

THE TRINITARIAN CHARISM OF ST. GASPAR BERTONI

Rev. Joseph Charles Henchey, CSS

The Founder and the Trinity

August 24, 1808:

At St. Joseph's Convent, at the base of one's own nothingness, God may be found.

While experiencing some sublime insights regarding God, I also had a much deeper understanding of myself.

This evening I saw a painting of the Most Blessed Trinity. This inspired much reverence and love for the Three Persons. The Eternal Father was depicted with His arms open, which explained His Mercy to me, and the ready communication of His gifts.

Thereafter, the Office was said with much devotion and for the glory of God.

September 27, 1808:

Meditation today was on the Incarnation. I experienced feelings of gratitude for the Most Holy Trinity, and of correspondence with Jesus Christ. I was obliged to love God even before he became man: how much more now.

September 28, 1808:

During Meditation today and afterwards, there was the desire for martyrdom, and prayer for it, along with deep interior exhortation.

This evening, expression of pardon. There was a sentiment of great love toward the Most Holy Trinity, in giving us the Son. Toward Him, there were feelings of much tenderness together with a very vivid faith, and a great desire for union.

There was also the yearning for association in His sufferings and shame - with a prayer for the grace to suffer and even to be disregarded as He was.

The Trinity and Mission

- a. Creation and Grace: Fr. Bertoni's interest in the Trinity is concentrated in the doctrines concerning the Indwelling, the Eucharist, Mission and Hope. In accord with many of the Fathers, there is a kind of cycle: the descent through creation; the sharing of the Divine Nature, for an eventual return to eternal life in the bosom of the Trinity. The universe comes forth from God - grace is offered - for one to be elevated to eternal life. Fr. Bertoni, in his writings, is much more concerned in the documents that have come down to these times with the Divine Plan of Salvation [the so-called "Economic Trinity"¹] than he is with the inner workings of the Trinity, or the "Immanent Trinity"¹.

¹ The Church considers the Trinity in two ways: The "Immanent Trinity" considers God in the Eternal Trinity (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) in Itself, while the "Economic Trinity" considers God in our world as creator, redeemer and sanctifier. "Economy" means an activity: God working outside of Himself in this world, creating, redeeming and sanctifying. Fr. Bertoni, as a priest, was concentrated on the salvation of the people who came into his life.

- b. Incarnation:** this pattern is noted in Jesus Christ: He descends to us from the Father - lives among us in total abjection and lowliness, His Kenosis - in order to lead us back to the life of the Trinity. The entire emphasis is on the Mission of the Son, so intimately tied in with His Personality: Jesus has been sent to accomplish our return. The Mission distinguishes the Son, but does not separate Him from the Father.
- c. Stigmata:** For the Stigmatines, the Paschal Mystery is seen in terms of Jesus' life carrying out this Plan of Redemption. The Five Wounds of Christ are the visible signs of this Paschal Mystery: the descent, the living among us, and the return to the Father [cf. Ph 2:5-11].
- d. Kenosis [cf. Ph 2:5-11]:** This biblical passage - even though not often quoted explicitly by Fr. Bertoni - is one that seems to figure throughout his thinking and life - the KENOSIS of Jesus Christ. In some way, we might think of a kind of Kenosis of the Father [who so loved the world that He gave up His only son – whom He did not spare: cf. Rm 8:32; Jn 3:16] - and the Holy Spirit who has not come to say His own word, but only to remind the Church of the Message of Jesus [cf. Jn 16,13,f].

The KENOSIS of Christ lends itself to this outline:

- Jesus did not cling to his equality with God: 'Pre-existence';
- But, He emptied Himself: His entire earthly sojourn;
- His Incarnation - assuming the form of a slave;
- His Redemption - His death on the Cross.
- And the Father raised Him on high - for the divine glory: the Exaltation.

The one classical principle finds a multiple application: Bonum est diffusivum sui: would offer some appreciation of the Mystery of the Trinity - the Sacraments – the Church and the Apostolic mission.

The great pattern is this: AS the Son is the Father's Apostle/Missionary, SO He sends His own Apostles, JUST AS He was sent by the Father:

"... Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you', and he showed them His hands and His side... 'Peace be with you... AS the Father sent Me, SO I am sending you...' [cf. Jn 20:21].

This is the 'Mystique of Service': the Trinity is not only contemplated, but it is also the heart of the message that is 'handed on to others.' It becomes clearer and clearer that the Trinity is the ultimate source and principle of the Apostolic Mission.

As Christ 'cooperated/collaborated' with the Father, each believe, each Stigmatine is sent, called to work as Christ did for the extension of the Father's Glory.

Among the 'Models of the Church', there will have to be room left for ecclesial obedience: Jesus, obedient unto death, is the primordial Model of the Church. While the Holy Spirit breathes where He will, Fr. Bertoni saw Him as the source of the Stigmatine Vocation: this vocation is a work begun by the Holy Spirit, and He will bring it to completion ². Fr. Bertoni believed, too, that the Spirit has been active in the

² "... puellam parvam, quae erat in obsequio uxoris Naaman..." [cf. 4 Reg. 5:2; cf. also Ps 123:4].

naming of the hierarchy. It is through the Bishops that the Stigmatines discern the Apostolic Mission for the community. The choice of the apostolates, as the assistance of Bishops - is left up to them as the Incarnate Divine Will for the Stigmatine ecclesial service.

Jesus, the ICON of the Invisible God

Jesus is the ICON of the Invisible God [cf. Col 1:15] - Jesus really is the 'Symbol of God'. By probing His humanity, one has a deeper sense of the divinity. The humanity of Jesus is a window into the Trinity, a mirror for Christianity. Fr. Bertoni seemed most aware of this:

August 17, 1808:

"In prayer, begin with Christ, and from His Passion - then the spirit should be left free for wherever the Lord may attract it..."

In his Constitutions on the Progress of Stigmatines in ecclesiastical disciplines, Fr. Bertoni noted the following in his original rule:

"Since the Apostle says: 'for I am determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified' - and since Christ said of Himself: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end' - therefore, all the confreres shall start here, that is, to learn by heart, if possible, the Christian Doctrine as set forth for everyone's understanding in the Catechism of Cardinal Bellarmine. Moreover, those who devote themselves to study, shall every now and then, return to it, putting a deeper knowledge and hold on it from the Roman Catechism".

There is a biblical foundation for all this:

"...whoever sees Me, sees the One Who sent Me..." [cf. Jn 12:45]

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

"... He is the radiant light of God's glory, the perfect copy of his nature..." [cf. Heb 1:3]

The Stigmatine 'image' of God, ideal, in some way can be understood through the Devotions to the Holy Spouses [manifesting the diversity of Gifts, and family unity, dedication to Christ, abandonment] - and the Sacred Stigmata, indicating the total self-giving of Christ, His abandonment to the Father's Plan - and the Apostolic Mission [cf. Jn 20:20,f.].

God has 'removed the veil', regarding Himself in Jesus Christ as God's Work of Art, and of Him we are invited to draw a portrait in our own lives ³. He is the Father's Symphony, His Master-piece, made manifest under a variety of aspects in the charism of St. Gaspar Bertoni.

The Second Vatican Council has noted that there is a 'growth' in the faith in the lives of the believers as they correspond to God's word. It seems most evident that this passage was truly 'experienced' by Fr. Bertoni:

³ "... qui serviunt, obsequentes erunt sancto ..." [Eccli 4:15].

“... There is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts [cf. Lk 2: 19, 51], through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth...”.

God is the supreme mystery - but, He has been made known through Jesus Christ:

“... No one has ever seen God; only the Son, who has made Him known. The Son is turned eternally toward the Father...” [cf. Jn 1:18].

This idea of God is completed in Revelation in all that is sufficient for salvation - but, the progressive understanding of Him, and His Plan will go on until the end of time, through the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of those docile to him.

St. Gaspar Bertoni’s Charism and the Most Blessed Trinity

The Mystery of God and human destiny are being unfolded also in the Stigmatine charism through the grace of God, the mediation of the Son and the continuing sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Bertoni’s charism flows out from the Most Blessed Trinity: beginning with the traditional teachings regarding the Indwelling of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Eucharist, Fr. Bertoni discerns the hand of the Trinity in everything.

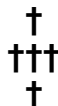
His heroic hope is expressed as a holy abandonment. His holy abandonment is presented as a superior form of confidence and hope in God.

A careful analysis of the Lord’s Prayer would indicate that the intimate relationship with the Father will culminate in the ‘end-time.’ To share in Divine Filiation, this is the ‘special grace of our vocation’, one that is superior to all difficulties, and dangers - this is ‘costly discipleship.’ Christ is identified with the poor, the struggling.

Through His own Filiation, Christ with his Sacred Stigmata is inviting all to the eternal nuptials. The Immolated Lamb, with the marks of His immolation still evident on his Body, invites all to come to the nuptials with the Church. It is on this note that all of Scripture draws toward its end:

“... The Spirit and the Bride say: Come. Let everyone who listens, answer: COME! [cf. Rv 22:17].

The theological virtues are the sublime ‘experience’ of God through the Holy Spirit to which all are being challenged by Grace. It is the Spirit of God sent into the human heart that enables all to cry out ABBA! [cf. Ga 4:6].





The Author:

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He spent 32 years in Rome - 10 years as General Councilor - and also taught at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas [*ANGELICUM*] [PUST] in Rome for more than 20 years.

Presently (2005) he is Assistant Spiritual Director at Blessed Pope John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Massachusetts, for second career men, desiring to spend their last years as priests.

For all of his Stigmatine life, Fr. Henchey has been a student of St. Gaspar Bertoni, the founder of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata.

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Note:

This article is an excerpt of the study: 'St. Gaspar Bertoni: A Trinitarian Charism of Hope', found on the website dedicated by Fr. Henchey to St. Gaspar Bertoni, at this address: www.st-bertoni.com, under 'Life & Spirituality'.