

# **ST. GASPAR BERTONI**



**NOVEMBER 4, 1816**

**A CREATIVE SYNTHESIS OF REALISM AND HOPE**

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## ABBREVIATIONS, QUOTATIONS AND NOTES USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

Abbreviation or Quotation	Meaning
f. (ff.)	Follow page(s) or verse(s)
Ibi (or "ib")	It is an abbreviation of the Latin " <i>ibidem</i> ", and is an editorial short-cut, which means: there; in the same place.
<b>MssB</b>	<b>Manoscritti Bertoniiani</b> - all typed in five volumes by Fr. Luigi Benaglia <sup>i</sup> , CSS - these are all the writings of Fr. Bertoni - they have also been printed out by computer in five volumes with marginal numbers for easy reference.
NB	NOTA BENE [ <i>"note well!"</i> - <i>"pay attention!"</i> - usually used in English and Italian manuscripts - from the Latin]
p. (pp.)	Page(s)
Ps (Pss)	Psalm(s)
Psalms number	The Psalm number refers always to the Latin Vulgate. When are quoted two numbers, the second one refers to the modern Bibles, where the Psalm 9 was divided into two.
q. (qq.)	These are abbreviations for: <i>Question/Questions</i> - these are abbreviations usually used with St. Thomas Aquinas.
ss.	Follow pages (or verses) [from the Italian <i>sequentia</i> ]
v. (vv.)	Verse(s) of the Sacred Scripture

Notes	Meaning
<b>Footnotes</b>	Author's complementary notes regarding terms and nouns used in this document, in numeral sequence (1, 2, 3...), in the same page (or following), at the bottom.
<b>Endnotes</b>	Author's complementary notes regarding terms and nouns used in this document, in Roman numeral sequence (I, ii, iii, iv...) at the end of the document.

## Introduction

[1] It was a time of year – almost two centuries ago – when Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, Fr. John Mary Marani and Bro. Paul Zanoli – the first Stigmatines – came to live the beginnings of the Stigmatine life, in the Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis, in Verona, Italy. More and more the days were shortening – one liturgical year was in its last weeks – and the hours of darkness surpassed the hours of sun light. These first three men were soon to be followed by a trickle of other men with like-minded ideals. This event started the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Their lives were marked with a clear balance between darkness and the hoped-for light of a New Advent in their lives, a new beginning – the long winter of life, would give way in grace to a renewed spring-time in the Resurrection.

[2] A central inspiration of the early Stigmatines living at the *Stimmate* <sup>ii</sup> in Verona, repeatedly surfacing in the life of the Founder would be the Five Wounds of Jesus Christ – sorrowfully received on Good Friday with great suffering – and gloriously retained in His Risen Body on Easter night, as the Source of the Apostolic Mission. In showing His five wounds, Jesus sent the Apostles on the same Personal Mission He had eternally received from his Father [cf. Jn 20:21, ff.]. Along with this, the Community early began to celebrate their Patronal Fest of the Holy Espousals of Mary and Joseph.

[3] One fact above stands out in this history: the Stigmatine Community has truly experienced the Sacred Stigmata in its nearly 200 year life, and for more than 99 years in this country: the 'Sorrowful' Good Friday aspect, in the enormous sufferings the Community has endured - the many pre-mature losses of dear and competent men - and the failures of not a few hopes. The 'Glorious', Easter aspect has been most evident as well: the undying hope in the resurrection, with its extraordinary commitment to the Apostolic Mission, living out in practice the words of Jesus on Easter night, when He manifested His Sacred Stigmata in the Cenacle room with this Apostolic Missionary Mandate: ***As the Father has sent me, I now send you!*** [cf. Jn 20:19, ff.].

[4] There is a distinct experience we all gain in serving Jesus Christ. This is a share in His unique relationship with His Father. In his transcription of the Meditations of St. Gregory the Great preached to the Seminarians of Verona commenting on First Kings [1 S] <sup>1</sup>, the Stigmatine Founder uses themes that are now quite familiar to us.

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Bertoni was always most challenging in his ideal for a more than ordinary knowledge [cf. CF ## 49;50;151]:

5012: There needs to be desires to learn the Science of the Saints in order to convert sinners, to watch over the just, and to advance in union with God. [Med 7]

Fr. Bertoni's unique bond with Jesus Christ is the source of our Stigmatine Vocation: seeing the Sacred Stigmata as our means of preparing for the Eternal Nuptials with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Fr. Bertoni noted this in his Meditations on First Kings – trials are the source of new life:

**Med. 6: 4985: *But Anna went not up: for she said to her husband: [v. 22].***

**Anna is invited to share in this solemn oblation, because the holy Church by the spiritual exhortation of her Spouse is enkindled from the daily desires of love to the eternal contemplation of divine clarity. <sup>2</sup>**

**Med. 9: 5140: *So that the barren has borne many, and she that had many children is weakened. 1 K 2:5.***

***The weakened one:* this is the Synagogue [This is because] by the institution of the old law, it cannot bring to term. For she lost the faith of the first man, and this brings forth progeny to the devil, and not to God.**

***She that had many children:* Because while she was in the truth of the Scriptures, she brought up the people of old subject to her to yearn for the Advent of the coming Redeemer, and she brought forth children from her embrace of her Heavenly Spouse.**

## A. A New Terminology

In order to summarize the one Eternal Word in the most expressive language, our own times emphasize even the prefixes of familiar words: as in Luke's Gospel 1:35], the Holy Spirit 'hovers', over-shadows' Mary. The Evangelist uses the same terminology as did the inspired author of the original creation story – and thus, Jesus' entire life is ***IN-spired*** by the 'Other' Paraclete; in Luke's Gethsemane story [22:44], we find that Jesus ***PER-spired*** His own Precious Blood [... *His sweat fell to the*

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**5093: *Give us this day our daily bread:* Our Bread is Christ. Give us a great knowledge of His excellence, so that we might ever more yearn to serve Him, in order to be able to know him the better. [Med 8] [With Fr. Bertoni's constant emphasis on service\_of the Lord, and the Church [cf. *obsequium*], here the implication is that such total service leads to a kind of experience of the Lord [*epignosis?*]**

**5253: And this is the second benefit of temptation, the effect of the provident care of the Church, cooperating in the designs of the Spouse concerning the care of the Elect put to the test, and it is the science of discretion. The soul, by submitting itself to the Magisterium of the Church acquires this knowledge in temptation, which reforms the indiscretion of desires, while it makes us know our own strengths and determines the levels of the virtues that we have acquired, after having examined them as with a touch-stone. *What does he know who has not been tried?* Ecclus 34:9 [Med .12]**

<sup>2</sup> cf. MssB 4985.

*ground like great drops of blood...*] – and John [19:30] describes Jesus' death as an **EX-Spiration**, a further sending out of the Holy Spirit: [ *...and bowing His head, He gave up His Spirit...!*] – in preparation for the coming Pentecost.

Our own journey of Redemption begins and unfolds with our **DIS-figuration** by Original and our own actual Sin - by God's Mercy, we are then **CON-figured** to Christ Jesus by Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist [Rm 6] – to be redeemed also by the **TRANS-Figuration** of Jesus, Who tells us: *It was not for my sake that this Voice [from heaven] came but for yours!* [Jn 12:30].

Through long years of intense personal suffering before he died, Fr. Bertoni became the great prayerful mystic of helplessness, under the crucible of his terrible daily monotony. He served God and the Church as an invalid for more than 20 years: the prime of his life and apostolic productivity were taken from him; his was a near silver-jubilee of an accepted near-solitary confinement, alone day after day with his thoughts, his intense prayer, and his on-going self-giving in behalf of God's People, as the great Missionary of Abandonment to the Paschal Mystery throughout his entire life. His daily oblation was that of routine – he was the Apostle of life's dimness and drudgery – as he noted the Church herself lived, which for him was the Model of Holy Abandonment. He once wrote:

***... This is the practice of the Spouse [of Christ] which the Church is. As she has already been assured by the divine promise of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, she does not ever giving up looking for the light in order to continue her work, or in defending the truth entrusted to her, or restoring discipline. And when she does see clearly, the Church never gives up working, studying, consulting, so that she might go proceed further under the light she receives...<sup>3</sup>***

He worked always to dissipate the awful dark night of the apparent 'non-sense' of so many years of suffering – in the old Latin it could be said of St. Gaspar: his life-journey was Per ***Crucem ad Lucem – Nox illuminatio mea!*** Knowledge of the Crucified Christ [CF # 51] served as his compass toward the Eternal Nuptials with the Risen Lord. In addition to his lived balance between suffering and healing, between death and hope for a new life, Fr. Bertoni believed that his grace of commitment – his self-giving – his **self-emptying** led to a Holy Abandonment to God, with its ever greater availability as an **oblation** for the sake of the Church<sup>4</sup> - would lead to eternal nuptial banquet with the Trinity.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 38, October 26, 1813, in: *Epistolario*, p. 99

<sup>4</sup> cf. his Meditation 2 on First Kings:

4891: *To adore and to offer sacrifice to the Lord God of Hosts in Silo. [1 K 1:3].*

The Man went up so that he could worship and offer sacrifice, because He wanted to be known for this, that in dying, He would redeem those whom He had taught by living. *He adored*: as an example for the chosen, He rendered Himself totally humble and abject through obedience to God the Father. *He offered sacrifice*, Who

The way life is lived, for St. Gaspar, is the best expression of the Stigmatine devotions which are always meant to lead to imitation. Giving oneself over to this ideal is the living out of the Stigmata of Christ – and this leads to a Holy Espousals, that will last forever, as the culmination of our life-long service of God in the Apostolic Mission – which sometimes will mean lengthy personal suffering. The permanence of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, the ideal of all living the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, served Fr. Bertoni also as a sign of that **eternal nuptials** of the Saints with the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Fr. Bertoni in his Meditations on First Kings notes that the marriage of the Lamb will lead us in the Church to eternal union<sup>5</sup>. As it

by living, offered examples of humility, He handed Himself over to God the Father on the altar of the Cross as an oblation and a host <sup>4</sup>, and those whom he taught by living, He redeemed by dying.

4894: Third Means: the Ministry of Priests ...

*In Silo* v. 3. This is the place of the immolation.

*Silo*: the word means “sent”, or is interpreted “mission”, indicating the imposed precept of the supreme Father, of obedience on His Only-Begotten.

*To offer sacrifice in Silo*: Because Christ in no other way gave Himself over to death than being sent by the Father. Jn 14:31: *As the Father has given Me commandment, so do I...* - Ph 2:8: *...becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross....*

*In Silo*, he adored and offered sacrifice, because both in living as in dying, He did the Father’s Will.

[Fr. Bertoni took his central ideal from this view: Christ offering Himself as an oblation rendered by the *obsequium* [cf. Rm 12:1] – this ideal is found in a number of Fr. Bertoni’s *Original Constitutions*: [## 1; 7; 57; 62; 125; 185; 195; 237; 296; 304]. This revealed data of Jesus’ being sent by the Father, [Jn 14:3] is behind all Mission in the Church – and certainly is the heart of Fr. Bertoni’s Trinitarian charism of Hope. At St. Joseph’s Convent, Verona, he saw a painting of the Trinity, and noted that this explained to him Divine Mercy – with the Father’s ready communication of his gifts [cf. MP, Aug. 24, 1808. [cf. Bertoni Web-Site, under ‘Studies, The Trinitarian Charism of Hope. cf. below].

<sup>5</sup> Vocation in the Church is life-long preparation, living of the Stigmata:

Med.6: 4905: *I am black but beautiful [Ct 1:4]. Do not consider me, that I am brown, because the sun has altered my color. [ib., v. 5]. - Solomon’s temple was built without noise [3 K 6:7]. – For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his wife has prepared herself. And it is granted to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen, glittering and white. For the fine linen is the justification of saints.... [Apo 19:7, ff.].*

[The Wounded Lamb takes the Church as His Bride – for Fr. Bertoni, the Church is the Spouse of Christ, is the *Model of Holy Abandonment* cf. the Web-Site, under Translations, that of Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove’s Doctoral Thesis, bearing this title].

is said that asceticism divides to conquer – as the old *Imitation of Christ* would remind us: if we were to gain one virtue a year, if we lived long enough we would be holy. The mysticism of the saints, then, through charity unites, ‘in-forms’ all that we are meant to be and to do.

To reach his synthesis, Fr. Bertoni was much inspired by the Scriptures: all theological students know that the heart of all our studies is a proper, Church-centered **EX-egesis**, avoiding all **EIS-egesis** [a personal, subjective reading into God’s Word]. The saints teach us a genuine **IN-egesis**, as an on-going process of finding Christ IN every verse. For the saints, the Divine Inspiration of God’s Word is not comparable to His employing passive musical instruments to produce His symphony of truth – or inert paint brushes [as these can only produce a work of art, the closer they are to the hand and heart of the Divine Artist]. Rather, the Creative God, sanctifying humanity with His redemptive word, inspired the artists of human language to express Divine Truth, in both word and deed, through charisms lived in the Church. The Bible for St. Gaspar is a symphony of truth of the Old and New Testaments; the harmony between history and prophecy; there is divine blending found in the Gospels and the Epistles; an integration of the Wisdom Tradition and the Apocalypse. Fr. Gaspar was much nourished by the dry grains of wheat – and refreshed by the sour grapes of life then consecrated into the Precious Body and Blood of the Risen Lord in the Eucharist.

## B. A Re-newed Mystical ‘Theology’

St. Gaspar would notice not only Scripture and nature, but sacred art as well to express his ideal. He noted this early in his Spiritual Diary one late summer night:

***...This evening I saw a painting that depicted an image of the Trinity, that inspired much reverence and love in me for the three Persons. The eternal***

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4980: *...She named him Samuel. v. 20.*

*Those whom He justified, those He also glorified [Rm 8:30], in this life, the militant Church, symbolizes the triumphant Church, as the Synagogue symbolized the militant Church. He glorified with the name, with the gifts and with the infused virtues, with merits.*

*God gives to those whom He calls to any given state whatever is necessary for that state of life. Therefore, God has done much for His own. The Church, too, His Bride, we will see that she is not lacking in her own prudent and provident commitment.*

[In his very important CF # 185 of the *Original Constitutions*, Fr. Bertoni makes clear that the difficult and arduous vocation of the Stigmatine is not based *on human strength, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit, who has begun and inspired this good work [cf. Ph 1:6], and He will bring it to perfection if He is not hindered in this by us; for this is the special grace of this vocation...*].



***Father as standing with His arms opened which explained for me something of His Mercy and his ready communication of His gifts...***<sup>6</sup>

St. Gaspar also saw his own vocation as that of drawing within himself a portrait of Jesus Christ:

**... We need to draw a portrait within ourselves of Jesus Christ...**<sup>7</sup>

Fr. Bertoni develops this in his beautiful **Original Constitution 223**:

***For indeed nothing moves one toward that love of genuine charity for another than for us to take note of those singular ornaments of virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit in him, and that we contemplate the other as an Image of God painted with the most excellent colors of grace. If, therefore, all strive to increase within themselves in those virtues and graces that they frequently reflect on in others, and that they come to consider these others are superior to ourselves [cf. Ph 2:3], and to rejoice in those spiritual goods of others, and to thank God for them, then in a marvelous manner will mutual charity increase in them.***

At the end of the last General Chapter held in Rome, the Capitulars were blessed at an Audience with Pope John Paul II. In thanking our small Congregation for its relatively high number of confreres chosen to be Bishops – the Holy Father quoted this ***Original Constitution*** - clearly based on CSJ 250 of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and the great Jesuit Theologian Francis Suarez<sup>8</sup>. Fr. Suarez noted other sources for this thought going back to the Rule of St. Augustine, and even to St. Paul, who wrote in captivity to the Philippians: ***be united in your convictions, united in your love ... be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself...*** [cf. Ph 2:2, ff.]. This serves as Paul's introduction of the central mystery of Christ's self-emptying. It is in His Divine Filiation that the Son loves the Father – and in Fr. Bertoni's ideal it is fraternal love and humility that the Stigmatine comes best to imitate Him. [CF ## 188; 208; 220].

The Irish Monk, Dom Columba Marmion, OSB, was beatified with Blessed Pope John 23<sup>rd</sup>. As one incardinated into the Arch-Diocese of Dublin, he was ordained in our own Stigmatine Church, St. Agatha of the Goths, in Rome, Italy. He once wrote:

***... 'leave your offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to your brother...' [Mt 5:23, f.]. This is why the least willful coldness, the last resentment harbored in the soul towards our neighbors form a great obstacle***

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<sup>6</sup> cf. MP, Aug. 24, 1808.

<sup>7</sup> cf. MP, Feb. 26, 1809

<sup>8</sup> F. Suarez, SJ, Tractatus Decimus. *De Religione Societatis Iesu*, Book 8, c. 8, n. 1, p. 955 a. [NB: The first Stigmatine Mission is one's own confreres – cf. CF # 262]

**to the perfection of that union which Our Lord wishes to have with us in the Eucharist...<sup>9</sup>**

Fr. Bertoni lamented that there are only very few who grasp what God would accomplish in them, if He was not impeded by them.<sup>10</sup> The German Protestant theologian Jurgen Moltmann noted that the original sin is not so much the titanic desire to be like God – but, rather the refusal to be what God likes!

The ultimate Model for St. Paul's ideal is Jesus Christ - ***who emptied himself*** [the Greek word is ***kenosis***] to become one of us – so that as He became poor for our sake, we might become enriched by His poverty [cf. 2 Co 8:9]. Christ's great wealth is that He is the Incarnation of His Father's Mercy, as Pope John Paul II describes so beautifully in his encyclical of the First Sunday of Advent, 1980, ***Dives in Misericordia***.

The ***Kenosis: self-emptying*** of Jesus Christ is the ***ICON*** of the invisible God [cf. Col 1:15] – Jesus by giving Himself is the radiant light in our darkness of God's glory, and the perfect copy [***karakter***] of His nature [cf. Heb 1:3] – whoever sees Jesus sees also the eternal Trinity: ***whoever sees Me, sees the One Who sent Me*** [cf. Jn 12:44, ff] – ***To have seen Me, is to have seen the Father*** [cf. Jn 14:7-9]. The Sacred Stigmata of Jesus Christ, then, is the Window allowing us to look into the Trinity – and the Mirror before which we are called by vocation to stand to see if we are truly ready for the Nuptial Banquet of the Eucharist, and the Eternal Espousals with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A great modern theologian [Fr. von Balthasar] has taught that within the Trinity, the divine Persons are constituted by their ***self-giving*** – a 'Person' within the Trinity is One Who gives of Himself to the Others. Jesus' Stigmata is the culmination of His Self-giving earth - and enables Him to be the Immolated Lamb of the special marriage noted near the end of Sacred Scripture: there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth. Forever, ***He will be our God and we will be His People*** – a ***nuptial formula***. He will wipe away all tears from our eyes - there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more separation, no more sadness! [cf. Rv 21:1, ff.] – the Church will be all dressed up as a Bride with the good deeds of the Saints for her Espousals with the Immolated Lamb! Fr. Bertoni uses phrases from the Song of Songs to describe [with St. Gregory] this mysterious attraction for the Eternal Espousals:

**Med. 7: 5004: Prelude 3.** *Draw me after You [Ct 1:3] You draw, O Lord, Your Spouse by Your right hand, and we will run after You to the odor of Your ointments:*

<sup>9</sup> Dom Columba Marmion, 'Christ, the Life of the Soul', 5 [CLS 2, 8, 5], in: *Spiritual Writings*. P. Lethielleux-Mardesus Abbey 1998, p. 236 [NB: St. Agatha of the Goths Church in Rome has been the Stigmatine General Curia in Rome since 1927 – from 1837-1927, it served as the Irish College and a Priest of Dublin – Dom Columba Marmion, was ordained there in June 1881, by the Rector, Bishop Kirby.

<sup>10</sup> cf. MP, May 18, 1811. cf. also Letter 19, Feb. 1813, *Epistolario* pp. 61, f.; Letter 80, ib., p. 166; Letter 154, March 28, 1829, p. 254.

ibi, and the teachings of the Church in words and deeds and disciplines: in *the odor of Your ointments*” this is the fruit of Your grace. *To the odor of Your ointments* Ct 1:3. And if we cannot follow you with a strong love of a Spouse already adult in the school of holy love draw me ibi. We will follow you with the first-fruits of the most tender, nascent and youthful fervor.

**Med. 7: 5005:** *We will run after you to the odor of your ointments* Ct 1:3. Therefore, the young maidens have loved you v. 2.

O Lord, you draw everything to the designs of Your Providence with the sweetness and effectiveness of Your grace, the precious fruit of Your House. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself. [cf. Jn 12:32]. Thus, You draw Your Spouse, which is the Church, our Mother, and Yours and her children, which we also are.

**Med. 7: 5006:** But, Your Spouse You draw as it were, by the hand, by Your right hand, and so she does not so much follow You, as accompany You: *draw me* Ct 1:3. Thus, you divide as though with your maternal care the execution of your paternal Providence over us. We, as your tender young children, cannot run with You, as You go not with steps, but with leaps, and leaps of a giant: *He has rejoiced as a giant to run the way* [Ps 18:6], We too will run after You - We will run after You ibi, in the odor of Your graces: *to the odor of Your ointments ibi*, and of the teachings, and disciplines, and of the examples of our Mother, and these are also Your graces. <sup>11</sup>

This is the divinely chosen Descent of God – so that we might go back through the Ascension, to be with Him forever in our resurrection. Theology speaks of Christology from Above – with the Descent of Christ among us at Christmas. The counter-part of this is the Christology from below: that the Lord ascends from His earthly sojourn for the eternal bliss of the Church with the Trinity. The Saints – as Fr. Bertoni does – teach us a Christology from Within! <sup>12</sup>

The Saints came to understand the *IN-spiration* of God’s Word, the *IN-fusion* of God’s Grace, that the Risen Christ *IN-forms* the Eucharist and those who receive It – in differing ways, as we are *IN-grafted* into Christ at Baptism, we are *IN-undated* by His Holy Spirit at Confirmation, we are *IN-corporated* into Him by the reception of Holy Communion. In the sufferings of life, there develops a kind of nuptial pattern: our adoring and praying saintly Founder discerned that within, a new life, a new and fresh charism that came forward for the Church. Authentic spirituality involves a sharing in Christ’s Holy Abandonment to His Father – and each of us is called to share in this as we accept the way life turns out. Our vocation is a persevering fidelity to Christ’s Stigmata, the ultimate expression of His self-giving –

<sup>11</sup> These thoughts are from Meditation 7. Fr. Bertoni uses this same expression in his gradated ‘Espousals Principle’ - cf. his Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi, perhaps the morning of the Feast October 4, 1808 [cf. MssB ## 144-1874, especially # 1868].

<sup>12</sup> For these thoughts, cf. Mark A. MacIntosh, *Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press 1966.

that will be blessed eternally with an espousals forever with God. The saints provide a marvelous synthesis regarding the presence of the Suffering and Risen Christ within us all – for Fr. Bertoni, the acceptance of God’s will is the ultimate living of the Stigmatine life – **configuration** to Christ means to share His experience. As Christ has risen, He is present in all of the segments of life: the past, this very day and the unknown tomorrow. This is kept before us in the Eucharist as Memorial, Presence and Promise. The saints more than anyone provide a tangible witness of Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

### C. The ‘Integral’ Stigmata and the Eternal Espousals

As Jesus died totally divested of His external glory, in deepest darkness and shame, can we in some way imagine Fr. Bertoni’s hope as a Founder flickering as long as he lived, and never being extinguished? He truly was caught up in Jesus’ own loving obedience, His abandonment to his Father. There is a growth for the Church in the understanding of God’s word, the Council teaches us [DV 8] through contemplation, study, lived experience and fidelity to the teaching Church: this seems to be a synthesis of Fr. Bertoni’s life. There is a deep divine fuller sense in God’s Word – for St. Gaspar, trusting in God: his style of Holy Abandonment to God’s Will was a translation of years of poor health, sadness at home, family struggles, some apostolic failures, and community difficulties – and then in death in itself. In coping with the challenges of his life, Fr. Bertoni was gradually forged into preparation for eternity.

Scripture refers to the nothingness before creation as an abyss of the darkness, the desert and the deep – and this abyss of human misery calls out to the abyss of Infinite Mercy <sup>13</sup>. Jesus bestows on those dearest to him an increasing share in His Sacred Stigmata – in all of this suffering, the Eucharist provides the Nuptial Banquet leading to the eternal life of union.

Corresponding to the life of Grace in the crucible of his own personal suffering and dedication to the changing needs of the Church, St. Gaspar developed in his self-abandonment to God and availability to the Church. He saw it as a gradual clarifying of the portrait of Christ Jesus within his own life. Through the Stigmata of his own life – so often *wounded, but not dead!* - he is brought beyond his own limitations to this in-depth experience of God’s Self-giving, and an experience of Christ’s Passion and Death. This was one of his avowed purposes in preaching – to lead his listeners to come to the **clefts** of the Stigmata:

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<sup>13</sup> Fr. Bertoni often refers to this abyss in his Letters to Mother Naudet – cf. *Epistolario*: Letter 8, Dec. 1812, p.40; Letter 48, June 1814 p. 115

**430:** *Show, therefore, to these souls who devoutly gaze upon you those cruel clefts of those nails made in you, first lacerating His hands, and then His feet. Show the very place where His head reclined upon you, expiring, as their loving Father, indeed their faithful Friend, their most tender Brother, their most lovable and most kind Spouse. Lastly, show that blood shed out of love for them, with which you still trickle and redden in long streams. In addition to the impression that you can bring about in them, let there be joined also the eloquence of this blood, as the Apostle describes [Heb 12:24]. Let there be attained, therefore, through you such a great commotion in the hearts of these listeners that I believe I will see this very day, even though I cannot achieve this with my words<sup>14</sup>.*

In his own mysticism of helplessness associated with the wounds of life, Fr. Bertoni's hope never wavered in **the special grace** of the vocation - one that is not based on human resources, but **is to be carried out with the grace of the Holy Spirit, for 'He Who has begun a good work in you will bring it to perfection'** [Ph 1:6] [cf. CF # 185].

The deep trials that St. Gaspar experienced with his health and mission were not an interruption in his life of prayer – but, rather a means that brought to an ever greater sharing in Christ's death and resurrection. In all his times of darkness, St. Gaspar went on searching, seeking for the Lord in all things: **seek God alone, for to see God in all things, this is a making of oneself superior to all human happenings<sup>15</sup> - reading today about the internal presence of God, i.e., that since God is within us, it is not necessary to go outside to look for Him<sup>16</sup> - God alone is to be sought, and nothing else: not consolations or satisfactions<sup>17</sup>.** This is the marked contrast: **...in the depths of one's own nothingness, God is found. Experiencing very sublime realities concerning God, there was a profound recognition of myself.<sup>18</sup>**

In the mystical style of Fr. Gaspar, he often expresses himself in terms taken from his reflections on the Stigmata, and on God the Spouse of the soul, or, Christ the Spouse of the Church<sup>19</sup>:

**4991:** **Regarding prayer, she feeds him having him meditate on the mysteries of His humanity; she feeds him making him meditate on His Passion; she brings him to the temple, making him meditate on the mysteries**

<sup>14</sup> This is from St. Gaspar's Good Friday sermon of 1801 – then repeated in 1806.

<sup>15</sup> cf. MP, July 30, 1808

<sup>16</sup> cf. MP, Oct. 13, 1808

<sup>17</sup> cf. MP, Dec. 23, 1808.

<sup>18</sup> cf. MP, Aug. 24, 1808.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Meditation 6

**of the resurrection and the divinity, so that he can then preach with unction, etc.**<sup>20</sup>

**We should correspond also in action, progressing from virtue to virtue, [Ps 83:8], from the moral virtues to the religious, to the divine; and in prayer seeking to profit from the life of Christ, to His Passion and to His Resurrection. Accomplishing all this methodically, and not by fits and starts. All is based on the divine Scriptures, from which one derives precepts for action, and knowledge for prayer. All prayer, all scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.... [2 Tm 3:16, f.]**

The mystical 'Night' assumes many forms – a kind of absence of the 'Omnipresent'; or silence of the Eternal Word; the 'darkness' of Christ's descent; the Psalmist's 'desert thirst' for the streams of Salvation [cf. Pss 22; 42; 63 – Is 12:1, ff.], for God; the biblical descriptions of Gethsemane or the Paschal Mystery in general. For St. Gaspar, his long and painful monotony of sacrifice led him ever more deeply into the mystery of the spirit of Holy Abandonment. The mystery of the Stigmata is not only loved – and learned about – but needs to be experienced in the School of God. In describing his healing process as *wounded, but not dead*, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Naudet:

***... I am getting better rather slowly! Please pray, Reverend Mother, out of your charity, that I may derive some fruit from the school in which He has deigned to teach me, so that I might be disposed to serve Him...***<sup>21</sup>

Years later, St. Gaspar saw his own long 'dark night' as the privileged time in which to learn in **the School of God**:

***...The works of God have their own trials, with which God shows his own hand in directing them and leading them to His purposes. He does this with the difficulties which He allows, by taking our cooperation away, that we might give space to His Providence. From this the way can be seen clearly that all depends on His conservation and granting success. When, therefore, it is night for us, it is the day-time for Him. He is the One Who knows what is to be done. And we ought to raise our hands toward heaven, when we do not know how to apply them, and thus it is better that we ask the outcome of God. 'In the nights lift up your hands to the holly laces, and bless the Lord.' [cf. Ps 133:2]. This is the Latin that God teaches to anyone who is in His School. 'And the night shall be light as the day.' [Ps 138:12] And this is a further Latin***

<sup>20</sup> Translator's Note: St. Gaspar notes here the need to meditate on the Resurrection, in order to preach with more unction. In Fr. Bertoni's retreat for young priests [September 13-22, 1801], Fr. Bertoni developed both aspects of the Stigmata: *Imagine that you see Him with the scars of his wounds... inviting you, too, to heaven... Christ has entered new life with the scars of His wounds...* [cf. MssB ## 2632; 2635-2647, passim.] [cf. also the website: [www.st-bertoni.com](http://www.st-bertoni.com), under "Studies", *STIMATE INTEGRÉ*].

<sup>21</sup> cf. Letter 45, June 1, 1814, in *Epistolario*, p. 109.

***principle that our good Father has explained to us from the very beginning, drawing the light out of the darkness, and that He would like, out of His goodness, to clarify subsequently, as the darkness returns. It is in this that He leaves our works, for the admirable splendor of His glory. ‘Trust in the Lord’, therefore, ‘and do good!’ [Ps 36:3].***<sup>22</sup>

As actions speak louder than words, the love of Fr. Bertoni’s heart moved him to abandon his cares into the arms of God’s loving mercy – and to commit every fiber of his strength to the service of the Church. The deepest wounds of love in Christ are the signs of His immolation endured on the Cross, the final one being inflicted even after his death – leading to an eternal espousals:

**Med. 3: 4899:** ...The fourth means: He governs her with the gifts of His grace and glory. *The charity of God is poured forth... [Rm 5:5]. - For we are saved by hope. [Rm 8:24].* **Such gifts had been merited with the Passion, communicated in the Resurrection and Ascension**<sup>23</sup>. *Ascending on high, He held captivity captive; He gave gifts to men. [Ep 4:8]. This is an internal government and realm. The kingdom of God is within you. [Lk 17:21]. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. [Rm 14:17]. “In the Holy Spirit”: For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God [Rm 8:14]. He Who is the Head, even Christ: from Whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplies to the operation in the measure, makes increase the body, unto the edifying itself in charity. [Ep 4:15, f.].*

**Med. 3: 4957:** This is how it can be understood concerning Anna and her Husband, Elcana as a type of Christ and His Church, that together they got up in the morning and went together to return to their own town: **Wherever the Church goes, Christ goes with her with His grace.**

*They returned and came into their house at Ramatha. v. 19.*

Ramatha is the heavenly homeland, as we have said. So how does the Church arrive there, which had just ceased in her preaching of the Jews, and has not ascended into the heavenly homeland? It is true that when the Lord arose from the dead, she spoke through the doctors who were sent in preaching, saying, [Mt 28:20]: *And behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the earth.* Hence, **it is not absurd that holy Church would consider herself having risen and returned with Him**<sup>24</sup>. He would never desert His chosen ones through a spiritual presence, and He remains with those still here, and withdraws from those who leave her.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Letter 157, May 22, 1929, in *Epistolario*, pp. 256, f.

<sup>23</sup> Here St. Gregory maintains the integral aspects of the Paschal Mystery – as Fr. Bertoni often does – cf. in this [Web Site](#): *Stimmate Integre*.

<sup>24</sup> St. Gregory the Great has a strong sense of the Church having already risen with Christ – the integral dimensions of the Paschal Mystery. [cf. this Web Site, under [Studies](#): *Stimmate Integre*.

**Med. 5: 4984:** *To offer the solemn sacrifice. ibi.*

Then it happened that when he manifested Himself in heaven to His Father through the matter of **His glorified flesh**<sup>25</sup>, and the nature of the Angels, as well as our redemption, so also He rejoiced in their reparation.

*To fulfill his vow. v. 21.*

***In the head of the book it is written of me: that I should do your will...then I said: I have desired it...*** [Ps 39:6, ff.]<sup>26</sup>.

*To offer: ibi.* Then, he made the offering when He made it possible for us to take our place in the heavenly realms.

Nuptial Love is sublimely receptive and totally geared toward the other, in a kind of mutual indwelling: ***Make your home in Me as I make mine in you... whoever remains in Me, with Me in him, bears fruit in plenty...*** [Jn 15:3, ff].

## Conclusion

It was in the new spring-time of 1841 - 25 long years later, following the founding of the Congregation in 1816, after a daily experience of life together – that Fr. Bertoni set about codifying his own lived experience in the establishment of a new religious community. On May 11, 1841, he wrote to his friend, Fr. Bragato, Royal Court Chaplain in Vienna, asking for his prayers. This is a paragraph of his letter:

***...Pray much also for all of us, and for that which I am now writing drop by drop, if the Lord wills that this should redound to His glory. We are doing our part, according to the grace that God grants, and He will certainly hold up His end of the bargain – nor, do I really wish to know now what it is that He would like to accomplish. I am at peace, firmly believing that God can accomplish all that He wants, and always does what is better, even though this is so often quite distant from our limited views – and even sometimes contrary to them. ‘I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth.’ [Ps 33:2]. And help me so that I might praise and serve Him ‘day and night’ [Rv 4:8; 7:15], dwelling forever in His house for all eternity, ‘for the figure of this world is passing away.’ [1Co 7:31].***<sup>27</sup>

By this time, Fr. Bertoni was a complete invalid, never leaving the house. And the Constitutions he was working on from his bed were never finished, when death came to him over 12 years later. Nonetheless, the 12 Parts, and 314 paragraphs that he composed, and which we know as the ***Original Constitutions***, come to an end

<sup>25</sup> Translator’s Note: the recurring interest in the Risen Lord.

<sup>26</sup> Translators’ Note: Biblical abandonment? Ps 39 {40} is the ‘Disciples’ Prayer.’ [cf. Heb. 10:5-7]

<sup>27</sup> cf. Letter 9 to Fr. Bragato, in: *Epistolario* p. 325].



with a direct quotation from the Constitutions of St. Ignatius of Loyola, in which Fr. Bertoni is speaking about Novices: this would seem to be a clear indication that Fr. Bertoni's whole life, codified to some extent in his ***Original Constitutions***, might be summarized as a

### **Contemplation unto Hope!**

**The terrible wounds of time will be exchanged for the Glorious Epousals of Eternity. This is his message today, our Stigmatine 'Memorial Day', here at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Milford!**

### **Final Prayer <sup>28</sup>**

**5041: COLLOQUY. Lord, bring it about that by corresponding to Your grace and guidance of the Church, we, too, might learn the proposals of great and strong virtues, in order to help others by preaching, and ourselves by praying. And may we gain the desires of the knowledge of God to preach well and to pray well. And may we always have the most pure intention of charity, and be totally bereft of every ambition of this world; and let us seek the virtues and the knowledge in Your Catholic Church. Grant that we might come to the prompt and devout execution of Your projects, and in the exercise of the virtues, and in our being indoctrinated in the divine Scriptures; and that we thus give ourselves without reserve to you <sup>29</sup>, and that through Your grace we might increase in virtue and knowledge <sup>30</sup>.**

**O Lord, this morning we have gleaned this flour from the seed of the divine words by meditating, and almost by threshing. We offer this flour to You, so that You might grant us bread, and our daily bread, so that we might live to carry out Your Will <sup>31</sup>.**

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<sup>28</sup> Conclusion to Meditation 7 of St. Gregory's Commentary on 1 Samuel.

<sup>29</sup> A program espoused and lived by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II: *Totus Tuus!*

<sup>30</sup> This ideal is presented by Fr. Bertoni in his Part IV, *Original Constitutions: De Progressu Suiipsius* [CF ## 47-48] – *De Progressu in Ecclesiasticis Doctrinis* [CF ## 48-50]

<sup>31</sup> This is Fr. Bertoni's central ideal: *in obsequium*: Abandonment to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - Availability to the Church, through any Ministry of the Word of God whatsoever [CF # 163] - this is the Apostolic Mission, conferred by Jesus Christ Himself, as a share in His Personal Mission from the Father, in showing His Sorrowful Stigmata **retained in His Glorious Body** [cf. Jn 20] – **and as exemplified by the Patrons of the Stigmatines, the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph.**

**ENDNOTES**

Author's clarification notes about words and phrases found in this document:

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<sup>i</sup> **Fr. Louis Benaglia, CSS** [Verona, 1900 – Verona, 1988], copied out the five typed volumes of the *Manoscritti Bertoniiani*. **Gino** was his 'nick-name', familiar name.

I worked with him in 1966-1967 - as he transcribed all of the spiritual writings of the Founder. It was a terribly painstaking work - which he did for the most part at our old Novitiate at Grottaferata, outside of Rome.

He was also a most accomplished musician. He was preceded in death by an uncle, Fr. Cesare Benaglia, who lived into his 90's - one of the oldest Stigmatines ever. Fr. Gino was about 88 when he died.

We can find more information about Fr. Louis Benaglia and other deceased Stigmatine confreres in [www.confrades.com](http://www.confrades.com).

<sup>ii</sup> **Stimmate**: I leave it in the Italian - just to distinguish it from the "Stigmata" of Jesus - for me, the "Stimmate" usually means the House in Verona - and the "Stigmata" are the sorrowful and glorious wounds of Jesus.