

St. GASPAR BERTONI



Biblical and Theological Reflections on his

APOSTOLIC MISSION

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St. GASPAR BERTONI
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on his
APOSTOLIC MISSION FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BISHOPS

Introduction: A Johannine Perspective
[Jn 20:19-23]

"... In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them: 'Peace be with you!' - and showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and He said to them again: 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, so am I sending you.' After saying this, He breathed on them and said: 'receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained...' [cf. Jn 20:19, ff.].

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[1] Considering Sacred Scripture globally, it can easily be seen that there is an intimate connection between the Mission of Jesus Christ, received directly from His Father - and the Mission of all Christians, received in Baptism from Jesus Christ. The Mission of each follower of Jesus Christ is simply a participation in the very Mission of Jesus Himself. This is particularly emphasized in **the Fourth Gospel and the writings attributed to John**.

[2] The expressions: "**AS... SO**", comparing Jesus to His Father, and His disciples to Jesus, is found relatively often in the Gospel of John, in a wide variety of relationships:

[a] Life:

"...**AS** I who am sent by the Living Father, Myself draw life from the Father, **SO** whoever eats Me will draw life from Me..." [cf. Jn 6:57].

[b] Knowledge:

"...I am the Good Shepherd; I know My own, and My own know me, **JUST** as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for My sheep..." [cf. Jn 10:14, ff.].

[c] Love:

"...**AS** the Father has loved Me, **SO** I have loved you. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, **JUST**

AS I have kept My Father's commandments, and remain in His love..." [cf. Jn 15:19].

"... Father, may they be one in Us, **AS** You are in Me, and I am in You, so that the world may believe it was You Who sent Me. I have given them the glory You gave Me, that they be one as We are one. With Me in them, and You in Me, may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you Who sent Me, and that I have loved them **AS** much as You loved Me..." [cf. Jn 17:21-23].

[d] Unity:

"...may they be One in us **AS** we are one..." [cf. Jn 17:22].

[3] This grammatical construction offers a three-fold relationship:

[a] Between Jesus and His Father: this is a particular fascination in Jn's Gospel: there is a repeated insistence by Jesus Himself on His subservience, loving obedience, to the Father, so that it would seem that this is a threefold of a great mystery:

"... My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work..." [cf. Jn 4:34].

I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does the Son does, too..." [cf. Jn 5:19].

"... I can do nothing of myself; I can only judge as I am told to judge, and my judging is just, because my aim is not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me..." [v. 29, f.].

"... I have come in the name of my Father..." [v. 43].

"...I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me..." [cf. Jn 6:38].

"... Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. Yet, I have not come of myself; no, there is One who sent me, and I really come from him, and you do not know him, but I know him, because I have come from him, and it was he who sent me..." [cf. Jn 7:28, ff.].

Jn 8:

"... I am not alone: the One Who sent Me is with me [v. 16] ... I may be testifying on My own behalf, but the Father Who sent me is My witness, too.... You do not know Me, nor do you know My Father; if you did know Me, you would know My Father as well [vv. 17, ff.]... The One Who sent Me is truthful, and what I have learnt from Him I declare in the world [v. 26] ... When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of myself: what the Father has taught me is what

I preach; He Who sent me is with Me and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases Him [v. 28] ... What I for my part, speak of, is what I have seen with My Father; but you, you put into action the lessons learnt from you father [v. 38]... When I tell you the truth, as I have learnt it from God [v. 40]... I have come here from God; yes, I have come from Him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent by him [v. 42]... I honor My Father [v. 49] ... Not that I care for my own glory... If I were to seek my own glory, that would be no glory at all; My glory is conferred by the Father, by the one of whom you say: He is our God, although you do not know him [v. 54]... But I know him, and I faithfully keep His word... [v. 55].

"...I lay down my life of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command that I have been given by My Father..." [cf. Jn 10:18]

... For what I have spoken does not come of my self; no, what I was to say, what I had to speak, was commanded by the Father who sent me, and I know that his commandments mean eternal life. And therefore, what the Father has told me, is what I speak.

"... If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, **just as** I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have made known to you everything that I have learnt from my Father..." [cf. Jn 15:10, 15].

[b] Between Jesus and His Disciples:

"...A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me; no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last and then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. What I command you, is to love one Another..." [cf. Jn 15:12-19, passim].

[c] Between the Father, through Jesus, in the Holy Spirit to the Baptized:
each of the faithful is commissioned to an Apostolic Mission.

[4] The Christian "Mission", as Christian: "Life", "knowledge", "love", and "unity" are all realities of the redeemed life and have their origin in Jesus Christ, the First-Born of the dead.

[a] The Christian Mission is a transmission of life, and is not only the communication of a task to perform, or a message to deliver. It is a life to

live, a Person to seek, as is evident in the sending of the Apostles, after showing them the Glorious Stigmata:

"... as the Father has sent me, I send you..." [cf. Jn 20:19, ff.]

"... As I who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so, whoever eats Me, will life from me..." [cf. Jn 6:57].

[b] Jesus was "sent" by His Father, not by means of a simple command - but, the ideal "Mission" has a verbal expression of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father - and also expresses His birth in time, from Mary: "...The Word was made flesh and He lived among us..." [cf. Jn 1:14].

[5] The Mission of Jesus, from all eternity from the Heavenly Father, seems to have been one of His central thoughts all throughout His earthly existence. His Mission is a privileged "expression" of the eternal love of the Father:

"... And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth and finished the work you sent me to do. Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify Me with that glory I had with you before the world was. I have made your name known to the men you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now at last they know that all you have given me comes indeed from you; for I have given them the teaching you gave me, and they have truly accepted this, that I came from you, and they have believed that it was you who sent me..." [cf. Jn 17:3, ff.].

[6] The intimate connection between the eternal Mission of Jesus, and His Incarnation in time, has been clearly seen by St. Paul:

"...God dealt with sin by sending His own Son in a body as physical as any sinful body, and in that body, God condemned sin... Since God did not spare His own son, but gave Him up to benefit us all, we may be certain that after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything that he can give..." [cf. Rm 8:3, 32].

"... Now before we came of age we were as good as slaves to the elemental principle of this world - but, when the appointed time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, and to enable us to be adopted as sons. The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his son into your hearts: the Spirit that cries ABBA, Father - and it is this that makes you a son, you are not a slave any more; and if God has made you son, then he has made you heir..." [cf. Ga 4:4, ff.]

[7] The unknown author of the Letter to the Hebrews offers a similar insight:

"... God has never said to any angel: ' You are my son, today I have become your Father'; or, 'I will be a Father to Him and He as Son to Me '..." [cf. Heb 1:5; Ps 2:7; 2 S 7:14].

"... This is what He said on coming into the world: You, who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in

holocausts or sacrifices for sin; then I said just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book: 'God, here I am! I am coming to do your will!' [cf. Heb 10:5-7; cf. also Ps 40:6-8, LXX].

[8] All Christian Mission, therefore, is clearly identified with that of Jesus Christ, received from the Father, in the Holy Spirit. It is a call that will lead one beyond and above his own innate abilities. The grace of vocation inspires a certain 'capacity' for Christ-likeness that is merely a passive potency bestowed on each human being at creation. St. Paul explained to the Philippians that the Lord Himself will bring this 'good work' to fulfillment:

"... I am quite certain that the One Who began this good work in you will see that it is finished when the Day of Christ comes..." [cf. **Ph 1:6**].

[9] Fr. Bertoni cited this passage many times in his letters. However, there is a very special text in his original Constitutions which sheds much light on his exalted idea of the Apostolic Mission for the assistance of Bishops:

"...Since the scope of our Congregation is to serve the Church [obsequium ***praestare***] with the various ministries of its vocation under the direction of the Bishops; and since this, at times, proves to be an arduous and difficult undertaking ... however, we believe that realization does not depend on human strength alone, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit: 'since the One Who began this good work, He Himself will see to it that it is finished', whenever keeping it going is simply beyond our powers. This is, in fact, **the special grace of our vocation**, a grace which is stronger than every danger and difficulty..." [CF 185 - based on Suarez].

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Section One

St. GASPAR BERTONI'S REFLECTIONS ON THE INTRA-TRINITARIAN MISSIONS: A TRINITARIAN - CHRISTOLOGICAL - EUCHARISTIC CHARISM

"... All depends on forming the resolution to wish **to serve God in any manner whatsoever... [qualunque]**. [cf. St. Gaspar Bertoni, MP: July 30, 1808].

"...During Mass today, at Communion, I experienced for a moment a kind of detachment of my spirit from all that is created, **in the service [in ossequio]** of the Creator...[MP July 2, 1808].

Presentation:

[1] It seems that for St. Gaspar Bertoni, the Stigmatine Founder, that the essential charism - the core of his spirituality, was that of forming Jesus Christ within us, by the specific means of our **obsequium**, total service, to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our abandonment to the Most Holy Trinity is expressed through our **obsequium** of the Church through her Bishops. Fr. Bertoni expressed something of this idea when he wrote to Pope Gregory XVI, offering the property of the community for what the Stigmatine Founder believed would be for a greater service of the Church. In part, his letter reads:

"... We offer this ... if it should seem to the Holy Spirit, and to You, O Blessed Father, that our work might be of service [**ossequio**] to Christ our Lord, and to be of some use to His Church..." [cf. Ep, p. 340].

[a] As has been noted, for Fr. Bertoni 'perfection', which is born of charity, consists in the following/imitation/the "mind" of Christ Jesus [cf. Panegyric in honor of St. Francis Assisi, in: Mss B # 1796].

[b] He once wrote in his Diary: "We should draw a portrait in ourselves of Jesus Christ..." [cf. MP Feb. 26, 1809].

[c] Perhaps implicit in this thought of making a portrait of Jesus Christ, there are also present ideas such as graduality, development, growth, progress. The portrait of Christ, sacramentally begun in Baptismal "configuration", more and more takes shape as one responds to the Stigmatine life. A **portrait** is not made in an instant, as would be an immediately developing photograph. A portrait of Jesus Christ would demand time, patience, reflection, maturation, correction, the experience of the life of Jesus, especially in His suffering, shame and resurrection.

[d] This idea of the painting of a masterpiece is also found in his Original Constitutions as a convincing motive for community charity:

"...Nothing helps the love of true charity more toward a person than to discern in that person the outstanding traits of the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the contemplating of the other person as an image of God, **painted with the most beautiful colors of grace...**' [CF 223 - based on Suarez].

[e] A similar idea is present in one of his letters to Fr. Bragato:

"...Read the Gospel often, and from the deeds and words of Christ our Lord, squeeze out with reflection and meditation, and apply to yourself, whatever is necessary for the circumstances in which you actually find yourself. Form yourself on that model, upon Whom all the saints made their copes...' [cf. Letter 3 to Fr. Bragato, Ep p. 313].

[2] In the patient spirituality of Fr. Bertoni, this model of Jesus was drawn gradually, painstakingly, in correspondence to the daily graces encountered in the routine of life. Fr. Stofella has remarked:

"... in Fr. Bertoni, abandonment to God could already be looked upon as a loving exercise of virtue even before it appeared in him as a distinct life-style, initiated with the particular grace of his vocation. It seems that this vocation of his made itself manifest little by little. It appeared in the first years of his priesthood, as one of his contemporaries [Fr. Matthew Farinati] stated, following his reading of the biography of the 'Saint of Divine Providence', Cajetan of Thiene. However, this Holy Abandonment developed markedly through Fr. Bertoni's personal study of St. Ignatius Loyola, particularly through his reading of the biography of St. Ignatius, written by the Jesuit, Fr. Anthony Francis Mariani..." [cf. CS IV, p. 63].

[a] The date of birth that the Congregation commonly considers its own is November 4, 1816. Therefore, this letter written to Fr. Bragato, telling him about the writing of the Constitutions - is dated almost twenty-five years later. Forced by Divine Providence so often to be 'nailed' to his bed, 'wounded, but not dead' - for the last decade or more of his life, Fr. Bertoni finally came to the writing of a Rule for the community. He did this only after sharing common life with his companions for nearly a quarter of a century. As an invalid, "home-bound", in his last illness, he made the first attempt to codify his ideal.

[b] Furthermore, even with this long experience, Fr. Bertoni was writing the Constitutions from his "solitary confinement", "drop by drop", little by little. This was due not only to the painful illness and debilitating state of his

general health, which was most evident - but, also because of the spiritual principle of 'never preceding the will of God', but of "allowing God to work within him ever more and more. As has been pointed out in another study of this series [cf. *St. Gaspar Bertoni and Fr. Francis Suarez, SJ. Reflections and Comparisons*] the Original Constitutions of St. Gaspar seem to be short pithy paragraphs, copied *verbatim* from Suarez, used perhaps as the Stigmatine Founder's meditation and served as the basic Code for his Constitutions. The large majority of the numbers of the Original Constitutions have Fr. Suarez as their immediate source.

[c] It is to the biblical and dogmatic background of his charism to which we now turn.

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1. The grace of Fr. Bertoni's life was a personal Trinitarian, Christological, Eucharistic and Ecclesial charism. His Apostolic Mission developed powerfully from these sources. It seems that a 'multiform' grace gave the tonality to the fundamental attitudes of the Stigmatine Founder. His sense of 'all' - of 'totality' - in his life-long seeking God alone, his consuming sense of Mission - all of these profound realities in his life seem to be deeply radicated in these central mysteries of the faith.
 - a. The Most Holy Trinity, Jesus, and the Eucharist - were not for him merely manifestations of a personal piety, expressed in prescribed, regular devotional exercises. The Christological, Trinitarian and Eucharistic roots of Fr. Bertoni are both deep and eminently personal. They seem to be embedded in the particular grace of his unique vocation, received through the love of God. Some indication of this might be present in a powerful text, already noted above:

"...Today I was at St. Joseph's Convent. The thought came over me that at the depths of one's being, one finds **God**. While pondering over sublime thoughts about God, there came a deeper understanding of myself.

"... This evening, I came across an image of the **Most Holy Trinity**, which inspired much reverence and love for the **three Persons**. The eternal Father, Who was standing with His arms extended, explained His mercy to me, and the generous communications of His gifts...

"... The Breviary was said then with much devotion and for the glory of **God**...' [cf. MP, Aug. 24, 1808].
 - b. It might be said that one way of contemplating the divine personality is to think of God as a **total Self-giving**, or Communication. Fr. Bertoni often expressed himself in the context of the Eucharist, as being moved by the

sublime mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. The response of Fr. Bertoni to his vocation was 'more than ordinary', strong and ever present. It seems that his profound attraction for God resulted from his deep faith and hopeful love. In his view, true Christian personality is established sacramentally, building on the gifts of creation - and develops by a life long gift of oneself: 'the extended arms of the Eternal Father, and the generous communication of His gifts' seem to have served Fr. Bertoni as a Model for the Stigmatine response to the Apostolic Mission. The Most Blessed Trinity for him was a profound force, passionately lived, which transformed him through the long years of his life.

2. His Spiritual Diary offers some indications of this Trinitary attraction, this intimacy, internal joy - accompanied so often by consolations, even tears - that inspired him in the long years of physical, spiritual and apostolic reversals. The Blessed Trinity pervaded his personality, and inspired his practical decisions:

"... the Meditation today was on the **Incarnation**. There were sentiments of gratitude toward the **Most Holy Trinity**, and of correspondence toward Jesus. I was already obliged to love Him even before He became man: how much more am I now obliged..." [MP, Sept. 27, 1808].

- a. The Trinitarian Grace in the life of the Stigmatine Founder seems also to have had as its scope that of on-going "conversion", i.e., it inspired his yearning for spiritual depth and development, his radical transformation. The contemplation on the Trinity sheds much light on the Stigmatine vocation and the Apostolic Mission. These are radicated in the mysteries of the trinity and the Person of Jesus, and are nourished in a particular manner, by the Eucharist. The vocation and the Apostolic Mission of the Stigmatine, as for all Christians, are "sacramentalized", "presented" in the Eucharist, and expressed in a privileged manner through union with God and obedience to the Church, through her bishops.
- b. Fr. Bertoni's devotion to the Blessed Trinity is not merely a summary of his prayerful exercises, or spiritual practices. His faith in the trinity indicates a fundamental inclination of his mind, or disposition of his heart: a very basic, particular form of his prayerful praise of God. His prayer was some indication of his devotion, in the fullest sense of that word. Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas [II-II, q. 82, a. 1, C.], Fr. Bertoni explains 'devotion' as "service", **obsequium** - an idea rooted in the teaching of St. Francis de Sales:

"...true devotion consists in a will **ready to give of itself to God** and to be dedicated to those things which pertain the more to His service..." [cf. PVC, p. 203].

- c. The fundamental idea of Stigmatine service in the Church, the Apostolic Mission of Fr. Bertoni, was born of this faith of his in the Most Blessed Trinity. The Lord Himself - particularly through the Eucharist and the Scriptures ["written by the same Holy Spirit who chooses the Bishops"] - were very real to Fr. Bertoni. He was graced by a profound sense of the "presence" of God:

"... Tonight, there were feelings of pardon. There was a great sentiment toward the Most Holy Trinity in giving us the Son, and great tenderness toward Him, together with a very vivid faith and a profound desire for union; and of association in His sufferings and shame; all this was accompanied by a petition of the grace to suffer and to be disdained for Him..." [MP, Sept. 28, 1808].

- d. All "Mission" seems to begin with an initial vision, or insight, which sheds much light on its content. For the Stigmatine, the "Apostolic Mission" for the Assistance [ossequio] of Bishops was initially seen in a Trinitarian key:

"...During Mass today, at the Consecration, there were rather vivid sentiments of the presence of Christ, as that of a **friend** who speaks with another friend - and further, of the Presence of the Father. And experiencing in a certain manner the distinction of these divine Persons in one and the same nature, there were great reverence and love. These lasted for about a half hour after the recollection..." [MP, Jan. 11, 1809].

3. It may be said that the Stigmatine Founder, by Divine Providence, had so many hours, days, weeks and months and entire years - given to contemplation, 'nailed as he was to his bed', 'wounded, but not dead'. The 'atrocious sufferings' of his life, pondered within the context of his contemplative prayer, brought him to being 'transformed' the more into His Crucified Lord. From his 'experience' of Jesus Christ, a deeper insight into the mystery of the Trinity was afforded, coupled with the light of his prayer. More and more, Fr. Bertoni came to concentrate on the Person of Jesus Christ, rendered ever more 'incarnate' to him by the long-sufferings he endured.

- a. Fr. Bertoni was fascinated by this central mystery of Christianity, and he saw everything as flowing from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, echoing them, and culminating in them. The Person of Jesus served him as a kind of 'mirror' - which reflected the inner life of God, and offered a Model for his own life. The special grace of his vocation - providentially formed throughout his long life by the experiences he had - brought him gradually to the idea of sharing ever more deeply in the Apostolic Mission of Jesus Christ, also in His suffering. His long experiences of God' were impregnated with the grace of his particular vocation - all the graces

received from God were accepted in his own personality, formed through the years.

- b. The charism of a Founder is analogically like an Eucharistic Consecration: the words of Consecration, the words of Jesus Himself, bring about a new reality to the common matter. Many individuals in the history of humanity had the same - and even more difficulty - experiences as Fr. Bertoni endured: physical, moral and spiritual sufferings. However, the particular grace of his vocation, together with the setbacks and consolations that he knew, transformed many natural elements in his life into occasions of even richer graces:

"...The Feast of the Sacred Heart. During Mass today, at the Consecration and Communion, and throughout the whole time of thanksgiving, I experienced tears of compunction and much affection. Particularly at the Communion, I experienced for an instant, a kind of detachment from all that was created, for the service [*ossequio*] of the Creator..." [MP, July 2, 1808].

- c. Perhaps one might also compare the charism of a Founder to the various senses of Sacred Scripture: the events of any given day, or period, will find their "fuller sense" only in the Person of Jesus, revealed in the word of God, contemplated and studied each day, and celebrated and shared in the Most Blessed sacrament.
4. The 'difficult grace' of his particular vocation flows from the light of the Most Blessed Trinity. Grace, which always presupposes nature, led the Stigmatine Founder more and more to reflect on the unity in the plurality of the love of God - on His 'kind purposes', His eternal Plan for the salvation of the world. The mystery of the Triune God is the heart of the charism of Fr. Bertoni:

"... One maxim alone, sufficiently meditated, is enough to save me: many things, even though they are convincing, confuse the mind, and do not move it to make practical resolutions. 'Just Father, the world has not known you, and does not want to know God as just. It would prefer a God by halves.' [MP, March 13, 1809].

- a. For Fr. Bertoni, it was the "total Christ" - His own inner fullness, the great demand of his words and deeds. Furthermore, *Christus totalis*, in the language of St. Augustine, would also include the Church - instituted by Christ, to continue His Apostolic Mission until the end of time.
- b. His Trinitarian, Christological, Eucharistic inspiration brought Fr. Bertoni far from his confining arm-chair, his bed and poor room, in which he was 'imprisoned' physically for so many years. Spiritually, his Apostolic

Mission carried him to the 'most distant isles' of this world. The Apostolic mission is worldwide in scope: ***anywhere in the Diocese and the world.***

- c. By nature, Fr. Bertoni was a reflective man, much taken up with the passing nature of things - particularly after the most painful experiences he had as a child in the deaths of people he dearly loved and with whom he lived - the separation of his parents - the many years of his own physical sufferings - the apparent failure of his community. Restless in his missionary reflection, he was not 'quieted' except with the total vision, and the ever-deeper consideration of reality. He looked on life in its over-all picture, in its global sense, in its deepest relationship, in its most profound reality:

"... To seek God alone, to see God in all things - this is to make oneself above all human things..." [MP, July 30, 1808].

- d. He was also a practical man, a diocesan priest dedicated with the best gifts of his mind and heart, to the 'local Church', his native diocese of Verona. His was a profound desire to serve his diocese, in any manner whatsoever possible to him. His own life remains the most convincing testimony that we have of the multiplicity of his activities he codified in his Rule. When he could no longer walk, he would be carried Friday evenings to the pulpit to preach the services in honor of the Five Wounds. When he could no longer go out of his room, he invited priests, seminarians and missionaries to it, to preach the Spiritual Exercises to them. During these years of confinement, he also shared his great dream with his followers, the Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops, in the form of conversation, meditations, conferences. His extensive writings bear witness to the life-long quest to which he had dedicated himself in his search for the will of God:

"... All depends on forming the resolution of wanting to serve God in any manner whatsoever [qualunque]. It is so necessary to be on guard against mere wishful thinking. Velleity of will can be discerned in the effect produced; the former gives in to difficulty, whereas genuine will power is made known in the reaction to difficulty; it gets stronger, stabilizes itself, is strengthened..." [MP, July 30, 1808].

- e. The image of the Triune God, in Whom we are created and called, became for Fr. Bertoni a lived reality, that was eventually codified. His 'Apostolic Mission for the Assistance of Bishops', his prayer, his sacramental life - everything for him was an expression of his vocation to continue the Trinitarian action of grace in the Church, in the lives of those who came within the scope of his apostolate. The apostolate was for him a continuation of the eternal mission of God - fraternal love was an

expression of the life of the Trinity among human beings - prayer was a reflection of the eternal contemplation of God, which expressed itself in the Incarnate Word:

"... it is necessary to make manifest in ourselves to the divine Father an image of His Divine Son..." [cf. MP, July 30, 1809].

"... Today there was a rather vivid sentiment, reverential love, of the presence of the Father, at the *Te igitur* of the Mass, and a vivid confidence and love toward the son... At the consecration, there was also a sentiment of the priestly dignity, making the Person of Christ present to His father..." [cf. MP, Dec. 11, 1808].

"... Christmas Day 1808: In the three Masses today, I experienced much recollection, and sentiments concerning the grand benefit of a vocation. What a great good it is to forget and to despoil oneself of all that is created to seek Christ alone. How God honors and loves His humiliated Son. And what debt is ours to do for him, at least in part, that which He first did for us. Frequent memory today of the life of Christ, accompanied by a tender love of correspondence. During Mass, at the Consecration, rather vivid and affectionate sentiments of the presence of Christ.

"- There were dispositions to accept even the shame of Christ..." [cf. MP, Feb. 1, 1809]

5. The entire Mission of Jesus in this world may be looked upon as a kind of 'expression' of the inner life of the Trinity, or a kind of; sacrament', revealing the eternal love of God:

"... Since God did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up to benefit us all, we may be certain that after such a gift that He will not refuse anything He can give." [cf. Rm 8:32].

- a. Fr. Bertoni's spirituality was not limited to praising the Triune God, or to praying. He deeply felt that he personally was associated with the divine community, and that he had been called personally to share in It, and to bring the Good News concerning It to the whole world. His Trinitarian Mission may be looked upon as the extension towards the Church of the inspiration through which the Father sends His son, and the Personal Love between them, the Holy Spirit.
- b. Fr. Bertoni's "Dark Night", "Spiritual Winter", were also experienced in having this sublime faith of sharing vitally in the Trinity - and then to see the communication of this joy so often apparently hindered on the human level, thwarted by so much sickness, or the frustrating circumstances of his times, so unfavorable to his ideal. His life was, eminently, "Eucharistic", but he was hardly ever able to be 'distributed' as he would have liked in the Apostolic Mission.

- c. However, even with all this, he freely accepted and even willed this special share in the life of Jesus. He expressed this through his characteristic holy abandonment. He was deeply convinced personally that his own life was a privileged share with the Christ in His agony in the Garden, sweating blood. His was a following of Christ that was at the cost of some of his most ardent ecclesial hopes. But, his was a life that drew him daily more closely to Jesus Christ:

"... I observed the disciples sleeping while Christ was in His agony, sweating blood for them..." [cf. MP, July 5, 1808].

"A greater tenderness and a more profound humility in holding Christ right in my hands, immediately after the Consecration..." [MP, Dec. 11, 1808].

"Meditation and following - A desire and an expressed petition for Martyrdom. There was great interior inspiration..." [cf. MP, Sept. 28, 1808].

- d. Fr. Bertoni interpreted the life of the Most Holy Trinity within himself as essentially the habitual inspiration to give of himself for the establishment, the betterment of the Church. "All that mattered", he once said, "is that God be served!" He saw the genuine Christian personality consists in the giving of oneself, surrendering oneself to the Father's will, of offering oneself for the establishment of the other. His great hope was to send numerous and qualified Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops to serve the Church, in accord with her various and changing needs. To share in the life of the Trinity for him meant to be sent.

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Section Two

The Personal Mission of Jesus Christ - Available to the Father

"Meditation: The reign of Christ. I experienced a powerful inspiration to follow our Lord more closely, even at the cost of life, especially in His poverty and shame...' [cf. MP, Sept. 25, 1808].

In presenting this aspect, three points might be considered:

- [A] Biblical Spirituality
- [B] Biblical Presentation of Jesus
- [C] Fr. Bertoni's Thought.

A Biblical Spirituality

A variety of points might be presented here from a random reading of frequently recurring texts:

1. Union with Christ: this aspect is basic to all Christians. However, the Apostolic Missionary would look on Jesus as particularly close, united to the Mission:

"... I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly..." [cf. Jn 10:10].

"... I am the vine, you are the branches..." [cf. Jn 15:5].

"... I betrothed you to one spouse, that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ..." cf. 2 Co 11:2]

"... Partakers of the Divine Nature...' [cf. 2 P 1:4].

2. Imitation of Christ:

"...I have given you an example, that **AS** I have done to you, **SO** you should also do [cf. Jn 13:15]

"... Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ' Jesus... Who emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave..." [cf. Ph 2:5, ff.].

"... Blessed are the poor... those who mourn ... those who suffer persecution..." [cf. Mt 5:3, ff.].

3. Apostolic Service

"... The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many..." [cf. Mt 2:28].

"...Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave..." [cf. Mt 20:27].

"...Let yourselves be like men waiting for their master's return..." [cf. Lk 12:36].

"... Blessed is the faithful and prudent servant..." [cf. Lk 12:42].

4. Personal Spirituality

"...My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, to accomplish His work...' [cf. Jn 4:34].

"...For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother..." [cf. Mt 12:50].

"... I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me, the Father..." [cf. Jn 6:38].

"... May the God of Peace ... fill you with every good thing to do His will..." [cf. Heb 13:21].

"... live no longer according to the lusts of men, but according to the Will of God..." [cf. 1 P 4:2].

"... He who does the will of God, lives forever..." [cf. 1 Jn 2:17].

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In Fr. Bertoni's spirituality, there is a clear insistence on the 'obediential' aspects of Jesus Christ. A close reading of Scripture allows for a profound insight into this aspect: "Jesus" is a loving, obedient response to His Father.

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B Biblical Presentation of Jesus Christ

Under this heading, the following outline will be considered:

[I] Jesus' Mission

The Father's Envoy
The Paradox of the Incarnation
Jesus and His Father
The Scope of the Mission: Life
The Father's Glory

[II] Jesus' Existence as Obedient Response ["Constitutional Filiation"]

It is accomplished!
Jesus's Total Existence as Obedient Response
Filial Obedience
Trinitarian "Obedience"
Stigmatine Obedience

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[I] Jesus' Mission

[cf. F. M. Braun, OP, *Jean le theologien*, Vol. 3, 1].

1. **The Father's Envoy:** in a given moment in history, the light of God shone on this world in a totally new splendor:

"...the light has come into the world..." [cf. Jn 3:19].

"...I, the Light, have come into the world, so that whoever believes in Me need not stay in the dark any more..." [cf. Jn 12:46].

John also uses the word "Life" to describe the coming of Jesus:

"...That life was made visible: we saw it and we are giving testimony telling you of the eternal life which was with the Father and has been made visible to us..." [cf. 1 Jn 1:2].

- a. Throughout, Jesus seems to show a sense of deference:

"... Yet I have not come of myself; no, there is one who sent me, and I really came from him..." [cf. Jn 7:28].

"...I have come from him; not that I came because I chose; no, I was sent and by him..." [cf. Jn 8:42].

"... I have come in the name of my Father..." [cf. Jn 5:43].

"... When a man's doctrine is his own, he is hoping to get honor for himself; but when he is working for the honor of the one who sent him, then he is sincere..." [cf. Jn 7:18].

"... I honor My Father... not that I care for my own glory...' [cf. Jn 8:50].

- b. The whole reason of His coming is His Father: He has simply come to carry out the works His Father gave Him to do" [cf. Jn 5:36]. It is the father Who consecrated and sent Him into this world [cf. Jn 10:36]:

"... and the one who sent me is with me..." [cf. Jn 8:16].

"... the Father who sent me is my witness, too..." [v. 18]

- c. Jesus is not merely 'sent' as would be a prophet for a determined action, but He has been sent from 'on high':

"... He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, even if his testimony is not accepted..." [cf. Jn 3:31, ff.].

"... I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me..." [cf. Jn 6:38].

"... I am from above..."

d. He has been sent so that the world might be saved by Him:

"... For God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved..." [cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47].

"... We ourselves saw and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world..." [cf. 1 Jn 4:14].

e. His coming is in full submission to the Father:

"... for I always do what pleases him ... " [cf. Jn 8:29].

1.] The Father's will is His "Nourishment":

"... My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work..." [cf. Jn 4:34].

2.] Obedience is His attitude unto death:

"... It was for this very reason that I have come unto this hour..." [cf. Jn 12:27].

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

f. Jesus does nothing of Himself:

"... When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of myself; what the Father has taught me is what I preach..." [cf. Jn 8:28].

"... what the Father has taught me is what I preach..." [v. 28].

"... For what I have spoken does not come of myself, no, what I was to say, what I had to speak, was commanded by the Father who sent me, and I know that his commands mean eternal life..." [cf. Jn 12:49, f.].

g. The Mission noted in all these texts is special: never does this Mission separate the One sent from the One sending. The Father who sends His Son into this world never leaves Him alone [cf. Jn 8:29]:

"... And yet, I am not alone for the Father is with me..." [cf. Jn 16:32].

Jesus and the father are always One [cf. Jn 10:30].

"... then you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father..." [cf. Jn 10:38].

"... do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak as from myself; it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me..." cf. Jn 14:10, ff.].

"...Father, may they be one in us as you are in me, and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me..." [cf. Jn 17:21].

- 1.] Between the Father and the Son, this is no point of disjunction:
 - the words of Jesus are those of the father [cf. Jn 12:49, f.; 14:10];
 - the works of Jesus are those of the Father [cf. Jn 5:17-26; 8:28; 10:25, 37, f.; 14:10].

- 2.] Not to know this union between the Father and the Son is tantamount to not knowing Jesus:

"... Have I been with you all this time... and you still do not know me...? [cf. Jn 14:9].

- h. With the great insistence of His coming into this world, there corresponds also His departure, and His return to His Father [cf. Jn 16:28; cf. also 6:62; 7:33; 13:3; 14:12, 28; 16:5, 10, 17].
 - 1.] In this return to the Father, He will take up once more the glory that was His before the constitution of the world [cf. Jn 17:5, 24]. Once His terrestrial work is completed [cf. Jn 17:4; 19; 30], He will return from when He came; His **ascent** [*katabasis* - cf. Jn 3:13; 6:33, ff.; 6:22; 20:17]. All this is seen in the light of returning to pertain to the Kingdom on high: "the Son of Man must be lifted up" [cf. Jn 3:13].

 - 2.] All the while that His contemporaries saw Him and listened to Him, His true domain was always the Father's House, where those will be introduced whom He will "draw" to Him:

"... There are many rooms in my Father's House... I am going now to prepare a place for you. I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am, you may be, too..." [cf. Jn 14:2-4; cf. 12:32].

 - 3.] His exaltation is as necessary as His descent - for if He does not go, the Paraclete will not come [cf. Jn 14:3, ff.; 16:5-7] - the Streams of Living Water could not otherwise flow out into eternal life [cf. Jn 7:37-39; 4:14].

- i. Repeatedly, Jesus expresses the basic idea of His Mission:

"... I have not come of myself; no, there is one who sent me, and I really come from him ... I have come from him and it was he who sent me..." [cf. Jn 7:28, ff.].



2. The Paradox of the Incarnation [cf. F. M. Braun, OP, pp. 64-67].

- a. Jesus of Nazareth appeared eminently human - there was nothing in His words, nor deeds [with the exception of His miracles] that would have led His contemporaries to confess His divine origin. Even after listening to Him, various responses would be forthcoming:
 - "... When the Christ comes, will he give more signs than this man...?" [cf. Jn 7:31]
 - "... There has never been anybody who spoke like he does..." [cf. Jn 7:46].
- b. John presents the great paradox in a brief expression: The Word became flesh [cf. Jn 1:14]:
 - 1.] Two extremes are skillfully contrasted: the Word/ flesh, which means a human being capable of suffering, imbued with weakness. Throughout history, in the long Christological struggles for an acceptable terminology, there have been interpreters who would either sacrifice the Logos, or the flesh *in* Christ.
 - a.] There have been those who thought of the flesh of Jesus as mere "appearance [e.g., the **Docetists**].
 - b.] Others have looked upon the **Logos** as pre-existing with the Father, as a fiction [as the **Nestorians**].
 - c.] Both of these extremes would empty the dogma of Jesus Christ of all meaning for the faith.
 - 2.] In the efforts to explain the Paradox, there are those who would make the comparison of a presence of what is hidden, in some distant way comparable to the OT CLOUD [**Kabod Yahweh**], under the Tent of Meeting - the very image used by John to describe the Incarnation: He set up His Tent among us." [cf. Jn 1:14].
 - 3.] Other OT attempts are the following:
 - Baruch noted that Wisdom had appeared on earth [cf. Ba 3:28];
 - Sirach noted that Wisdom officiated in the Holy Tent [cf. Si 34:10].
 - 4.] John also reserves these ideas to the Incarnate Word of God:
 - he contrasts the coming of Jesus as grace and truth [cf. Jn 1:17];
 - whereas the Law had come through Moses.

Jesus comes as the Logos, the Son of God, the Son of the Father [cf. Jn 1:14], Whom He has made visible and dwelt among us.

- c. The faith about God would ask of the believer to maintain that the infinity and the simplicity of God indicate that God is everywhere that He exercises His power: this is His presence of immensity. Immediately, though, there is a paradox:
- 1.] God may not be seen: "... You cannot see my face ... for man cannot see me and live..." [cf. Ex 33:20].
 - 2.] Yet, Jesus is "transparent": "... whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me..." [cf. Jn 12:45]. - "... If you know me, you know my Father, too. From this moment that you know him and have seen him... To have seen me is to have seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me...? " [cf. Jn 14:7, ff.].
 - 3.] To "see" means to "believe": it is very clear that the discourse here is not with physical sight, but means faith. Faith is an adherence to a Person in this sense. Hence, the primary role of Christ is to make present by means of His Body, the Beginning, the Principle of all.
- d. Without ceasing ever to be God, the **Logos** has appeared with a human nature, in a human form. To be united to the Father - means to share in His Power. In His Mission, Jesus remains personally, intimately, united to the Heavenly Father.
- e. Jesus repeats many times the OT divinity formula: **I AM**:
- the Bread of Life [cf. 6:35];
 - the Bread that came down from heaven [cf. 6:41];
 - the Light of the World [cf. 8:12];
 - the Resurrection [cf. 6:25];
 - the Way, the Truth, the Life [cf. 14:6].
- 1.] In analyzing these passages, the over-all impression that is received is that Jesus was establishing an emphatic point.
 - 2.] The first person singular pronoun on the lips of Jesus has a precise meaning: it means that the All-Powerfulness of God pertains to Himself. Jesus of Nazareth refers to Himself a number of OT attributes reserved for Yahweh, the NT "Father".
- f. Yet, the Mission that Jesus has received, and which He has the consciousness of accomplishing in accord with the Father's will, is clearly and repeatedly in deference to the Father. The indivisible union between the Person of Jesus and His Mission is one of the characteristic notes of the 4th Gospel. It is the unique Person of Jesus which conveys the special message concerning the Father and His Plan. Jesus did not present Himself merely as one more Rabbi - He teaches with unique authority, and asks for a total adherence to the truth:

"...Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth ... I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them..." [cf. Jn 17:17, 26].

1.] Jesus says only what He has learned from His Father:

"... the one who sent me is truthful, and what I have learnt from him, I declare to the world [cf. Jn 7:26].

"... I do nothing by myself [v. 28] ... the words I say to you I do not speak as from myself; it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work..." [cf. Jn 14:10].

"...I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father..." [cf. Jn 15:15].

2.] His works are simply those of the Father:

"... The Son can only do what he sees the Father doing ... For the father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself [cf. Jn 5:20].

"... But my testimony is greater than John's; the works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me..." [cf. Jn 10:37]

3.] Whoever sees, i.e., believes in Him, "sees" the Father:

"...to have seen me, is to have seen the Father..." [cf. Jn 14:9].

- g. The Fourth Gospel is eminently clear on this point" through the humanity of Jesus Christ, which is "transparent" to the eyes of faith, there are the "I" and the "Me" of the unique Son of God. It is the Son of the Father who speaks to humanity through this assumed human nature. It is the Father Who "works" through Him. John places much emphasis on the "I" and the "Me" of Jesus - perhaps still some distance from the definition of Ephesus, but nonetheless clear in its profundity. God speaks and works among humanity through Jesus.
- h. Jesus is presented as being born from on high, which leads us to the eternal **Logos**. In full truth, the **Logos** has not "surrendered" His transcendent height, to which a creature could never 'ascend'. His marvelous condescendence: is such that while remaining God [cf. Jn 1:1, ff.], in the intimacy of the Father's heart [cf. Jn 1:18], before the constitution of the world [cf. Jn 17:5, 24] - He has assumed our "human condition" - in all, save sin.



3. Jesus and His Father

a. Unique Expressions of Unity: [cf. F. M. Braun, OP, Vol. 3/1, pp. 70, ff.]

1.] Anyone reading the Gospel, or the Letters of John would be struck by the unusual even singular expressions Jesus uses to describe His relationship with his Father. The Synoptics most generally speak of the father as "our", whereas in Jn's Gospel, Jesus emphasizes more **MY** Father, **THE** Father.

a.] One outstanding exception to this would be the Resurrection scene when Jesus tells Mary Magdalen to announce the resurrection:

"...Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But, go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God...' [cf. Jn 20:17, ff.].

b.] Jesus' insistence on THE, MY Father indicates His intimate relationship, as well as His distinction as a Person: this way of speaking manifests an incommunicable title. [cf. Jn 1:1; 1 Jn 1:1]. From all eternity [cf. Jn 17:5, 24], Jesus was "with" God [cf. Jn 1:1] - and only the Son has ever seen God [cf. Jn 1:18].

c.] He has come "in the Name of the Father" [cf. Jn 5:43] - He comes from God [cf. Jn 16:27].

d.] Concerning the Father, He was a remains in a totally "other" relationship with Him than do all other creatures. This unique relationship is the ultimate source of His fullness of grace and truth [cf. Jn 1:14, 16].

2.] It would be most incomplete, and doctrinally unsound, to think of the distinction of the Father and the Son solely in function of revelation. Jesus is indeed the privileged instrument by which God has made Himself known. Along with this distinction between them, there is repeatedly insisted upon their union:

"... The Father and I are one..." [cf. Jn 10:30].

"... The Father is in Me and I am in the Father..." [cf. Jn 10:38].

"...You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason [cf. Jn 17:11 21, ff.].

a.] The formula is markedly Trinitarian. It was destined to play a major role in the Christological controversies. Like so many of the early confessions of faith, it seems to manifest a cultic

concern. For the Father and the Son to be truly "one", it is most necessary that the Divinity of the son to be recognized.

b.] The title "Son of God" is of the Messianic order, and could be understood "metaphorically". At the end of the 4th Gospel, however, there is the emphatic confession of faith on the part of Thomas: "... **My Lord and My God!**" [cf. Jn 20:28]. This confession goes back to the opening lines of the Prologue: "... In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God, and **the Word was God...**" [cf. Jn 1:1]

c.] There are two special titles which are applied simply to Christ:
- the **Son**: [cf. Jn 3:17, 35, f.; 5:19, ff.; 8:36; 14:13; 17:1; 1 Jn 1:2; 2:22, ff.; 4:14];
- the **Only-Begotten** [Monogene] [cf. Jn 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9].

To Jesus, therefore, belong the divine "glory" by natural right [cf. Jn 1:14; 2:12; 11:40; 12:41; 17:5, 24].

3.] **Jesus is inseparable from His Father**: it is His glory alone that Jesus seeks [cf. Jn 12:28; 14:13; 17:1, 4]. His Mission is to be the Savior of the World [cf. Jn 3:17; 4:42; 1 Jn 4:14]. Since the Mission of the Only Son and His Incarnation are indivisible, His earthly life reveals much concerning the inner life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christ of the Fourth Gospel always presents to those who believe in Him His divine origin, as well as His earthy nature. He never allows any division between His infinite power from on high - and His inherent weakness of the "flesh".

4.] **Jesus totally consumed in Self-Giving to the Father**: Jesus, the Only Son of the Father, changes water into wine; heals from afar; forgives sin; opens the eyes of the blind: **obeys unto death**. Having come into this world, it is nonetheless in humility and in suffering, in being exposed to the lack of understanding of His disciples, to the violence of the mob - He consumes Himself in total dedication to the Father's Will:

"... No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so, it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command that I have received from my Father..." [cf. Jn 10:18; 12:27; 14:31; 15:10].

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b. Submission to the Father's Will [cf. F. M. Braun, OP, Vol. 3/1, pp. 139-142].

1.] In Paul's Christological Hymn [cf. Ph 2:5-11], the Apostle exhorts the recipients of his Letter to have the same "mind" as is in Christ Jesus. In this same Letter, Paul tells the Philippians that the death of Christ was a heroic act of obedience [cf. Ph 2:8]. This same obedience unto death, the "Death on the Cross", is signified on two occasions in the Fourth Gospel by the fact that Jesus went to His death by order of the Father.

a.] The first text figures in the Good Shepherd Parable: He is speaking about laying down His life and taking it up again: "... and this is the command [*entole*] that I have received from my Father..." [cf. Jn 10:17, ff.].

b.] The second instance terminates the first section of the Farewell Discourse: "...I shall not talk with you any longer, because the prince of this world is on his way. He has no power over me, but the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me..." [cf. Jn 14:30, f.].

c.] In both cases, what is intended is the love of the Father for Jesus and then, the love of Jesus for the Father. This explains His decision: Come **Now**, let us go! [cf. Jn 14:31].

2.] This mysterious divine will comes up again at the moment of His arrest: "Put your sword back into its scabbard; am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me? [cf. Jn 18:11]. All of this confirms what went before: Christ cannot refuse to drink the cup that the Father has prepared for Him.

a.] This Cup of Suffering recalls to mind the Prayer of Gethsemane: "...And going on a little further, he fell on his face and prayed. My Father, he said, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by..." [cf. Mt 26:39, par.]. John has shifted this scene to his last chapter in "the Gospel of Signs": "... Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But, it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" [cf. Jn 12:27].

b.] The Symbol of the Cup recurs in Sacred Scripture applied to the terrible, awe-inspiring interventions of God in history [cf. Is 51:17-23; Jr 25:17-28; Mk 10:38, f.; Rv 14:10; 16:5, ff.]: Hi Cup of Anger. It is remarkable that John does not use this symbol in His Gospel.

c.] Whatever is the ultimate explanation for this fact, in Jesus' Discourse He takes strong exception to the impetuosity of His Apostle. The figurative term underlines the irrevocable will of accepting death contained in the Father's will for Redemption.

3.] If Jesus obeys out of love, even in the very sacrifice of His life, it is already self-evident that His submission to the Will of His Father is not limited to the carrying out of rigorous precepts alone. John's Gospel is characterized by short sayings, such as:

"... For I always do what pleases Him..." [cf. Jn 8:29].

"... If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love..." [cf. Jn 15:10].

a.] Jesus does not ever seek His own will [cf. Jn 5:30], nor His personal glory [cf. Jn 7:18]. His Will is in conformity to that of the Father [cf. Jn 5:30], and He does not intend ever doing any other thing than the works of His Father [cf. Jn 5:19; 8:18; 10:37]. He only says what the Father says to Him [cf. Jn 12:49, ff.]. On His "own" He does not "do" [cf. Jn 5:19, 30; 8:28], nor "say" anything [cf. Jn 8:28] - all the deeds and words of Jesus are those of His Father.

b.] When the Apostles returned from the town of Sychar, Jesus had been speaking with the Samaritan woman [cf. Jn 4:8, ff.], and they urged Him to have something to eat. Following the discourse on "thirst" to the Samaritan, Jesus then speaks of His own "nourishment":

"... My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete His word..." [cf. Jn 4:32, ff.]

1.] With a slight inversion of Chapters 5 and 6, a certain order might develop:

- Chapter 5: is the second Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem [AUTUMN];
- Chapter 6: is the Passover, and the Bread of Life [SPRING-TIME].

2.] The two themes are intimately inter-connected:

- the Discourse on the sources of the **Living Water** by the well of Jacob with the Samaritan woman [cf. Jn 4:5-25];
- the Discourse on the **Bread of Life**, contrasted with the Manna of Moses, and the multiplication of the breads.

3.] The parallel is clearly noted in the lesson Jesus draws from both discourses:

"...Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water I shall give will never be thirsty again..." [cf. Jn 4:13, ff.].

"... He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst..." [cf. Jn 6:34].

4.] In the manner of Wisdom [cf. Pr 9:5; Si 24:20], Jesus offers to humanity the sole nourishment capable of satisfying their deep spiritual needs. Only the Word that has come down from heaven can give life to the world.

c.] In similar manner, the nourishment for which Jesus Himself experiences a deep hunger is on the level of heavenly realities which He seeks. For Jesus, it consists not so much in the Word, as He Himself is the Word. For Jesus, this "hunger" is the perfect adherence to the Will of the Father, Who has sent Him so that the world might be saved..." [cf. Jn 3:17].

1.] Jesus "hungers" to carry out the Divine Will, point by point, as He explains:

"... As I who am sent by the living God, myself will draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me..." [cf. Jn 6:57]

"... He is the Father, just as the Father is in Him [cf. Jn 14:10], and the Father and He are one..." [cf. Jn 10:30].

Each time, Jesus accomplishes a "work", or says a "word", He has the consciousness of doing this, or saying that - simply as the Father wills, and does all in union with Him. For Him, the will of the Father sustains His life - as nourishment does the life of a human being.

2.] In the same way that nourishment responds to the basic requirements of humanity, to do the Father's Will for Jesus responds to a vital need: this is His **Constitutional Filiation**. This need is of such a quality, and unique experience, in that it flows from the **AGAPE** which arouses it. This is the height of the analogy. What should be retained is that the submission of Jesus to the Will of the Father is of absolute necessity.

3.] Jesus assumed an individual and concrete human nature. This **Logos-Sophia** [Word-Wisdom], "nearest to the Father's heart" [cf. Jn 1:18], manifests these intrinsic notes:

- He is the Word by which the Father has done all [cf. Jn 1:3];

- He is equal to the Father [cf. Jn 5:18];

- He is indeed God [cf. Jn 1:1].

a.] Yet, He speaks of His Eternal Filiation in terms, such as: "For the Father is greater than I" [cf. Jn 14:28].

b.] Nonetheless, the revelation of His intimate union with the Father is revealed not merely through "formulae",

or "statements carefully crafted", but also through deeds, by **His entire earthly existence**:

"... My food is to do the Will of the One Who sent me, and to complete his work..." [cf. Jn 4:34].

"... I can do nothing by myself... my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me..." [cf. Jn 5:30].

- c.] Cardinal Newman has described this in an extraordinary insight [cf. "The Humiliation of the Son of God, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*. III. London 1883, p. 163]:

"... Though he was Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Obedience belongs to a servant, but accordance, concurrence, co-operation, are the characteristics of the Son. In His eternal union with God, there is no distinction of will and work between Him and His Father; as the Father's life was the Son's life, and the Father's glory was the Son's also - so, the Son was the very Word and wisdom of the Father, His Power and co-equal Minister in all things, the same and not the same, as He Himself.

"But, in the days of His flesh, when He had humbled Himself to the form of a servant, taking on Himself a separate will and a separate work, and the toil and sufferings incident to a creature, then what had been mere concurrence, became obedience. This, then, is the force of the Words: 'Though He was a Son, yet He had experience of obedience.' He took on Him a lower nature and wrought in it towards a will higher and more perfect than it. Further, He learned obedience through suffering."

- d.] In the Christological controversies, there was within the Church a great struggle with "Adoptionism". Nonetheless, the obedience of Christ is the expression in attitudes and human decision of His eternal condition. His over-all intention in His human nature is dependence, elevated from that of "Servant", responding to the loving plan of the Father, and through fidelity to His commandments [cf. Jn 15:10]. By His own life, Jesus has fixed decisively the "Law" according to which His disciples will be called to surpass the level of "Servant".:

"... If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love..." [cf. Jn 15"10].

"...You are my friends if you do what I command you..." [cf. v. 15].



4. **The Scope of His Mission: LIFE** [cf. F. M. Braun, OP, Vol. 3/1, pp. 71-75].

- a. The scope of His Mission as assigned by the Father, is that of Life:
"...Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost, but may have life eternal..." [cf. Jn 3:16].

This idea appears 17 times in the Gospel, and 6 additional times in the Epistles. The concept first made its appearance in Daniel:

'... Of those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth, many will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting disgrace...' [cf. Dn 12:2].

- b. In John's idea, in the place of being rejected at the end of time, there is this promise of Life which is already present, begun. From the coming of Christ onward, all have been called to share in it. Between the presence of Jesus here and now, and eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is some kind of identity, even though "eternal life" here does not manifest all of its effects:

"... My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is... [cf. 1 Jn 3:2].

- c. Nonetheless, essentially those who believe in Him are already in possession of this life; Jesus never tires of preaching this to His listeners [cf. Jn 3:35, ff.; 5:24; 6:40, 47, 54; 10:28; 17:2; 1 Jn 1:2; 2:25; 3:14; 5:11-13]:

"... I have written all of this so that you who believe in the name of the Son of God may be sure that you have eternal life..." [cf. 1 Jn 5:13. 18-20; cf. Jn 20:31].

- d. What this "life" requires here and now is a New Birth from on high, from God [cf. Jn 1:13; 1 Jn 2:20; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18]. In the grace of this New Birth, elevated above the earthly and sinful condition [cf. 1 Jn 3:9], the "regenerated believer can have access to the Kingdom on high" [cf. Jn 3:3]. It is here that the Lord shares the power to become the children of God [cf. Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1, 2, 10]. This **Filiation** and only this - will ensure eternal life. Jesus has come to share His Divine Filiation, to communicate His Filial Attitude.



5. The Father's Glory [cf. F.M. Braun, OP, Vol. 3.1, pp. 146-152]:

- a. The "Hour" of anyone indicates his/her great moment, when the work for which one has been destined is accomplished. The "hour" of the Mother-to-be is when the child comes to the light of day [cf. Jn 16:21].

1.] The biblical "Hour", however, is present as something ominous:

"... I have told you this so that your faith may not be shaken. They will indeed expel you from the synagogues, and indeed the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think that he is doing a holy duty for God..." [cf. Jn 16: 1, ff.]

".... But I have told you this so that when the time comes for it, you may remember that I told you..." [cf. v. 4].

2.] Jesus' "Hour" is that moment when there is definitively realized the "work" for which He had been sent into this world: i.e., the Victory over Satan, sin and death [cf. Jn 12:23, f.; 27, 31, f.].

- a. There is no doubt that for the 4th Gospel, this "Hour" represents something of the first order. The importance that is given to it, the fact that it is assigned to the very end of the earthly life of Jesus, are emphatically brought out by these words:

"... Now that the hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified... a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies... and yields a rich harvest.... Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But, it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!..." [cf. Jn 1:23, 27].

- b. Before the Feast of Passover, Jesus knew that the Hour had come for Him to "Pass Over" from this world to the Father, and Jesus who had loved His own, would love them through to the very end. [cf. Jn 13:1].

- c. And again, at the very beginning of the Priestly Prayer:

"... Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you, and through the power over all mankind that you have given to him, let him give eternal life to all those who have been entrusted to him..." [cf. Jn 17:1, ff.].

- d. At times, this "Hour" was projected at some relatively distant point in the future [cf. Jn 2:4; 7:30; 8:20] - but, the Inevitable Hour for which Jesus came, was constantly present to Him. Until His "hour" came, His enemies will not have power over Him. When they try to apprehend Him, they can not [cf. Jn 7:30; 8:20]; yet, each time the increasing opposition between Jesus

and His adversaries comes to light, the final "Hour" seems more and more ominous [cf. Jn 5:18; 7:1, 19-25; 8:37-40; 11:53].

- e. The "Hour" of Jesus becomes one and the same as His Elevation on the Cross:

"... I tell you most solemnly, the Hour will come - in fact, it is here already - when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God, and all who hear it will live..." [cf. Jn 5:25].

"... Do not be surprised at this, for the hour is coming when the dead will leave their graves at the sound of his voice..." [cf. Jn 5:28].

It will be an "Hour of Decision", those who did good, will rise again to life; and those who did evil, to condemnation ... It is an "Hour" when the true worshippers of the Father will appear [cf. Jn 4:23].

- f. The "Hour" is also noted at Cana: "... Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet..." [cf. Jn 2:3]. The account of the "Woman" of Cana is a challenging passage and violence is done to the passage when it is "sweetened". The Hour of Cana is the introduction of the "Great Moment", from which the thought of Christ I hardly ever distracted.

1.] The changing of the Water into Wine which had been contained in the stone jars, was meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews. The water became an excellent wine, "reserved for the end", contrary to practical customs of brining out the "poorer" wine for the end of the nuptial banquet. This whole ceremony indicates the New Covenant announced by the prophet. "Woman, what does this mean to me and to you?" - also indicates the transcendence of the Son, entirely submitted to the Divine Will, far beyond any ties of flesh and blood. The changing announces the great transformation which will be produced at that instant when Mary, present at the foot of the Cross, will receive as son, the Beloved Disciple, re-presenting the faithful. [cf. Jn 19:25-27].

2.] There is here what is called by scholars a biblical inclusion, i.e., a very similar parallel as between two texts:

"... Jesus said: 'My food is to **do the will** of the one who sent me...'" [cf. Jn 4:34]

"... I have glorified you on earth and finished **the work that you gave me to do...**" [cf. Jn 17:4]

From beginning to end, Jesus is presented as totally committed to the "work" which devours Him. Thus, from Cana on, he begins the 12 hours of the day when one can walk without stumbling - this will no longer be possible in the hour of darkness. At the end of this, He will "Give up His Spirit" [cf. Jn 19:30]. Until this Day will reach its conclusion and fulfillment, He will not cease to work [cf. Jn 5:17] - throughout the long "Day" He will pursue His task.

g. By contrast with the Last Hour, the "particular moments" assigned by the Father to each one of His "Works", are the opportune time [the *kairoi*] which flow throughout His life with an established plan. When His disciples sincerely suggest: "since you are doing all this, you should let the whole world see..." [cf. Jn 7:4], Jesus declines their invitation for the sole reason: "The right time for me has not yet come..." In this sense, they have more "freedom" than He does - they may go up for the Feast, but He will not:
"... Go on to the Festival yourselves: I am not going to this festival, because for me the time is not ripe yet..." [cf. Jn 7:8].

h. In all truth, the moment of His great manifestation will take place when His "Hour" does come. As long as the intermediating time passes, He must be busy about His Father's Work, in the conditions determined by Him. It was "necessary" for the suffering man of Siloe to have been born in affliction, so that through this occasion, the works of God might be manifest:
"...As long as the day lasts, I must carry out the work of the one who has sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work..." [cf. Jn 9:4].

1.] It was necessary for Jesus to be far away while Lazarus, His friend, suffered his illness. This was all to glorify the Son of God [cf. Jn 11:4].

2.] It simply "had to be" that He should return from Jerusalem into Galilee and that He would make a stop at Jacob's Well, precisely at the 6th Hour [cf. Jn 4:4-6].

3.] Nothing in His life was left to mere chance, however. On the pathway that had been traced out for Him, Jesus was not to hasten the stages, to anticipate the "hour" - it had all been foreseen. When it does come, it will come unexpectedly and this is an invitation for all to profit by His presence. There is always the great risk to seek, and not find Him [cf. Jn 7:33, 36; 8:21]:

"... The light will be with you only a little longer now. Walk while you have the light, or the dark will overtake you; he

who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Walk while you still have the light, believe in the light and you will become sons of light..." [cf. Jn 12:35, ff.].

- i. As for Himself, when the "Hour" finally does come, His soul is "troubled" [cf. Jn 12:27] - this is explained not so much for fear of the terrible ordeal, this total out-pouring of the unleashed powers of evil. This is an Agony like that of Gethsemane [cf. Mt 26:37, par.; Mk 14:35]. This prayer offers the slim hope that this "Cup" might indeed pass from Him, that indeed, He might be spared this "Hour". The piteous request: "Save me from this Hour" cannot be said that He is asking for a release from the Father's Will - it is for this very "Hour" that He has come. Nonetheless, He frequently is presented with troubled soul:
 - before the tomb of Lazarus: "Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart..." [cf. Jn 11:33];
 - at the betrayal of Judas: "... Having said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared ... one of you will betray me..." [cf. Jn 13:21]
- j. So, Jesus has come a long way to reach this "Hour" and He accepts His will so that the "Name of the Father might be glorified": "... Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me...?" [cf. Jn 18:11]. It is all part of the "Plan", through which the son of Man will be glorified: "...Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..." [cf. Jn 12:23].
- k. Form one end of His earthly life to the other, Jesus' entire earthly existence was dominated by this "Hour":
 - the "Hour" had not yet come;
 - it was "approaching";
 - is "here".

The "Hour" toward which Jesus' entire existence is oriented, is an inexorable "march", a program to be carried out, a "Plan" to be fulfilled; it is purpose that is expected; a moment that will arrive - and all of this is in the utmost solidarity with that which the Father has given Him to accomplish [cf. Jn 6:34; 17:4]. Divine Wisdom will make use of human instrumentality, so that the "Hour" of Jesus must be subject to history and to geography, all as part of the "marvelous condescension" of the Incarnation. The "Hour" is that for which Jesus has come into this world.

- I. The "Hour" of Jesus is the grand moment of Salvation History, which separates all of time into two segments:
 - the first, began with creation and ends on Good Friday;
 - the second, picks up on that day, and continues to unfold, in full dependence on eschatological fullness. It has already been realized in Jesus, who sets a model for the life of the Church. This will go on until the end of all time. To live this second period, there is need to return repeatedly in faith to the word and to the sacraments, in order to have eternal life and to be saved.

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[II] Jesus' Existence as Obedient Response ["Constitutional Filiation"]

6. It is accomplished! [cf. Jn 19:30]

- a. To indicate this accomplishment, Scripture usually uses the word **pleroma, plereo**: to fulfill: "in order that the Scriptures be fulfilled." In connection with His Passion, there is the expression: **telciolethe**: "...After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfill the scripture perfectly he said: 'I am thirsty!'" [cf. Jn 19:28]. Whatever word is used, the whole drama of Jesus is to complete, fulfill the Scriptures [cf. Jn 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24,35].
- b. There seems definitely to be a Plan behind all this insistence on the part of John: "...He had always loved those who were his in the world and now he showed how perfect his love was..." [cf. Jn 13:1]. This "perfection", "fulfillment", implies the entire earthly existence of Jesus. This is all part of the: works" that He accomplishes for His Father: "... My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete His work..." [cf. Jn 4:34].
- c. John shows in detail that in the Passion, the "Scriptures" - and notable Ps 22 [The Sufferings and the Hope of the Virtuous Man] find their fulfillment, completion in Jesus. There has been a systematic Obedience to a Plan.
 - 1.] This is noted three times in a relatively short space:
 - they shared out my clothing... in this way the words of Scripture were fulfilled [cf. Jn 19:24];
 - all this happened to fulfill the words of Scripture: not a bone of his will be broken [cf. Jn 19:36];
 - and in another place, Scripture says: They will look on the one they have pierced [cf. Jn 19:37].
 - 2.] The suffering and death of Jesus are presented as part of the Divine Plan [cf. Jn 19:11] - and this is present in the scene describing His "thirst": "to fulfill the Scriptures" [cf. Jn 19:28-30].

- 3.] Jesus has the conviction of being the ultimate Prophet, and so expresses His will to give His life [cf. Jn 10:11, 15, 17, ff.], for the salvation of the world [cf. Jn 6:51], and the unity of believers [cf. Jn 10:16; 11:52; 17:19-21].
- d. Therefore, the fulfillment of the Scriptures [cf. Jn 19:28] - and: it is accomplished [cf. Jn 19:30] - express the same reality. Between the profound conviction that Jesus has of having accomplished the program assigned to His earthy existence, and the proclamation that He indeed had carried it all out, is a direct transition. Subordinate to the accomplishment of His Mission, the fulfillment of the prophecies in His drama is secondary.
- e. Even though it is "secondary", the Evangelist goes to great pains to present the individual fulfillment of the Scriptures. John's idea is that all that Moses and the Prophets have written [cf. Jn 1:45; 2:22; 5:46; 12:16] simply have concerned Jesus Christ. In the over-all understanding of the individual texts, Scripture indeed contains the Word of God. All the particular application to the Person of Jesus tend to demonstrate that the unfolding of His earthly life depended entirely on the Father's will. The accomplishment of Scripture was the accomplishment of the Father's "work", being carried out to the full, just as Yahweh had ordered. The Scriptures contain the salvific will of God.
- f. In the Synoptics, Jesus utters an agonizing cry:
 "...At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice..." [cf. Mk 15:37].
 "... But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit..." [cf. < 17:50].
 "... Jesus cried out in a loud voice: 'Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit...' [cf. Lk 23:46].
 In John, it is simpler:
 "... Jesus said: 'It is accomplished...'" [cf. Jn 19:30].
- 1.] There is a slight contrast also with what Stephen would do: he asks the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit [cf. Ac 7:59].
- 2.] Jesus, however, addresses Himself to His heavenly Father, as He does in the Priestly Prayer [cf. Jn 17:4]. He realized the Scriptures - so, there was no more for Him to do, than to give way to the Spirit: He "expired", laid down His life, only to take it up again. [cf. Jn 10; 18].
- g. With deep intuition, St. Augustine interprets this dramatic scene: the inclination of Jesus' head, prior to the last breath, is an indication more of a man in control of His destiny, offering this obeisance to the Father - rather than one despairing in agony.

- h. The manner of description of this scene is a carefully worked out passage. In "giving up His Spirit", there is a unique expression: the intention here seems to be that as a crowning of His earthly existence, by His voluntary death, Jesus gives to the world the Gift of His Spirit, promised for the final times.



7. Jesus' Total Existence as Obedient Response [cf. G. Marchesi, *La Cristologia di Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Roma: Universita' Gregoriana Editrice 1977, pp. 246-274, passim].

- a. The abundant biblical data offers much material for deeper contemplation. A series of characteristics of Jesus' earthly sojourn emerge: obedience, availability, transparency, poverty - and also Jesus' authority - all of these are as rays which enable one to seek to penetrate the center of this great Mystery.
- 1.] When one tries to respond to the challenging question placed before all believers: "Who are you, Jesus?" [cf. Jn 8:25] - a believer is led to drink from the streams of the Living Water, the source of eternal life [cf. Jn 4:10, 14; 1 Jn 5:6; Ps 36:10; Is 58:11]. The effort is to seek to penetrate to the heart of revelation to grasp the full implications of Jesus' relationship to the Father, as this is expressed in human terms.
- 2.] His "obedience", His "availability" are by no means abstract. They constitute rather privileged means for fathoming more profoundly into the inner Mystery of Jesus, the Icon of the Father. They are channels opening profoundly into the depths of the Mystery of His Person, shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit. They can lead the prayerful reader to a deeper share in the Mystery of the Living God.
- b. The humanity of Jesus is the expression, the sacrament" of His Divinity: the entire "openness" of Jesus to His Father leads the believer to ponder the very nature of God. "Obedience" is a term used to represent His existential constitution.

To have seen Me, is to have seen the Father cf. Jn 14:9; Col 1:15; Heb 1:1, ff.].



8. Jesus' Filial Obedience and His Constitutional Filiation

- a. The Word of God has become man and experiences "obedience". This offers to the Church the greatest proof of His infinite **Filial Love**. With the historical obedience of Jesus to the Father are faithfully connected themes, such as: the **Spousal Availability of Mary**, the new Daughter of Zion - the **Fidelity of St. Joseph** [cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos*, August 15, 1989]; the faithful availability of the Church - the Spouse of Christ; and the following/imitation of Christ, as the realization of the Christian vocation. By means of obedience, and its allied concepts, there is offered a fundamental element that sheds light on the Person of Jesus. The many various happenings of the earthly existence of Jesus have a point of meeting in His loving obedience toward His heavenly Father. This insight can shed some light on the multiple beauty of the Divine Personality, as lived by Jesus.
- b. There is a difficulty in thinking of the Person of Jesus s being revealed by obedience: there is the risk that such a presentation, when carried to the extreme, would remove from Jesus His optional capacity, His freedom, and hence - the merit of His earthly acts. There is a false mysticism in presenting the Person of Jesus as mere passivity. In the totality of Christ, this obedience of His is an eminent expression of His love for the Father, which remains a free act of His will. There is a radical unity in Jesus for the Will of the Father, as well as for His Person. In the "absolute intensity" of His obedience, the Father's Will is His "food" - there is no contrast between what the Son wills and what the Father wills. For Jesus, the execution of the father's Will is one and the same as Jesus' love for the Father.
- c. The obedience of Jesus manifests His radical "openness: to receive all from His Father. Obedience thus becomes that grand act of love with which Jesus expresses His intimate essence as Son: His obedience is a lived attitude, an existential disposition. It expresses His divine fullness in difficult human terms, and, at the same time, gives to obedience a new fullness. In the strength of the hypostatic union, there is an identity between the One Who obeys, and His obedience. Jesus is structurally constituted by His loving obedience, and is existentially obedient lovingly.
- d. Jesus is not only the Original Word of God, but He is also the Word from which all others originate. His Word embraces and realizes all other expressions of creation. He is, therefore, the Word and Response in a unique act of love. He is the Word that frees all human beings. Jesus is not only the "sovereign", and "transcendent" Word of God - but, He is also "correspondence". He is the perfect "restitution", the full response to all that has been received from the father. Jesus is the "Open One", the One who is "Receptive" to the Father, the One Who perfectly fulfills the Father's Will.

- e. James' words in his letter have already been perfectly fulfilled in Jesus: "... You must do what the word tells you..." [cf. Jas 1:22]. In the strength of His availability to the word and to the will of the Father, Jesus is the model and the supreme realization of the operative listening and obedient carrying out. His obedience becomes intimately and directly associated with openness to the Father, which is His ontological constitution - this is His existential disposition. His: "openness" is a way of thinking of the mystery of the Man-God: this is the "Mind" of Christ Jesus, which all of His followers need to "put on" [cf. Ph 2:5, ff.]. He is oriented above and beyond Himself, in this is the mystery of Jesus Christ.
- f. The connection between obedience and openness of Christ is further confirmed by the same terminology concerning **Mission**. This, too, is founded in His receptive openness toward the Father. Loving obedience establishes the existence of Jesus, and this is revealed through His human nature, as an expression of His inner nature and being. His incomparable obedience is **His fundamental act**, the form of His very being. It is on His unique obedience that there is based His authority, His fullness of power. As the **Mission from "on high"** is the proof of the divinity of Jesus [cf. Jn 4:33-34; 5:30; 6:38-40], so obedience is the very verification, the explicitation of the divine Mission itself, and realizes It fully. In Christ, therefore, Mission and Obedience are in perfect harmony. Jesus is identified with Mandate, with obedient, in so far as His loving obedience is the full response of the Father's sending of Him.
- g. There is in this consideration of Jesus [which is one of the many ways theology employs seeking to come to grips on a deeper level with His personality}, a certain esthetic vision. There is in Jesus a unique receptivity and sensibility for the fascination of the Beautiful - which is both revealed and hidden at one and the same time in Him. Therefore, the Encounter, with the Mystery of the Beautiful is not accomplished once and for all - nor can the meeting with Christ ever be a mere intellectual, rational knowledge before the harmonious Person. Jesus Christ is "Beautiful by Essence" - in this there is a profound Paradox, Enigma, Secret. In Jesus, there is extraordinary "proportionality", harmony - between the divine and the human. The key to the understanding of Jesus is His Yes to the Father, His fiat. In Jesus, there is no contradiction, but merely loving obedience.
- h. Fundamentally, Jesus obeys the Father - Who is the stable Point of the Redemptive Mission and the mirror of the contemplation and the action of the Trinity. Precisely in so far as the obedience of Jesus is absolute, "even to the death on the Cross" [cf. Ph 2:8], it is total abandonment, the extreme weakness to the Power of the Father. In His Filial Consciousness Jesus realizes that "before Abraham, He already "was" [cf. Jn 8:59] - and that He was already David's "Lord" [cf. Mt 22:45] - Jesus obeys the Father, by accepting and carrying out His entire salvific plan [cf. Rm 15:8]. Making

His very own the "destiny" of the prophets- martyrs, Jesus does not remain on their level [cf. Mt 12:41, ff.], nor is He restricted to the dimensions of their Mission. The obedience of Jesus is His radical response to the Spirit given to Him from on high, even to the point of identifying His life and His death with the very Word of God and its "demands".

- i. The loving, obediential relationship of Jesus to the father "hides" His transcendence in one sense - but, at the same time, reveals it. In carrying to fulfillment the Law and the Prophets, He carries to completion the "terrestrial work" of the Father. Jesus remains personally "open" to the Father, as do the many Christological affirmations manifest [cf. Jn 2:25; 5:33, ff.; 8:18; Mt 11:7-11]. The testimony of the Father is the guarantee of the revelation and the work achieved by the Son on earth. The filial carrying out of this will is His "food" [cf. Jn 4:32-34; 6:38-40], which "sustains" Jesus in His whole living, dying and resurrecting.
- j. As the Father is the One Whom Jesus obeys, the question of "how" Jesus obeys comes to the fore. His obedience paradoxically also expresses His full freedom. There can be no "fatalistic" vision of Jesus the Son of God - even though it was "necessary" that it all came to happen [cf. Lk 24:26; Mt 16:21; Mk 8:31]. In His "oneness toward humanity", there is the tie with the divinity. The ultimate expression of this unifying openness and obedience is, of course, love; Jesus came on earth to bring the father's **agape**, the very bond of the life of the Most Blessed Trinity.
- k. The "historical" life of Jesus, even though already sketched and traced out for Him in anticipation by the prefigures of the Old Law, in no way was "determined" before-hand. In so far as Jesus is the fullness and the foundation of the promise, He constitutes the Archetype of Scripture - inspired from beginning to end in a Christological form. Jesus perceives His own biography in sacred history, which unfolds in the light of His eternal openness toward His Father. The Will of the Father constitutes the content and the form of the Son's existence. This is an eternal content, given continually and communicated concretely in the life and time of the earthy Christ.
- l. Jesus does not obey "by instinct", but out of the fullness of His loving free will for the Father, for humanity - and it is this love that "teaches" Him "obedience" [cf. Heb 5:8]. It is not the obedience of a slave/servant, Who carries out to the letter the dispositions of an employer. The faithful and docile response of Christ is much freer - His obedience is essentially His love. It flows from the unity of dialogue between the father and the son, from the vision [cf. Jn 5:19; 6:46; 8:38], from the listening [cf. Jn 8:26,40], from the knowledge p [cf. Jn 7:29; 8:55] - which Jesus has in a unique and proper manner in relation to His Father. This obedience of the Divine Son is in Itself, eternal love. This obedience of love, or loving obedience of the

Son for the Father coincides with the love of the Father for Him. The One sending and the One receiving the mandate act from the same freedom of divine love. The Son "leaves" the Father free, while remaining united to Him in His obedience.

- m. From the loving obedience of Jesus, other aspects develop, such as: Trinitarian diffusion and revelation. This is thought of as "Irradiation", going out from a central source, and a concentration, directing all to that Fontal Love. The new fecundity which is inexhaustible - of the obedience of Jesus, is based precisely on His personal response, on His total commitment, that is absolutely unconditioned, for the Cause of the Father. No one else ever fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, and brought such honor to the Father. No one ever before grasped the ultimate intention and the deepest secrets of the spirit in the reading of the Divine Word. The love with which Jesus obeyed is the creative element which signs the leap from the "old" to the "new" [cf. 2 Co 5:17]. The love of Jesus is so perfect that it removes the principle of servile obedience, and places the whole Law at the service of love. This obedience of love is the "service" which the Son renders freely to the Father. Jesus is not merely a passage from the Old Law to the New - but, rather that of a qualitative abyss between the old and the new. He indeed is the new Creation, the new Covenant, the New Commandment - in the best possible manner.



9. Trinitarian "Obedience" in Divine Revelation

- a. The obedience of Jesus Christ is profoundly "Trinitarian", and this under two points of view:
- first, in the unitive sense: the intimate union of Jesus to the Father in communion and docility to His Spirit;
 - secondly, in a diffusive sense: in that obedience out of love is the visible expression to the world of the hidden mystery of God.
- 1.] The historical obedience of the Son gives the highest emphasis to the Trinitarian life; through His obedience, the "positions" of the divine Persons in their most intimate unity, become distinguishable in a precise manner. The obedience of Jesus is "Trinitarian", in that in so far as He is God, He is already "obedient" eternally to the Father, being sent by him, in His openness and docility. He is obedient to the Father guided and loved by the Spirit. This communion accompanies and vivifies the entire existence of Christ [cf. Jn 1:32; 3:34; 6:63; 7:39]. The death, the supreme manifestation of His obedience, is sealed by the "e-mission", the "ex-spiration" of the Holy Spirit [cf. Jn 20:30]. His

death is the sign of a Mission completed [cf. Jn 19:34]: this is the return of Jesus to His Father.

2.] His "going to the Father", including the Cross and Glorification, is to be read in the sign of obedience: this implies the total remission of humanity to God. This act of Jesus is the fulfillment of the New and Ever-lasting Covenant.

3.] In this Trinitarian "obedience" of Jesus, there is clearly a two-fold dimension:

- vertical: in this dimension, the Father's will is accepted; in His uninterrupted Mission is all that constitutes him "Son", both in time as well as in eternity. Jesus accomplishes the Father's works with fidelity and docility.
- horizontal: this consists in bringing to completion also the promises of Prophecy, within human history.

b. The privileged "place" for the manifestation of God is the concrete existence of Jesus Christ, His humanity, as the visible expression of God. In His humanity, the historical obedience of Jesus plays a determining role and one that sheds much light on the inner mystery of God, as well as offering a model for the life of the Christian. There is a most intimate tie between the very clearly intra-Trinitarian, eternal expression of Christological obedience - and the revelation that His human life afforded in words and deeds. Christ personifies the glory of God - precisely through His obedience, He becomes the auto-manifestation of divine Glory.

1.] His historical obedience corresponds to His unique Divine Nature. His Mission from on High corresponds to His docile and faithful response as a man. In Jesus, there is no mere neutral image of God, but there is necessarily manifest the divine event of the eternal procession. In Jesus, the Triune God appears.

2.] In so far as He is God, He can command and obey at the same time. The Mystery of the Incarnation, particularly in its culminating moments, is an outstanding revelation of the Trinity.

c. It is precisely through His obedience [cf. Jn 14:31] that the love of Jesus for the Father becomes "visible". Through the glorification of the Son, resulting from His obedience even unto death, there is manifest the Father's love for the Son. Christ is the presence of divine love on earth - that presence in which eternal love is visible, is expressed, and is realized. Throughout His entire life, from His birth, through His infancy - His public life [cf. Ac 10:38], to the extreme humiliation of the washing of the feet [cf. Jn 13:1, ff.] - to the institution of the Eucharist, through His Passion, Death

and Resurrection - Jesus manifests throughout, His most intimate essence; this is not mere "parable", or metaphor. The great affirmations of Jesus:

- I AM the Light of the World [cf. Jn 8:12];
- I AM the resurrection [cf. Jn 11:25];
- I AM the Bread of Life [cf. Jn 6:35, 48, 51] -

these are all seen as having their ultimate source in the Heavenly Father, and that Jesus merely manifests Him as a most unique revelation of the Father, Who is behind all of them.

- d. Gradually, the profound, unfathomable unity in Christology: the unique union of God with humanity is presented with ever-greater sublimity to the reflecting Church. There is a most intimate identity between: Mission, Openness, Obedience, **Love**.

1.] In a most particular manner, Mission, Obedience and Love are the human expressions that shed the most light around which the mystery of the Incarnation, Redemption, Trinity, evolve. The "marvelous condescension" of Jesus, as well as His "Glorious Exaltation" from the father are brought together in these terms.

2.] The love which guides Jesus Christ, and constitutes Him in His Eucharistic Presence and in His return to His Father, is the vital source of His entire contemplation and action, of His work of revelation and sanctification. This is the filial love of Christ for the Father, His sacrificial love for the world, merely two expressions of one and the same reality. This is His knowing response to His mission from on high.

- e. With reflections on the obediential love of Jesus, one could well conclude the development of "Ascending Christology". However, there is an aspect of His earthly existence in which His obedience and love stand out in a most extraordinary manner - so much so, that this has remained as the genuine sign of the entire Mystery of Jesus: **the Cross!**



10. The Sacred Stigmata: the "Form" of the Figure of Christ - the Icon of Trinitarian Love

- a. In this consideration of the Mystery of Christ, loving obedience is the fundamental act of the life of Jesus. It is commonly believed that the ultimate scope of the earthly dimension of the Incarnation is the Cross, the Stigmata. The existence of Christ is a path toward the Cross. Hence, His loving obedience is not some passing act - not a choice of circumstances. The Cross is the supreme act of His Self-giving of love. It is anticipated

intentionally and lived existentially in every instant of His earthy history. Loving obedience is presented by Scripture as a kind of specification of His very being and of His Mission of Love. Loving Obedience is the form of life of God made man.

- b. By "**Form**" in this context is meant the active element which imprints a determined configuration on His earthly existence - which is the revelation of His divinity. The "**Form**" is what delineates, and unifies the wide variety of elements known in His life. The "**Figure**" might be thought of as the visible result, that is delineated and signed by the impressed form.
- c. The "**Figure**" of Christ has been presented to us by divine revelation on various levels. These are all characterized in harmony and proportion, in a perfect accord between the divine and the human. Thus, the "Figure" of Jesus presented to us in Revelation is the supreme expression of the beauty and the love of God, and the most high response to God.
 - 1.] In this consideration of Jesus Christ, loving obedience is the active element, the aspect that revelation presents to us as configuring and unifying the image that Jesus presents concerning Himself and His Father. Jesus is "signed" by obedience. It is this loving obedience which "configures" His entire existence, gives color to His every act, offers a tonality to the revelation which He makes of Himself and of the Father.
 - 2.] His death on the Cross is but the ultimate and definitive sign [cf. Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32] - one that is not in any way "spectacular", but in every way, is imposing - of His existence IN and THROUGH obedience.
 - 3.] In the complex manifestation of the life of Christ, loving obedience presents the Figure of Christ under a particularly revealing light - He, nonetheless, remains a great mystery. The more direct and profound the revelation of His nature, His relationship with the Father becomes - then all the more difficult it is to include under any single human expression, such as "loving obedience"! This has to imply the most extraordinary tendency toward the Father and humanity at the same time.
 - 4.] As the mystery is infinite, there is always possible a constant misunderstanding of His own Words, that may be heard and read, but not fully grasped. This shows anew the basic necessity of "faith" which Christ demands and arouses: it is the light of faith that penetrates far beyond all the "systems" of reflection.
- d. The **Image** of God is presented to us by Jesus Christ and in Him [cf. Jn 14:9-11]. This **Icon** is a Paradox, characterized by two essential elements:

- it embraces the dynamism which renders Him "empowered" to speak and to act with the very power of God;
 - and yet, at the same time, He suffers and dies in abject misery. This **Image** is not a contradiction, but a harmonious unity - and what unites the human and the divine in Jesus is His is not a contradiction, but a harmonious unity - and what unites the human and the divine in Jesus is His Yes to the Father, His receptivity of Mission, His openness to the Father's Will. Jesus is the One Who speaks with divine power and suffers with human weakness, and does this in the strength of His Loving Obedience.
- e. The Words of Jesus in His own time, and also in our own - can bring a certain "discomfort". His message is presented with a disturbing power that does not allow of discussion: He presents His word as the only and definitive word. He constantly demands a response of faith and conversion. In doing this, He clearly speaks with a divine capability. Jesus speaks with "divine right", about which He manifests no doubt. While on the one hand, we find Jesus surrendering the divine glory, which is His "right" - yet, He never minces His message, and speaks with a divine "right" the words of the Father [cf. Jn 6:60; 8:52-59; 10:33]. He speaks with a divine prerogative, authority. Jesus often invokes this divine "right": He knows that He is the Word of the Father, His Revealer. It is Jesus Who makes the word of the Creator resound throughout the world. Jesus presents Himself in the inimitable realization that He has the absolute prerogative of being the define salvation of God for humanity. Jesus is the synthesis of previous History, Law and Prophecy - and now is the **Way**, the **Truth** and the **Life**. He has absolute transcendence, authority, superiority, over the Law of Moses, the Sabbath.
- 1.] It is the Synoptics most of all who amply present Christ under this aspect of His Power:
- in commanding the unclean spirits;
 - in exorcising the demons;
 - in His opposition to the "powers" which do not operate in God.
- Throughout, Jesus speaks with "authority", performs miracles as the Creator: heals, pardons. The moment of "truth" of the encounter of Jesus with the powers of evil are: His temptations, Gethsemane, the Cross. In all of these, paradoxically, Jesus "conquers".
- 2.] Throughout His public life, His "new authority" was evident [cf. Mk 1:27; 4:41]; surprise and wonder are manifest concerning Him [cf. Mt 7:28, f.; Mk 1:22; Lk 4:32; 7:1]. He indeed has the fullness of power [cf. Mt 11:22; 28:18], and His message is that He is the Word of God, the Word of God present to the world, the revelation of the Father and the Triune God.

- f. His Power is that of Subjection: whether He presents Himself as Word, Way, Truth, Life, Light, Bread: it is always from God that He takes His inspiration, power. The Mystery of the Incarnation is based on Trinitarian "obedience". It is the mystery of the Incarnation which illumines all the dynamism of the obedient life of Christ, which gives the right coloration to the power of His works and words. From the Gift that the Father makes to humanity in the Incarnation of His Son, there is the idea of the offering, the oblation, the consent to His Father. Form the part of Christ, it is the act of loving obedience, out of His sublime love for His Father and for humanity, in full freedom, and total lack of self-interest, that constitutes the ontological foundation of His life. For the Father's salvific Mission, the Son has responded with total commitment of Himself. The power that Jesus "has" is a power "received" in His eternal Mission from the father - the "Word" that Jesus is, is the expression of the Father. It is in His loving self-giving that Jesus expresses full power, and offers the ultimate word.



Summary

- [1] Jesus' entire life, earthly sojourn, is "configured" by obedience, out of love.
- [2] From this, there is formulated a **Christological analogy** between the life of Jesus and that of every Christian.



C. FATHER BERTONI'S THOUGHT

1. Total Commitment to Jesus Christ:

For Fr. Bertoni, his creativity was his placing himself at the disposal of the One Who was simply beyond him - One indeed capable of "drawing" all to Himself. The Person of Jesus Christ, as was noted above, was the core of his charism, his yearning and his service of the Church. We often find passages, such as: "... Frequent memory of the life of Christ, with a tender love of correspondence..." [cf. MP, Feb. 1, 1809].

- a. The entire life of Jesus is a Lesson - Jesus is **the Master in this School of God**:

Jesus teaches us how His principal occupation and His entire effort was that of attending to all that would be of service to His heavenly father, without being diverted to anything else..."

[cf. Spiritual Exercises to the Seminarians and Priests - cf. CS I, p. 179].

- b. The great Model for the **Apostolic Missionary for the Assistance of Bishops** is Jesus' own relationship to His Father and toward humanity:

"... We serve the One Who is by so many titles our Master, and One Who has more than purchased our service. The reason is that He Himself before we did, served with such fatigue, with so many humiliations, so much suffering. Furthermore, it is He who promises to reward our service by having us sit with Him on the same throne in His glory..." [cf. Sermon 36, external Worship, October 3, 1805, in PVC p. 215].

"... For you also are the Lessons of Christ, your Teacher, necessary: 'Learn of me', He says, 'For I am meek and humble of heart.' [cf. Mt 11:29]. 'Learn of Me' in that I am equal to the Father, but I emptied Myself, taking on the nature of a newborn baby, Whose first crib was stable hay. Then for 30 years I was subject to those whom I had created, to make Myself obedient to the Father, even unto the death on the cross [cf. Ph 2:6-8]. [This was Fr.. Berton's first public sermon, delivered as a Deacon, more than three months prior to his priestly ordination - in: PVC 146].

- c. Stigmatine "availability" is meant to be an active choice, often repeated - and not merely passive acceptance. It is meant to be a dynamic state of mind in that, by it, one strives to remain always open to the call of God in this concrete "now" of time. Availability, furthermore, is open to boundless hope in Him Who guides us along the pathway to an ever new encounter with Him, and then ultimately, toward the totally "new" and definitive encounter:

"... to You, my Jesus, my God, I surrender, I commit myself, I abandon myself..." [cf. Sermon 23, April 2, 1804 - in PVC, p. 37].

"... What does 'Jesus' mean if not 'savior'? That is, He Who is a God, Who, to manifest to humanity that excessive love with which He loves each person and from all eternity. The reason why He descended from Heaven was so that each person might right up there. He took on our flesh to make us the 'consorts' [sharers] in His own nature. Finally, He died to give us life, and life eternal. Is not this a love that is so generous that it should be able ... to penetrate even the hardest of hearts...?" [cf. Sermon 9, "The Name of Jesus", 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 1801 - in: PVC 243].

- d. The over-all motivation for St. Gaspar Berton's Apostolic Mission is always the Witness of Jesus Himself:

"... My brothers and sisters! Let us think better of God, now that we have seen that He did not even spare His only-begotten Son because of love for us. But rather, He handed Him over to the most crude torments, and to a shameful death to redeem us from our iniquities..." [cf. Sermon 27 - Jan. 27, 1805 - in: PVC p. 40].

2. The Father's Infinite Love and Mercy: the Inexhaustible Source of the Apostolic Mission

The infinite Power behind this Witness, and the ultimate inspiration of the Apostolic Mission is the Father's eternal love:

"... That love which the father has had for you has never been sterile, nor inefficacious. Rather, this love became most effective in the proper moment of time, by sending you a Redeemer ... Therefore, just think over this benefit of Redemption. Just consider how God has sent His own Son into this world to save you... The charity of Jesus Christ is admirable also in its extension. As He was sent by His Father for the entire human race, and by reason of His Father, He loved it all, and divided Himself equally among all - and to all He gave fully of Himself without an acceptance of persons..." [cf. Nello, Vol. 2/2, p. 169].

- a. The Apostolic Mission, therefore, is a reflection of the total availability of Jesus towards His Father, a privileged expression of His love:

"... 'If I could only find' - the Lord said to a Holy Woman in a vision - 'individuals who would generously give themselves to me without reservations, all that you would ever read in the lives of saints that I did to them, I would do again, also in such persons... How very few are they are even understand what God would do with them if He were not impeded by them in His Plan...' [Retreat to Priests and Seminarians, The Reign of Christ, I Part. II - CS I, p. 171; 172, note 18].

[This was a favorite principle of Fr. Bertoni - not unlike the insight of a modern theologian, Jurgen Moltmann. He said that original sin is not so much the titanic desire to be like God, but the refusal to be what God would like! While exegetically the interpretation does not hold up, nonetheless, this Ignatian principle, quoted often by Fr. Bertoni, offers much food for thought.]

- b. Fr. Bertoni himself had such an exalted idea of the Apostolic Mission:
"...Chosen apostles, disciples, ministers ... Nobility of an apostolic vocation such as ours is. How important it is that one corresponds to it faithfully... 'Many indeed are called, but few are chosen' [cf. Mt 20:16]. " [CS I, p. 190].
- c. The faith of the authentic Christian often implies the acceptance of the unexpected invasion into one's life and daily routine by God whose OT name might have been, in its root, an irregular verb. The faith of the Apostolic Missionary means to restate the initial religious profession, made to the One Who comes to us as the only One who can offer the authentic support for our lives, with His unique stability and power. The gradual discovery of Him and the acceptance of Him who is the rock of salvation, will deliver one from his own individual inconsistency: "...Let us keep firm in the profession of our hope, because the one who made the Promise is faithful..." [cf. Heb 10:23].

d. The full acceptance of the word of God by faith comprised the beginning of the long itinerary, exodus journey of Life - that began for Him in a stable, and ends on the Cross, the threshold to the resurrection. This is called the Christian way. Fr. Bertoni interpreted one of the aspects of the infinite love of Jesus for the Father expressed by means of His availability to His Will.

1.] Even today, the Word of God that the Church might pronounce can invade one's life, and way of thinking. Faith presents itself to us as a vivid experience of a more radical availability for Christ.

2.] This makes of our Stigmatine 'encounter' with Him the ultimate meaning of our lives and the basic inspiration of our Apostolic Mission. The 'Amen' of faith presupposes a surrender of oneself to the Person of Jesus Christ. In the risk of faith, sharing in the Mission of Jesus, the Apostolic Missionary will experience an interior liberation. This deliverance, freeing power of availability, assists one to overcome the barriers of one's own spiritual incapacity and limitation. This allows one to go beyond self-imposed limits and restrictions of the lack of self-confidence.

3.] At the same time, it provides Jesus as our Model, that eliminates any subtle pretension, or dependence on one's own talents, real or imagined. All of this leads the Stigmatine to go beyond himself, and communicates a new consistency in or particular community following of Jesus, the Father's Envoy:

"... You should not precede, but follow the Lord. He will illumine your path, and will suggest to you - in response to your prayer - how to progress and to correspond..." [cf. MP, Jan. 12, 1811].

3. The Specific Stigmatine Means: Abandonment to God, Availability to the Church:

The characteristic Christian means, common to the wide variety of paths available to reach the one and the same holiness to which all are called, is that of following, imitating Jesus Christ. It may be that Vatican II with its description of faith offers a good suggestion in its principle of the *obsequium* of faith: '... The 'obedience of faith' [Rm 16:26; cf. 1:5, 2 Co 10:5-6] must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man **entrusts his whole self freely to God**, offering ' the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals' and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him..." [cf. DV 5].

a. The specific Stigmatine means is that of accomplishing this through **Availability**: abandonment to God, and service to the Church, through the Bishops. As has been noted, Fr. Bertoni received from the Lord a singular grace of contemplating the Most Blessed Trinity. At times, this grace guided him to reflect on the Trinity, drew him interiorly towards this central mystery; at all times, this contemplation inspired the ever-increasing self-giving, surrender to life, and dedication to the Church, no matter what

the state of his health. Fr. Bertoni became more and more united to this mystery with all his heart, and very often with profound sentiments of devotion.

- b. He contemplated the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. These reflections permeated so much of his adult life. Therefore, to speak of Christ in the spirituality of Fr. Bertoni, means to reflect on the real, central position that Jesus Christ occupied in his prayer, thoughts and writing. From his own lived experience of which he has left some record in the 6000 pages that have come down to us in his own handwriting, we learn that Jesus Christ was the Stigmatine Founder's constant companion. He used expressions that would remind one of the Stigmata: he described his long illnesses as being 'nailed' to his bed [cf. Letter 92, p. 183] - and the many surgical interventions that he endured as being 'wounded', but not yet dead [cf. Letter 104, p. 197]. For Fr. Bertoni, the Will of God was the supreme rule of his life, and we see him explaining the classical theological distinction between the "Will of Sign" [as the Decalogue, precepts of the Church, dispositions of ecclesial superiors] and the divine Will of Good Pleasure [as in the events of everyday life] [cf. Letter 3, p. 51; Letter 47, p. 113].
- c. Our central ideal of the **Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops** is the real purpose of offering a competent, available service, and to see this as sharing Christ's own Mission. Christ is presented as the "Eternal King and Lord of All" [cf. CS I, p. 167] - in Whose service all those listening to Fr. Bertoni's preached retreat were being invited to offer themselves to His service. It is always Christ Who is presented as the font and scope of all walks of life. Fr. Bertoni presented Him as the "Incarnate Lord", and every retreatant was being inspired to serve Him ever more [cf. CS I, p. 177]. Fr. Bertoni often spoke of Him as His "Divine Majesty", who yearns to make the ultimate use of our services. It is Christ who calls each one, and invites all to enroll under His standard, banner for service to the Church, to share forever in His life [cf. CS I, p. 185].
- d. Thus, his main scope in preaching was to enlist his listeners in the ever-greater service of Jesus: this was the motivating power in the activity of Fr. Bertoni's spirituality. It could be said that for him the "assistance [obsequium] of bishops' was simply the "incarnation" of his deeper, interior **obsequium** of Jesus Christ. [cf. Letter to Pope Gregory XIV, Ep, p. 240]. The Will of the Father has been made known in Jesus - "to serve Christ" means to give all of oneself for the assistance of Bishops. The Lord Jesus makes His will known, offering His own example and His teaching. This record of His words and deeds has been left for the contemplation, study, experience, of those who believe - that through this prayerful study and imitation, this intimate experience of Jesus Christ might then be translated into love for Him and for an ever more dedicated service of Him. This fuller "imitation", and closer "following" of Christ, stressed particularly the poverty, humiliation and sufferings of Christ for the Kingdom.

4. Fr. Bertoni's Christological Perspective: Stigmata and Spouse

- a. The Humiliated, Crucified Christ, the Servant of the Father: although a relatively recent exegetical discovery, the OT prophecy that comes to us under the name of "Isaiah", in its second part {"The Book of Consolation", Is 40-55] - contains four sections that once may have existed as separate parchments [Is 42:1-6' 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12].
- 1.] The very powerful perspective - of Christ, in His divine reality is present throughout the thought of Fr. Bertoni. This view of his is a particular aspect of the mastery of Jesus that seems to emerge in his thinking. The aspect of Christ that is presented by Fr. Bertoni places in great evidence the **Kenosis** of Jesus Christ [cf. Ph 2:5-11]. Fr. Bertoni contemplated Him particularly in His poverty and humiliation, willingly lived for the redemption of the world.
 - 2.] Jesus, as "omnipotent God" and "His Divine Majesty", is often presented as the One Who assumed human nature, was the Son of the Virgin Mary. [Fr. Bertoni hardly ever referred to Mary as "Spouse" - it was always as "Virgin", or "Mother"]. This unique divine Personality accepted the Sorrowful Stigmata, always with a view to fulfilling the Will of the Heavenly Father, Whose universal salvific will had chosen to heal the disrupted plan of creation. This aspect of "healing" was also a vital part of Fr. Bertoni's earlier form of his charism - he himself helped out in hospitals until civil law forbade this for those engaged in teaching school. Nonetheless, service in was one of the elements of his vocation [cf. Nello, Vol. I, pp. 240, 244, 247, 472, 641, ff.]. In the sick, one encounters the suffering of Christ in His members. A trace of this perhaps is found in his Original Constitutions:
"... The infirm should be served as brothers in the Lord... one serves them as one would genuinely serve Christ Himself..." [cf. CF 262].
 - 3.] As a lived experience, through humiliation one learns a most painful aspect of the reality of Jesus Christ. At the core of the Stigmata is Jesus Christ, exposed to the jeering crowd, to those who made fun of His basic message: "IF you are the Son of God, come down off the cross!" The deepest meaning of the Stigmata is this **total Self-giving**, of all that is human, so that something of the divinity might come to humanity.
 - 4.] Fr. Bertoni offered his life so that this most special insight into the life of Christ might be lived among those whose lives he so deeply touched. His was an ever greater, and ever more decisive commitment to find in the Lord and in His life, the motivation for an ever greater availability to the ecclesial community - for the ultimate purpose of an ever more committed attitude toward God and the Church.

b. Christ Our Savior, Spouse of the Church, the Soul:

- 1.] To witness to Christ, in the total service of His people, was a characteristic of Fr. Bertoni. In this, he was deeply inspired by the **espousals theme**: Mary and Joseph dedicated to Christ, Mary and Jesus in the service of Christ. Christ is presented by St. Paul as **the Spouse of the Church, Who sacrificed Himself to render the Church holy**: "this mystery has many implications!" [cf. Ep 5:25, ff.]. The underlying image is that of Jesus Christ Who emptied Himself so that the Church might truly be enriched by His own Self-giving [cf. 2 Co 8:9]. Fr. Bertoni was personally convinced that the Congregation was instituted by the Holy Spirit [cf. CF 185] for the competent, dedicated service of the Church, as well as for the praise of God through the assistance of human beings. This goal was to be achieved not only by contemplation of these august mysteries, but by handing on that which had been contemplated [cf. CF 49] - for the conversion of souls [cf. CF 255].
- 2.] This is the marvelous contemplation of Jesus Christ, as committing Himself, putting Himself on the Cross, for the salvation of humanity. The "greater glory of God" is identified with **the total service of the Church**. The spirituality of Fr. Bertoni is of profound Christological intensity, without forgetting its deep Trinitarian, Eucharistic, and Espousals implications. The Apostolic Mission is being closely associated with Jesus Christ, to love and serve Him, the omnipotent God - and through Jesus, the entire Trinity.
- 3.] This is the Christ, eminently portrayed by the Scriptures, poor and humble - who perennially invites the believers of all ages, to follow Him, in the communication of His message. The call of Christ is an invitation to share totally in all of His life, all of one's own life: whether eating, or drinking, and in all other factors, of keeping oneself vigilant, of responding to the sense of urgency to His message. It is a matter of following Jesus not only through the ideal decision of planting the Kingdom of God with whatever apostolic talents and graces that one may have.
- 4.] The call of Jesus Christ is meant to reach every level of human existence. There is no wonder, then, that this all-pervasive call of Jesus means to imitate Him in supporting offenses, misunderstanding and every type of experience of poverty, whether material or spiritual. It is not only the request to carry to term some apostolic undertaking, but far more, the vocation of the Apostolic Missionary means to follow Jesus closely, in the imitation of His life, particularly in His abandonment to the Father, through the Stigmata - as one disdained, and truly poor.

- 5.] To "follow /imitate/ put on the mind of Christ Jesus serves as the fundamental element of every Apostolic Missionary, of all the baptized. The Stigmatine vocation is a spiritual experience of Jesus Christ, made up of convictions and sentiments from which flows a firm will to persevere. Fr. Bertoni lived this experience himself, and nourished it with his Eucharistic, biblical contemplation. The vocation finds its expression in the synthesis of his life-long pilgrimage in the ways of the Spirit.
- 6.] In the mysteries of the life of Christ, as these were perceived by St. Gaspar Bertoni, frequent references were made to His poverty, and the suffering of shame. Following St. Ignatius of Loyola, Fr. Bertoni offers a rather original consideration on manifestations of humility. A superior form, closely emulating that of Jesus Himself, is that of choosing to be poor, rather than enjoying wealth and independence, and he offered this in company with Jesus. Poverty of this nature is a faith-vision, a fruit of profound love for the Person of Jesus Christ. The total dedication of the Stigmatine is a radical dimension of poverty, and an expression of particular love for the Father.

5. Availability to the Father lived as Total Service to the Church:

- a. In the entire matter of "holy abandonment", there has to be some practical expression of one's self-giving. On the faith level, this first response, of course, is to God Himself, to His grace, and to one's vocation.
- b. However, if this was the sole expression of abandonment, it would simply be that of each Christian. Stigmatine Availability begins with abandonment to God, choosing as one's Model the intimate relationship of Jesus Christ toward His Father, as this is made known to us in the pages of Sacred Scripture, particularly in St. John. The "specific" Stigmatine element would seem to be: the **Apostolic Mission offered for the Assistance [obsequium] of Bishops**. This does not mean that each individual confrere would draw up his own "contract" with the various bishops of the world, but rather that the Stigmatine Apostolic Mission would be interpreted through Chapters, General and Provincial, and Local, according to the needs of the Church in the changing times and places. On the concrete and practical level, as the renewed Constitutions read, this involves the mediation of the legitimate superior, both on the ecclesial level as well as those within the Congregation.
- c. Stigmatine availability is not some vague sense of "abandonment" to the Lord, but it is an authentic availability, both in the acceptance and in the choosing of a variety of mediations, each representing Jesus Christ. It involves dedicated service to the Shepherds of the Church - the "First Rock", Peter - the bishops, and in a particular manner - the superiors of the Congregation: General, Provincial and Local, as well as the activities

to which the community is committed, along with the real needs of God's people and individual talents. The process of discernment of all this demands a real quest for the Lord alone on all levels.

- d. In the charism of Fr. Bertoni, these mediations are all subsumed under the bishops, whom Fr. Bertoni considered to have been chosen by the Lord Himself, as noted in the Acts of the Apostles. It is the Holy Spirit Who speaks to us in the Scriptures [cf. Letter 5, Ep 33; Letter 22, Ep 68; Letter 103, Ep 196; Letter 176, Ep 279]. The Spirit selects the Bishops [cf. CF 185 - cf. Ac 20:28].
- e. Therefore, the Stigmatine vocation has a multiple consideration:
 - there is the immediate commitment to the concrete apostolate, to which each one is invited to be totally dedicated;
 - an over-riding self-giving to the inexpressible mystery of God and His Kingdom.
- f. With the great consideration of the ultimate Cause in all this, there is absolutely no indication of any lessening commitment to the tasks at hand. A specific apostolic mission is the most important, and it is this that gives meaning to one's routine life of each day.
- g. However, beyond the daily commitment, the Stigmatine spirit would ask of each one that attitude, an interior disposition of will, and on-gong preparation, **availability** for what the apostolate requires, and to where it is intended to lead. In the light of the new ecclesial spirit, this involves great patience and effort on the part of the superiors and confreres, **to find the ever-greater service of the Lord**, together with the community. In the ideal of the Stigmatine vocation, this commitment of each one is hoped for, to experience this mystery of Jesus, ever ready and capable of serving the Father's Will.
- h. Such availability is one of the most convincing affirmations of the mystery of Jesus. Such "abandonment" to a higher ideal eliminates all that is partial, provincial, or folded in on oneself. Such availability is based on a theology and spirituality of total Incarnation. It seems that Jesus, in the total mystery of His **Kenosis**, leading to the fullness of God, is the salvific mystery of Life.
- i. This presents a delicate area of striking a balance - every human being, through Baptism, is consecrated into the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ [cf. Rm 6:1, ff.]. In striving to follow Him in this way of Holy Abandonment, one will live an experience expressed through the continual quest for what the Lord truly wills. This vocation will invite the spirituality of the "pilgrim", the "nomad", the "over-night guest." The individual who truly wants to follow the Lord will often be invited to leave "his father's house behind", like a modern--day Abraham, Moses, or

the Spouse of Psalm 45 - invited to go on an unknown, life-long Exodus journey. Fr. Bertoni sought Jesus Christ not only in the pages of sacred Scripture, but also in his own spiritual and apostolic living of the very Mission of Jesus Christ, received from His Father.

6. A Total Incarnation in the Stigmatine Vocation would lead each one to think of a number of concrete forms of the **Kenosis** of Jesus Christ. Here are three possibilities:

- a. **Obsequium**: this will be treated more fully further on, and also in other parallel studies. To live a truly Christian abandonment, modeled on the Incarnate Son of God, there has to be a concrete form of this in daily life. The form lived by our Founder was a total self-giving in the apostolate, fully in accord with the directions, the limitations, imposed by the Diocesan Faculties received from his bishop. The **Assistance of Bishops** serves as a concrete form, a kind of "sacramentality" of the divine will in the life of Fr. Bertoni in what concerns the Apostolic Mission. The Stigmatine Founder sought as an ideal, the ever-greater service of the Church through the assistance of her bishops.
- b. **An Instrument** in the hands of the Lord: if not a definition, this was a way of looking at the service a Stigmatine can offer. The human nature of Jesus is a "Conjoined Instrument", hypostatically united to the Divinity. Steeped in the Thomistic tradition of the Instrumental Cause, important in earlier years of theology to describe the authorship of Sacred Scripture, and also for the human nature of Jesus being united to His Divinity - Fr. Bertoni looked upon the Apostolic Missionary deeply united to the Principal Agent, Jesus Christ: by the life of sanctifying grace, the Apostolic Missionary is called to imitate the hypostatic union, to be an Instrument joined to the Lord: ordinary talent close to the Lord can perform extraordinary wonders in the Apostolic Mission.
- c. **The "Espousals Principle"** might be based on St. Ignatius' ideal expressed in his letter to one of his Provincials, in which he stated that an ordinary "instrument" performs extraordinary tasks when united intimately to the artist-genius: whereas sometimes great talent accomplishes very little separated from Jesus Christ. In His Espousals Principle [already explained above], Fr. Bertoni declares that the most intimate following/imitating of Jesus is that of Spouse: one not attracted by the reward, or enjoying the filiation; but the one truly interested in the **Spouse of Christ, the Church**. Fr. Bertoni offers a traditional view of the Church in his early sermons - but his view of service of the Church; in the beginning, this meant a total dedication to the bishops, as this passage might indicate:

"...By the name of 'Church' [in our service of the Church] ... is to be understood the bishops, and the Supreme Shepherds of the flock of Christ. The

Bishops in the Church are the sole judges authorized by God. The custom of the Church confirms this. Furthermore, not all are doctors, as St. Paul says [cf. 1 Co 12:29]. To lead the flock to pasture in knowledge and doctrine is proper to the Shepherds, i.e., to the Bishops. Lastly, a certain doctrine contrary to all this cannot be, nor should it be ignored in these times - it has already been rejected by a legitimate censure [cf. Denzinzger # 1310].

"The Holy Spirit has placed these Shepherds to rule the Church of God, which Christ acquired with His Blood: from these legitimate Pastors we ought to depend, and to await from them the proposition, explanation and declaration of the true sense of the Word of God, revealed in the Scriptures, or in Tradition, as the unique infallible rule of our thinking and working. We ought to follow this word faithfully and constantly, if we wish to arrive at the knowledge of the truth and the possession of that supernatural, eternal beatitude we hope for in union with God: 'may peace come to those who have followed this rule...' [cf. Ga 6:6 - Vulg.]...This is the Star that we should follow..." [cf. Epiphany 1806, Sermon 35. PVC pp. 259, ff.].

In accord with modern developments in Ecclesiology, some aspects of Fr. Bertoni's view may seem somewhat "dated". There is a most valid point, however, and that is that for the Stigmatine the needs of the Bishop have to exercise a central role in the choice of the Apostolic Mission to which the community dedicates itself, **anywhere in the Diocese and in the world.**

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