Bertoni, suffering becomes a necessity and an advantage. He said:

...The following of Christ, our Lord, is so worthwhile that infinite sufferings and very lengthy travails are not on the same level. They are the payment for so great a price... ⁴²⁸

Fr. Bragato, who was an intimate friend of the Servant of God, arrived at the point of wishing crosses for him. He knew that such a wish would be understood. Fr. Bertoni responded to him:

... What benefit could you really wish for your friends, if not the cross? Surely, you could not have pleased me more. It is not that I have the strength of virtue to carry it, but the Lord grants me the grace to appreciate it. I await patience, through your prayers, and divine mercy, together with suffering... ⁴²⁹.

⁴²⁷ Panegyric honoring St. Veronica Giuliani. [MssB, n. 28].

⁴²⁸ Letter 22, February 28, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n.3, p. 472.

⁴²⁹ Letter to Fr. Bragato, January 29, 1840. SA, Doc. 35, p. 745.

The Lord directed the blows of His chisel toward the purification of Fr. Bertoni's heart, in his family affections, his ministries and in his other endeavors. First of all, the Lord asked a great deal of sacrifice from Fr. Bertoni in the area of his family affections. His father, through certain character difficulties, made it impossible for him to live in harmony with his wife. Fr. Bertoni was practically on the threshold of his ordination when he, too, had to sign the legal act of his parents' separation. He lived in the city with his pious and wise mother. But, he lived there with a thorn in his heart, at the thought of his own father, living out in the country. This situation for Fr. Bertoni filled those who loved him with apprehension. At the death of his mother (1810), the father decided to come back into the city to live in the family home. He brought with him his own personal maid – she would eventually be preferred in the father's will, even over the benefits due to his son. Fr. Bertoni was thus forced to leave his family home, to maintain the freedom of his apostolate, and to safeguard his own good name.

In this same year, preaching to the priests and seminarians, Fr. Bertoni used certain expressions that could be interpreted as a justification of what he had done:

... Some priests, in accepting certain offices, benefices, etc., allow them- selves to be regulated by the human view of their parents. But, when the parents' pleasure is an impediment to duty: '... he who does not hate his father and mother, cannot be my disciple ...' (Lk 14:26)

Jesus, 'when he was twelve years old, remained in the temple. He wanted to show how we are to be detached from flesh and blood, and from the love of parents. We should even leave them, and not hesitate to leave them sad, when it might be necessary to attend with greater diligence to the interests of the Heavenly Father ...

And He showed us that we must not remain with them any more than the will of God requires... I may come to suspect my parents, or any other person of the world as impeding me from what God wants. They may be doing this either through ignorance and zeal, or even through malice. It would then be better to leave them without saying anything even if they should thereby be afflicted, or if they will then find fault with me. We have to trample all this under foot, with a resolute and virile intention, to do God's will ...⁴³⁰

The Lord also asked of Fr. Bertoni the sacrifice of some of his undertakings. In 1802, he had founded a Marian Recreational Oratory. He had set it up in such a way that he had in the palm of his hand all the youth of the parish. He was able to make of them in their entirety something like a military squadron. Following his example, and due to his assistance, almost the entire diocese could enjoy the benefit of a perfect Catholic Youth Organization. However, it was not long that serious opposition appeared. This was directed against the one who was the directing force of so vast and such a sweeping movement for good. Some enemies became furious and they did not spare the Servant of God from terrible scenes in the public streets⁴³¹. But, the fatal

⁴³⁰ Retreat to Preists. 'Jesus Christ's Private Life'. [MssB, n. 16].

⁴³¹ SA, Doc. 26, p. 531.

blow to the movement came to Fr. Bertoni's oratory program by the Decree of May 26, 1807. By it, Napoleon abolished confraternities, congregations, companies, and all like movements.

Fr. Bertoni was thus forced to give up his customary afternoons with the boys at the Oratory in his own house. He had to put an end to all the manifestations outside of the Church, and he had to do away with all external, juridical organizations. He was made to disband all the consultative and deliberative meetings, as the election of officers and the like. He did continue, though in a substantial manner in doing good for the youth. He was put under a special surveillance of the police, and was in danger of being arrested. He was a person suspect of every possible sub- version of the law, that could be discovered. All of this lasted until the fall of the French Government, that occurred in Vienna in 1814.

Another activity of the Servant of God in which he achieved great success, was the preaching of parish missions. However, one such preaching endeavor of his, which was his greatest, was interrupted by the Civil authorities. This was the Mission begun at St. Firmus Major, on May 4, 1816. Its director was the Canon, Monsignor Louis Pacetti, Apostolic Missionary. Fr. Bertoni's assignment was to preach the meditation to the people. In the notes of the historian, Sommacompagna, and in the reminiscences of Fr. Gramego, this Mission is presented as a most extraordinary event, and one that was without equal. It did not go on without incident. There were criticisms, discussions and mockery. At length, it was the object of hostility. The police were called, and pressure was exerted on the ecclesiastical authorities. There came forth prohibitions, suspensions and countermands. Finally, from Venice, the government intervened with a letter to His Excellency, the Bishop:

... From now on, no more missions can be held without the permission of the government...

This Mission that was supposed to last for a month, had to be cut short after a little more than twenty days. Fr. Bertoni was saddened by this trial. However, the Mission had brought about many confessions that he heard – even for months afterward, day and night. For some time, he also tried to supply the suspended preaching with a well prepared preaching of the Way of the Cross that was preached each day.⁴³²

In 1816, Fr. Bertoni withdrew to the *Stimmate*, to conduct there tuition-free schools for the sons of the working class. He also was to establish there a Congregation of Priests, in accord with the Ignatian spirit. Notwithstanding many persecutions, the school prospered. Between the elementary, grammar and humanities grades, eight classes were being taught. However, the Lord would also ask of Fr. Bertoni the sacrifice of this endeavor. Sicknesses, the deaths of a number of his priests and some departures, forced the Servant of God, first to lessen the classes. Then, in 1843, he had to close the school entirely:

⁴³² SA, Doc. 26, p. 377. *Note per servire* ... V, pp 39, ff.

... This decision was heard with sorrow by the entire city. This was because the reputation that the School of the *Stimate* enjoyed was a great one. The good that our Fathers did in those classrooms had accomplished over the years, and were still doing was likewise great...⁴³³

If Fr. Bertoni was also saddened by this, he never gave up abandoning himself to divine Providence. Let it suffice to re- call that earlier, in 1837, his school was enjoying great prosperity. At this time, he spontaneously offered the entire operation to the Jesuits, to facilitate their return to the city of Verona.⁴³⁴

As for his Congregation, the Lord also wished to purify Fr. Bertoni's heart. The last period of his illness went from 1842 until his death in 1853. During this time, in addition to his physical pain, he also had to suffer an increase of contradictions and struggles:

... It is as though it was not enough that the other trials, even more painful, had begun for the saintly Founder and his companions. After having worked so hard, and suffered so much for the beloved Congregation, they were now watching it, little by little, growing smaller and almost vanishing altogether...⁴³⁵

After having provided it with some means of support, and writing its constitution, the Servant of God died. Juridically speaking, he had left behind only a simple union of secular priests, even though it was looked upon as a religious community.⁴³⁶

The union of priests instituted by Fr. Bertoni for the very purpose of placing itself at the disposition of Bishops under certain conditions. This implied that even in the most unforeseen way, the most difficult impositions would be asked of it. We are not speaking about the simple requests for teachers for the seminary that Fr. Bertoni readily granted:

... In 1817, the Diocesan Vicar, Monsignor Dionisi, asked Fr. Bertoni if he would send one of his priests to assist those infected with typhoid in the public prisons. Fr. Bertoni accepted this invitation, and assigned Fr. Matthew Farinati to this, from among all the priests who volunteered for this ministry. Fr. Farinati went very willingly to fulfill this ministry of charity. However, from this apostolate, he contracted an illness which, in a short time, brought him to his grave. The saintly Founder envied him for the fortune that he had of sacrificing his life in the exercise of his ministry, and of dying a martyr...⁴³⁷

In 1835, an order came to Bishop Grasser, young Bishop of Verona, to choose a Confessor for Her Majesty, the Empress Maria Anna⁴³⁸. The Bishop thought of Fr. Louis Bragato of the *Stimate*. He asked Fr. Bertoni for him, who was unable to

⁴³³ *BC* I, p. 67.

⁴³⁴ *ib.*, p. 54.

⁴³⁵ *ib.*, p. 65.

⁴³⁶ In 1824, on the occasion of Bishop Mutti's Jubilee, he considered the union of the *Stimate* a true religious community. He therefore granted them the faculties of religious [cf. *BC*, I, pp. 71, # 1].

⁴³⁷ *BC* I, p. 27.

⁴³⁸ Cited in *BC* I, p. 52.

refuse his request⁴³⁹.

...[obtaining these few things for the trip] was simply our debt; and we have given willingly to our most beloved Sovereign your person, which to us was the most dear thing, the most useful that we have, so what does this little expense amount to that we wish to make of these few things for your journey..."

Mother Naudet had recourse to the Bishop, and obtained his permission for Fr. Bertoni to remain as her spiritual guide⁴⁴⁰. However, in 1829, when Fr. Bertoni decided that it seemed to be God's will for him to terminate this direction, he broke it off immediately, saying:

...God distributes His servants, how, when and where He wishes, because His family is so large. And when He says to one: '... It is enough...', that one should not say: '... still more...'.⁴⁴¹

And he would not change his mind to take up again this direction, no matter how much pressure was brought to bear on him.

We can conclude that with these purifications, Fr. Bertoni's charity was not encumbered by any bond. It remains now to be seen clearly whether he achieved such love, "which never says it is enough." These are the very words of the Servant of God⁴⁴². It remains to be seen whether he did indeed achieve transforming union, mutual adherence to God, assiduous thought, and even ecstasy.⁴⁴³

⁴³⁹ Letter to Fr. Bragato November 18, 1834. *SA*, Doc. 35, p. 740.

⁴⁴⁰ Letter 2, August 28, 1812. *Bertoniano* 1929, n. 2, p. 42.

⁴⁴¹ Letter 140, August 28, 1828. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 7-9, p. 128.

⁴⁴² Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi. [*MssB*, n. 26].

⁴⁴³ *ib.*

CHAPTER 4

THE GENERAL CALL TO THE HIGHEST DEGREES OF MYSTICAL UNION

1. The Night of the Spirit disposes One for Transforming Union.

There is one practical advantage for the Night of the Spirit, as we have seen. It is that of placing the individual before his/ her abilities, for the attainment of a determined end. A further benefit is that of bringing about in the soul the purification that leads to interior tranquility, and to deep recollection. But, what is more important, the Night of the Spirit disposes proximately for transforming union. Fr. Bertoni attributes the characteristics of transforming union to anyone who arrives at the “first time” described by St. Ignatius, to make a healthy and good choice.⁴⁴⁴

And he immediately specifies how this “time” is not only supernatural, but even more, down-right extraordinary. The reason is because a further addition is made to those who have passed the other two “times”, or degrees of love. It is “the divine liberality with the gratuitous showering of His supernatural lights and infused gifts.” These elevate one “to the desire of participating in the Truth, the Goodness, and the Joy of the divine presence.”⁴⁴⁵ Here, “they are finally joined to that purity and peace of spirit. For this, there is promised the very intimate and familiar communion with the source of all light, and of all good and of all joy”.⁴⁴⁶ This union no longer admits of any “obstacle”, nor any intermediary”:

... Those whom God leads thus far, see things very clearly, just as they are. These souls are illumined more closely by Divine Wisdom, judging things by their highest Cause...⁴⁴⁷ .

2. The Normal Development of Grace leads to the Highest Union with God

Fr. Bertoni made more clear in what this extraordinary period of this “time of election” consists. He comes to manifest what we will be able to call his thought about the general and remote vocation to Mystical Union⁴⁴⁸. We will offer first this important text from his writings:

... Now, it is to be noted how it is that this time is called extraordinary. This is relative to all those in whom the dispositions of inciting grace did not precede. Hence (it does not seem extraordinary) to those who have ascended almost through previous remote and proximate preparations of operating and

⁴⁴⁴ ... The ‘first time’ occurs when our Lord, so moves the will that without doubting, and without being able to doubt, the devout soul follows whatever is shown to it. Thus, St. Paul and St. Matthew did in following Christ, our Lord... [Retreat Conference: ... Three ‘times’ to take a healthy and good choice, in each one of these]. Fr. Bertoni joins to this ‘first time’ those special favors that establish the soul in perfect union with God [1 Kings, Med. 11. MssB, n. 23].

⁴⁴⁵ 1 Kings, Med. 16 [MssB, n. 23].

⁴⁴⁶ ib.

⁴⁴⁷ ib.

⁴⁴⁸ This is an opinion maintained by Fr. Garrigou-Langrange, OP, *Perfection Chretienne et Contemplation*. t. II, c. V.

cooperating grace (“ascensions”). These preparations also could have been from the visits of the good spirit. This was directed toward God. The spirit (He has disposed), and their hearts purified still further (in the heat). This was accomplished by the withdrawal of the good Spirit, and with the permitted temptation of the evil spirit (in this valley of tears) .

Through the order of intention and the purgation of the affections, constituted in great tranquility, reason has been able to make free use of its capacities. It has followed the better good, and also cooperated with divine grace. It has been recollected with a generous disdain of the world, and reposed in the intimate circumspection of its own heart. This would be in accord with the measure of Christ’s gift (in that place He has chosen).

And here, there is added the divine Liberality with the gratuitous showering of His supernatural lights, and infused gifts. These are elevated almost through three degrees of love to the desire of participating in the Truth, Goodness and the Joy of the Divine Presence (they shall go from virtue to virtue). They finally achieve that purity and peace of spirit. To them is promised the very intimate and familiar communication with the Font of all Light, and of all Good, and of all Joy. (the God of the blessings, will be seen in Sion] (Ps 83:6,7,8).

To these, I have said, it does not seem extraordinary, but very familiar, or at least, frequent, the “first time” of manifestation (Since in this, there are not found obstacles, or intermediaries of itself, the divine power immediately so moves their will, that it takes from the soul all doubt, even to the ability of doubt...⁴⁴⁹

From this long citation, it seems clear enough that the Servant of God did not attribute the characteristics of being extra- ordinary to the immediate union with God, without intermediaries. This is at the summit of infused contemplation, as long as there has not been the absence of any preparation whatsoever for it. This is what occurred in St. Paul, and in St. Matthew.⁴⁵⁰ There is a progress in grace that normally leads to the highest union with God. And this is the customary order of Providence by which Fr. Bertoni was able to prove one of his meditations to the Seminarians. He gave these three reasons:

1.... it is not unfitting for us in any way to aspire humbly to better and essential gifts of grace and charity. These precede and accompany this time according to the customary order of Providence, in conformity to this saying: ‘... Yet strive after the greater gifts...’ (1 Co 12:31].

2. This ‘first time’, preceded and accompanied by these singular gifts of God, is rather in accord with the vocation of His elected ministers. As for Himself, He is ready, provided that no impediment has been placed by them, to give to them the first blessings and the greatest abundance of those gifts that he spreads and diffuses in His people, in accord with this saying: ‘... *And I will fill the soul of the priests with fatness: and my people shall be filled with my good things, saith the Lord ...*’ (Jr 31:14].

⁴⁴⁹ 1 Kings, Med. 16, MssB, n. 23].

⁴⁵⁰ These are the names in St. Ignatius’ text.

3. This 'time' with these gifts is most befitting to the vocation of those ministers who are especially called with the new spirit, by the Holy Spirit, the Innovator and Restorer of all things. They are called to renew and restore the face of the earth on the rectitude and the firmness of the First Rock. This is after the buffeting and reproof of every human spirit in their minis- try. Therefore, for them, there is a two-fold spirit, according to the following: '... Let there be in me a double spirit...' (4 K 2:9).⁴⁵¹

After Fr. Bertoni had developed his argument, he concluded:

... This is how God draws those souls very high. He wants to talk to them in this time to dispose them for a sublime communication. And although sane times He does this like a jump, as he did with St. Paul – but, more commonly, He does it gradually, by degrees.

Very few are they who understand what God would do with them if He had not been impeded by those in His plan.

We cannot think what God would do with us, and how much He would accomplish in us, and through us, since we are the pupils of His eye. He would do all this, if we did not place an obstacle to His grace, but gave ourselves over freely and totally to His hand...⁴⁵²

Let us allow God freely to enter and take possession of this soul of ours that He loves so much, and seeks to unite to Himself...'

This was Fr. Bertoni's exhortation after repeating another time this principle of St. Ignatius⁴⁵³:

... We know the time of His visit; we beseech all creatures and our senses not to awaken this soul when it reposes in the mystical bed of its Lord. No more is asked. In its time, it will produce a fruit that is so precious, so exalted, so noble, worthy of such holy and sublime nuptials...⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ 1 Kings. Med. 16 [MssB, n. 23].

⁴⁵² ib.

⁴⁵³ ... Very few are they who know what God would do with them [for they would not be able to accomplish this with their own strength], if He had not been impeded by them in His plan. In summary, the whole matter in the last analysis, is reduced to a lively faith, and to ceaseless prayer ... [Letter 21, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, p. 470].

⁴⁵⁴ ib. When Mother Naudeet was on Retreat [in 1813], Fr. Bertoni discerned that his spiritual daughter was precisely in the attitude of 'Mystical Spouse' with its chaste embrace:

...I do not wish to detain you, Reverend Mother, any longer with my words, in these precious moments of divine communication with you. Only, I exhort you ... rather, our Lord exhorts you through my words – not to awaken your soul from this quiet and peaceful repose, which first, you did not even want ... 'I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and hearts of the fields, that you not stir up, nor make the beloved awake, till she pleases ...' [Ct 2:7]. Because this would not be so much to deprive the soul of her better interests, as it would be to deprive our Lord from His dearest delights. '... My delight is to be with the sons of men...' [Pr 8:31]. Lastly, for as long as our Lord does not get up, she should not make any indication to Him about the time of departure. This would be bad manners, even with a creature that meant something in this world... [Letter 26, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 4, p. 514].

CHAPTER 5 MYSTICAL GIFTS

1. The True Graces of Prayer are accompanied by Solid Virtue

Fr. Bertoni noted:

... Certain spiritual persons begin the building upside down: from their fervor in external works of charity. Actually, in this, there is little real charity, and much that pertains to nature. Hence, there appears in them certain signs of supernatural prayer, that are only apparent. They are recognized for what they are by their inconstancy and their lack of *stick-to-it-iveness*. They are also known by the lack of solid effects that only accompany sublime prayer. So it is, that if these acts are placed in their prayer, then they truly are in a state of pure idleness. Hence, it befits them to change their prayer, and to start the entire matter all over again from the beginning, as they do lack a solid foundation. This foundation is the internal spirit that will produce in its time, seasoned and mature fruits of charity. It is assisted by a more severe discipline of obedience, and by a more practical prayer that brings fervor to the will⁴⁵⁵.

While Fr. Bertoni proceeded most cautiously in the ways of mysticism, he nevertheless could not evade the impetus of grace. And he kept vigils so that the exclusive concentration in prayer would not impede his apostolate⁴⁵⁶. Still, he himself was subject to elevations of his spirit, the unmistakable signs of which assure us that these were extraordinary states. Let us state from the outset that the sole font for this discussion has been the little notebook of his Personal Memoirs that have come down to us. It is a notebook that contains a condensed report of favors, sentiments and resolutions from July 1, 1808 until June 26, 1813.⁴⁵⁷

2. The Sentiment of the Presence of God

A first group of mystical phenomena embraces all that refers to the sentiment of the Presence of God. Here are a few texts of his:

⁴⁵⁵ Spiritual Diary, November 16, 1808. [SA Doc. 35, p. 663].

⁴⁵⁶ **... Those most attached to prayer, it befits to urge on to action...** [ib., July 12, 1808. ib., p. 657].

‘... It is an error to presume to move up to contemplation without erudition in knowledge, and solid active virtues.’ These words follow pseudo-Gregory: **‘If the unlearned presume to suspend themselves contemplating the more subtly higher things, they will more easily deviate in error than apprehend the light of truth. And unless one first does good deeds, and does them perfectly, he will never find that clarity of internal vision that he deserves ...** [Book III, in: *First Kings*, c. IV, n. 18].

Leopoldina Naudet had asked him how she ought to handle the abandonment of her senses, to which she was subjected. He responded to her:

...with utmost discretion, abandon the senses, where the heart alone should suffice for those few moments. There will come the day that the heart and senses will be inherited at that font of beatitude. But, meanwhile, to gain it, since it is a reward and payment, it is fitting also to work in serving this God, Who is so good. And assist Him in His great work for which He sent His Son into this world, as He wishes – knowing that He needs no one ... [Letter 125. *Bertoniano*, 1933, p. 118].

⁴⁵⁷ Almost all of the Spiritual Diary can be found: SA Doc. 35. We dispense ourselves from repeating this citation at every passage we will cite in this passage. [Translator’s Note: the document has been edited and published by Fr. Joseph Stofella, CSS as: CS IV, pp. 1-205].

... July 11, 1808: After Mass, during the thanksgiving, there was a very strong sentiment of faith in the Presence of our Lord, and much confidence...

... October 13, 1808: Reading about the internal presence of God (i.e., how, since God is within me, it is not necessary for me to go out looking for Him). St. Thomas put it this way. If one has food in the house, it is bad for him to go outside to look for it, because one would always remain fasting), I experienced deep feelings about this and great recollection. This lasted also for some time afterwards, even though I was much disposed for my usual delight. There was a great desire to please His Divine Majesty in everything.⁴⁵⁸

... October 23, 1808: During Mass, there was much recollection and reverence. The recollection lasted even afterwards, even while hearing confessions....

... October 25th: During Mass, there were brief, but vivid, inspirations. There was a profound sentiment of the divine presence, confidence, love, desire to be transformed into Him, that Jesus would live in me, and no longer I. After Mass, this grace of union did not last but it returned along the street, while I was attending to some family matters., just as when I was in Church...

... October 27th: At the first point of the noon examen, i.e., in the thanksgiving, prostrate on the ground in the sight of heaven, there was a great sentiment of the divine presence, and love and offering...

... December 4th: During Mass, there was a vivid sentiment of the presence of Jesus Christ. Although brief, this excited much confidence. The recollection, however, lasted even afterwards, and devotion went through the day...

... December 11th: There was a lively sentiment that was quite reverential and loving, of the presence of the Father, at the Te igitur of the Mass. There was lively confidence and love toward the Son... This sentiment lasted until after Holy Communion. Afterwards, there was compunction until evening...

... January 4, 1809: During Mass, at the Consecration, there was a rather vivid sentiment of the presence of Christ, as of a friend, talking with another friend: there was also a sentiment of the presence of the Father...

... February 1, 1809 : During Mass, at the Consecration, there was a sentiment of the presence of Christ that was very vivid and affectionate....

From the passages cited so far, it can be established with certainty that Fr. Bertoni, at least at certain times, enjoyed special graces. He was gratified with an intellectual knowledge of the experiential order, concerning the presence of God. He was, therefore, admitted to a certain mystical union. A long time before the dates noted in the texts above, Fr. Bertoni had enjoyed a continual remembrance of the presence of God. He confessed in a sermon dated in 1801:

⁴⁵⁸ There is a similar regret expressed on September 11th:

... At the end of Mass, there was a great recollection and modesty: it lasted only a short time, because in the external acts of charity, I have been diverted ... [SA Doc. 35, p. 659].

... if it is true that our every sufficiency comes from God, and that by ourselves, we are incapable of producing a single good thought – I do not know how to trace the origin of a holy thought that formed in my mind, and then remained there always with constancy....!⁴⁵⁹

The thought that was fixed in his mind was that which forms the subject matter of his entire discourse: “our hearts are meant to be the temple in which; God resides.” It is impossible to determine what type of constancy this was of his experiencing the presence of God in 1801. However, from some expressions in his private memoirs, we can discern that it was not a recollection that would be proper to ordinary prayer. It pertained to a superior order. There are, in fact, some allusions to an experiential knowledge of God, and not one that is merely abstract. This latter can be constituted by a simple act of faith, and also pertained to one’s own choice. However, the experimental knowledge of God is had only when it is pleasing to God⁴⁶⁰. Fr. Bertoni referred to this in his Memoirs, when he wrote:

... After Mass, this grace of union did not remain. It did return along the street, while I was going about some family business, as when I was in Church...⁴⁶¹

It is evident that this is not a question of union with God that could be obtained by any one’s personal efforts. We are considering the first gift that God places in a soul, one that leads to a sublime prayer life. Fr. Lallemonet notes:

... After a long practice of the purity of heart, God enters into a soul, and He is revealed there openly. This is the gift of His holy presence, that is the beginning of supernatural gifts, (viz., the passive gifts of the mystical order). When this occurs, the soul feels so happy in this state, that it seems to it that it had never known, nor loved, the Lord...⁴⁶²

3. The Gift of Tears

A second group of phenomena pertains to the gift of Tears, and the sweetness of contemplation. These derive from a sense of tenderness and love for the Lord. Here are a few texts:

... July 2, 1808: At Mass, during the consecration and Communion, and throughout the thanksgiving, there were many tears of compunction and affection...

... July 13th: The ways of God, Who sometimes makes use of the weakest means, and the thinnest threads to bind a soul, and to keep it from falling over a precipice, and to keep it in His service. There are admirable, and they constitute the object of the sweetest contemplation...

⁴⁵⁹ PVC, p. 302. The title given to the Sermon is: ‘The Holy House Transferred into ourselves – or, our Hearts made a Temple of God’. This was delivered on December 13, 1801

⁴⁶⁰ Poulain, *Des graces d’oraison*, c. 5, n. 11, pp. 72, ff.

⁴⁶¹ October 25, 1808. [SA Doc. 35, p. 663].

⁴⁶² *La doctrine spiriuelle*, tr. Virgotti, ed. Ancora, p. 417.

... September 15th: Introduction to the Exercises. In a visit to St. Ignatius' altar, with my companions, there was much devotion and recollection. These were accompanied by great internal sweetness, and some tears, even though the visit was brief...

... October 9th (He first mentioned a grace of union that we will comment on further ahead)... these increased both the knowledge of goodness, and love that divided into very sweet tears, that lasted until after the communion...

... October 10th: Tears during Mass, and recollection afterwards, and silence...

... March 16, 1809: At Benediction, there was the sentiment of much tenderness and offering: there was a sentiment of how Christ draws our hearts just as He said: '... I will draw all things to Myself ...' (Jn 12:31): and how every good, all knowledge and sweetness that are in creatures, are totally His. This is why He alone ought to be praised and loved...

... May 30, 1812: ... great affection during Mass, where the soul also found sweet tears in Holy Communion...

To these texts, we add this following testimony. If he ever came to know of some progress, or spread of the faith, or of some glorious victory of Christianity, or of something acquired over infidelity, or heresy, he would speak of it to anyone who approached him. He would do this with such emotion, that he would often break, into tears, with sweetest tenderness. He would make it known that these are the true and greater consolations of his soul⁴⁶³. Fr. Poulain teaches:

... The mystical state does not necessarily produce tears. St. Teresa, when she speaks of her very elevated contemplation, makes no mention of tears...⁴⁶⁴

St. Thomas speaks of the gift of tears, or better, of the beatitude of grief. He attributes it to the Gift of Knowledge, in so far as this is directing – and to the Gift of Fear, in so far as this is carrying out its mandate⁴⁶⁵. The influence of the Gift of Knowledge in Fr. Bertoni is clear. It is, for example, when he says that it is proven that the sentiment of every good, knowledge and sweetness found in creatures pertains totally to God.⁴⁶⁶ It is proper to the Gift of Knowledge to make known created 'reality according to its relationship with God'⁴⁶⁷. This same Gift makes known how some created realities might constitute the danger of perversion. This is by their deterring the soul from God by the little amount of joy, or sensible delight that they can offer.

The fearful soul considers its submission to God as its good. It flees by divine instinct from every fault, even the slightest, as it is instructed by the lights of the Gift of Knowledge. Such a soul feels profoundly the sorrow of a similar situation, and even more, it sees the misery of creatures, and the perversion to which they can often lead,

⁴⁶³ SA, Doc. 26, p. 505.

⁴⁶⁴ *Des Graces 'd'oraison*, c.13, n. 20, p. 176.

⁴⁶⁵ I-II, q. 68, a. 3, ad 3^{um}.

⁴⁶⁶ Diary. March 16, 1809. [SA Doc. 35, p. 667].

⁴⁶⁷ II-II, q. 9, a. 2.

the more it weeps before God. As we have already noted, Fr. Fedelini heard Fr. Bertoni blurt out one time:

... Enough! Sin is a great evil!... At the same time, he heard him breaking into tears⁴⁶⁸.

However, “the very sweet tears” that Fr. Bertoni diversely expressed in his Spiritual Diary, are more properly the effect of a particular tenderness of love. This is more in accord with the statement of St. Teresa.⁴⁶⁹

4. Revelations and Ecstasy

A third group of mystical facts, or phenomena, refers to revelations, illustrations, interior words, and the like. Let us read from his own Memoirs:

... October 9, 1808: During Mass, during the prayers said silently, at the Memento, there was what seemed to be an offering up of my intellect to know who was speaking...

... October 24, 1808: While making the Way of the Cross, at the First Station, I heard: ‘... If, I, innocent, allow myself to be condemned, why do you, guilty of a thousand faults, with so much concern, seek to be justified of everything before men...?’

... October 25th: During Mass, there were brief, but vivid illustrations.

... May 30, 1812: I heard Him from the crucifix, saying to my heart: Look at this, My heart...

Fr. Bertoni confided to Fr. Marani, about 1812, that he had had revelations concerning the foundation of his Institute⁴⁷⁰. In the last days of his life, he gave some evidence that he had had some celestial vision. He seemed preoccupied that the infirmarian, Louis Ferrari, perceived that something out of the ordinary was taking place⁴⁷¹. As for what Fr. Bertoni noted on October 24th, it seems that he was talking about exterior words, for he wrote: “**... I heard...**” The note of May 30th, evidently refers to interior words: “**I heard Him from the Crucifix saying to my heart...**” Intellectual visions were those experienced during the celebration of Mass: “**... an opening up of my intellect to know who was talking...**”

Visions and exterior works are not essential to mystical union, but they are only accessories. In passing, they can be granted also to persons who are in the way of ordinary prayer. But, visions and word of a more elevated order (as interior illustrations and interior words) are not generally granted. This is to say that they are not granted

⁴⁶⁸ SA, Doc. 20, p. 124.

⁴⁶⁹ Life, c. 14, n. 1.

⁴⁷⁰ SA Doc. 25, p. 265.

⁴⁷¹ ib., Doc. 20, p. 192.

with any frequency, until one has arrived more or less at the level of ecstasy⁴⁷². It seems to us that we have reason to state that Fr. Gaspar Bertoni had reached ecstatic union with God. We surely ought to renew our regret that there has only come down to us a very small part of his Memoirs. Therefore, we will make of it a special analysis. On October 9, 1808 [his 31st birthday] we find noted there what we will call a referral to an ecstasy:

... *St. Dennis and the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. During Mass, at the prayers said silently, at the Memento, there was what seemed to be an opening up of my intellect to know who was speaking. There was great affection and an expansion of charity. Then, there were certain thrusts of my heart to God, and like impulses of my spirit to God.*

It was like those from a person, surprised by a friend of his, when he had not seen for a long time. Then, on first seeing him, there is the desire to throw himself at him, to embrace him. Then, came a desire that the vision would increase, and the impulse, to be able to achieve the Supreme Good.

But, fearing some vanity, since I was in public, I had recourse to the consideration of very grave sins. This increased, as did the recognition of the goodness and love, that dissolved into very sweet tears that lasted until after the Communion. And, in the meantime, faith and confidence increased a great deal, together with humility and loving reverence.

Finally, at the Communion, there was very great devotion, and a sentiment similar to my First Communion as a child. I do not know that I ever experienced it afterwards. The recollection lasted even an hour afterwards, and then, throughout the evening...

This reference to his First Holy Communion seems to us to be very precious. It reveals the particular preparation for the mystical life that the Lord wished to realize in his soul. As for the refusal of the ecstasy, we should state that he was motivated only by the fact that he was in public. In fact, from a counsel given to Leopoldina Naudet, we know that it was his opinion that the internal movement of grace is not to be opposed but is to be allowed to lead⁴⁷³. There was no refusal by him on May 30, 1812:

... While praying before Mass, I was overcome by a short sleep, and I heard Him from the Crucifix saying to my heart: '...Look at this, My heart...' These words shed a wondrous light on my intellect; there was a great and sudden love in my heart. Then, my spirit rose to see the lovable object that had been indicated. I felt a

⁴⁷² ib., Doc. 20, p. 192.

⁴⁷³ Mother Naudet tells us that she herself had been counseled not to resist in any way:

.... Thinking during Mass, at which I was going to receive, of the instruction on the Most Blessed sacrament, I was taken in spirit to the Cenacle. In the contemplation of all that happened there, I felt with the greatest sweetness, but strongly, that I was being taken out of myself. But in the act whereby I abandoned myself interiorly and gave in to the force and sweetness of this attraction, feeling that one still communicated bodily, and I began to hear no more. I distracted myself by a fear caused by nature. I did this with some scruple, knowing that it had been told to me not to do this, and to entrust myself to God ... [March 26, 1812 – Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona].

shiver run throughout my body, and I found my eyes closed, and my mouth, too. But, my soul was wide awake, and joyful. It seemed that my soul wanted to be divided from my body. It responded another time as the act of turning, by desire, toward the One Who spoke. The shiver was repeated, as the effect of a sweet, painful death. Hence, the soul was uncertain whether it was supposed to go on. It seemed to it that if it did continue the matter, it would be dead – or, at least, taken from the communion of the body. Therefore, since it was impeded, it remained joyfully in the Lord's arms, finding much quiet, as though that moment, it had died. In a moment, it saw itself restored to the use of the senses, as before. The effect was a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, and great affections during the Mass.' Whence, the soul also found sweet tears in Holy Communion, and afterwards, great recollection and sweetness throughout the day. This was accompanied by an increase of the theological virtues...

Let us analyze this text:

... While praying before Mass, I was overcome by a little sleep...

Fr. Poulain notes that natural sleep can surprise one, even during the Prayer of Quiet⁴⁷⁴. He supposes that the ecstasy, or the states close to it, have the ability not only to repress sleep, but to substitute for it⁴⁷⁵. This was verified by Fr. Bertoni, who added that he felt that his soul was awake. In Fr. Bertoni, there is detected again the suddenness with which the gift was received. Because of this, it is to be excluded' that here there is a question of simple ecstasy. An ecstasy generally comes about in a gradual manner.

For the suddenness and violence, are given to be understood by the words: immediately shed a wondrous light. It seemed that my soul wanted to be divided from my body: from this, it seems one can infer that what is being described here is a "rapture", or "flight of the spirit"⁴⁷⁶. The proximate cause of the rapture are these supernatural The double "shiver" experienced by Fr. Bertoni makes one think of what St. Teresa stated in her "Sixth Mansion" of the Castle⁴⁷⁷. She was referring to the matter of raptures:

...Returning to what I was saying, the Spouse gives the command to close the doors of the mansions, and also those of the Castle, and the surrounding wall. In fact, when the rapture begins, breathing ceases and even though the other senses conserve themselves a bit more, at times, as for talking, it is absolutely impossible. Sometimes instead, in an instant, all sense is lost: the body and the hands become cold, so that it seems that the soul is no longer there, nor is it known at times, if one is still breathing. But, this, does not last long – I mean, on the same degree – because while this great suspension diminishes somewhat, it seems that the body returns to itself to a degree. It seems to become reanimated, but only to return to die, and to give greater life to the soul. Nevertheless, this ecstasy does not last very long...⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ *Des graces d'Oraison*, c. 16, n. 24, p. 237.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ib.*, n. 25.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ib.*, c. 18, n. 4, p. 254

⁴⁷⁷ *Ib.*, n. 30, p. 263.

⁴⁷⁸ *Interior Castle*, 'Seventh Mansion', c. 1, n.13, p. 950.

The character of Fr. Bertoni's ecstasy is joyful: it remained joyfully in the Lord's arms, finding much quiet as though at that moment, it had died.

Another coincidence among the many that Fr. Bertoni describes is what St. Teresa stated in the "Mansions" regarding the effects of ecstasy. Fr. Bertoni had noted: the effect was a most tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, and great affection during Mass. Whence, "the soul also found sweet tears in Holy Communion and, afterwards, great recollection and sweetness throughout the day. This was accompanied by an increase of the theological virtues." St. Teresa had noted:

...It happens, then, that when the ecstasy is over, the will would remain quite absorbed, and the intellect quite abstract. One would remain in this state for one, or more days, and would not be able, as far as it seems, to be occupied in other things that do not move the will to love. This will is quite awake, while it is numb as far as being determined toward anything created...⁴⁷⁹

Lastly, we ought to add that ecstasies such as what Fr. Bertoni experienced are had generally only in a very elevated spiritual life. Such a life would have heroic virtues, visions and interior locutions. Fortunately a note of January 4, 1809 confirms that Fr. Bertoni had reached the level of ecstatic union. He noted:

... During Mass, at the Consecration, there was a rather vivid sentiment of the presence of Christ, as of a friend, talking to another friend: there was also a sentiment of the presence of the Father. I experienced in a certain way again the distinction of these three divine Persons in a single nature. There was great reverence and love: it lasted a half hour, even after, the recollection...

Fr. Poulain assures us that it is proper in the period of ecstasy that the Lord begins to manifest to the soul attributes that previously He had kept hidden. One of the most exalted communications is that of the intellectual vision, or experimental knowledge of the Holy Trinity⁴⁸⁰. St. Teresa speaks of this in the first chapter of the "Second Mansions":

... Once introduced to this Mansion, in an intellectual vision, the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity are uncovered for the soul. This is in a representation of the truth, in the midst of a fire, like a most resplendent cloud, that comes to its spirit. The three Persons are seen distinctly, and the soul, by an admirable notion with which it is favored, knows with absolute certainty that all three are one, sole substance, one sole power, one sole wisdom, one sole God...⁴⁸¹

There remains only one question for us now. When Fr. Bertoni noted his first ecstasy in his Private Memoirs, that have come down to us, he was 41 years away from his death. The question is, did these graces continue flooding him with the same abundance?

⁴⁷⁹ SA Doc.26, p. 410.

⁴⁸⁰ *Des Graces d'Oraison*, c. 18, n. 23, p. 260.

⁴⁸¹ *Inerior Castle*, Seventh Mansion, c. 1, . 8, p. 1017.

In order to by-pass the barrier he built up around himself, because of his modesty and humility, we have very few exterior sources. His biographer says that Fr. Bertoni's face during meditation, was **"more than enkindled, it seemed on fire..."**⁴⁸² As for his offering of Mass, his biographer has recorded:

...All those who had the good fortune of assisting at his divine Sacrifices confess that so great was his modesty and devotion, so great was his recollection, and his way of moving about, as though he was enraptured in God, that one could not look at him, without being moved to heartfelt compunction and tenderness...⁴⁸³

In general, he stated that Fr. Bertoni's eyes seemed always turned toward the Lord, and that they glistened with holy exultation⁴⁸⁴.

We might wish to lend credence to what Fr. Bertoni asserted about the normal order of Providence in leading souls to the highest level of union. First, though, we would have to discover the reason why this grace had been stopped in him before we could deny that there had truly taken place in him all that he had stated concerning the normal progress of grace toward the highest union with God.

On the other hand, we do have a reason to affirm the exact opposite. The forty years following the ecstasy, analyzed minutely by us, were enriched with an admirable progress in virtue. These were brought to light in his endeavors that were most useful to the Church, and to souls. IN a special way, do the twenty years of his excruciating physical sufferings stand out in him. These completed the most purification. There were, perhaps, some tremendous periods of darkness. But, even during these trials, grace must have worked secretly, to the point of leading Fr. Bertoni to transforming union.

⁴⁸² SA, Doc. 26, p. 410.

⁴⁸³ib., p. 232: **... I remember in this moment that he had a rather long [most devout] Mass and that therefore, none of the boys wanted to serve him...** [*Positio*, SA, p. 23].

⁴⁸⁴ SA, Doc 26, p. 231.

PART IV

Fr. GASPAR BERTONI'S

HOLY ABANDONMENT

CHAPTER 1

HOLY ABANDONMENT IS A SUPERIOR FORM OF CONFIDENCE AND HOPE IN GOD

1. Holy Abandonment guarantees a Tranquil Awaiting of the Future Life, and of All that leads to It.

Fr. Bertoni noted:

... A man of prayer goes only towards whatever the Lord has disposed with His Providence. He does not go ahead, nor does he proceed. All is ordered, and everything is tranquil. He is not hasty, nor is he rash. He awaits the time and, the circumstances. All this, by following God...⁴⁸⁵

In these few lines, we have, it can be said, Fr. Bertoni's central thought on Holy Abandonment. Holy Abandonment is surely "a going towards whatever the Lord disposes with His Providence". One of the principal obstacles that impedes one from being in harmony with Providence, is that of not knowing how to wait, when the divine plan has not been revealed. Too often, the execution of the divine will is compromised by the craze of doing something. Fr. Bertoni had recourse to the state of abandonment, as the state that guaranteed the most tranquil and sure waiting.

Precisely speaking, it is hope that gives security to our expectancy of the future life, and of everything consequently, that leads to it. Hope, in fact, is based on the indestructible rock of omnipotence, that is placed at our disposal, and for our help. We have already seen in the 6th Chapter of the First Part how the Gift of Fear has taken away any motive whatsoever of placing our confidence in ourselves. Instead, this is to place us completely into a confident handing ourselves over into God's hands.

The impossibility of depending on oneself became for Fr. Bertoni an evident matter. This was due to his continuous recall of the concept of creation, with which he sounded the whole depths of his own nothingness. Thereby, he found himself incapable of establishing the least supposition of being able to do something by himself.

2. The Theological Foundation of Holy Abandonment is Hope and Trust in God

It is a real pity that the classical authors on Holy Abandonment have left unresolved the question of its theological foundation. We would see perhaps that Fr. Bertoni was right in referring to the theological virtue of hope. St. Francis de Sales stopped at the conformity that abandonment implies between the will of the creature

⁴⁸⁵ 1 Kings, Med. 12. [MssB, n. 24].

and that of the Creator. He sees in this only a superior form of hope⁴⁸⁶. DeCaussade, in stead, affirms that “the state of abandonment includes the state of pure faith, pure hope and pure love”⁴⁸⁷.

Surely there are not excluded from abandonment the virtues of faith and of charity, when it is stated that metaphysically, abandonment is founded on hope. But, its nature is to be made more precise by removing from it that indistinct and imprecise thought. This lack of clarity would result if it were considered as a simple conformity, no matter how perfect, to the will of God⁴⁸⁸. It is known that conformity is the most direct way to arrive at the perfection of the spiritual life. There is a particular virtue that conforms our will with that of God, in the case that His will is incorporated in a precept. This is obedience. When the divine will is considered in itself, or even outside of a precept, then conforming to it remains as a general obligation. Opposition to it is a general element that is included in every kind of sin.

St. Thomas offers a precise analysis of conformity proceeding according to its various causes. Conformity is had, according to its material cause, “when one wills something that is willed by God.” This naturally is a “secondary” (“*secundum quid*”) conformity, because conformity “simply so called” will be given to it by its form. Conformity according to the efficient cause is had “when one wills what God wills, because He wills it.” Conformity is had according to the final cause “when one orders his works for the glory of God, because of which, the Lord alone has all things”. This conformity, together with the efficient conformity, give the essential conformity. According to the formal cause, conformity is had “when one wills, moved by charity, as God wills all things through charity.” In this, consists the perfection of conformity⁴⁸⁹.

However, although charity realizes perfect submission to God, it leaves in the wayfarer a certain imperfection of conformity, concerning what is willed. The cause of this is the imperfection of our knowledge of God, and of what He wills, as long as we are on earth:

... The will of God cannot be known fully, and, therefore, we cannot ever fully conform our wills to His...⁴⁹⁰.

Only the blessed who now comprehend are conformed fully to the divine will, since they have a perfect knowledge of it:

⁴⁸⁶ *On the Love of God*, Book 1: ‘Love of Submission’. However, in the second spiritual treatise where he deals with ‘Perfect Abandonment’ he inculcates more explicitly, hope and confidence in God.

⁴⁸⁷ *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Tr. II, c. 1, 3 p. 50.

⁴⁸⁸ Fr. Bertoni considered abandonment as a special ways that was not necessarily followed by all:

... He who is drawn by the spirit to a way of greater perfection, as is to be totally abandoned in God, should not resent it if others, of inferior virtue, make use of means that are lower, but nonetheless good... [Diary. October 12, 1808].

⁴⁸⁹ *I Sent.* D. 13, 2, a. 2 c.

⁴⁹⁰ *De Ver.* q. 23, a. 7, ad 1 um.

... In fact, the will of the blessed, who are in the continual contemplation of the divine goodness, and who have a rapport with it, regulate all their desires. They do this in so far as they know the order of each object willed by Him. All those who know what God wants, they also will it absolutely, and without any movement to the contrary...⁴⁹¹.

Certain souls, thirsting for perfection, are impatient to achieve the perfect conformity, even material – during this life. They thrust themselves into the hands of God, completely devoid of desires, in a holy indifference. This gives the guarantee of their quick acceptance of anything whatsoever willed by their Lord. It cannot be said that this is that perfect conformity of the blessed. Nevertheless, it corresponds to it very well, even though the soul has not yet received in particular, the precise order that God would will to give it. However, in some way, it has already received it, by accepting in a general way, all the possible orders that God could impose on it. It is presented to the Lord as a “carte blanche” and it willingly gives Him the right of writing on it whatever is more pleasing to Him. It is like a baby that throws itself around the neck of its mother, and allows himself to be carried anywhere at all that she might wish to take him.

Such a dedication is always based on the persuasion of the infinite power and mercy. According to the divine promises, this gives us security both for the present and for the unknown future, even more than if we were to trust in ourselves⁴⁹². St. Thomas calls hope, thus reinforced, by the name of “trust”⁴⁹³:

... The name trust means principally this, that one hopes because he believes in the words of the one who promises him help... Trust implies a certain form of hope, proceeding from the consideration that creates a strong conviction of being able to achieve a determined good...⁴⁹⁴

3. Holy Abandonment gives . Security even when all Human Supports are missing

Ordinarily, a person busies him/herself in possessing a quantity of things that are perfectly vain, and even harmful. One thus leaves the goods of the soul in a second level:

...We assure ourselves, first of all, with the goods that are indispensable for life – we say this practically speaking, even without confessing it - afterwards, we will be able to occupy ourselves with the conquest of spiritual goods. This conquest should be placed in the first line, among our main concerns...⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹¹ l.c., a. 8 c.

⁴⁹² Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange asserts: **... True abandonment is a superior form of confidence and hope in God [Providence and Confidence in God – Faithfulness and Abandonment, p. 181. Tr. Nivoli, Turin. Herder - in passing, states that the metaphysical foundation of abandonment is hope [in: VC, 1948, n.2, p. 234. Cf. Philippon, *Saint Therese de Lisieux*, 3 e. ed., Desclee-deBrouwer, pp. 113, f.**

⁴⁹³ Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Providence and Confidence in God*, p. 183.

⁴⁹⁴ II-II, q. 129, a. 6: **‘Confidence is hope strengthened by some firm opinion ...** [ib., ad 3 um].

⁴⁹⁵ Geoffrey, ‘Abandonment et Providence and the other theological virtues’, in: VC 1936, n. 6, p. 626.

Nothing is more opposed to what Jesus Christ inculcates regarding trust and holy abandonment:

... Do not be troubled, saying: 'what shall we eat, what shall we drink, or what shall we wear?' The gentiles are the ones who seek all this. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all this. Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and His justice (the object of supernatural hope) and all the rest will be added to you... (confidence and abandonment).⁴⁹⁶

Fr. Bertoni embraced this doctrine in its fullest meaning. First of all, we will look at some texts of his from his correspondence with Fr. Bragato. He wrote to him on August 27, 1840:

...Ah! how the ways of God are different from those of men. Who understands this well, and would not lose his way, when it occurs, as it did to Abraham, the father of all the faithful, '... to believe in hope against hope...' (Rm 4:18). Blessed are they who close the eyes of their short-sightedness, where the most wise hand of God takes ours, to direct us, and govern us...⁴⁹⁷

Abraham can be considered as the type and model of anyone who abandons himself to God. Even when all human helps were taken away from him, he did not lose his confidence and his abandonment in God. Fr. Bertoni had recourse to this example when he suggested to Fr. Bragato that he entrust himself to Divine Providence. His biographer also cited the example of Abraham, when he wanted to describe Fr. Bertoni's confidence in God⁴⁹⁸. Fr. Bertoni wrote as follows to Fr. Bragato:

... Let us entrust ourselves to God, as this is a beautiful trust, and let us not trust at all in ourselves. '... It is good to place in God my hope...' (Ps 72:28). And ... though many tribulations, as is necessary (Ac 14:21), that we will also have. We hope most firmly that the way to his glory is being opened, where our heart continually yearns to be. It cannot have quiet, unless in repose in God, for When it is made...⁴⁹⁹

... Be of good cheer, and place in God all your confidence. This will be well placed, and will be much more fruitful than you would expect. Keep yourself, at any rate, in that imperturbable tranquility and peace, free from all disdain, and every root of bitterness. This was so recommended by St. Francis de Sales and St. Paul: '... Seek only the Kingdom of God and His justice..' Take pleasure in the most holy Will of God, and conform yourself to it...⁵⁰⁰

... 'Blessed is the man whose trust is Me Lord...' (Ps 39:5). Oh! how the word of God consoles the faithful souls! His Goodness, His Wisdom, His Power, God offers His all to assist anyone who confides in Him. How could one not be

⁴⁹⁶ Gospel text. Mt 6:31-34 – ib.

⁴⁹⁷ Bragato, SA Doc. 35, p. 749.

⁴⁹⁸ SA Doc. 26, 9. 472.

⁴⁹⁹ Bragato, SA Doc. 35, p. 750. September 26, 1840.

⁵⁰⁰ ib., p. 751. May 11, 1840.

blesse'd? What would be lacking to the one 'who dwelleth in the aid of the Most High?' (Ps 90:1) p Go over this entire Psalm again, with attentive consideration, and you will have to conclude with St. Paul that '... in hope, we have been saved...' (Rm 8:24). Whoever has his head just above the waves, remembers that the Lord is with him, even though He is still sleeping on the boat. St. Peter did remember that with Him, he could walk on the waters. O most loving, but hidden Providence of God! Who could be afraid, while remaining in His hands, and under His protection?⁵⁰¹

Fr. Bertoni was led to the abandonment in that sense of confident security, that he found only in God. He was happy when he came to find himself in those circumstances in which everything was not even possible. One time he had to remain in bed while some important business regarding Leopoldina Naudet's Institute called for his attention. He wrote to her, and after having restored his spiritual daughter's confidence, he said:

... If I did not have so many sins that ought to make me tremble, I would not have even more, a better feeling. While I am not able to do anything, I stand and watch what the Lord does. Oh! how good He is, and how He surpasses all our praise!⁵⁰²

And when Mother Naudet saw a beautiful opportunity vanish for acquiring property suitable for her purposes, Fr. Bertoni promptly wrote to her:

... And do you not see with what force the Gospel carries out: '... Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and all this will be added to you...?' (Mt 6:33)⁵⁰³

As far as his own endeavor was concerned, it will suffice to see the sentiment he expressed to the Holy Father. This refers to that act in which he was asking the Pope's permission to keep the property of Sezano that had once belonged to another religious order:

...Now, should it seem to the Holy Spirit and to You, Most Blessed Father, that it would redound to the homage of Christ, our Lord, and to the utility of His Church, to designate this, Your property, to that end, that I intend to apply this earthly property, I will receive it from Your hands, as a gift from heaven. If the Holy Spirit, and Your prudence should dispose otherwise, I will also be more happy and glad that the Lord and You consider me worthy, to accept from my hands, a gift, however meager, as a bit of gold that with every confidence, I place at Your most holy feet. I will not give up from the service that I have undertaken, and this would be to me, an argument to trust even more, to be able to carry it out the better, and, with greater perfection.⁵⁰⁴

The greater perfection of divine service would be that he obtained through the absence of any earthly means. In fact, the poverty in which he would have been in,

⁵⁰¹ ib., September 26, 1841 – p. 750.

⁵⁰² Letter 13, January 15, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 2, p. 398.

⁵⁰³ Letter 33, June 28, 1813. ib., 1930, n. 3, p. 108.

⁵⁰⁴ Letter to Pope Gregory XVI, August 9, 1838. [SA Doc. 14, pp. 69, ff.].

would have given his spirit of abandonment a greater sway of activity⁵⁰⁵.

We will end this chapter by referring to a given time in Fr. Bertoni's life. IN this period, the characteristic of his spirit of abandonment appears to be as the habitual attitude of his life. In October of 1812, he was struck down by a mortal illness. This seemed .to overturn all his projects, relative to the foundation of a religious institute, disclosed to him by God. At the same time, it threw into disarray the many plans involving him on behalf of Leopoldina Naudet. This came right after she had received the Lord's assurance that she would benefit for a long time from the assistance of the Servant of God.

This is a typical case in which the soul is to handle the difficulties of the present moment. It needs to be abandoned blindly into the arms of divine Providence. It was in this circumstance that Fr. Louis Fortis came every day to Fr. Bertoni's room. Fr. Fortis was his old teacher and spiritual father, and the future General of the Company of Jesus. He would suggest to Fr. Bertoni, word for word, the Jesuit act of abandonment:

... Accept, O Lord, through the hands of St. Ignatius, my entire liberty... Give me love for you alone, with Thy grace, and I am rich enough, nor do I ask for anything more...

Fr. Bertoni was later to get better, and Mother Naudet would find fault with herself for having doubted, even a little,, regarding what the Lord has assured her. But, for her, a new trial followed immediately. This came about when Bishop Liruti assigned Fr. Bertoni to the spiritual direction of the Seminary, and he asked him to give up the care of St. Joseph's where Leopoldina was residing. This second trial determined Mother Naudet to take some steps to retain her, spiritual director. Fr. Bertoni, though, maintained the attitude willed by holy abandonment:

... As for me, it seems in the Lord, that I am to be so disposed to go wherever He tells me to go and to come wherever He tells me to come. It seems that the Lord wanted this lesson well drummed into my ears. While I was seriously ill, in those past days, every evening He had me hear from the lips of my old teacher, Fr. Fortis, that excellent prayer. I would follow these words in my heart: '... Accept, O Lord, through the hands of St. Ignatius...' ⁵⁰⁶

And in another letter, he added this comment concerning those facts:

... Whatever God does, is always better. O most wise hands, haw much the more do they work in a hidden way. Let us trust in Him always, so that we will never be confused... ⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ In an outline of a Meditation for a Retreat, there is found written: Poverty-Abandonment' [MssB n. 16].

⁵⁰⁶ Letter 3, November 26, 1812. *Bertoniano* 1929, n.3, p. 99.

⁵⁰⁷ Letter 7. December 14, 1812. ib.

CHAPTER 2

In Abandonment, it is necessary to leave All up to God

1. Holy Abandonment renders more Docile Instruments in the Hands of God

St. Francis de Sales speaks about “the death of the will” required in the state of Holy Abandonment. He says that we ought:

...to render ourselves pliable and manageable to the divine good pleasure, as though we were made of wax. This, we are able to do without desiring and willing things, but leaving to God to will and to act for us, as will be pleasing to Him. We are to abandon in Him all our anxiety because He is thinking of us, according to what the Apostle: says... (1 P 5:7) ⁵⁰⁸.

In Fr. Bertoni, we find all this realized in a perfect manner. His biographer, in fact, found the Servant of God mature for this “death of his own will.” In him, it was composed of indifference from the time he was a child, with the exception of only his passion for music.⁵⁰⁹ Whether it was to follow his priestly vocation, to which he interiorly aspired, or whether later, it was to dedicate himself to the apostolate, he knew how to await first the sign from God.⁵¹⁰

This waiting had for Fr. Bertoni a great importance in all his undertakings. It was the point in which he wanted to train well the souls who placed themselves under his direction. It is in the necessary waiting that the Will of God is made most clear. It is thus He manifests that it is important to allow God alone to act. He wrote to Mother Naudet:

... Let us allow God to act, as He knows well how to, and on His part, He will do it... ⁵¹¹

... Let us allow the Lord to do it, as He has always disposed things well... ⁵¹²

His biographer stated about Fr. Bertoni that his leaving everything up to God, and nothing to man, was in him an ordinary and habitual matter.⁵¹³ Fr. Marani, who was his first companion and successor, stated about Fr. Bertoni:

... He used to say frequently: '... We have to go behind God, and never ahead of Him....' And my beloved Father and Founder practiced this constantly... ⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁸ *On the Love of God*. Book 9, c. 14, p. 262.

⁵⁰⁹ **... Little Gaspar, with the exception of music, and of the things of God, was considered to be without desires, without needs, and without will ... [SA Doc. 26, p.303].**

⁵¹⁰ *ib.*, pp. 321 & 340.

⁵¹¹ Letter 22. February 18, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, p. 472.

⁵¹² Letter 14, no date. *Bertoniano* Suppl. To n. 2, p. 429. Cf. also Letter 159, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 10, p.204.

⁵¹³ *ib.*, p. 425. Doc. 23, Intr. p. 243.

⁵¹⁴ SA, Doc. 23, p. 265.

During the most critical moments of his life, he remained in the serenity of his abandonment. When, for example, he was accused before Bishop Liruti, he did not worry in the slightest how this calumny would be handled. His biographer writes:

... He had a firm plan of leaving everything up to God, and of remitting everything, no matter how adverse, and contrary that might happen to him, to the divine good pleasure. This made him so tranquil and sure that the Lord would take up his cause. So, he did not worry at all, in that God Himself was to be his defense and protection...⁵¹⁵

Further, his biographer believed he knew the foundation of Fr. Bertoni's renunciation. He felt that it was in:

... that great maxim that he always had on his lips, and which was the continual director of his activity. This was that one must never go ahead of the Lord, but rather, it is necessary for us to follow Him...⁵¹⁶

... This leaving everything up to God, and nothing to man, was most habitual and ordinary in him. Hence, it could be called the identification card and norm of his thoughts and affections, as well as of his every activity and plan...⁵¹⁷

Mother Naudet was engaged in the foundation of her community, and she was most anxious to overcome all delay. Fr. Bertoni kindly offered the example of a baby that rests in the arms of his mother, who had not yet decided to place her child on the ground:

... Since the Lord stands above all our internal contrasts, it follows that we ought to keep motionless the eyes of our confidence in Him, without losing our way. It is most certain that '... He has strengthened this mercy towards those who fear Him...' (Ps 102:11). What will we do in recognition for so many mercies? We will do more than we should do. And what should we do now? That which a baby should do to his mother, as she holds him in her arms, and does not yet want to place him on the ground...⁵¹⁸

This is not to say how complete Mother Naudet found herself at ease in this complete abandonment. Especially in prayer, she no longer had any feeling for herself, nor would she even make any reference to her own perfection. All this she had placed in God's hands⁵¹⁹. Fr. Bertoni had followed step by step the ascent of this privileged soul. He saw that there remained in her some small earthly remnant that the Lord wanted destroyed. He understood, though, just as well that these last remains require the exclusive action of grace.

⁵¹⁵ ib., Doc. 26, p. 534.

⁵¹⁶ ib., p. 542.

⁵¹⁷ ib., p. 425.

⁵¹⁸ Letter 46. June 1, 1814. *Bertoniano* n. 3, p. 322.

⁵¹⁹ **... At Communion during prayers, I was much occupied in seeking everything and perfection for the pure object of giving glory to God, and serving His love, no longer looking for my own profit, but purely for Him** ... [Mss. Naudet. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Retreat of May 1811.

Therefore, Fr. Bertoni would make her understand that there would be a slow simmering in which she would be completely purified. This was to be the purification of prayer, in which she would be completely passive, and in complete abandonment. The exactness of this counsel was recognized by Mother Naudet Herself:

...In prayer today, I experienced a confirmation, like yesterday, of all the minister of God told me. Just as the Lord Himself had made me understand many times, He wishes to perform the entire work. This will be done by means of that prayer, and particularly, that in which I am only passive ...⁵²⁰

2. Holy Abandonment does not exclude Work and Personal Effort

It is not a matter here of folding up one's arms, in complete passivity. The Quietists, or the Semi-quietists, condemned by the Church⁵²¹, have understood it this way. As for what pertains to prayer, it is in fact only in passing that there is verified "leaving it all up to God." This implies certain moments of sublime mystical union. Then, as far as action is concerned, it is left up to God until His will is known. This does not mean the disdain of one's own efforts and activity, to await the sensible movements of grace that would excite activity. These movements do not always occur, and then the soul would be placed in harmful inactivity⁵²². A baby does walk when his mother places him on the ground, and he lets himself be carried when she picks him up in her arms. St. Francis de Sales continues:

... So, the soul that loves the divine good pleasure allows itself to be carried. Nevertheless, it does walk, performing with great care, whatever pertains to the signified will of God...⁵²³

Fr. Bertoni followed this teaching exactly when he said:

... We must carry out the divine will that is called the signified will. This means it is signified to us, according to the rules that we have to recognize it. And we must adore the will of good pleasure, when it will be made known to us by what happens⁵²⁴. **Meanwhile, it befits us to do the will of those who fear Him...** (Ps 144:19)⁵²⁵.

When Mother Naudet felt interiorly moved to pray for the healing of one of her sisters, she was assailed by doubt. She wondered if this would be in conformity with

⁵²⁰ Ib., July 23, 1811. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. ... **Let us recall here what St. Teresa says about the prayer of union in which the soul 'sleeps to all things on earth and to itself. It is transformed directly by the action of God...** [*Interior Castle*, 'Fifth Mansions', c. 1, pp. 879, ff.].

⁵²¹ Denzinger, ## 1221-1288 for Quietism; and ## 1327-1349 for Quietism.

⁵²² Bossuet, the articles of d'Issy, n. 11. cf. DeGuibert, *JO*, doc. 493.

⁵²³ Tr. II, tr. Borgogne. Pia Soc. Di S. Paolo, p. 35.

⁵²⁴ Here Fr. Bertoni places happenings as pertaining to the 'Will of Good Pleasure', according to the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales [*On the Love of God*. Book 8, c. 3; Book 9, c. 1]. St. Thomas applies such as these to the 'Signified Will'. He gives give species of 'signs' of the Divine Will: prohibition, precept, counsel, operation and permissions [cf. I, q. 19, a. 12]. For St. Francis de Sales, however, 'operation' and 'permission' constitute the 'Will of Good Pleasure'. Only precept, counsel and prohibition constitute the 'Signified Will.'

⁵²⁵ Letter 48, June 5, 1814. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 326.

the perfection required by the state of holy abandonment. She felt this all the more because her desire of a cure was motivated by the advantage that would have come from her good health to her nascent Institute.⁵²⁶ Fr. Bertoni responded to her:

... I do not find either from the part of the desire, or from the part of the prayer, anything contrary to the Lord's spirit. Rather, I see great conformity to the Will of God, which is called by theologians the 'signified will.'⁵²⁷ This is what we should await, until the 'Will of Good Pleasure' is recognized. I also accept my own insufficiency, the commission to pray for her health, and thereby, I enter into your most up-right purposes, Reverend Mother...⁵²⁸

Therefore, Fr. Bertoni was very far from every form of Quietism. This is also shown by the meticulous attention with which he wanted to apply the Ignatian method to himself and to others⁵²⁹. He was well versed in clearly distinguishing the field of our activity, from that sphere of God's action. In the area of our activity, he exacted a most rigorous application:

... An extraordinary diligence is required to do on our part all that is needed not to impede all that God can, and wants to do on His part...⁵³⁰

...It is the part of man to prepare the soul...' (Pr 16:1), says Scripture, and as our Lord has made known to you, Reverend Mother. With the divine assistance, I will say that you should use extraordinary diligence to the utmost, and to have your soul always ready for the visits of His Divine Majesty...⁵³¹

⁵²⁶ Mss. Naudet. Archives of the Sisters of Holy Family.

⁵²⁷ As we have already mentioned in note # 17, 'inspirations' pertain to the 'Signified Will.'

⁵²⁸ Letter 12, January 12, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 2, p. 396.

⁵²⁹ He did this even to the point of leading Mother Naudet to examine herself every half hour and to an examination with a written account of every meditation made in the Retreat [Mss Naudet.

⁵³⁰ Letter 19, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, Suppl. to n. 2, p. 436.

⁵³¹ Letter 22, February 28, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930, n. 3, p. 471.

CHAPTER 3 ABANDONMENT AND PRUDENCE

1. Abandonment is a Fruit of the Gift of Counsel:

In drawing up the panegyric on St. Zeno, the Patron of Verona, Fr. Bertoni stated:

... In the most secret part of his Oratory, with fasts and prayers, he asked God to open the way for his preaching. So, this just man, before acting, places his heart, and hands it over into the hands and the will of God... DO you see the simplicity of a dove? You see rather the prudence of the serpent. He does not hurry, impatient for the victory, but he awaits the time and the sign...⁵³²

As for what pertains to the connection of prudence with knowing how to wait, that is characteristic of Holy Abandonment, Fr. Bertoni again mentions it in his laudatory description of his bishop, Joseph Grassler:

... He is a person who is not hasty, no matter how busy and efficient he may be. This is because he is busy, as well as being courteous and good. In brief, he is a man of God...⁵³³

Schryvers in his book, *The Principles of the Spiritual Life*⁵³⁴, has dedicated a paragraph to explain that abandonment to Divine Providence is the fruit of the Gift of Counsel⁵³⁵. In Holy Abandonment, it is not so much a question of enjoying God, through the Gifts of Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge. It is rather a matter of being led with security to realize the plan that Providence has pre-established through the slightest particulars of the practical life.

First, prudence – and then the Gift of Counsel have the task of placing us under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He guides us directly with an interior inspiration, a secret instinct, that traces out for us the path to follow. One should not think, though, that the lights of the Holy Spirit dispense us from having recourse to the norms of prudence. These have been constituted by Holy Scripture, by the Magisterium of the Church, by the counsel of wise persons, and other sources. Neither abandonment, nor the Gift of Counsel, dispenses us from this duty. They impose rather that the same internal inspiration is subjected to the wisdom of Holy Scripture, and the wisdom of prudent human beings:

... It is in no way opposed, but it is much in conformity to the wishes of the Lord when one listens to, and even asks for the counsels of a man who is so wise, so prudent and likewise, a zealous lover of the interests of the divine glory...

Fr. Bertoni wrote this to Mother Naudet who has asked him if she should listen

⁵³² Sermon delivered on August 18, 1839, published in Fascicle II of the *Description of the Great Solemnity for the Discovery of the Body of S. Zeno*, 1839, p. 111.

⁵³³ Letter 151. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 4, p. 200.

⁵³⁴ Tr. by Fr. Alex. Canatone. IVth ed. Marietti, Turin, pp. 301, ff.

⁵³⁵ ib., Part II, c. 3, art. 1, 2. pp. 301, ff.

to the counsels of the Superior in the drawing up of the Constitutions. It had seemed to her that only God should have a place in this work⁵³⁶. Another time, in a more general manner, Fr. Bertoni suggested:

... When you see clearly what is to be done, do it freely, trusting in God. And where you have difficulties that pertain to conscience, and doubt whether some action might be displeasing to God, do not fail to submit this doubt, and to obtain clarification. Obtain it from that minister of the Lord, whom your discretion will find better endowed with sufficient knowledge and probity and prudence. Confide fully in God, wherever it is necessary for the salvation of your soul, and of the souls that are under your care. He would not deny the light of His wisdom to His ministers...⁵³⁷

2. Rules of Prudence

For himself, so that he might be assured of acting prudently, Fr. Bertoni adopted the norms of the pseudo-Gregory⁵³⁸. The Servant of God grouped these in this way:

1. prepare the manner;
2. await the time;
3. discern the time;
4. take hold of the opportunity⁵³⁹

In accord with Fr. Bertoni himself, the first point requires: "great prayer, and much recollection:

... There are also needed great counsel, and refined prudence, to know and to ascertain the manner, i.e., ' what, how much, how, and by what means... ' For thirty years the Lord remained hidden in the secret life, teaching us thereby to prepare ourselves, before manifesting this to the people, His own divine Mission. Therefore it is necessary to pray and to take counsel, until the manner has been made perfectly clear...⁵⁴⁰

Fr. Bertoni concluded:

... All this is required, so that the plan and the design be not ruined. Many build up, and then tear down...⁵⁴¹

For the second point, in the Second Chapter of this Part, we have already considered it enough, seeing the importance Fr. Bertoni gave to waiting:

⁵³⁶ Letter 45. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 2, p. 269. The 'Father Superior' is Fr. John Louis Fusari, formerly Superior of the Oratorians of St. Philip, prior to the suppression of 1810. He was still considered superior, even afterwards, as he had stayed on to care for the Church.

⁵³⁷ Letter 93. October 16, 1825. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 1, p. 32.

⁵³⁸ 1 Kings, Book 3, c. 1, nn. 22, ff., p. 119.

⁵³⁹ ib.

⁵⁴⁰ ib.

⁵⁴¹ ib.

... When one has, by prayer and prudence, ascertained the manner, he does not manifest his mission, except in the time determined by God and by reason. He does not, however, neglect in the slightest preparing the souls with sweetness. He initiates the Lord's government and His Providence, and totally follows this. Many rush into enterprises and hurry through them, and seem to want to anticipate their success...⁵⁴²

In the application that Fr. Bertoni makes of this point, in the direction of Mother Naudet, he stated:

... Wherever you see clearly, then go ahead; and when it is not very clear, wait for the light, confidently, for some of the points. Prepare not only what is to be done, but even their order, and the manner of treating them before the Lord, prior to handling them before men...⁵⁴³

... It is necessary to take one step at a time. He who wants to jump, very often breaks his neck...⁵⁴⁴

... If you do not see clearly where to place your foot, leave these cares to God, because He sees for us... Furthermore, we are living in times that the greatest precautions are worthy' very little, or nothing at all. It is more necessary than ever to follow behind the tracks left for us by divine Providence, that goes on ahead of us...⁵⁴⁵

... It seems to me, in a circumstance of the times in which matters are, to remain waiting patiently... and who knows whether divine Providence, that disposes all that man proposes, will this be brought to an even better conclusion than was expected? He who hopes in God will never be confused, nor will he cane back embarrassed. On the other hand, sometimes God, our Lord, has things succeed, following same other path than the one we might have arranged. Thus, it is known that 'unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...' (Ps 126:1).⁵⁴⁶

For this third point, Fr. Bertoni established an unmistakable sign to discern the just time to begin an endeavor, that has already been prepared. It is that of a greater infusion of charity, as it happened for the Apostles:

... The time of manifestation is ordinarily indicated by a superabundant infusion of charity and an increase of love, 'going, therefore, teach all nations...' (Mt 28:19). '... But, wait here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high...' (Lk 24:49).⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴² ib.

⁵⁴³ Letter 44. January 3, 1814. *Bertoniano* 1932, n.2, p. 270.

⁵⁴⁴ Letter 120. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 3, p. 115.

⁵⁴⁵ Letter 90. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 1. P. 30.

⁵⁴⁶ Letter 149. March 21, 1829. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 4,p. 199.

⁵⁴⁷ 1 Kings. Med. 16, bis. [MssB, n. 23].

Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Naudet concerning this:

... If the Lord has made clear the object of His glory, He will also make clear little by little, its manner, and its time. And you, Reverend Mother, 'wait here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high...' (With expectation, I have waited for the Lord.' And one day, you, too, will say: '... and He was attentive to me...' (Ps 39:1).⁵⁴⁸

... Reverend Mother, you have known clearly 'what is to be done..., but St. Gregory says this is not enough. It will be necessary also to wait to find out clearly 'how it is to be done.' Nor will this suffice either: but, it will be best to clarify also 'when it is to be done...' The Lord, though, who has taken the first step, will also take the second, and the third. He communicates His light, that illumines every man who comes into this world...⁵⁴⁹

... Thus, the matter proceeds, according to the order that St. Gregory mentions. Take a step when you see clearly, waiting to take the second one gradually, as the clarity increases...⁵⁵⁰

The fourth point indicates the degree of dedicated ardor that there is needed to carry out the fulfillment of the Divine Will, once it is known. As soon as something is made clear by God's light, and is consecrated by His Will, then it is required to bring oneself to it with enthusiasm, and energetically to take hold of it. Fr. Bertoni expressed all this in relation to his own mission of a priest, who knows the time assigned for his preaching:

... When the time of manifestation has come, the elect will employ a strong charity without weakness. He will not look at the effect, whether his words are well, or poorly received. He will rather keep his attention on the order of God, and fulfill his obligation, leaving its success up to God...⁵⁵¹

Fr. Bertoni showed himself to be prudent and circumspect all the more, by leaving aside all regard. His sole intention was the fulfillment of the divine order. St. Francis de Sales also urges onward a soul, fully confident, "to set sail on the sea of Divine Providence":

...He is to do this without supplies, without oars, without rudder, without sails, without any provision whatsoever... He is not to be pre-occupied with anything, not even his own body, and his own soul... Our Lord, to Whom he is completely abandoned, will think for him...

However, the Holy Doctor was speaking about the Flight into Egypt. He was describing one of those cases in which it is impossible for men to foresee and to make provisions⁵⁵². Fr. Bertoni seems to go further when he counsels: throw yourself into the

⁵⁴⁸ Letter 33. January 28, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1931, n. 3, p. 108

⁵⁴⁹ Letter 32. January 16, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1931, n. 3, p. 106.

⁵⁵⁰ Letter 40. October 26, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 1, p. 227.

⁵⁵¹ 1 Kings. Med. 16, bis. [MssB, n. 23].

⁵⁵² Citation and reflection by Lehodey, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, p. 61.

sea...” He was sure that “some whale will bring us to shore!”⁵⁵³ This mention of a whale does not imply the case where audacity would be rewarded. It is rather a reference to Jonah, where the whale was presented by Providence. Providence will reward the abandonment of anyone of us who has placed himself in its arms.

3. The most Perfect Form of Abandonment is that practiced by the Church

In St. Gregory’s Doctrine, Fr. Bertoni found an excellent justification for Holy Abandonment. However, he was not satisfied until he had an even more secure guarantee, and he found it in the Roman Pontiff. The Servant of God wished to adhere to him with the utmost perfection possible. He had already finished a most painstaking task of copying over Pontifical documents⁵⁵⁴. From this, he was able to make what was perhaps the most original observation of his life. It was his attributing to the Church the most perfect form of Holy Abandonment. His statement is found in a letter to Mother Naudet, and merits to be cited in its entirety:

... The hope that the Lord gives, the attestation of His charity, i.e., divine consolation: if we are still in the dark concerning the points of our activity, He keeps us steady, awaiting the moment of light, to begin the endeavor.

If we do see clearly, He will inspire us to action. This seems to be the practice of His Spouse, which is the Church. As she has been assured by the divine promise of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, she does not give up looking for light to act, either for the defense of the truth entrusted to her, or of discipline.

And when she does see clearly, she does not give up acting, studying, and consulting, that she might proceed further in the light, and in her activity. And when she is impeded from acting, she waits her time, trusting in God. And in all these manners, she is always uniform in her abandonment in God. This, if I am not mistaken, is the perfect model of our abandonment in God.

It is a beautiful virtue to be abandoned when we cannot act, into the omnipotent arms of divine Providence. But, it is an even more perfect and consummate virtue when indeed we can, and we should work with our own hands, according to the order placed by divine Providence – but, we still do not cease being equally and totally abandoned into His hands.

Then, it seems the principle is to be: ‘... I live (and consequently, ‘I act’) now, no longer I, for Christ lives (and consequently, ‘acts’) in me ...’ (Ga 2:20). And ‘if anyone speaks, let it be as with the words of God...’ (1 P 4:11).

Please forgive me, Reverend Mother, and adjust whenever I have had the temerity to speak of things from which I am still far away, and pray that I achieve them...⁵⁵⁵

From his concluding expressions of humility, Fr. Bertoni gives the impression

⁵⁵³ Letter 56. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 336.

⁵⁵⁴ There remain [at the time of the writing of this thesis] at the Congregation of Rites, some 2000 pages of documents that he copied over in his small and neat handwriting, all concerning the Pontifical supremacy. [MssB nn. 44-66].

⁵⁵⁵ Letter 40. October 26, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 1, pp. 227, ff.

that he was convinced himself that this is a most important principle. It was not only from the careful study of the life of the Church that he obtained this idea. He saw it in the study of her note of Holiness. The life of the Church is marked by a continual assistance on the part of God. IT is an assistance that is infallible, in the definitions of the truths of the faith, and dogmatic facts. It is prudential in her canonical decisions, especially those of a general nature – but also, to a lesser degree, those decisions even of a particular order. It is, to use the expression, almost a “biological” assistance, when it is a matter of the temporal conditions of her existence⁵⁵⁶.

These last two degrees of assistance, are not so infallible as to exclude every uncertainty for the future. But, the Church achieves equally the security in her actions, by abandoning herself confidently to the arms of divine Providence. As for what pertains to the note of the Church’s holiness, Fr. Bertoni includes this under the expression, “*Bride of Christ*. This title is what the mystics apply to one who has achieved transforming union. Fr. Bertoni explained it this way:

... The Spouse, an adult in the school of love, is not attracted by the odor, but by the power of her Spouse. Strongly clinging to Him, and finding her support in His strength, she proceeds at His side. With Him, she does not run, but flies, ‘...leaning on her beloved...’ (Ct 8:5).⁵⁵⁷

This is Fr. Bertoni’s statement to explain in a general way the ultimate bond of love. He finds its application in the Church, as appears from his prayer, that follows:

... O Lord, you draw all things in accord with the designs of your adorable Providence, with the sweetness and efficacy of Thy grace... Thus, you draw Thy Spouse, which is the Church, our Mother, and Thine, and her children, which we are.

But, You draw Thy Spouse as by the hand, by Thy power. Hence, she not only follows Thee, but she accompanies Thee. So it is that You thus divide as with her maternal care, the execution of Thy paternal Providence over us...⁵⁵⁸

It is right that the Church can be presented as the model of Holy Abandonment. This is because it benefits from a union that is so perfect with God, and by an assistance that is so reassuring. In fact, no one could be under the care of God in a more perfect form than the one in which the Church perennially finds herself. Therefore, Fr. Bertoni’s intention was to start with the Church to learn how to wait, and to act, according to what is requested by the present circumstances.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁶ cf/ Charles Journet, *L’Eglise du Verbe Incarne*, v. 1, ‘Le Hierarchie Apostolique’, ed. Desclee, pp. 399, ff.

⁵⁵⁷ Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi. [MssB, n. 26].

⁵⁵⁸ 1 Kings, Med. 7 [MssB, n. 23].

⁵⁵⁹ **... The doctrine and the conduct of the First Pastor, relating to the universal good is the norm of rectitude of good spiritual government, and therefore, it is the common font of the happiness of the faithful... [1 Kings, Med. 46. (MssB, n. 23)]. ... The form of virtue and the conduct of the Holy See in the interior government of consciences is the norm of the rectitude of ecclesiastical government, proposed to all the other Pastors who do so much good as long as they are in agreement with the Holy See... [ib., Med. 47. MssB, n. 24].**

4. The Angel of Counsel

We can say that in his efforts to carry out this program, the Servant of God achieved a special profundity. He became universally recognized as an “Angel of Counsel.” He was respected and most often consulted by the bishops of his region, and by the clergy, the nobility – both in and beyond Verona. His poor room received Emperors (Francis I, Ferdinand I), and Princes, very high Church dignitaries (such as Cardinal Monico, and generally, Prelates passing through Verona), Founders of Institutes, government functionaries, ambassadors, generals, magistrates, and people of all walks of life.

For a half a century, by his counsel, he was part of the background, the inspiration of almost all the works for good that was then flourishing in an extraordinary manner in Verona. He was the first confessor and spiritual director of the first daughters of (St.) Madeline de Canossa. He was practically the co-founder with Leopoldina Naudet of the Sisters of the Holy Family. He was a much sought after counselor for Teodora Compostrini, for the Little daughters of Charity of the Sorrowful Mary; for Anthony Provolo, and his Institute of Deaf-Mutes; for the Servant of God, Fr. Nicholas Mazza, for his Institute that took care of abandoned girls, and for poor boys, who showed intellectual promise; for Camillo Cesar Bresciani, who brought the Camillians to Verona; and for the Jesuits, in their return to Verona. Also Fr. Anthony Rosmini had him as counselor and guide in the drawing up of his Plan, and the Constitutions for the Institute of Charity.

Fr. Bertoni was called “the oracle of our times”, not only for Verona, but even for distant cities, from where people would come to receive his counsel: ⁵⁶⁰

... He was a priest, singularly endowed by God, with the Gift of Counsel... ⁵⁶¹

... He was another St. Francis de Sales, or a St. Vincent de Paul... ⁵⁶²

... He was an Angel of Counsel, to whom so many would turn when they were confronted with most complicated affairs... ⁵⁶³

... He was a man of extraordinary understanding ⁵⁶⁴ – who “could read right into souls...” ⁵⁶⁵

He was endowed with a discretion and a sagacity that were truly admirable and singular... These were not the effect merely of a natural perception and wisdom. They were rather a gift and the fruit of that fervent prayer in which he sought that spirit of wisdom and prudence, that are totally the gift of God... ⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁰ SA, Doc.20, pp. 134.

⁵⁶¹ ib., Doc. 30, pp. 610, f.

⁵⁶² ib., Doc. 26, p. 366.

⁵⁶³ b., Doc. 30, p. 610.

⁵⁶⁴ l.c.

⁵⁶⁵ ib., Doc. 26, pp. 367; 417.

⁵⁶⁶ ib., Doc. 22, pp. 214, ff.

Among all the testimonies, that of Fr. Anthony Bresciani, S.J., stands out. He considered Fr. Bertoni “had settled for him the path that lead him to the Company of Jesus...:

... The outstanding character of that man’s extraordinary holiness, seems to me that he was precisely the light of counsel, both for himself and his own affairs, as well as the affairs of others. Beyond the natural intelligence with which God had so abundantly endowed him, it seemed to me that his every action was weighed and directed by the light of the Holy Spirit. His gentleness, his modesty, and depth, his kindness and courtesy, that accompanied every act, and every activity of Fr. Gaspar, were the fruit of that goodness and wisdom, infused in him by the Holy Spirit, to render him an apt instrument to guide souls to eternal life...⁵⁶⁷

If Fr. Bertoni could merit such recognition, it was due to the fact that he could admirably fuse his prayer life with his active life. He knew how to combine the life of love to the order in which charity is manifested. His was a simple charity, but one that was prudent, as he spoke of it in a letter to Mother Naudet:

... Reverend Mother, you see clearly that I am recalling all your reflections on the simplicity, if I am so speak, of charity. This is the first step of that gospel precept: ‘... Be simple as doves...’ (Mt 5:16) toward that most developed prudence of the serpent.

This stands in the very order of charity itself, and it is the step that follows: ‘... and be wise as serpents...’ (ib.).

But where is this prudence that is not human, but heavenly, learned? And how can one make laws for it, or give training for it? Here is the school, and here is the teacher, Sacred Scripture points this out: ‘... *The king hath brought me into his storerooms: he has ordered love in me ...*’ (Ct 1:3).

It is quite necessary to allow oneself to be introduced by this King Who calls us to it, and invites us to it. He also waits until we enter the storeroom of His love with those beautiful words: ‘... *Hearken, o daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father’s house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty ...*’ (Ps 45:11).

When the soul (has reached here, by its great good fortune, He inebriates it with the wine of His charity. This precious wine, cheers, fortifies, transports, the soul outside of itself. It unites the soul with God, and orders it most perfectly: ‘... he hath ordered love in me...’

Therefore, a light is shed in the intellect, one of admirable wisdom and divine Providence. This is to judge everything in their universal cause, that is God, in order to choose and to direct whatever has a relationship to God, either as an effect, or as a means, to achieve it in the future, and to glorify it for the present. With this, I intend to animate always more your charity, Reverend Mother, direct all its strength in prayer. From this, it will achieve opportune lights in difficult

⁵⁶⁷ l.c.

circumstances, to make clear the ways that you are to keep...⁵⁶⁸

From this it can be seen how Fr. Bertoni would not offend the norms of prudence, suggested by reason. Yet, he would not acquiesce, except in the light of supernatural gifts. This gives such a discernment that in comparison to it, every human far-sightedness can be compared only to darkness. Schryvers concludes:

... When the Divine Master designs to endow a soul with supernatural discernment, it takes giant steps along the way of holiness, and takes them with security. Is not God its guide? And is not God infallible...? The soul awaits with confidence from the goodness of the Divine Master every good. It awaits even the most extraordinary blessings, when these are necessary to carry out same endeavor, or for the sanctification of souls. God never permits His generosity to be any less than our hopes...⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ Letter 16. January 26, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1930. Suppl. To n. 32, p. 432.

⁵⁶⁹ *The Principles of the Spiritual Life*, p. 152.

CHAPTER 4

ABANDONMENT IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED STIGMATA OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

1. The Work of God Alone

The foundation of the Stigmatine Congregation is connected with a particular characteristic of the spirituality of its Founder. Under a certain aspect, it could be said that Fr. Bertoni did not even want to establish a Congregation. He was so preoccupied that the endeavor would result solely as that of the Lord. From the time of his very clear vision of it (not after 1812)⁵⁷⁰, that manifested to him what he was to do, he gave much thought to preparing for it, in the best possible way. But, he was still quite far removed from the events that were to follow.

He would first have to wait long years before he could even take a first step. Then, he would wait even more years to take a second, and then a third. But, he would never live to see his work completed. On the point of death, he had only around him a union of secular priests. For this union, it is true, he had drawn up a rule for true and genuine religious. He had also assured their continuance, by providing for their maintenance. Some would mention to him that he should take some steps to obtain approval. This advice would be referring to one of these steps that he had not yet clearly seen as pre-ordained by Providence. He would respond evasively, that “he was not of the stature to found a religious institute.”⁵⁷¹

2. The Foundation of the Marian Oratories

In St. Paul's Parish, in Campo Marzio, Fr. Bertoni brought about the beginnings of the Marian Oratory in the year 1802. He was not satisfied with the school of Christian doctrine, but, using that as his base, he also initiated classes of reading and writing. He also set up classes to help students and workers with their homework, and to give them instructions. He organized little art shows and trade exhibits, a recreation center, youth groups, music lessons for voice and instruments, and religious pilgrimages. He organized this group most carefully, setting it up like a “Marian Cohort”⁵⁷². With tremendous success, it spread throughout the city and the Diocese of Verona.

⁵⁷⁰ ... The Venerable Gaspar Bertoni ... had a vision in which God made it known to him that He was destining him to found a new Congregation. This fact is attested to by Fr. Lenotti, in his life of the Venerable, and it was confirmed by Fr. Marani. He declares that he had heard it from Fr. Gaspar himself ... [BC I, p. 18, n. 3].

⁵⁷¹ ... The fact is that Fr. Gaspar had desired the approval for the Institute. Fr. Marani gives us every assurance. He states that Fr. Bertoni did not ask for it, because of his humility. And Fr. Fedelini, too, recalls Fr. Bertoni and that when he was exhorted to seek approval, he would respond with his usual humility and pleasantness, that he was not of the stature to found a religious institute. But it would also be that he had foreseen the danger to which the Congregation would have been exposed, if it had been approved. He put the matter off for a more favorable time ... [cf. BC I, p. 76].

⁵⁷² *Note per servire...* V, p. 8. Suppl. *Bertoniano* 1942, n. 3.

To provide for the needs of such a vast and intense activity, some helpers soon came to his side. There would be young priests and others who were still seminarians. With Fr. Bertoni's fascination, they felt in their hearts an attraction for the religious life. Their ideal remained the Company of Jesus which was still suppressed, and their spirits yearned to be imbued with that of St. Ignatius. Fr. Bertoni did have revelations about that little company that he was establishing around the existing apostolate for the youth. He had in mind the exercise of these ministries and conferences on both sacred and literary subjects. But, in silence, he cultivated in his heart the fervor of preparation, for the time and the hour of God to strike. In the meantime, he worked hard to have come alive in himself and in others, the spirit that had been indicated to him through the book of the Spiritual Exercises.⁵⁷³

3. The Stigmatine Congregation is glimpsed in the Commentary on the I Book of Kings attributed to St. Gregory the Great

In 1810, a new circumstance came about to make the idea of an Institute more concrete. This was the study of a work that was attributed to St. Gregory, commenting on the 1st Book of Kings. From this, the Servant of God garnered material for a connected series of meditations for the clerics of the Seminary. These meditations were to last over a two year period. The work speaks insistently about a new order of preachers, and Fr. Bertoni could see outlined in them, his own "apostolic missionaries"⁵⁷⁴. Surely, with some secret satisfaction, he must have presented for the consideration of these seminarians the new ministers of the Word, pointing out their prerogatives, and their mission. Their call would have been that general call⁵⁷⁵. Their selection, though, would have been verified by the fact that the new minister would be called to a most exalted task⁵⁷⁶. Only those most enkindled with charity would have been constituted:

... in the army of God, as a division of perfect workers in the true faith, and in the exercise of all the virtues. They would be heroic workers, imitators of the apostolic life...⁵⁷⁷

Fr. Bertoni's Congregation would be precisely "a flying squadron for the assistance of Bishops."⁵⁷⁸ The new ministers would have to be marked with these four

⁵⁷³ It was the invitation that Fr. Bertoni had heard at the foot of St. Ignatius' altar. On September 15, 1808, he had gone there with his companions for a visit:

...It seemed to me that the Saint was glad we came, and he invited us to promote the greater glory of God, just as he had done ... It seemed to be that he wanted to say: 'Onward! Soldiers of Christ! gird yourselves with fortitude, put on the buckler of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the divine word, and fight with the ancient serpent. Make my spirit come alive again in you, and in others through you... [SA, Doc. 25, p. 659].

⁵⁷⁴ Fr. Bertoni's Congregation was called 'Apostolic Missionaries', but this was not its title, but its work, to which all were to be dedicated [*Bertoniano* 1932, n. 2, pp. 287, f.].

⁵⁷⁵ **...By means of the indefectible firmness of the First Rock, there is manifested even now as an invitation, or general vocation of the Spirit Creator, that is known in the circumstances ...**[1 Kings. Med. 14, (MssB, , n. 24)].

⁵⁷⁶ 1 Kings, Med. 14. [Mss, n. 24].

⁵⁷⁷ 1 Kings Med. 44.

⁵⁷⁸ *Life of the Founder*, Fiorio, p. 221.

characteristics:

1. an open confession of faith, without weaknesses and fears;
2. imitation of the passion of Christ, without the comforts of life, disregarding even death⁵⁷⁹;
3. being united with authentic priests⁵⁸⁰, to seek in harmony God's glory, without any isolation through self-love, or the loss of natural parents;
4. the desire of heaven, and no more the returns of this earth, or the honors of this world⁵⁸¹.

In waiting to realize his dream, Fr. Bertoni from 1811 onward had a foretaste of it in his vision of a small squad of choice members. These "would all speak with a single voice... having one heart and one spirit." The soul of "this army would be the captain." The exultation of the Church already was envisioned. The Church could do nothing but exult, whenever there would be united under one sole spirit, and directed by a holy shepherd, and general of the troops, and of the ministers of such perfection..."⁵⁸² Fr. Bertoni said:

... The interior life, as that of Christ, has to precede this undertaking. In it there should be time to form one's spirit...A good reserve should be kept for the courage to suffer, disposing the soul to sustain persecutions. The hope of some fruit, must never diminish, and there is needed confidence in the undertaking⁵⁸³. All is to be attributed not to oneself, but to God. In the end result, each is to avoid his own glory, to seek only that of God...⁵⁸⁴

4. The Practice of Holy Abandonment in Confident Waiting, and' in the Progressive realization of the Work

While the years of waiting lengthened, trusting abandonment increased in him. We can denote this in the suggestions that he gave to Leopoldina Naudet. During this

⁵⁷⁹ cf. Circular Letter, Fr. D. Martinis, Superior General. *Bertoniano* 1946, p. 80.

⁵⁸⁰ Fr. Bertoni stated:

...A united force is stronger ... As long as we remain isolated, and each one 'seeks the things that are his' [Ph 2:21]. We will be conquered one by one. When we will be united, 'seeking the things that are Jesus Christ's, then we will do everything; we will overcome everything. This is why our Lord said: 'I ask, Father, that they might all be one with Me... [Jn 17:21] ... It is not necessary to search for zeal... but rather to make of it one's own and to draw after oneself, even the most timid... 'Hewho hears, will say, come... [cf. Rv 22:17] [1 Kings. MssB n. 24].

In the case of Fr. Matthew Farinati, he was a companion of Fr. Bertoni from the earliest times of the Marian Oratories. As for entering the Stimmat, he had some hesitation. Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Naudet from Mantua:

... I do not believe that I will have the time on this occasion to write to Fr. Farinati. I pray you to answer him that he should not look at the present good, that might be for his benefit in particular. But he should look at the good of the entire Congregation, which will always do a greater good than that which comes from one alone ... [Letter 37. October 13, 1816. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 337.

Thus, Fr. Bertoni sought to draw after him even the most timid.

⁵⁸¹ As for the gratuity of the ministries, these words of Fr. Bertoni's Constitutions suffice: *Serve God and the Church entirely gratuitously.* [cf. ib. Compendium Rude].

⁵⁸² 1 Kings. Med. 44. [MssB, n. 24].

⁵⁸³ ib.: ... **The Lord adds there His own help, when one is abandoned in Him, and follows Him faithfully, strongly and humbly – and does not go on ahead of Him ...** [ib., Med. 16, bis. [MssB, n. 23].

⁵⁸⁴ ib., Med. 54. [MssB, n. 24].

same period, she was awaiting an indication from God, for an analogous feminine institute. Both of them can be considered like children in the arms of God, waiting to be put down on the ground to act.⁵⁸⁵ The way for action is ordinarily given by an extraordinary increase of charity. In this, one feels more particularly invested with the mission that the Apostles received, with these words:

... Going, therefore, teach all nations...⁵⁸⁶

For Fr. Bertoni, this took place in May of 1816. It was during the extraordinary mission given at St. Firmus' Major, together with Canon Pacifico Pacetti.⁵⁸⁷ The infusion of charity and the ascent of love in that circumstance was admirable. It can be said that the sign was given: it would not now be long for the hour of God to strike. In fact, on the following August 17th, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni was able to tell his spiritual daughter, Leopoldina Naudet, that the time of their joint waiting was over:

... The Arch-priest, Fr. Galvani... has offered me the Stimate, as an opportune place to establish a congregation of Priests, who would live under the rule of St. Ignatius, after telling me gladly that the Convent of St. Teresa's is for you, Reverend Mother...⁵⁸⁸

Even so, the motives why he should still abandon himself into the arms of Providence did not cease. Even though the place where he was to be established had been found, there always remained the hostility of the authorities for every form of religious life⁵⁸⁹.

Furthermore, there were some awkward situations that befell Fr. Galvani directly from the family of the Testator, Joseph Bellotti. There were repercussions of these, also on those who were to enter as tenants in the places, where the inheritance was contested. However, we know well what Fr. Bertoni's attitude was, just as soon as he was able to discern with precision the hour of activity. There succeeded his tranquil waiting, an indomitable tenacity to follow the "signified will of God." No difficulty could have stopped him. Suffice it to read what he wrote to Mother Naudet at the beginning of September:

... So, the matters are entangled, but patience and courage... The one who outlasts them, wins. Now we must throw ourselves into the sea, and some whale will take us to the shore...⁵⁹⁰

When he finally took over the Stimate on November 4, 1816, Fr. Bertoni:

⁵⁸⁵ Letter 46. June 1, 1814. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 322.

⁵⁸⁶ 1 Kings. Med. 16 bis. [MssB n. 23].

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. *Note per servire* ... VI, pp. 39, f. Suppl. to *Bertoniano* 19342, n. 3.

⁵⁸⁸ Letter 54. August 17, 1815. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 333.

⁵⁸⁹ Under the French domination, the religious houses were closed in Verona, and their members dispersed. Conditions improved in 1814, when the Austrian government succeeded the French. However, the difficulties that impeded religious foundations had not disappeared. The government of Vienna had not forgotten the principles of Joseph II, nor did it favor congregations and religious orders.

⁵⁹⁰ Letter 21. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 3, p. 336.

... took care from the very beginning that his companions, without making profession in any particular religious institute, would live as religious... That is, there would be an exercise of a prompt obedience, and the observance of a life, perfectly in common...⁵⁹¹

After having restored, or better, re-made, the Church, over a five year period (1823-1828), he constructed living quarters. In 1838, he provided his group with support, with the acquisition of a huge country estate. As we have already seen, he immediately placed this at the feet of the Supreme Pontiff. As he had chosen to live the life of abandonment, the Lord did not let pass a number of occasions for it. This program would be fulfilled in its purest form. For a few years, there was a good number of priests and coadjutor brothers. Had this continued, they would have been able to urge him to establish his institute with a sense of permanence. It would have had its own rules, and he would have sought their approval. However, such was not the case. The voice of God was not making itself heard, neither directly, nor through the favorable circumstances of the times.

It would be necessary for the then distant year 1841 to arrive, the 64th of Fr. Bertoni's age, to hear him even mention his Constitutions. He wrote about them to Fr. Bragato:

... Pray much for all of us, and for that which I am now writing, little by little, that the Lord might will it, and that it might redound to His honor. We do our part according to the graces that God gives to us.

The Lord will certainly do His part, and I do not wish to know what He wants me to do. "I am at peace, firmly believing that God can do anything that He wills, and He always does what is better. This is so, even though it might be distant from our limited view, and sometimes even contrary to it. '... I will bless the Lord at all times, and His praise shall always be in my mouth...' (Ps 33:2).

And may He help us that we might praise and serve, 'day and night', dwelling together in His house for all eternity, '... for the world as we see it, is passing away...' (1 Co 7:31).⁵⁹²

The following facts can be marshaled to show how the limited human views are thwarted:

- the deaths of four confreres, and the departure of three others (a priest and two lay brothers) in the brief span of two years;
- the absence of new recruits for the Institute, which was considered even by the most willing, as too severe, austere;
- the lessening of the classes, until the total closing of the school, which took place in 1843;
- the almost continuous illnesses of Fr. Bertoni.

⁵⁹¹ *Cenni sulla Congregazione*, cf. *Note per servire ...* VI, p. 44.

⁵⁹² Letter to Fr. Bragato. May 11, 1841. [SA, Doc. 35. P. 752].

It is hard to imagine how, at a certain point, the work of the Stimate, just did not cease to go on. There were only seven priests living in Verona, and one at the Court of Vienna, serving as the Empress' Confessor. Distrust and a little discouragement, little by little, made their appearance on the amazed faces of some of the ascetics at the Stimate. But, Fr. Bertoni retained the serenity of an indomitable security. It seemed that he had never before seen with such clarity, that this was his "hour." He would say:

... Courage, let us trust in God; we will leave it up to Him, Who can do all things...
⁵⁹³

In a private chronicle that has come down to us, kept in the Archives of the Stimate in Verona, we read:

... So great was his hope of succeeding in a work that God Himself had inspired Him, that it could even be said that if he knew for certain, that on the morrow the end of the world was to occur, he would nonetheless go on in his work...⁵⁹⁴

5. The Spirit of Holy Abandonment was codified in the Rules of the Congregation

At long last, His Constitutions were put down on paper. They were accompanied by the guarantee that came to them by the continual divine assistance, asked for by Fr. Bertoni, with endless prayer. No word, no expression, escaped the sieve of such an intimate divine approval. This was even more requested by one who was experienced in the state of Holy Abandonment in God. However, Holy Abandonment does not exclude, but rather demands prudence and the Gift of Counsel. So, the waiting for divine inspiration in the writing of the Constitutions, did not impede Fr. Bertoni from having recourse to Suarez, for the greatest part⁵⁹⁵, and to St. Thomas Aquinas, for some points in particular⁵⁹⁶. He did not ever fail to take the central idea of the Congregation from the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith. This was the Decree that conferred on Fr. Bertoni his personal title, of "**Apostolic Missionary**"⁵⁹⁷.

The sphere of divine assistance is revealed in his work of selection, adaptation, synthesis, and the ordering of the material. This was the work of the Founder, abandoned completely in God:

...He preferred the formulae of others because he found them corresponding well to his personal thought. Hence, he thought of them as better accepted by the Church. He also felt that these offered to him a means of humbling himself the more in his slogan: '...the animals of the field have their little holes, dens...' He had

⁵⁹³ SA, Doc. 26, p. 473.

⁵⁹⁴ ib. Doc. 29, pp. 608, f.

⁵⁹⁵ *De Religione Societatis Iesu in Particulari*. Tom. 15, ed. Venetiana, ex Type Balleoniana 1754.

⁵⁹⁶ II-II, qq. 160; 161; 166-168.

⁵⁹⁷ Fr. Bertoni received this title in 1817.

taken this as a motto, its meaning for him a necessity. From all this a mosaic resulted. This is true, but in that mosaic, the Servant of God wanted to express, just as he had envisioned it, a plan that he stated was inspired by God...⁵⁹⁸

We would add here that there also resulted the same spirit of the Founder's abandonment, codified. The very scope of the Apostolic Missionaries is fixed in the formula: "... for the assistance of Bishops..."⁵⁹⁹ This places in evidence the function that Fr. Bertoni's sons ought to have in respect to Bishops' desires and wishes. It was a waiting, that would not be the same as inactivity, but one that would be according to the prudent rules, already suggested by Holy Abandonment. This waiting ought to be changed into a continual, laborious preparation for all, eventual requests of Bishops. It ought to prepare the most varied abilities, in the field of the sacred sciences, as well as secular studies⁶⁰⁰. This would mean to be ready for the most varied assignments that from one moment to the next, could be assigned.

Thus equipped, in the best possible way, the Stigmatine Congregation is a real, "flying squadron" for the assistance of Bishops. It will have to serve with ardor on every field of active, in every region of the earth. This conforms to the Program established by its canonized Founder: **"Going everywhere in the Diocese and the world."**⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ *Note per servire* ... VI, p. 56. Suppl. to *Bertoniano* 1942, n. 3.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. n. 1, of the *Compendium Rude*, which states: *End: Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops*.

Fr. Lenotti was the first Novice Master in the Congregation, and then Superior General. He comments:

... It is clearly seen that the intention of Fr. Bertoni must have been to establish a Congregation like the Company of Jesus. This in a special way is dedicated and directed to the assistance and in accord with the dispositions of the Roman Pontiff. So, Fr. Bertoni wanted his men dedicated to, and determined in an entirely special way, and marked for the service of Bishops. However, with this difference, that while the Professed of the Company of Jesus make a vow of obedience to the Pope, our Professed do not make a vow of obedience to Bishops. But, they see in every way that they can to assist him respectfully and to be dedicated in a particular way to him... [Archives Stimmate, and for one part: SA, Doc. 23, p. 220.]

⁶⁰⁰ The Congregation aims to possess among its members, not only those who are suited for the performance of the ordinary duties of the Congregation, but as far as possible, those who are gifted with learning and prudence in the various ecclesiastical ministries and the spiritual works of charity, and in the various branches of knowledge, either profane, or particularly theological, so that observing all the prescriptions, they can be of assistance to the Bishops of the Church, or the Ordinaries, in their various needs, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls...

⁶⁰¹ *Compendium Rude*, # 5.

CHAPTER 5

ABANDONMENT DURING TWENTY YEARS OF HIS SICKNESS AND IN HIS DEATH

1. Values in Suffering

Physical sufferings over a long period of time, were simply part and parcel of Fr. Bertoni's life. Consequently, they had a decided influence also on his spirit. In his early years, he was most dynamic. Later on, though, he became serious and more solemn. This was after the Lord had wanted him "not dead", but "wounded", almost in continuity. At the age of 35, he suffered his first mortal illness. His excessive activity, his mortifications, his vigils that he kept increasing after the death of his pious and practical Mother (1810), finally undermined his health. This illness was a very serious "miliary fever", that in a short time, brought him to the edge of the grave. His abandonment on this occasion was sufficiently expressed by that prayer that, as we have seen, had been suggested to him by Fr. Fortis:

...Accept, O Lord, through the hands of St. Ignatius, my entire liberty...⁶⁰²

On the night of October 26, 1812, his spiritual daughter, Leopoldina Naudet, had from afar, the vision of all that was happening at the bed-side of the dying Fr. Bertoni. She heard, as though she were actually present, the last dispositions that he was leaving to his companions.

However, this time, Fr. Bertoni was to get better, although he never enjoyed robust health again. These ailments would be with him now, to a greater or lesser degree, until his death, that would take place forty years later. It was scarcely a year later (in August 1813) that he suffered a very serious relapse. The severity of his discomfort experienced at that time were to satisfy Fr. Bertoni in his old desire for martyrdom and pure suffering⁶⁰³. Life now had only for him the single attraction of serving the Lord, and of suffering something for Him. He wrote:

...The present life is for serving God, and for suffering for Him. This is seen from experience that life has no other delights that fulfill our desires...⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰² ...While praying, there came into my mind that person who is sick. To him, I owe so much, as do all of us. I do, because he has encouraged me on toward my own perfection, and for the advantage of our institute. I saw him as though he were reading that which he would dispose concerning his own business and that of his companions His sickness was getting worse, and he told me a few things. I had to respond that he alone knew that I had to be commanded in all things, and that trusting in the Lord, I will obey. An hour later, it followed as I had seen, and heard that I had to answer such and such, and nothing more... [Mss. L. Naudet, October 26, 1812. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy family, Verona].

⁶⁰³ Spiritual Diary, July 24, 1808. ... During Mass, I had from the Lord as a gift, an actual, continual offering of my work, in the Sacrifice with much sweetness... [SA, Doc. 35, p. 657]. September 29th: ... Recognition of the great good that suffering for love of God really is ... [SA, Doc. 35, p. 661].

⁶⁰⁴ Letter 37, August 24, 1813. *Bertoniano* 1932, n. 1, p. 223.

2. The School of God

On June 1, 1814, he was confined to bed, with a new sickness. He used an expression that is rather profound to describe the entity of suffering. He called it “***the School of God***’:

... Reverend Mother, please pray in your charity that I might reap some fruit from the school in which the Lord deigns to teach, so that I might be disposed to serve Him...⁶⁰⁵

It can be demonstrated that in the spiritual life, there is greater importance attached to the school of the interior Master. The major part of the instruction is reserved for the Gifts of Understanding, of Knowledge and of Wisdom. These are so many “delicate touches” of the Holy Spirit. On another occasion, Fr. Bertoni stated:

... The school through which God teaches are the lives of the saints, the Sacred Scriptures, and the lights of prayer...⁶⁰⁶

A soul abandoned to God is particularly adroit in drawing profit from all the lessons that God imparts. This pertains to every event, in that all are regulated by His most wise Providence.

But, if this soul perceives everywhere just how loving the will of God is, out of preference, it rejoices in and profits by the more solemn lessons. Among these would be the purifying lessons of prayer. There is a pain in being detached from all that is not God. This renders one more capable of being instructed by Him. This means that detachment increases in us the level to which we can be taught. It is required that this grace be the greatest in an Apostle who is commissioned with the mission of teaching others. Fr. Bertoni had copied down the following notes from pseudo-Gregory:

... One might be able to be taught by God when after taking on the office of preacher, he wishes to teach others...⁶⁰⁷

In the years that followed, he was called to advance even more deeply into the School of Suffering. In 1822, there appeared on his leg a swollen lump that seemed to be of little consequence. The doctor, however, felt that surgery would be necessary, so that the cause of it might be removed at its core. However, the after-effects of his previous illnesses brought about a longer siege than what had been planned. The operation was performed again, and in a more radical manner. It was repeated again and again, more than two hundred times. This reduced the leg to a horribly scarred member, with lacerations in places as long as a span and right down to the bone. It should be remembered how far they were then from the modern advances in surgery in the use of anesthesia, and the like. It can be appreciated how much greater was the

⁶⁰⁵ ib., Letter 46. June 1, 1814, n. 3, p. 123.

⁶⁰⁶ 1 Kings. Med. 26. [MssB, n. 23]: **... Make very dear to us, O Lord, the School of Prayer, in which You, Yourself reach. Human reason, learning, are too timid and uncertain. In ministry, we need Your light ...** [1 Kings. Med. 37. MssB, n. 24)].

⁶⁰⁷ St. Gregory, Book 3, in: 1 Kings, c. 5, n. 30, p. 171.

fortitude of soul of this patient, who for four or five years was subjected to the excruciating martyrdom of so many operations.

From Fr. Bertoni's lips, there never escaped a complaint. In the most acute severity of the operations themselves, he restrained himself to pray a little more intensely. He would then feel obliged to ask pardon of the surgeons, for having so disturbed them. There was also a time that they saw silent tears run down his face, when his leg was pierced.

3. Unchanged Abandonment in God

His state of abandonment into the hands of God remained unchanged:

... The Lord keeps me in bed, under the iron, and the knife. Nay He be blessed. '... I will bless the Lord at all times...' (Ps 33:3). As long as He is served, this suffices for me. However, I ask for your prayers, that God might maintain in me the patience He gives me. '...with- out me, you can do nothing...' (Jn 15:5)⁶⁰⁸.

In the comings and goings of his illnesses. these were not always foreseen by his doctors, even by the most proficient among them. Considering himself to be in the School of God, he would see in this a joke of a loving Providence':

...It seems to me that they are not going to cut any more, or, if they do, it will be at most, very little. I see certain jokes of Divine Providence, that amaze me beyond measure. Nay the Lord be praised for them, and may He reward your charity, Reverend Mother...⁶⁰⁹

The doctors were divided into different opinions when they tried to give an explanation for his troubles. But, they never seemed to get together on them. In a joking way, Fr. Bertoni wrote about them:

...Many say many things...' , and I do not say anything. I let each one do what he wills. It suffices that '... whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's...' (Rm 14:8).⁶¹⁰

We should not omit certain expressions of his that are ingenuously child-like. Fr. Bertoni would express these from his most tender sense of the spirit of devotion. Here are some examples:

... The Lord has put me to bed...⁶¹¹

... The Lord got me up for Mass and the Office this morning, because that little tumor on my knee has begun to break. We shall see what He wants...⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁸ Letter 113 B, n. 2, p. 85 – May 11, 1827.

⁶⁰⁹ Letter 127. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 3. P. 117.

⁶¹⁰ ib., Letter 138, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 3, p. 126.

⁶¹¹ Letter 147. Septuagesima Sunday, 1829. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 4, p. 198.

⁶¹² Letter 142, *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 4, p. 196.

... It seems to me that Divine Providence, if it is not my lack of faith, wishes each time to give me that little health that is necessary for me to continue to live, and to work a bit more. He has His reasons, and not only one, but a thousand...⁶¹³

... He wants me wounded, not dead. So, if I could serve Him, and not abuse His graces, I can do that penance that is necessary for me...⁶¹⁴

4. His Final “FIAT”

To adopt an expression of his, Fr. Bertoni's illnesses did not pertain to any earthly physician⁶¹⁵, but to a Heavenly Doctor. Hence, whenever He chooses, there would be a bit of a respite. He fell ill again in 1842, and from then onward, it can be said that sickness did not abandon him again, until his death (in 1853). We will refer only to the last thirty months of his life, during which Fr. Bertoni was forced to an absolute immobility. All the while, he was suffering the most excruciating pain. He wrote:

... If you only knew, my sons, the sufferings that I have, if you only knew! The anguish is such that it would lead to desperation, if the Lord did not help me with His grace...⁶¹⁶

... My sons, pray much for me to the Lord that He grant me patience. I have need of His help, to be able to go on...⁶¹⁷

And, at every such time, there would be heard on his lips the expression of Holy Abandonment, that was so dear to him:

... Thy Will be done... ' Nay the Lord be blessed!

He even found strength to ask the Lord to bear down a little harder with His hand:

... Strike, o Lord, strike, because You have reason. Strike, because I merit this, and even worse...⁶¹⁸

Two Seminary professors came one day to visit. When they courteously asked him how he was, he answered simply:

... Here I am, in school...!⁶¹⁹

Fidelity to the Interior Master, even in those most difficult times, were what impressed

⁶¹³ Letter 104. July 5, 1826. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 2, pp. 78, f..

⁶¹⁴ Letter 99. *Bertoniano* 1933, n. 2, p. 84.

⁶¹⁵ **... My little ailments do not come from an earthly doctor .. SO, I accept the offering of a heavenly Doctor** ... [Letter 143].

⁶¹⁶ SA, Doc. 20, p. 143.

⁶¹⁷ ib., Doc. 26, p. 423.

⁶¹⁸ ib., Doc. 20, p. 144.

⁶¹⁹ ib.,

him the most. One day, he wrote to Fr. Bragato at the Court of Vienna. He was telling him how the schools had just opened at the Stimate. He concluded:

... Since you are out of the school (here), remain in the School of God: '... they will all be taught by God...' (Jn 6:42). '... Blessed is the man You shall instruct, O Lord, and shall teach him out of Thy law..' (Ps 93:12).⁶²⁰

Now, on the bed of his indescribable sufferings, he learned his final, and most sublime lessons. His desire to progress in this School of Purification grew ever more. In fact, when a confrere whispered in his ear, if he needed any- thing, he answered: "... I have need only of suffering..."⁶²¹

Suffering was the portion meted out to him for such a large part of his life, but it was a lesson that he marvelously assimilated. This was true to such an extent, that those who knew him well, would always describe him, not only a man who was patient in a holy manner, but one who was "blessed in his suffering."⁶²² He was not even spared the most terrible trial, that pertaining to the state of his own soul, and his eternal destiny⁶²³. Thus, Abandonment in God had for Fr. Bertoni, its extreme trial.

Death came on June 12, 1853. It took him at the height of his ascension, in such a consummation of the spiritual life to move his Pastor, Fr. Cajetan Giaccobbe very deeply. He noted these words in the registry of deaths within the Parish of the Most Holy Trinity. These remarks seem to indicate the truly unique opinion which Fr. Giaccobbe had of Fr. Bertoni, even before he became his biographer:

... June 12, 1853: The Reverend Father Gaspar Bertoni, son of the late Francis, and of the late Brunora Ravelli, the Founder of the very praiseworthy Institute that has arisen next to the Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis, at the age of 75 years, comforted with all the sacraments and spiritual helps, full of virtue and of merits, fell asleep in the embrace of Jesus Christ...⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ To Fr. Bragato, no date. SA, Doc. 35, p. 753.

⁶²¹ SA Doc. 26, [. 424.

⁶²² ib., Doc. 26, p. 424.

⁶²³ To a confrere who once tried to encourage him by reminding him of all the good he had done in his life, he answered:

...O Brother, please do not say that, please! Do you not know what a poor and unfortunate sinner I am!? If you truly wish me well, do not say any more, but pray instead much to the Lord for me, that He might pardon me, and extend His mercy to me... [ib., Doc. 26, p. 469].

⁶²⁴ SA, Doc. 19, p. 05.

CONCLUSION

There only remains to us now to sum up the various tracts that constitute St. Gaspar Bertoni's spiritual patrimony. In the order of grace, the divine liberality endowed his soul with a complexity of virtues and supernatural gifts. These are like new faculties, capable of producing acts of the God-life. In the varied harmony of these faculties, there is to be re-traced the particular outline of each soul. Fr. Bertoni noted:

... One virtue never excludes another, nor do they fight among themselves...

He wrote once to Mother Naudet:

... When, at times, it seems to you that prudence is needed, or charity, for something, do not fear that this is against poverty, or a failing against a religious vow. The religious vows are no more than a means in respect to charity, which is their end. And it is the end that gives the order, the manner and the measure to all the means...
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Everything in Fr. Bertoni's life and gravitated toward this pivot: charity. It was a charity that was revealed in its purest form, with the constant quest for the greater glory of God. It was accompanied by the most absolute and complete abandonment in the Divine Will:

...Strive after the greater gifts. and I point out to you a yet more excellent way...' (I Cor 12:31). Now, the most excellent is that which is the most direct, the smoothest, sure and adroit. It is where all walk, and in which there must . be that single gift, if it is a true one. This is charity, toward which are ordered all visions and ecstasies, and the like, almost like the Sacraments in the Church. These signify, produce and increase charity...⁶²⁶

For Fr. Bertoni, true charity is only that which is manifested in deeds. It is an affective and an effective love, and at the same time, it is revealed in a service. This is rendered in the spirit of humble reverence and submission to the divine will:

... The Lord grants us grace, not partially, but totally, to carry out His Will. In this Will, is all our sanctification, the usefulness for our brothers and sisters, and His glory...⁶²⁷

... Let us seek the glory of God and our own spiritual salvation, and that of our neighbor. God will give us the rest added on, having already given us His Son, and with Him, all things...⁶²⁸

Charity that is so intense, supposes a complete dedication, with the logical subordination of our entire selves, and of all things to the divine glory:

⁶²⁵ Letter 97, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 4-6, p. 72.

⁶²⁶ Panegyric on St. Veronica Giuliani. [MssB, n. 28].

⁶²⁷ Letter 51. December 21, 1814. *Bertoniano* 19323, n.3, p. 330.

⁶²⁸ ib., Letter 97. *Bertoniano* 1933, nn. 4-6, p. 73.

...I ought not to seek my own interests, tastes, but the interests of the glory of God, and His pleasure...⁶²⁹

It is necessary to put “the soul on the point of doing everything with divine help, for God, without any regard for self”⁶³⁰. “We ought to be with all our interests and our desires sanctified in God...”⁶³¹ Therefore, the studies, health, sickness, relations with our neighbor, the starting of our endeavors – all this ought to serve in bringing about for God the greatest possible glory, according to the differing circumstances. This is how Fr. Bertoni practically suggested all this to Mother Naudet:

... Consider the strength of your Community, and what would determine what would seem to you as better, that God might be served with these individuals, in these circumstances, in these times, and in these places, etc. Since we cannot do any more for our Lord, would we not want to do for now, at least this? In another time, we might do better, if he should so wish it for His glory and for our greater good and that of our neighbor...⁶³²

And the great lesson learned in St. Ignatius’ school was: measure the means to the end, and take the better and more efficacious means in those circumstances in which one presently is, to achieve the end as fully as possible. In the search for divine glory, Fr. Bertoni was not moved only by the *virtue of religion*, which inclines one to render to God the honor due to Him. But, he was thoroughly imbued and permeated with tenderness because of the influx of the *Gift of Piety*. This had him look on God as a loving Father, and by the *Gift of Wisdom*. By this, he was made to yearn for the joy of union, and of transformation in God. He experienced “**what a great good it was to forget and to despoil oneself of everything created to seek only God!**”⁶³³ “**O blessed is he who could so disavow everything, to remember only God!**”⁶³⁴

His profound humility was perfected by filial trepidation, specifically by the Gift of Fear. In this, Fr. Bertoni found a way also to increase in the esteem of God. This is truly to elevate God so much the more in our estimation, the more that we lower ourselves in the recognition of our miseries.”⁶³⁵

And so, there sprang up in Fr. Bertoni a reinforced hope, which is confident abandonment into the hands of God, Abandonment is the perfecting and determining point, not only of Hope, but also under diverse aspects, of faith, or Love of humility, and of all other virtues and gifts. The last word, therefore, that can express the summit of perfection for Fr. Bertoni is Holy Abandonment.

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⁶²⁹ Retreat to Priests, [MssB, n. 16].

⁶³⁰ ib.

⁶³¹ Letter 72. December 1822. *Bertoniano* 1933, p. 14.

⁶³² Letter 138, no date. *Bertoniano* 1933, p. 126.

⁶³³ Spiritual Diary. December 25, 1808. [SA Doc. 35, p. 665].

⁶³⁴ Letter 4. December 1, 1812. *Bertoniano* 1929, p. 101.

⁶³⁵ Letter 14, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, p. 429.

The realization of the divine love that took place concretely, occurs through the union of the soul with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ not only has the function of means, or of the way in our return to God. Nor does He remain as a simple model to be drawn faithfully. His is a life that needs to be transformed into our own, a vibrant interiority to be brought into ourselves. Charity of deed is constituted by participation in the life of Christ. In fact, St. Thomas distinguishes in perfection that which is principal, from that which is secondary. In doing this, he says that the "Follow Me" spoken by Christ, signifies what is principal, viz., the very life of love.⁶³⁶ Fr. Bertoni wills likewise to keep present two realities:

...the perfection that has its root and fulfillment in charity, as 'charity is the bond of perfection...' (Col 3:14), consists in the conformity of our life with that of Jesus Christ, our Lord. '... All will be perfect if he is like his master...' (Lk 6:4)⁶³⁷.

The perfection of a believer consists in union with God, through charity. This takes place in the plan of sanctifying grace, which is a created participation in the very nature of God. The nature of God is charity: '... God is love...' (1 Jn 2:16). Therefore, every supernatural life consists in loving God. But, there is not there a supernatural perfection taken in the abstract. This cannot be realized in the concrete, except according to the Christian form. Fr. Bertoni saw the diverse grades of perfection, precisely in relationship with a likeness of Christ:

... That charity which is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us, when it has' just been born, and is still like a baby, assimilates us to Christ. It does this according to all the precepts through the works of every virtue. This is the common evangelical perfection, necessary for all the children of God, members of His Church, regenerated in the light of His Gospel.

...This charity, when it is nourished, and has grown, and becomes an adult, conforms us to Christ, in accord with His counsels. It does this through the works of supererogation, and of every heroic virtue. This is the perfection proper to the saints, to heroes and apostolic men.

... A seraphic charity in a way-farer is one that transforms a person into Christ, through the strictest and most literal fulfillment of His every word. It is also done through the most vivid copy of His every, most individual action. this is the perfection characteristic of the humble patriarch, of the poor St. Francis, the most perfect lover and imitator of Christ...⁶³⁸

Fr. Bertoni tended toward this seraphic charity through the application of every word of the Lord, and in imitation of His every action. He wrote this in his Memoirs:

... Desire to imitate Christ...⁶³⁹

⁶³⁶ II-II, q. 184, a. 3, ad 1 um.

⁶³⁷ Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi. [MssB, n. 26].

⁶³⁸ Another Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi. [MssB, n. 26].

⁶³⁹ Diary. December 22, 1808. SA, Doc. 35, p. 662.

... Desire to be transformed into Him, and that Jesus might live in me and no longer I...⁶⁴⁰

... Frequent memory of the life of Christ, with tender love of correspondence...⁶⁴¹

... Strong movement to follow our Lord closely, at the cost of life, through poverty and ignominy...⁶⁴²

... We must make a portrait in ourselves of Jesus Christ...⁶⁴³

And he goes on in search, specifically, of particulars in the life of Christ, to reproduce them⁶⁴⁴. He suggested to Fr. Bragato:

... Mull over often in the Gospels, and break down into small portions the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, our Lord, through meditation. Apply to yourself what is required by the circumstances, in which you are. Base yourself on that model whom all the saints have copied...⁶⁴⁵

He offered to Mother Naudet for her Particular Examen these words from pseudo-Gregory:

...In all that one does, let him always look to Him, and direct to Him the rectitude of one's life. Through His assumed humanity, He has recognized the type of His chosen ones to be formed...⁶⁴⁶

Surely this does not mean a mere exterior copying. Other- wise, Fr. Bertoni would not have told the Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family to examine her prayer and her holy desires. She was to examine to see if these were:

... imitating the prayer, and the most holy desires of the Heart of Christ, that in this world was mortal and passable, but which is glorious and immortal in Heaven, and in the Most Holy Eucharist, for the benefit and sustenance of His Church...⁶⁴⁷

From this point of view, we can say that the asceticism of Fr. Bertoni respected the exigencies of our solidarity with Christ:

... With Christ, I am nailed to the Cross [or, more closely in accord with the Greek: with Christ, 'I am con-crucified. This means, crucified together with Christ, as though grafted and inserted into the tree of Christ's Cross. This is to have in common with the tree itself, both sap and life, that is, grace and charity...⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁰ ib., p. 663.

⁶⁴¹ ib., p. 666.

⁶⁴² ib., p. 660.

⁶⁴³ ib., p. 667.

⁶⁴⁴ ib., September 25, 1808, p. 660; October 24, p. 662; Dec. 25, p. 665; July 30, p. 668.

⁶⁴⁵ Letter to Fr. Bragato. June 4, 1836. SA, Doc. 35, p. 742.

⁶⁴⁶ 1 Kings, Book 2, c. 2, n. 41, p. 78.

⁶⁴⁷ Letter 21, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, p. 470.

⁶⁴⁸ Panegyric on St. Francis [MssB, n. 26].

Therefore, we ought to see Fr. Bertoni inflict death on himself, and on all that is perishable in him. This is uniquely the function of the integrity with the true life that is in Christ. Being illustrated by the Gift of Knowledge, he sees how encumbered all those things are that are not of Jesus Christ:

... On account of the surpassing knowledge of Christ...’ (Ph 3:8). This is through a knowledge that is not acquired in the school of philosophers, but only in that of Christ. It is through a knowledge of Christ that is eminent. This is because it surpasses by far, all the others that are not Him. It is also because among all of His knowledge, the one of renouncing everything is not ordinary, but surpassing. This is precisely because no other science is less practiced: this means to be stripped naked, so as not to wish for anything else on earth, but the nude Christ.⁶⁴⁹

Fr. Bertoni lived in a time in which naturalism threw discredit on everything that pertained to the supernatural, renunciation and death. Like St. Paul, weeping, as he had to say that many in his times, were living like enemies of the cross of Christ (Ph 3:17). So, Fr. Bertoni lamented: “... I fear that the cross is being dispersed from the hearts of many in these parts...”⁶⁵⁰ One day, he heard an interior voice that imposed this on him:

... Take up the spiritual life, but the strict one, the one of penance. I will forget your sins, and I will show you how much you will have to suffer for My name...⁶⁵¹

These words must have guaranteed how on all that he practiced, and on all that he cared about, to work for his own well-being. Fr. Bertoni’s austerities, in fact, were of an impressive severity. The renunciation of his own thought, and of his own will, as well as of earthly goods, was most extraordinary. In addition, from the virtue of *fortitude*, and during his terrible maladies, from that of *patience*, Fr. Bertoni seemed to be imbued with the *Gift of Fortitude*. Through it, he thrust himself beyond his strength, to the most arduous undertaking of all: his transformation into the patient Christ. His biographer noted:

... In fact, for as often as his men gathered around him, his words were no different, his expressions of affection did not vary – always riveted on Jesus Christ, and Christ on the Cross. His studies were only that He might accompany His Passion, and to ask Him that he might become like Him, and suffer the more...⁶⁵²

Fr. Bertoni’s spirituality was thoroughly imbued with zeal for the salvation of souls. He founded a Congregation that was eminently apostolic. As in the natural order, paternity is conditioned by physical maturity, so for Fr. Bertoni, spiritual paternity is conditioned by that maturity of perfection, expressed by St. Paul, with these words:

⁶⁴⁹ ib.

⁶⁵⁰ Letter 110, no date. *Bertoniano* 1930, p. 470.

⁶⁵¹ Spiritual Diary. April 18, 1811. [SA, Doc. 35, p. 671].

⁶⁵² ib., Doc. 26, p. 423.

“...to perfect manhood, 'to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ...” (Ep 4:13)⁶⁵³. There is required a total complexity of virtues to be able to generate spiritual sons⁶⁵⁴:

... Christ wanted to give to us the honor of being His spiritual parents. This is what spiritual procurators and parents of Jesus Christ ought to be those who generate Him, namely, with His preaching and with the administration of the Sacraments, in the souls of the faithful.

1. faithful in their minds, and in their works, like Abraham; 2. prudent, to know what should be done: just to dispose them with rectitude, strong in manner, that the good they wish to carry out, they may be able to do so; all should be temperate, that they might carry out everything with discretion, like the Patriarchs.

Therefore, moral and theological knowledge is not enough. Virtues are needed, both human and divine, as well as moral and theological. '...The one who does, and not the one who knows, the will of my Father, he is My mother...'⁶⁵⁵

It is never required to trespass, or offend sane virtue, in order to avoid harming one's work⁶⁵⁶, **“not even in the slightest.”**⁶⁵⁷

The salvation of souls sought for in an ardent apostolate demands “effort and struggle.” For this battle, the weapons ought to be sharpened in a “continual meditation and prayer, preparing the way.” And there are to be chosen “with the most diligent circumspection”, the appropriate means against the manifold evils and enemies, especially against the passions that cloud the reason, and take away the light of truth.” Therefore, by also preaching against the vices, it is necessary to employ in confessions “charity, prudence and strong zeal.” The apostolate is ordered to the up building of the body of Christ” (Ep 4:12). It succeeds more efficaciously when the Apostles are united in the same spirit, in dependence on one. This one must be able to give more agility and dynamism to the action. He will have “free leadership in everything”, but always in subordination to the “respect and obedience” owed to the Church. The active life is preceded by “the secret life, as was that of Christ, in which there must be the ease to form the spirit.” Therefore, also those will be gained, who despise us, because virtue is perceived as more solid.”

⁶⁵³ 1 Kings, Med. 2 [MssB, n. 23].

⁶⁵⁴ **...Mortification of the flesh, circumspection of the mind, simplicity of intention, strength in acting, virtue of charity, affluence of speech. Excellent gifts, sublime humility, and the gift of prayer for the subjects; sublime manner of living and authority, integrity of habit and example, affability, communicability, solitude...** This is what Fr. Bertoni asked of his missionaries. He then added: **... God gives good will through grace to His preachers, that they might generate spiritual sons. When God wants to benefit people, He gives good will to their priests ...** [1 Kings. Med. 30. [MssB].

⁶⁵⁵ **Ib., Med. 2 [MssB n. 23]: Elsewhere he lists the requirements for an apostle:... Zeal for souls, in divine knowledge, spirit in various works, diffidence toward oneself and fear of God, prudence and prayer, obedience and subjection to the Roman Pontiff from one's heart, humility and reverence ...** [1 Kings. Med. 30, MssB].

⁶⁵⁶ Spiritual Diary. July 13, 1808. [SA, Doc. 35, p. 656].

⁶⁵⁷ **...Many are in this deception so that they will not ruin their endeavors, and their undertakings, they neglect their duties, but precisely for this, they do them more harm. Never leave a single point of perfection to avoid harming your undertakings ...** [1 Kings, Med. 16 bis. (MssB n. 23)].

He is not to set out on the apostolate, who does not have “the courage to suffer, and a soul disposed to sustain persecutions.. ‘Al 1 who want to live piously in Christ Jesus, will suffer persecutions’ (2 Tm 2:12). This is always true in time of peace, but even more so, in the time of war. ‘They must not only wish to live piously, but they must also wish that others live piously in Christ...’” Besides, there is required that the Apostle be sustained by the “hope of fruit” and by the “confidence in the under- taking.” This is founded in the certainty of the help of God, Whose glory, he seeks exclusively.⁶⁵⁸

Fr. Bertoni could only suggest that one stay continually “in the School of God.” This would obviate all the difficulties, and overcome the dangers that are encountered in the apostolate:

“...He who wishes the perfection of the apostolate, while he humbly follow the examples of his elders, while he is endowed, through study, with the erudition of sacred eloquence, it is most necessary that he take care with that purity of mind, he comes to know those things that are to be taught, by contemplating them. For, he ought to be able to be taught by God, who has taken on the office of preacher, and de-sires to teach men....” (St. Gregory the Great, I Kings, c. 5, v. 30) (p. 171).⁶⁵⁹

Therefore, Fr. Bertoni wanted the Apostle “to have al- ways his heart in heaven, when he sought rest from his continual labors, and their natural ending. There would be formed the rule of those judgments and directions and then, they would direct their desires, and efficaciously direct souls.”⁶⁶⁰ And he appealed to the example of the Angels, who “assist the elect without losing their contemplation”⁶⁶¹. He also cited the example of Ezechiel’s animals, who drew the cart of divine glory and had a likeness of the firmament on their heads...” (I, 22).⁶⁶²

At the beginning of the apostolic life, Fr. Bertoni had already placed an extraordinary ascension of charity. Now, this ought never to be extinguished, as long as the reason for the apstolate is not diminished:

... Charity is that which generates and nourishes spiritual children. It is charity that God wishes to spread in the world. ‘... I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I, but that it be kindled...? (Lk 12:49). It is enkindled in meditation. ‘...In my meditation, fire shall flame out...’ (Ps 38:4). ‘... Unless the Holy Spirit enkindles their hearts, and permeates their tongues, and sees to it that they spark in their manner that is suited to the hearers to uplift their hearts, they will accomplish nothing...’ (St. Augustine, Concerning Christian Doctrine, Book 4, c. 15). ‘... The tears that he wishes to pour out from his hearers, he himself first sheds, and so by the compunction of his own heart, will he enkindle others...’ (St. Prosperus, De Virt.

⁶⁵⁸ Ib., Med. 54. MssB, n. 24. In his Diary for December 2, 1808, Fr. Bertoni wrote concerning confidence and certitude, that there must be had in whatever is undertaken: **... We must especially careful not to fail the Lord, being sure that for His part, he surely will not be lacking; when this has been done, when will we clearly understand with God that this cannot harm, or oppose our undertakings ... [SA, Doc. 35. P. 664].**

⁶⁵⁹ 1 Kings, Med. 26 [MssB, n. 26].

⁶⁶⁰ ib.

⁶⁶¹ Retreat to Priests. Med. For New Confessors, n. 17.

⁶⁶² 1 Kings. Med. 26, MssB, n. 23

Cant., Book I, c. 23). '... We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word...' (Ac 6:4) .⁶⁶³

The charity of the Apostle ought to be, according to be, according to Fr. Bertoni, as follows: prudent, persevering, discreet and strong:

... As prudent charity disposes the matter; persevering charity awaits the time; discreet charity distinguishes it, and does not hasten the endeavors through unpreparedness, or immoderation; it seizes the opportunity, and does not leave the works imperfect. So, strong charity, without regard and human fears, makes the very most of its time, among the upright and the just who admire it. It holds in check those who are rebellious, who fear it, but who keep for it a certain reverence and regard. The human spirit and vice are timid and vile, when confronted by true virtue and the spirit of God...⁶⁶⁴

In a final conclusion, we can state that the personal apostolate of the Servant of God was regulated not only by the light of prudence, even though infused – but especially by the Gift of Counsel. He was, in fact, like a docile instrument in the hands of God. This was so true that a renowned witness stated:

... It seemed to me that his every action was weighed and directed according to the light of the Holy Spirit...⁶⁶⁵

There cannot be found a more beautiful – and, at the same time, a more simple expression of how St. Gaspar Bertoni's life unfolded, other than within the sphere of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, his life was a complete handing over of himself in total abandonment to the divine initiative.

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⁶⁶³ Retreat to Priests. Med. For New Confesors, n. 17.

⁶⁶⁴ 1 Kings. Med. 16, bis. [Mss, n. 23].

⁶⁶⁵ SA, Doc. 22, p. 215. Letter of Fr. Anthony Breciani, SJ.