

UNIVERSITY OF STUDIES OF PADUA
TEACHING FACULTY



THE SPIRITUALITY
of
LEOPOLDINA NAUDET
in her
SPIRITUAL JOURNAL

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PRESENTATION

In taking up this work of research and deepening my understanding of the writings of Leopoldina Naudet, I came principally to understand that I was making some contribution, however modest, to the history of the spirituality of the 19th Century. A contemporary Author observes that in trying to bring out the characteristics of that period, it is impossible to draw on the personal nuances of each figure¹. This would require a more particular and profound study, on the greater part of the unpublished documents held in archives.

This is truly the situation of Mother Leopoldina Naudet. Prior to this present effort, her personal writings were not studied in depth as a principal font in order to trace out her spirituality. The work of Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove ² is more historical and biographical in style, but does leave ample space for the development of her spiritual make-up. Fr. Stofella's study ³ is a commentary on a very limited part of her Spiritual Journal, taking up the years 1811-1813. However, it was precisely this study which opened for me a ray of light into the richness of the spiritual motivations in the writings of Leopoldina. This appeared to me as the most valid and immediate means to achieve the scope previously announced.

Therefore, the principal source of this present endeavor is constituted by the **Spiritual Journal**. This contains the personal jottings of Mother Naudet that she would write down on the occasion of her retreats, days of recollection, or on other occasions of rather intense spiritual activity in her life

The First Part of this study presents the history surrounding the composition of the **Spiritual Journal**, so that the reader might have forthwith some knowledge of her writing. In the Second Part of this work, however, I have sought to delineate her spirituality, drawn from:

- the spiritual authors she consulted;
- from the counselors and confessors who had some influence on her spiritual journey;
- from the models of holiness who impressed her, and whom she proposed to imitate;
- from the specific virtues that she practiced that appeared most to those who observed her;
- from her special devotions that express that pure and wholly interior thrust of her soul toward God.

¹A. Prandi, "Correnti e figure sella spiritualita' cattolica nei secoli XIX e XX", in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanita'*, Fossano 1966, V, p. 119.

²N. Dalle Vedove, *Dalla corte al chiostro, donna Leopoldina Naudet, fondatrice delle Sorelle della Sacrea Famiglia*. Verona: 1954.

³G. Stofella, "Il diario spirituale di Leopoldina Naudet e il ven. don Gaspare Bertoni", *IL BERTONIANO*. a monthly periodical reserved to the Stigmatines. Verona 1930, XVth Year, supplement to n. 1.

Toward the end, I offer a brief documentation on the particular forms of the spiritual experience of Leopoldina Naudet, with special reference to her mystical life. It seemed to be the most fitting to place this theme as the conclusion of this work, in so far as it constitutes the natural outlet of her intense interior life. This mystical life seems to have been the coronation of her progressive effort at simplification, which appears so very often throughout this work, and is one of the characteristics of her psychology.

Sister Pia Accordini, Ph.D.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Arch.S.d.S.f. Verona	Archivio Sorelle della Sacra Famiglia, Verona
Arch. Rom.S.J., Roma	Archivium Romanum Societatis Iesu, Roma
Arch. Prov. Veneto-Mediol. S.J.,Milano	Archivium Provinciale Veneto-Mediol. Societatis Iesu. Milano
Arch. Segr. Vat. Roma	Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Roma.

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**G.S. [*Giornale Spirituale*]= The *Spiritual Journal* of Leopoldina
Naudet**

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Leopoldina Naudet [1773-1834], was born in Florence, Italy, on May 31, 1773, of a family of French origin, which had moved to Florence as part of the Hapsburg-Lorraine Court. As a young child, she lost her Mother in death, and was then entrusted to the Monastery of the Nuns of St. Frediano, in Florence. She subsequently received her early education in France, with the Sisters of Notre Dame of Soissons. She then returned to Florence at the age of 16. With her sister, Luisa, she later accompanied the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold to the Court of Vienna, as tutor of the three last Archdukes. She lived in Prague with the Archduchess Maria Anna, named Abbess of the Chapter of Nuns of St. George. She visited with the Abbess the more important cities of Europe, and assumed positions of trust in the Instituted known as “the Beloved of Jesus.” To this community, she committed her life in collaboration with Father Paccanari and the Archduchess.

Padua, Loreto, Venice and Verona were the successive stages on the long journey which Leopoldina traversed sustained by her faith. From 1808 until 1816, she worked in collaboration with Madelene di Canossa. From 1816 until her death, she dedicated herself entirely to the formation of her own religious family, which came into being through her desire to serve God and the Church.

In this enterprise, she found great assistance in the counsels from men well known for their sanctity and learning: Gaspar Bertoni, John Rozaven, John Roothaan and Louis Fusari, the Superior of the Oratorian Priests in Verona.. She left to the Sisters of the Holy Family the challenge of the civic, moral and Christian education of the youth. To these Sisters, she communicated her apostolic ardor, by bringing together the active life and an intense and profound contemplative life.

On December 23, 1833, Pope Gregory XVI approved the religious institute founded by her, crowning years of intrepid expectancy. In the following year, on August 17, 1834, Leopoldina died, repeating to the end to her daughters: “I want only what God wills!”⁴ This principle had been the sole program of her entire life, lived without uncertainties, until her death.

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⁴S. Gagnere, *Memorie sulle virtu...*, f. 7.

PART ONE

THE “SPIRITUAL JOURNAL”

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The “Spiritual Journal” of the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet

A Description and the History of Its Composition.

The *Spiritual Journal* is a collection of three hand-written fascicles, of different sizes. The first fascicle has about 3 folders, of register size paper. The second fascicle, though, is also the most extended, includes 30 folders, the last being made up of 8 smaller sized sheets. These texts are found all together in one large file, put together without any precise chronological order. To each of the sheets, though, even on the blanks, a progressive number has been given so that the whole work covers about 185 pages. The Original, as a single copy, is kept in the Archives of the General House of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

In recent times there have been made numerous xerox copies of this *Spiritual Journal* without copying, of course, the blank sheets. An effort has been made to order these writings systematically and chronologically, assigning to the pages a new numbering. Thus, following this new system, the end result is a work of about 125 pages, register-sized pages.

In this present study, the intention is to follow this new numeration of the pages.

No comprehensive title was given to these writings, largely because this new presentation of the original pages is posthumous. Leopoldina, of course, never dreamed of making more than a single copy of her writings. It was her daughters who carefully collected these texts and sought to bring them together. Since the ultimate intention of the work was never formally stated, it is evident that there would be no title. As a result, there are only sectional titles, of the various groupings of the pages. Leopoldina herself called some of her papers, *Secret Recollections*⁵; others are called *Journal*⁶; and still others, *Retreats*⁷. Lastly, at the front of a few texts are written the words: *God alone*⁸ - and more simply, the apparent the [Italian] abbreviations for this, *D.S.*⁹.

Fr. Stofella¹⁰ assigned to these writings a more pertinent title, the *Spiritual Diary*, which then passed into the current usage and was then accepted also by the most important biographer of Leopoldina Naudet, Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove¹¹.

⁵ G.S., 1800, f.13.

⁶G.S., 1811, f. 44; 70.

⁷G.S., 1801, f. 18.

⁸G.S., 1802, f. 38. [In Italian, this would be: *Dio Solo* !]

⁹G.S., 1800, f. 9; 1801, f. 27.

¹⁰ Fr. Joseph Stofella, a Stigmatine [1885-1966], made a special study of one part of Leopoldina Naudet's *Spiritual Journal* on the occasion of the 77th anniversary of the death of the Stigmatine Founder, the Venerable [now “Saint”] Gaspar Bertoni. Fr. Stofella reflected particularly on the years 1811-1813 in

Someone gathered the fascicles early on, and wrote on the opening folder the words: *The Retreats and other things, in the Hand-writing of the V. Foundress* ¹².

Now, the accepted usage is to call these writings her *Spiritual Journal*, because this is the title that Leopoldina herself gave to the most important section of her Recollections.

The *Spiritual Journal* contains only Leopoldina Naudet's spiritual experiences. Never can one find any reference to events, or to persons, even in the most stormy moments of her life ¹³ - a time when it would have been most natural to express in some way, on paper, her own sufferings and perplexities. In this matter, Leopoldina is quite different from Madelene di Canossa, who writes down in her own recollections very precise and articulated descriptions, even regarding her friend, Sister Leopoldina Naudet, her guest¹⁴.

It might seem superfluous to go through the pages of the *Spiritual Journal* one by one for their content, especially since very often, there is the same general motivation for writing. It will suffice here to list in a general way, the most evident parts of the work.

The text opens with two rather minute descriptions of her own state of conscience, which are indicative of Leopoldina's own psychology. There follow then some notes, reflections and resolutions made on the occasion of her retreats. A careful reading of these would indicate that these would include five separate retreats that she had made. There are also indications of a course of Spiritual Exercises that she gave to her own companions¹⁵. These are all personal notes, spontaneous out-pourings that are found dispersed throughout the work, and these reveal the most intimate motivations and ideals of a woman and foundress. An important place is reserved for her reflections on the Constitutions, which Leopoldina was compiling under the guidance of Venerable [now Saint] Gaspar Bertoni. These begin in Foglio 65 and then are extended throughout the entire *Spiritual Journal*.

Leopoldina's writings, with brief references also to other years. He published his work in the *Il Bertoniano*, at that time, a monthly periodical reserved for the Stigmatines, Year XV, Supplement to n. 1. Verona 1930.

¹¹N. Dalle Vedove, *Dalle Corte al Chostro, donna Leopoldina Naudet, fondatrice delle Sorelle della Sacra Famiglia*. Verona 1954.

¹² This most assuredly was Metilde of the Marquis di Canossa [1804-1848], niece of the Blessed Madelene di Canossa, Foundress of the Daughters of Charity. Metilde was educated in the Convent of Leopoldina Naudet. At the age of 20, she left her paternal home in order to enter the Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Family. She was a woman of much wisdom and virtue, and very soon became Leopoldina Naudet's "right arm". For many years, she served as her secretary, and after the Foundress' death, she was elected Vicar General of the Institute. Metilde di Canossa was the first one to study Leopoldina Naudet's writings. It was she who gathered the first reminiscences regarding the life and the virtues practiced by her Venerated Mother.

¹³ Leopoldina Naudet had much to suffer because of the ecclesiastical condemnation of Fr. Paccanari, that took place in 1808. This event destroyed the work of the Community known as "the Beloved of Jesus", that was begun in Prague in 1799. Another very difficult time in Leopoldina's life was that period that she spent with Blessed Madalene di Canossa, in St. Joseph's Retreat. There, Leopoldina was the Superior of a community which was not her own, while she ardently yearned to found her own Community, which the Lord was suggesting to her for some time.

¹⁴T Piccari, *Sola con Dio solo...*, pp. 343, ff.

¹⁵f. 80

Other documents, that are very precious, then complete this collection of writings. Among these are the following:

- the Act of Abandonment¹⁶;
- a copy of her Letter to Pope Pius VII¹⁷;
- some biblical maxims¹⁸;
- some copies of some passages from her letters¹⁹;
- and lastly, some passages taken from the Life of the Servant of God, Teresa Saodata of Salò, and some passages from a Panegyric in honor of St. Francis of Assisi²⁰. Leopoldina was not a writer who composed with the intention of rendering her work public. Nor was she a sentimental woman who intended to commit to writing her most intimate experiences. All this can be deduced from the real difficulty she had in taking pen in hand²¹.

Many pages of her *Spiritual Journal* were written in obedience to a precise order of her spiritual director²². However, Leopoldina also wrote in it when she no longer had any spiritual director. In these instances, she would document for herself the gifts that she received from the Lord. The first passages in her **Spiritual Journal** were intended for the attentive reading of her spiritual director at that time, Fr. Nicolas Paccanari [1773-1820].

The possibility cannot be excluded that Leopoldina also wrote later so that she would have material to present to Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, in their personal conversations, or to treat with him of her concerns by letter. In fact, several of her Letters to Fr. Bertoni are in regard to spiritual problems, or matters of a spiritual nature²³.

Lastly, as may be noted in Pourrat's study, it can also be that the spiritual writers of the 19th century followed the style of the times, when so many of them kept their spiritual dairies²⁴. However, this fact does not seem to pertain to Leopoldina. If such indeed was the custom of the times, this would be only in the mind of the director who might ask her to write these personal things, as it does not seem that the initiative would ever have come from herself.

The use of this document of hers then, assumes a great importance, in that it becomes a kind of key in order to penetrate into the mystery of Leopoldina and to come to understand better how she was able to bring harmony, despite her many duties and challenges, into balancing her contemplation and activity, in a period in which the monasteries were strictly bound to monastic legislation²⁵.

¹⁶ f. 108.

¹⁷f. 115.

¹⁸ f. 48

¹⁹ f. 23 & 24.

²⁰ f. 936-939.

²¹ **G.S.**, 1800, f. 9; 1801, f. 27.

²² **G.S.**, 1800, f. 9; 1812, f. 85; 1812, f. 89

²³ C. Stofella, *Epistolario...* , pp. 221-222.

²⁴ P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...* , IV, p. 649.

²⁵A copy of Leopoldina Naudet's letter in response to the comments made on her constitutions, presented to her by the most Eminent Cardinals, December 29, 1933. cf. The Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

Leopoldina's writing style is most immediate. These pages do not follow any general theme, but present the various moments of her spiritual life. In perusing this document, we can find a report of hers sent to Fr. Paccanari²⁶, as well as a letter sent to Pope Pius VII²⁷, which represent particular cases. There may also be found impressions she experienced during her retreats, and these too manifest her ready style. During the months of January and February of 1812²⁸, we run into her monthly reports. For what concerns the rest of the document, it seems that what we have here are notes that she would write, most likely at the close of her day. The overall unity of the work is provided by the totality of her expressed thought, since of itself, it is a document built up by fragmentary, unconnected entries. It is up to the reader to attempt a synthesis at the end of the reading. The logical connection between them all does not appear so much from the composition itself, or even from the avowed intention of the writer, but much more from the unity of the person within herself and from the continuity of the life she lived.

Even in this matter, Leopoldina is different from Mother Madeline di Canossa. In fact, when the revered Marquess set about to writing the reminiscences of her life, that was done in a specific time set aside for this and in a very systematic manner, even though she was not always exact in her chronological memories, as she herself admits²⁹.

Regarding her style, Leopoldina manifests no real attention. Very often, her language is obscure and difficult³⁰. This defect finds its explanation in the fact that Leopoldina is most often taken up with her thoughts of God, and this made it difficult for her to express herself in the desired clarity³¹. Furthermore, there were many things that she was just unable to state, since they already were ineffable in her own heart, as they pertained solely to the supernatural sphere³². Regarding the defect in her punctuation, which is found just about everywhere in her **Spiritual Journal**, her disordered use of capital letters, exclamation points, and question marks, accents and paragraphing, it is necessary to remember Leopoldina's own education. It can be said that she had followed a curriculum of studies very little suited to forming one in any literary style.

In fact, Leopoldina was born in Italy, of French parents. She was educated first in Florence, by the Nuns of St. Fredian, and then later in France, in the celebrated Monastery of Notre-Dame of Soissons. In this period, her preferred authors were Bourdaloue and Massillon³³. She went then to the Royal Court of Vienna, where she was the instructress of the last three Archdukes. Then she moved on to Prague, in the retinue of the Archduchess, Anna Maria³⁴. Finally, she came to Italy to live. Here, too, however, she could not have acquired much of a literary style, in that for a number of years, she moved from one place to another on

²⁶G.S., 1800, f. 1.

²⁷G.S., 1815, f. 115.

²⁸G.S., 1812, f. 85.

²⁹T. Piccari, *Sola con Dio solo* ..., p.319.

³⁰G.S., 1800, f. 14.

³¹G.S., 1811, f. 49.

³²I. Gobry, *L'esperienza mistica...*, p. 98.

³³M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 1

³⁴M. Canossa, *Epoche* ..., f. 5.

the peninsula, in search of a place that would be suitable for the foundation of her life's work³⁵.

Among the noteworthy elements of Leopoldina's writing style is her frequent use of expressions that smack of French, Latin or the Tuscan language.

Her confusion with French in her writing of Italian is most evident in her manner of accentuating the letter "e" at the end of syllables³⁶, and this phenomenon occurs in many words. Her use of pronouns in front of verbs; the verb "to donate, give" [*donare*] in place of *dare*³⁷; her use of the French *c'est*³⁸; her use of *qualche* in place of *alcuni*³⁹ [perhaps a confusion with the "partitive"].

Regarding her insertion of "Latinisms", it should be noted that these are most evident in her phrasing of sentences, with the use of subordinate clauses, gerundives or infinitives, her verbal constructions, particularly as regards the verb *invenio* and the verb *dono*⁴⁰. There are also true and proper "Latinisms", such as *cura* for "concern", or "preoccupation"⁴¹; *intestine*, for "internal"⁴²; *studio*, for "diligence"⁴³; *partire* for "to suffer"⁴⁴; *giovare* for "to assist, help"⁴⁵ - and many others. In some passages, there is even found the Latin word⁴⁶.

Less frequent are the "Tuscanisms", which are resolved for the most part in the use of the "past remote", or in some other particular expression⁴⁷. What do merit a certain emphasis in her **Spiritual Journal** are the biblical citations, even if these are not very numerous, but are of a fragmentary and occasional character. Leopoldina certainly was familiar with the Old Testament books: Deuteronomy⁴⁸, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Lamentations⁴⁹. She certainly knew the books of the New Testament as well, since, in addition to the four Gospels, she quotes in her writings the Acts of the Apostles⁵⁰, the Epistles to the Romans, 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter, and 1 John⁵¹. It appears, however, that all these books remained simply texts of consultation, and perhaps not so much of meditation and personal study. There is noted an almost complete absence of every classical citation, from every and all literature. Nonetheless, it is known that Leopoldina had received a complete education

³⁵M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f. 10.

³⁶G.S., 1800, f. 6.

³⁷G.S., 1811, f. 61; 1812, f. 85.

³⁸G.S., 1800, f. 5; 1811, f. 66.

³⁹G.S., 1811, f. 47; 62.

⁴⁰G.S., 1811, f. 47.

⁴¹G.S., 1811, f. 79.

⁴²G.S., 1800, f. 10.

⁴³G.S., 1813, f. 102.

⁴⁴G.S., 1811, f. 60.

⁴⁵G.S., 1811, f. 71; 78.

⁴⁶G.S., 1811, f. 62.

⁴⁷G.S., 1811, f. 50.

⁴⁸G.S., 1831, f. 125.

⁴⁹G.S., 1811, f. 48.

⁵⁰G.S., 1812, f. 85.

⁵¹G.S., 1811, f. 48.

under all these aspects⁵². There is only one single, albeit indirect reference, in this regard. It is a matter of a manifestation of conscience, which Leopoldina submitted to the judgment of her spiritual director. In this, she was asking whether it would be better to be silent regarding matters that one remembers or knows⁵³.

With this exception of this random indication, judging from her **Spiritual Journal**, Leopoldina would have known only the Bible, the Holy Fathers, and some spiritual writers. In some passages, she quotes St. Augustine⁵⁴, St. Gregory the Great⁵⁵, Propser of Aquitaine⁵⁶, St. Teresa of Avila⁵⁷, St. Ignatius of Loyola⁵⁸, St. Jeanne de Chantal⁵⁹, St. Thomas Aquinas⁶⁰..

Leopoldina's handwriting is spontaneous and smooth, without evident concerns of presenting herself in a more acceptable manner to the reader. However, it is very clear, and so the reading of her **Spiritual Journal** is never really tiring. Each one of the letters of the alphabet in general is in conformity with the models of the era for handwriting. Between each of the lines there is a space that is more or less uniform in all times and on all of her pages. It happens only rarely that the strokes of a lower line would run into the letters of the supper line, or vice or versa. What is evident everywhere, though, is a sense of order, neatness, balance and style. Even the spaces between the words, even though this varies, is always sufficient. The lines follow one another in a notably straight manner. Even though the end of words tends to rise, the first letters of the following word seems to restore the straight line. If it should happen that the line itself should slightly ascend, perhaps around the middle of the line, her tendency is to come back down to the original level.

Her writing style is always sober. The letters are limited to what is essential for them to be distinguishable. There are no flourishes with the pen, either at the beginning or end of sections, except for a few modest occasions in her writing of capital letters. There just is no wasted motion.

Excluding all pretense in her penmanship and style, it seems that it can be safely affirmed that from Leopoldina's writings, there is revealed a very balanced character, one that is lacking in all rough edges. It appears especially evident that she was a very sober individual, one who was totally distant from all vanity and pride, but she was one who tended always toward the essential. One noteworthy fact is the variation in her handwriting beginning with the year 1811, when she began spiritual direction with Fr. Bertoni. From this moment on, her characters are even clearer, more elegant, but without ever flourishing in any artificial manner. It might almost be said that Leopoldina received from the Minister of God, in addition to his directions and spiritual counsels, also a clear order and precision in her handwriting. From the collection of his Letters one learns that Fr. Bertoni also offered useful suggestions to

⁵²M. Canossa, *Epoche ...*, f.2.

⁵³G.S., 1801, f. 29.

⁵⁴G.S., 1811, f. 48.

⁵⁵G.S., 1811, f. 48.

⁵⁶G.S., 1831, f.125.

⁵⁷G.S., 1800, f. 11.

⁵⁸G.S., 1813, f. 101.

⁵⁹G.S., 1831, f. 123.

⁶⁰G.S., 1827, f. 120.

Leopoldina and her companions regarding the manner of writing, and grammar in general. It is only natural that these disciples would gather in all the suggestions of their teacher, and not only those of a spiritual nature⁶¹.

An even superficial comparison with the letters sent to Fr. Bertoni there is immediately revealed the authenticity of the **Spiritual Journal** attributed to Leopoldina. An even more evident confirmation is given by the signatures that the authoress puts on her “papers”⁶². There are, then, many other proofs that justify the authenticity of her writings. Above all there is the relative private nature of the document and the fact that it had not passed among different persons. The type of paper she used, as well as the ink, certainly pertained to that period. The entire tradition of her Institute in which no one had ever doubted that the writing was indeed composed by Leopoldina. There is further to be noted the perfect chronological correspondence between the life of the Foundress and her annotations in her **Spiritual Journal**. Lastly, it should be kept in mind that the manuscript is unique of its kind in the Archives, jealously protected in the General House of the Institute, and had never been promulgated to others. There is thus excluded every possibility of any interference on the part of eventual transcribers.

Leopoldina began to write in 1800⁶³, at the age of twenty-seven, and she continued until 1831, three years prior to her death⁶⁴. The **Spiritual Journal**, in this arch of time, embraces the period of her full youthfulness until her mature age. She began writing the first pages right after she had entered to become a member of the “Beloved of Jesus”, and finished writing at the age of fifty-eight, already the Foundress of the “Sisters of the Holy Family”.

The **Spiritual Journal** would offer a kind of precise photograph of Leopoldina’s spiritual life, if we did not have to take into account the considerable gaps. However, despite these, it is still possible to see the unity of the work.

Through the reading of her manuscript it is always possible to follow the various stages of Mother Naudet’s spiritual journey. The lapses in her writing cover the years 1806-1811; 1815-1820; 1820-1827; and 1827-1831. The most serious is beyond doubt the first one. These years cover that period of the very troublesome matter involving Fr. Paccanari, who was eventually condemned by the Holy Office in 1808. The **Spiritual Journal** in these years contains only a few rare, but yet significant references to this matter. On one page, Leopoldina confesses that she has had to suffer very much because of injustices⁶⁵.

Once this period of her life had passed, Leopoldina wanted to bury in the secrecy of her heart all these events that she had experienced. She manifested some concern that there should not remain a single of her papers, regarding this unhappy matter. At one stage, she was assured by Father Rozaven that all had been burned⁶⁶. The other lapses can be justified by the

⁶¹G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 48.

⁶²G.S., 1802, f. 34; 1815, f.115.

⁶³G.S., 1800, f. 13.

⁶⁴G.S., 1831, f.123.

⁶⁵G.S., 1802, f. 38-39.

⁶⁶Letter of Fr. Rozaven to Leopoldina Naudet, December 29, 1827. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

many occupations that Leopoldina covered, so taken as she was by the foundation of her Work, and by the “furtive flames” to which she had destined many of her writings⁶⁷.

As a general rule, Leopoldina did not note the complete date of her entries in her **Spiritual Journal**. Often, she just wrote the day of the week⁶⁸, or the day of the month⁶⁹. However, one can rather easily arrive at the reconstruction of the complete date, on the basis of certain well determined data, which are not lacking in her writing, or from other chronological references. In “Foglio” 7, for example, the date is noted with only the day of the week, but already the opening words of her entry read: “Today is the Feast of St. John the Baptist.” From this, it is easily deduced that the date was June 24th. On “Foglio” 13, Leopoldina expresses her total confusion in having arrived at the moment in which she had to preside over her companions, and writes simply: “June 1st.” However, from her biography we know that Leopoldina was elected superior of the “Beloved of Jesus” on June 1, 1800, and thus, the complete date is obtained⁷⁰. In this manner it has been possible to date the entire manuscript with sufficient precision, with the exception of a few passages.

While she was writing her **Spiritual Journal**, Leopoldina traveled throughout various localities in Italy, but she never indicated where she was on her pages. However, it is often easy to determine these places, by following the reminiscences of her life and her biography. Thus, in 1800, Leopoldina wrote an entry from her **Spiritual Journal** from Loreto⁷¹, where the “Beloved of Jesus” had gone to meet with Pope Pius VII. Then, she made entries from Terraia, of Spoleto⁷² and then from the Corsini Palace in Rome⁷³. In this entry, Leopoldina notes in her **Spiritual Journal** here reflections during a retreat she was making from October 10 - 16th of 1801. She noted two accounts of her own conscience and on the top of these pages she wrote the slogan, **God Alone**, and her resolutions for the year 1802⁷⁴. In 1805, we find Leopoldina in the Monastery of St. Clare in Murano⁷⁵. Then, after a silence of five years, we find her in Verona, at St. Joseph’s Retreat, a guest of Mother Madeline di Canossa⁷⁶.

The most precious testimonies she has left are from this period, in which she had met Fr. Bertoni, the Confessor of the community at St. Joseph’s. Again, another four years of silence, and then finally, we find Leopoldina in St. Teresa’s Monastery in Verona, where she had begun the work of the institution of the “Sisters of the Holy Family”⁷⁷. There are but very few sheets dating from this period, that was so intense and full of activities for Leopoldina, as Foundress. However, there is one passage that merits a most particular reflection. It presents a

⁶⁷G. Stofella, “Il diario spirituale di Leopoldina Naudet e il Ven. Gaspare Bertoni”, in: *Il Bertonian*, monthly review reserved to the Stigmatines. XVth Year. Verona 1930. Suppl, to n. 1, p. 293.

⁶⁸G.S., 1800, f. 3

⁶⁹G.S., 1802, f. 21.

⁷⁰N. dalle Vedove, *Dalle Corte al Chostro...*, p. 108.

⁷¹M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f. 10.

⁷²M. Canossa, *Epoche ...*, f. 10.

⁷³G.S., 1801, f. 18.

⁷⁴G.S., 1802, f. 35.

⁷⁵M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f. 10.

⁷⁶M. Canossa, *~Epoche...* f. 11.

⁷⁷M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f.11.

most minute psychological reflection, both very intimate and authentic, that places the whole spirit of Leopoldina before the reader. This entry manifests her complete spiritual maturity and an almost perfect moral balance⁷⁸.

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⁷⁸G.S., 1827, f. 120.

PART TWO
THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE
“SPIRITUAL JOURNAL”

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I. SOURCES AND SPIRITUAL AUTHORS

Presentation

[1] In the **Spiritual Journal**, it is easy to understand that Leopoldina did not follow with any particular predilection one, or more schools of spirituality. There is not, in fact, evident in her writings any constant return, even involuntary, to determined themes. There are not even found references to the genuine spiritual masters that would give the impression that she was inspired by a direct font, from which Leopoldina would have drawn her own spirituality.

[2] When one ponders deeply her writings, however, it is possible to trace out an outline, even if this is not exhaustive in all its details, of certain spiritual orientations that influenced her religious formation. It can be noted from the outset that there are three principal schools to which Leopoldina is indebted:

- the Carmelite School;
- the Salesian Doctrine;
- the Ignatian Spirit.

[3] The careful reader will also note the influences of St. Catherine of Siena and that of St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

[4] In her early formation, Leopoldina experienced a significant influence from two French authors, Louis Bourdaloue [1632-1704] and Jean Baptiste Massillon [1663-1742]. Her memories pertaining to that period in which Leopoldina was living with the "Madames of Our Lady" at Soissons, in French, recall only these two names, attributing to them a great importance⁷⁹. Furthermore, on the first anniversary of her death, the orator who was delivering her eulogy once again recalled these two authors, adding to them certain phrases that he attributed to the late Mother Naudet⁸⁰.

[a] It would seem strange, however, that a young girl would delve into the reading of two authors of such depth. To anyone who indicated some surprise at her tastes in this regard, Leopoldina would respond that "the first of the two was a great intelligence, and quite able to convince the intellect; and the other had great knowledge of the human heart and was able to inspire the will. Both authors were quite able to raise up previously inexperienced senses of love for God, if in the silence of the passions, they are meditated"⁸¹. In this short

⁷⁹M.Canossa, *Memorie...*, f.1.

⁸⁰G. Venturi, *Orazione funebre...*, p. 50.

⁸¹G. Venutir, *Orazione funebre ...*, p. 58.

sentence, Leopoldina seems to have gathered in synthesis the spirituality of her two preferred authors.

[b] Massillon, in fact, is considered as the greatest moralist of the 18th century, and is admired especially for his profound knowledge of the human heart⁸². In preaching, he manifested himself as both practical and eloquent, with a persuasive style, great piety and insuperable competence. At times, he did come across as almost excessively severe, in the area of morality⁸³. However, he was never accused of Jansenism⁸⁴. His rigorism has to be framed within the environment, in which he generally exercised his ministry of preaching. Almost always, he found himself communicating to individuals of an extremely superficiality and lightness in the matter of religion and morality⁸⁵. As a result, he was almost always forced to assume a somewhat rigid attitude.

[c] As regards Bourdaloue, Leopoldina's judgment concerning him seems to have been confirmed by history. He, in fact, has remained famous for the power of his oratorical logic and for the force of his reasoning⁸⁶. Furthermore, Bourdaloue insisted on a concept that was dear to Leopoldina that of fidelity to the graces and inspirations of the Holy Spirit; this is a fidelity that is ever more delicate than to inaugurate the dominion of the Holy Spirit into a soul⁸⁷. Some interpreters refer to Bourdaloue as the "apologist of grace and of its effects in the human soul", especially its most intimate effects, those that are the most mysterious and delightful⁸⁸.

[d] Another of Bourdaloue's principles that was not lost on Mother Naudet, is that regarding duty and the need for interiority. The French orator preached an active devotion, one that was effective, that unfolds itself in the carrying out of one's own duty and in the exercise of virtue, even the most simple of them. Contemporaneously, he would insist on the fact that it would have to be a very interior devotion, defended by recollection, by the separation from human attachments, and one that would open the soul up to the action of grace.

[5] Leopoldina found herself "right at home" in these readings and through them was able to abandon without regret the "youthful diversions and amusements." Now we will turn to those spiritual authors that nourished the Spirituality of Mother Leopoldina Naudet.

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⁸²A. Molien, "Jean Baptiste Massillon", in: *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique* ..., X, 1, Col. 262.

⁸³P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne*..., IV, p. 327.

⁸⁴A. Molien, "Jean Baptiste Massillon", in: *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*..., X, 1, col. 262.

⁸⁵A. Molien, "Jean Baptiste Massillon", in: *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*..., X, 1, col. 259.

⁸⁶H. Cherot, "Louis Bourdaloue", in: *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*..., II, 1, col. 1098-1099.

⁸⁷R. Daaeschler, "Louis Bourdaloue", in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'*..., I, col. 1905.

⁸⁸H. Bremond, *Histoire litteraire du sentiment religieux en France*..., VIII, p. 353.

1. St. Teresa of Avila [1515-1582]

St. Teresa of Avila occupies a very important place in this enterprise, even if the references to her are not all that frequent. Furthermore, it is not always possible to indicate the works to which Leopoldina is referring.

The mystical doctrine of St. Teresa on prayer was certainly quite well known to Leopoldina. Evidence of this may be noted in a spiritual conference that she gave once to her spiritual daughters:

“...I do not speak to you already about contemplation, because that is given by God, and we cannot arrive at that state by ourselves. St. Teresa has said, that whether or not one reaches this state, it is not of itself necessary in order to achieve holiness...”⁸⁹

Leopoldina saw in St. Teresa above all else, a contemplative. In fact in the matter of prayer and of the mystical life, the Carmelite spirituality owes to St. Teresa both an enrichment and a deepening of appreciation⁹⁰.

St. Teresa does not offer a true and proper method of prayer. She limits herself to offering very generic counsels. She recommends the consideration of the Christian mysteries and of Christ's life and the elevation toward God, beginning with creatures⁹¹.

Far more concrete, however, is her description of contemplative prayer. To this level, the soul of good will should be able to achieve, more or less rapidly, according to St. Teresa. This passage is achieved through a progressive simplification of the discursive elements of the interior life, and leads the soul towards forms of contemplative prayer, which are distinguished by various terms: recollection, quiet, divine taste. These thrusts of love are as the reward for the good will that the soul brings to prayer.

When, on the other, she speaks of mystical prayer. St. Teresa allows it to be understood that the soul cannot reach this of itself, despite all its efforts, since this always remains a gift of God, that is absolutely gratuitous⁹². Leopoldina not only knew this doctrine, but she experienced it herself. In fact, around the year 1813, it seems that Leopoldina had reached the highest levels of mystical prayer. Some indication of this may be found in a letter to her from Fr. Bertoni, that was sent to her as she was about to begin a special retreat. Fr. Bertoni wrote:

...You must not forget the honor which His Divine Majesty has bestowed on you in admitting your soul to the preparations and promises of His nuptials...⁹³.

The echo of this letter within Leopoldina was a spontaneous outpouring, while she meditated:

⁸⁹*Spiritual Conferences*, f. 71.

⁹⁰G. Gauthier, *La spiritualita' cattolica...*, p. 135.

⁹¹L. Cognet, *La spiritualite' moderne ...*, I, pp. 93-94.

⁹²L. Cognet, *La spiritualite' moderne...*, I, pp. 93-95.

⁹³G. Stofella, *Epistolario ...*, p. 73.

...on the Reign of Jesus Christ: it seemed to me that the Lord was drawing me to consider a call that was not only the usual and ordinary kind, to this Reign, but one that was more sublime. It seemed as though He were raising me up, and drawing me to Him, having me come to understand that He calls some to serve Him, He called me not only as He might the lowest servants of His court, not even as those who are the closest to the King and who are among His favorites. It seems as though He is calling me as His spouse, who ought to seek to imitate Him in all, and to be assimilated to Him, and to please Him...⁹⁴

Such expressions leave little doubt concerning the state of the interior life that Leopoldina had reached by this time. Furthermore, it seems that in her there had already appeared those signs, which, according to St. Teresa, accompany mystical union: a kind of binding of one's faculties, the exercise of heroic virtues, the desire for heaven, a profound sorrow for past sins, and inviolable fidelity even in little things, with the constant quest for what is more perfect ⁹⁵. As a result of this development, Leopoldina was able, through her own personal experience, to serve as the interpreter for her daughters of the Teresian thought regarding prayer.

Another point of the spirituality of St. Teresa taken into consideration by Leopoldina is her zeal:

“... a zeal that is discreet, secure, charitable and observant. This is what St. Teresa herself had and taught this in her books and writings...”⁹⁶.

Leopoldina was particularly interested in St. Teresa's thought on this matter. The Institute, that she was forming, was oriented toward a two-fold end, one subordinated to the other: it was a concord between the contemplative and active life, renewed with regard to the old cloister organization. Inst. Teresa, Leopoldina found both the explanation and the realization of this ideal.

Genuine love, according to St. Teresa, is active. The more God is loved, the more does one desire that He become glorified - and the more one prays, the more will one work for the realization of this desire. St. Teresa thought that souls taken over by God's love, would burn with the desire of showing Him concretely this love, working for the salvation of souls. Having achieved the heights of the mystical life, the saint remained continuously taken over by God and, at the same time, committed herself to the apostolate. It is inconceivable for her, that a prayer would exclude interest in the souls redeemed by Christ:

... A soul who aspires to become the spouse of God Himself cannot give herself over lazily to sleep. The Redeemer God put His own life and His own love on the line, which are given to the soul who gives herself to Him...⁹⁷.

Also the doctrine of Teresian obedience piqued Leopoldina's interest. This was often the object of her own reflection in her spiritual conferences. She saw in St. Teresa an extraordinary soul, graced by God with the most sublime gifts of mystical prayer. Yet, at the same time, she comprehended that the ideal of Teresa's holiness was very concrete: to make

⁹⁴G.S., 1813, f. 104.

⁹⁵P.Pourrat, *La spiritualite chretienne...* III, pp. 34-255.

⁹⁶*Spiritual Conferences...*, f. 105.

⁹⁷G. Gauthier, *Spiritualita' cattolica...*, p. 144.

of her own will one reality with the Will of God ⁹⁸. This ideal responds fully to Leopoldina's own aspirations, and therefore she sought to discover how St. Teresa arrived at making her will uniform with that of God. She noted then that the Saint had completely renounced her own will and never:

...carried out what she had only understood in prayer, but always conferred her entire enterprise with her confessors, who at times, would tell her the opposite of what the Lord seemed to be saying to her, and that is which she did and immediately obeyed...⁹⁹.

Right here, Leopoldina is penetrating into the very core of Teresian thought. In fact, while prayer does remain essentially that means which allows that organic unity to reign in the soul, constituted by love which embraces both contemplation and the apostolic life ¹⁰⁰, obedience becomes the most efficacious means to achieve union with God ¹⁰¹. This obedience, according to St. Teresa, ought to manifest itself in a particular manner towards one's spiritual directors, because the believer is thus rendered certain not to follow one's own will.

According to these criteria, Leopoldina united her entire spiritual life, even though she was truly hesitant to speak of herself, she submitted herself to the judgment of her spiritual directors and even wished to bind herself to this by vow ¹⁰². There was only one single occasion in which Leopoldina seemed not to accept immediately the decisions of her spiritual director.

Fr. Bertoni eventually made known to Leopoldina that he would not be coming any more to the Monastery of the "Teresians"¹⁰³, to hear the confessions of the Sisters. He used every effort to explain to her that God, in his opinion, did not wish that he give that direction any more. Leopoldina, though, thought that from the part of God, nothing had really changed, and so this fact gave rise to certain anguished expressions of hers:

... now, I no longer understand anything. In my view, everything is still the same, but you do not think so. Obtain for me from the Lord that I might also be able to see this: I find myself repeating often: 'O Lord, that I might see!' ...¹⁰⁴

This passage allows us to see just how much it cost Leopoldina to submit herself to the judgment of the spiritual director. She surely would have remembered in this connection that St. Teresa always obeyed her confessors, even when she was convinced that they were mistaken¹⁰⁵. On the other hand, Leopoldina was accustomed to teaching her daughters, taking

⁹⁸P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p. 256.

⁹⁹*Spiritual Conferences*, f. 62.

¹⁰⁰L. Cognet, *La spiritualite' moderne ...*, I, p. 97.

¹⁰¹P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p. 256.

¹⁰²**G.S.**, 1812, f. 96.

¹⁰³The monastery was called the "Teresians" because nuns had always lived there who followed the Teresian spirituality, up until the French suppression. The property had been bought back from the government by a certain Joseph Bellotti, and then left in his will to a Veronese priest, Fr. Nicholas Galvani. From Fr. Galvani it then came to Fr. Bertoni, who granted the perpetual use of it to Mother Naudet in 1830. (cf. E. Puppa, *Cenni biografici...*, p. 31; G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, pp. 200-201, 250.

¹⁰⁴G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁵P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p. 258.

inspiration from St. Teresa, that “it is not authentic obedience unless the person is resolved to suffer”¹⁰⁶. She would even state: that when one is lacking in obedience, that person “will never make a contemplative, nor for that matter, an active religious”¹⁰⁷.

St. Teresa offers to Leopoldina a most precious teaching regarding interior peace. The saintly Carmelite indeed is a soul of light, one who simply ignored darkness and obscurity. She always experienced a profound need of lucidity and a clear conscience¹⁰⁸. Leopoldina accepted with pleasure this characteristic of the saint and made of it a norm of her own activity:

...The manner that I use to overcome internal restlessness and disturbances is to persuade myself that that which disturbs my soul comes from the devil. I read this some years ago in St. Teresa, and have always made use of it...¹⁰⁹

Later she would confess to Fr. Bertoni:

...I am little accustomed to suffer disturbances, internal restlessness, fears, doubts, because, as you know, I was always at peace...¹¹⁰.

Leopoldina had always learned from the great reformer of Carmel that the dominion of God over the soul is achieved with prayer, and obedience is that interior joy, peace and ineffable happiness¹¹¹

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¹⁰⁶*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 62.

¹⁰⁷*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 62.

¹⁰⁸L. Cognet, *La spiritualite' moderne...*, I, p. 98.

¹⁰⁹*G.S.*, 1800, f.11.

¹¹⁰G. Stofella, *Epistolario ...*, p. 147.

¹¹¹P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' moderne ...*, III, p. 221.

2. St. Francis de Sales [1567-1622]

Some of the aspects of Mother Naudet's spiritual life manifest clearly the influence exercised on her by the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales.

It is not known with certainty to which of the saint's works Leopoldina had access. It can be supposed, however, that she had read them, at least in part, since she cites passages from them, here and there, in the course of her spiritual conferences¹¹². As for the writings of St. Jeanne de Chantal, on the other, hand, there is no doubt. Leopoldina herself notes in her **Spiritual Journal**: "The spiritual reading before all other: the works of St. Jeanne de Chantal"¹¹³.

In this study, however, the choice has been made to make reference to St. Francis de Sales alone, in that St. Jeanne de Chantal, according to some authors¹¹⁴, seems to have drawn much from the doctrine of her great spiritual director.

Leopoldina in her writings chose with predilection the characteristic point of the Salesian spirituality, "simplicity." St. Francis recommends the tending toward simplicity and to peace in one's relationship with God, not only in the time of prayer, but also in one's exterior occupations¹¹⁵. And when he chose to explain in what this simplicity consists, he says that it is a virtue that is inseparable from charity, rather it is an act of simple charity which aims directly to God, without any mixing in of personal interests¹¹⁶. Leopoldina emphasizes this concept among her spiritual daughters with much precision:

... Simplicity, St. Francis de Sales says, is nothing other than an act of charity that is pure and simple, and which has but one single end, which is that of acquiring the love of God ...¹¹⁷.

Continuing the argument, Leopoldina places her daughters on guard from interpreting the saint's words in any light-headed manner, as if simplicity was an indication of an ingenuous spirit, and she always sought to clarify it with other quotes:

...St. Francis de Sales says that when simplicity is spoken of, it is necessary also to say a word about prudence. But he says this in a very beautiful manner...¹¹⁸

Leopoldina, lastly, offers an example from the saint, in which there is comprehended very well that "simple" means pure, without mixture of other ends in one's endeavors¹¹⁹.

¹¹²In the Archives of the General House of the Sisters of the Holy Family there are kept the books which, by tradition, were considered those used by Mother Naudet. Among others, there are also the works of St. Francis de Sales, including those first critical studies on them of Camus and of Gallitia: Francis de Sales (St.), *Opere* divided into three volumes. Venice 1735; P. Camus, *Lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales*. Venice 1735. G. Gallitia, *La vita di S. Francesco di Sales*. Venice 1712.

¹¹³G.S., 1831, p. 934.

¹¹⁴P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite chretienne...*, III, p. 406; L. Cognet, *La spiritualite' moderne...* I, p. 299.

¹¹⁵P. Camus, *Lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales*, Venice 1735 [2], p. 435. I cite this author in that I think that he might have been known to Mother Leopoldina Naudet.

¹¹⁶P. Pourrat, *Spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p. 454.

¹¹⁷*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 82.

¹¹⁸*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 86.

From her **Spiritual Journal** it can be noted that Leopoldina was cognizant of this doctrine from the beginnings of her consecration to God. In 1800, she had written:

...I heard myself saying [interiorly] that an impediment, which I had within me, to a greater communication with God was the lack of simplicity...¹²⁰.

It is evident that her soul had already become aware of her own spiritual situation, and hastened to make amends:

...I thought that simplicity is a gift of God, but with the one he had given me to recognize it, I saw that it was a way of corresponding to grace in this...¹²¹.

From this realization, Leopoldina passed immediately to action and proposed: "...to make every day a particular examen on this point..."¹²². In 1811, her **Spiritual Diary** registers two attitudes of Leopoldina, from which one can see that she is progressing swiftly in the acquisition of simplicity.

The Lord had brought to her attention that He wished to lead her "to the total transformation into Him", explaining to her also what the effects of this transformation would be. Leopoldina, in the presence of such a noble invitation, recognized her own state of misery and knew that she could nothing other than

...make this known to the Lord, in simplicity of heart, that He might be leading her too quickly from one state to the other of union...¹²³.

It is easy to understand from this passage that simplicity is not yet a completed fact for Leopoldina. In her, there is still some of that "mixture" in that which pertains to the interior life and the manner of achieving perfection. The Lord, then, led her to understand that He is the Lord of her spirit, and to her it pertains to obey, since those things she was not even capable of "thinking them, nor of understanding them" ¹²⁴.

Following this correction, Leopoldina abandoned herself completely to the action of God. She freed herself from the tie that held her still imprisoned in her concerns regarding progress in virtue, so much so, that a little later, she would confess with sincerity that she was tending solely

... to seek everything and perfection for the sole purpose of giving glory to God and of serving His love, no longer looking for my own profit, but purely to Him...¹²⁵.

¹¹⁹*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 173.

¹²⁰G.S., 1800, f. 7.

¹²¹G.S., 1800, f. 7.

¹²²G.S., 1800, f. 7.

¹²³G.S., 1811, f. 6.

¹²⁴G.S., 1811, f. 6.

¹²⁵G.S., 1811, f. 66.

These expressions of Leopoldina's respond fully to the teaching of St. Francis de Sales, when he states that simplicity removes from the soul the restless quest of exercises and certain means of loving God. The soul that reaches this spiritual stage thinks only of God and is not concerned with anything other than pleasing Him in all things, leaving to Him every care of herself, both regarding her material life as well as her spiritual needs¹²⁶. Leopoldina had understood and lived this teaching. Otherwise, one could not explain expressions of hers, such as this one:

... it is necessary that one remain in a continuous and always direct view towards the Lord: how easy it is that even something very insignificant might impede that justice in which I ought to walk, without allowing myself for any reason whatever to be drawn to one matter, or to some other; and without allowing any mixture of my spirit, which the Lord wants to be clear and limpid...¹²⁷.
 ...The Lord knows well that my only true good is that my heart should not will anything other than Him...¹²⁸.

There is another aspect, and one that is more important of the Salesian doctrine, which, so to speak, informs Mother Naudet's spiritual life: charity. St. Francis de Sales repeated often with the Apostle, Paul, that faith, alms-giving, knowledge and even martyrdom, immediately allowing oneself to be burned are not worth anything, without charity¹²⁹. In this passage, St. Francis de Sales makes it clear that charity has preeminence over all the other Christian virtues, since, as he will say elsewhere, "heaven is promised to humanity, salvation is shown in faith, it is prepared in hope, but it is only given to charity¹³⁰. All the virtues are merely, for the Saint, but modifications of charity¹³¹, as would be said for example regarding simplicity¹³² and of charity¹³³. In fact, Salesian spirituality can be summarized in love, because it conceives of the Christian life from its interior principle, which is charity. All is in reference to this virtue and all is explained by it¹³⁴.

Leopoldina made her own this conception of the spiritual life. The Lord Himself had led her to the choice of charity, as may be noted in her **Spiritual Journal**:

...The Lord made me understand that I should always have charity, love for Him as the principle, the cause and end of every word, of every movement, of even the least activity...¹³⁵.

This same expression Leopoldina would repeat many years later, as though to wrap up in it her entire religious experience. In 1827, she wrote:

¹²⁶P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, pp. 454-456.

¹²⁷G.S., 1811, f. 68.

¹²⁸G.S., 1801, f. 23.

¹²⁹P. Camus, *Lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales...* p. 351.

¹³⁰F. de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, cf. *Opere* of St. Francis de Sales, Book I, c. 6, p. 152. Venice 1735.

¹³¹P. Serouet, "Saint Francois de Sales", in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'...* V, col. 1065.

¹³²P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p. 454.

¹³³P. Camus, *Lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales*, pp. 28-29.

¹³⁴P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, VIII, pp. 413, 414.

¹³⁵G.S., 1811, f. 45.

...Love for God is to be the principle, cause and end of every word, of every movement, of every least activity...¹³⁶.

Charity, and not fear, for Leopoldina, as for St. Francis de Sales, is the path that leads to God:

...The Lord opened my heart every more to follow Him by the way of charity...¹³⁷.

In order for the love of God to triumph in the soul, according to the Salesian teaching, it is necessary to dislodge from it every remnant of sin. Leopoldina felt this demand and comprehended, at the same time, that love not only constitutes perfection, but it is the most efficacious means to acquire it:

...today I occupied myself in prayer with charity, as the stimulus to the emendation of my defects, and as the still efficacious means to obtain this intent...¹³⁸.

Leopoldina insists continuously on this concept, fundamental also in the Salesian ascetical teaching:

...it seemed to me that the Lord had me comprehend that the entire endeavor that has to be done He wants accomplished by means of charity...¹³⁹.

...there is greater facility by the way of charity of discovering my sins...¹⁴⁰.

As can be noted, Leopoldina accepted from St. Francis de Sales this positive aspect of his doctrine, understanding that the better means for battling vices is not so much that of attacking them directly, as rather that of forming a soul which would spontaneously fight against the vice ¹⁴¹. Leopoldina was so convinced of the efficacy of this method, that she did not hesitate even before the multiplicity of her “failures”, since experience had taught her that

...no matter what my imperfections and defects may be, all in me needs to be accomplished by means of charity and that every time that I distance myself from this, wishing to undertake the correction of my defects, rather than arriving at this goal, I actually get further and further away from it. The reason is that charity is nothing else than that means in which there is consumed in me all rust and defect...¹⁴².

It can be said that, with these means, Leopoldina arrived at that human perfect possession of charity,, although there was manifested in her continuously the desire to immerse herself ever more in it:

... I experienced my heart being enkindled further in charity, but rather than rejoicing in this, it seemed to me that this only increased the desire to be the more enkindled by it...¹⁴³.

¹³⁶G.S., 1827, f. 117.

¹³⁷G.S., 1813, f. 105.

¹³⁸G.S., 1811, f. 37/

¹³⁹G.S., 1811, f. 57.

¹⁴⁰G.S., 1815, f. 110.

¹⁴¹P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p. 438.

¹⁴²G.S., 1811, f. 74.

¹⁴³G.S., 1812, f. 91.

According to St. Francis de Sales it is necessary that the soul might be nourished always in itself by the love of God, and this is why he always gave such great importance to the “desire” for love. He was accustomed to saying that there was “nothing that one should ask of God with such insistence as the pure and holy love of our Holy Savior” ¹⁴⁴. And this Leopoldina sought with such insistence in her writings:

... grant me, Lord, Your holy love! ¹⁴⁵

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3. St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556]

The Ignatian imprint on Leopoldina’s spirituality is even more evident, especially in her **Spiritual Journal**. From its very first pages, with the name of St. Ignatius ¹⁴⁶ there appears the concept of the “service of God”, which is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality. Leopoldina always lived out of this framework of “service of God”. Already in 1800 she wrote to her spiritual director:

... I found myself in the disposition of doing something, in order to demonstrate to you that which I want to do for the Lord, Whom with my whole heart and with all perfection I desire to serve at any cost...¹⁴⁷.

Further ahead, she writes that she is really “consumed with the desire of serving God” ¹⁴⁸.

Leopoldina had orientated her entire life toward this ideal and promised repeatedly to achieve this and to maintain herself always in this interior attitude:

...This disposition, Father, I will conserve it and promise to it all that this will demand of me: everything for the greater service of my God, Who bestows on me the grace not to will, to love and desire anything, unless I know that they will serve this purpose, which is the ultimate end of all I do...¹⁴⁹

In 1813, Leopoldina is still of the same opinion. Further, there is noticed in her a certain maturation of the ideal, in that it does not express itself simply in desires, but enables one to realize that “service” is her particular vocation:

... In beginning this meditation, it seemed to me that the Lord drew me to consider not only a generic and ordinary call to this realm, but to a more sublime call, raising me up and drawing me to Him, having me comprehend that if He does indeed call some to serve Him, He called me not to respond as servants of the lowest rank in His court... but, as His spouse... ¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴P. Camus, *Lo spirito di s. Francesco di Sales*, p. 447.

¹⁴⁵G.S., 1820, f. 108.

¹⁴⁶G.S., 1800, f. 16.

¹⁴⁷G.S., 1800, f. 1.

¹⁴⁸G.S., 1800, f. 2.

¹⁴⁹G.S., 1800, f.2

¹⁵⁰G.S., 1813, f. 104.

Although Leopoldina realized that she was “the spouse of the Lord”, she never ceased thinking of herself as His “servant”; or even better, it had dawned on her that the Lord had called her to serve Him in the quality of spouse.

By 1815, Leopoldina could no longer contain within herself her deep “yearnings” to serve God - and then, on the other hand, seeing that He had not yet granted to her the realization of these desires of hers with the foundation of her work, she conceived the idea that the fault lay with herself, with her own sins, as the cause of that delay. Her **Spiritual Journal** contains a number of colloquies between herself and God, such as:

... I begged Him to grant me the grace to discount my past ingratitude, but not to deprive me any more of the good of serving Him with greater fervor and of having Him served perfectly also by others...¹⁵¹

Leopoldina, therefore, believed that she was not yet worthy of serving God, so much so that a few years before, it seemed to her that she heard the Lord reassuring her interiorly:

... have patience! Wait a bit more, and you will see, you will see!¹⁵²

In this attitude, Leopoldina seemed to overcome the desire for solitude cultivated in the quiet prayer of the Trappist way of life, that was so radicated in her spirit. St. Ignatius led her to the discovery of “the service of God”, one that was generous, and without self-interest, so much so that she herself confessed:

... I made it clear that I would like to serve Him, even if I would not have any reward from Him, but simply to do this because He merits it...¹⁵³.

Leopoldina, following the direction of St. Ignatius, reached the ideal of “service”, departing from her basic concept of love. According to some authors, in fact, the Ignatian spirituality is principally one of love, because it gives preference to love, as to the fundamental element of service¹⁵⁴.

Among the many expressions that would bring out the more the prerogatives of the Incarnate Word, such as that of the poet, of the artist and of the victim, who is immolated for Christ, St. Ignatius has chosen the love of the servant, committed without reservation to the work and fatigue for the interests of his Lord¹⁵⁵. This imprint invests the entire spiritual edifice of St. Ignatius. Leopoldina came to realize this when she took up the reading of the Ignatian Constitutions, in order to examine them, and to make for hers “those changes and opportune and necessary explanations”¹⁵⁶. And have having finally written out the Constitutions for her own Institute, she thus concluded:

¹⁵¹G.S., 1815, f. 109.

¹⁵²G.S., 1813, f. 106.

¹⁵³G.S., 1813, f. 101.

¹⁵⁴This concept is very clear in J.DeGuibert, *La spiritualite de la Compagnie de Jesus...*, pp. 163-170; in: A. Roldan, *Ascetica e psicologia...*, p. 542; in: G. Gauthier, *La spiritualita' cattolica...*, p. 249. It is less evident in: L. Cognet, *La spiritualite' moderne...*, I, pp. 15-32; and P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, pp. 35-71.

¹⁵⁵J. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus*, pp. 591-592.

¹⁵⁶*Memorie per 'Istituto*, manuscript of Leopoldina Naudet. Archives of the sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

...The law of charity is that which ought to animate all the Sisters of the Holy Family to the perfect observance of these constitutions...¹⁵⁷.

Also in Leopoldina it is always love which dominates, an effective love, as in St. Ignatius, that inspired her to bring into uniformity to the Will of God everything in her life, as Christ did, in His earthly life:

...would like to have a conformity to the Will of God, such that I would not desire anything other than this most holy Will...¹⁵⁸

Here Leopoldina tastes the purest joys of her spiritual life, so that she would exclaim:

... how sweet is the dominion of this King [Christ], and how easy is service of Him! ¹⁵⁹

In the last analysis, it seems as though Leopoldina had wished to synthesize this concept of the “Service of Love” in a prayer, that she would have her daughters offer, at the beginning of every community gathering: “... Behold Your handmaid, let Your will be done in me” ¹⁶⁰.

The other point of the Ignatian spirituality, both studied and fully accepted by Mother Naudet, is that contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In fact, all of her retreats registered in her **Spiritual Journal** bear the stamp of the Ignatian method ¹⁶¹. Leopoldina seems to have known St. Ignatius through the works of Bartoli ¹⁶². However, for what pertains to the *Spiritual Exercises*, she did not want commentaries. She wished to draw personally from this Ignatian font, as is witnessed to by Fr. Bertoni. He was advising her to conduct herself faithfully as “is prescribed in the authentic book of St. Ignatius” ¹⁶³. The doctrine of the *Spiritual Exercises* penetrated profoundly into Leopoldina’s soul, without restricting her, and without taking her liberty from here in her decisions. In fact, among the Preliminary Counsels [the 18th Annotation] of the little book of St. Ignatius, one finds:

...18. The Spiritual exercises should be adapted to the requirements of the persons who wish to make them, that is to say, according to their age, their education and their aptitudes. A person who is uneducated or of little natural ability should not be given matter which he could not conveniently bear or from which he could get no profit. ¹⁶⁴

Leopoldina understood deeply the value of this method, and as soon as the circumstances permitted her to do so, she desired to withdraw into solitude and prayer, according to the suggestions of St. Ignatius. It was likewise abundantly clear to her that it is not possible to draw fruit from the *Spiritual Exercises* if one does not enter into them with the interior dispositions as desired by St. Ignatius. He asked for above all, personal effort, active

¹⁵⁷*Costituzioni originali*, last paragraph. ms. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

¹⁵⁸G.S., 1802, f. 37.

¹⁵⁹G.S., 1811, f. 59.

¹⁶⁰*Lettere* of Leopoldina Naudet to the “Beloved” of Mantua, from Verona, January 28, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

¹⁶¹There are contained her reflections on five retreats,, from the years of 1801-1827.

¹⁶²In her *Conferenze spirituali* Leopoldina states that she had taken “certain passages from Bartoli”, on the Life of St. Ignatius, f. 13-14; in 1828, Fr. Bertoni thanked her for the copy “of Bartoli”, but the specific volume is not indicated. [cf. G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 240].

¹⁶³G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 71.

¹⁶⁴cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, Image Books: Doubleday 1963, p. 41.

collaboration and the energetic commitment of the one making the Exercises ¹⁶⁵ Fr. Bertoni reminded Leopoldina of these requirements, as she was beginning a course of the *Exercise*:

... The *Exercises* cannot be made unless in the way that St. Ignatius himself made them, and with that same spirit...¹⁶⁶

It also seems clear that he, too, understood personally that the essential scope of the *Spiritual Exercises* consists above all in orienting the soul towards the Will of God, in order to discover it and to embrace it. Therefore, he added:

... be fully abandoned to God in these days, as this is what St. Ignatius wanted, by not placing any boundaries, no imposing certain objects, nor times, on our Lord...¹⁶⁷.

The fact remains true that Leopoldina, while admiring and living the Ignatian spirituality, did not allow herself to be carried along passively, but this vivified her, placed on her the imprints of his personality - in brief, she made it her own. It would be sufficient to hear her own confession in this regard, to be assured of this:

... I made the Meditation concerning the end of man, taking the points from St. Ignatius, but considering this more interiorally, than from any other perspective, being nonetheless totally occupied with the Lord. In the midst of all this, I experienced joy and consolation at not being limited to a method and in having the freedom to allow myself to proceed to all that the Lord wished to achieve,, as also not being limited as to time, and being able to remain with Him for as long as He wanted...¹⁶⁸

By now, Leopoldina had achieved the scope of the *Spiritual Exercises* but she would never forget to offer her own recognition to the author of this method. Among the principal means of the apostolate, that she assigned to the Sisters of the Holy Family, she placed also this:

... The *Spiritual Exercises* [to be given by suitable priests, approved by the ordinary] will be provided in the course of the year for those persons who might want to retire into our houses for this purpose...¹⁶⁹

At the end of her life, Leopoldina, remembering still the great spiritual benefits received from making these *Spiritual Exercises* herself, left as her last will that should it ever be

... that the Institute should cease existing ... its revenues should be committed to the Holy Missions and at least, some for the holy *Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. ¹⁷⁰

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¹⁶⁵P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, III, p.66.

¹⁶⁶J. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus.* p. 16.

¹⁶⁷G. Stofella, *EPistolario...*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁸G.S., 1813, f. 101.

¹⁶⁹*Costituzioni originali*, The Plan in Compendium of the Institute, c. 4. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

¹⁷⁰Holographic Will of Leopoldina Naudet. ms. 1832. Archives of the Holy Family, Verona.

4. St. Catherine of Siena [1347-1380]

St. Catherine of Siena is only occasionally remembered in Leopoldina's writings. In her Conferences to her daughters, when she wished to express a concept that was close to her heart, Leopoldina would have recourse almost always to the authority of spiritual authors to convalidate her own thesis. One of her themes on which Leopoldina was accustomed to ponder was that of interior recollection. This disposition, in her view, cannot be hindered by external occupations, to which the religious are assigned. Therefore, she would explain to the Sisters that the spirit of the Institute

... asked of them that knowledge of how to unite a free spirit, and an openness that would in n way prove to be an obstacle to recollection. This is all the more necessary especially when the occupations to which we have to be committed are so varied...¹⁷¹.

Such an attitude doubtlessly requires a truly dedicated and courageous asceticism on the part of religious. Leopoldina herself was most aware of this and constantly offered her encouragement and counsels to achieve this. In one conference, probably dating from 1807, Leopoldina took up the matter, taking her opening from the impending festivity of Pentecost, and making use of the doctrine of St. Catherine of Siena. The Apostles on that occasion were all gathered in the Cenacle to attend the coming of the Holy Spirit [Ac 2:1-6]. The Sisters, however, could not absent themselves from their ordinary occupations, necessary for their lives, even for a few days, to have the time for solitude. Leopoldina clarified for her daughters her precise point of view by referring to a passage from St. Catherine, who

... in this matter says that the Cenacle in which we need to withdraw ourselves into the cell of our own self knowledge...¹⁷²

According to Leopoldina, one can reach internal recollection only through self-knowledge, and understanding the obstacles that each person places to the action of grace. Only with these convictions can one proceed to the work of purification, in order then to be filled by God.

St. Catherine recommended this beyond all else in her letters of spiritual direction. According to her doctrine the knowledge of oneself leads to the most sublime holiness. This knowledge, in fact, generates humility because it destroys self love and makes one vividly experience one's own nothingness. From this realization one reaches the knowledge of God, which is everything. The Saint counsels, however, not to stop at only one aspect of this knowledge, because, knowing only oneself, the soul could easily fall into deep discouragement - and when one knows only the divine goodness, such a person could become presumptuous¹⁷³.

In her **Spiritual Journal**, there can be noted the need Leopoldina experienced in this regard. In her opening pages, especially, she does nothing other than penetrate deep within her own being in order to know and to analyze her own most hidden sentiments. The conclusive

¹⁷¹*Confernze spiritualit*, f. 169.

¹⁷²*Confereenze spirituali*, f. 145.

¹⁷³P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, II, pp. 315-319.

line of this process of deep self-knowledge leads her to make this rather severe judgment concerning herself: "... all is evil in me!"¹⁷⁴ - "my wretchedness seems to me to be a pile of mud!"¹⁷⁵

Contemporaneously, though Leopoldina found the strength so raise herself up out of the state of humiliation in which she found herself, appealing to God:

...I truly need to overcome myself and beyond myself I find help in the Lord, whereas if I remain always in this mud, I will be more muddy still¹⁷⁶.

It is clear - I think - that in these expressions there is a veiled reference to the teaching of St. Catherine of Siena, even if explicit references may not be offered.

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5. St. Bernard [1090-1153]

For what pertains to St. Bernard, this research endeavor becomes rather difficult, because of the very few explicit references to him in the writings of Mother Naudet. Basing ourselves on the testimony of F. Bertoni, it seems that Leopoldina had read St. Bernard's *Sermons*. In a letter dating from 1812, Fr. Bertoni stated: 'I suggest to you St. Bernard's text [Sermon 15, in Ps 90] regarding hope...' ¹⁷⁷. This passage seems to imply that Leopoldina would know the works of St. Bernard, since otherwise she could not have been able to understand easily the doctrine it contained. Fr. Stofella clarifies this supposition by affirming that Fr. Bertoni, "in response to Mother Naudet, sent to her a text of St. Bernard on the second theological virtue"¹⁷⁸.

From the reading of her **Spiritual Journal**, there can be noted just what position the virtue of hope occupies in Leopoldina's spirituality. However, from this it cannot be deduced that this theme had been drawn from St. Bernard's teachings. Certainly the passages cited above shows that Leopoldina had deepened her own spiritual culture in this matter, meditating also on St. Bernard's writings. At the end of this same letter, Fr. Bertoni makes note of a rather freely cited phrase from St. Bernard ¹⁷⁹ to illustrate to Mother Naudet the "effects" that the virtue of humility produces in the soul and that she had already "experienced these in the past."

St. Bernard attributes great importance to humility. In his view, it constitutes the foundation of the Christian life and perfection. The other Christian virtue, in reality, could not

¹⁷⁴G.S., 1800, f. 9.

¹⁷⁵G.S., 1800, f. 10.

¹⁷⁶G.S., 1800, f. 10.

¹⁷⁷G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 39.

¹⁷⁸G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁹The abyss invokes the Abyss. The luminous Abyss invokes the abyss

subsist without humility. In its perfecting the other virtues, humility elevates the soul to the heights of mystical contemplation¹⁸⁰.

Leopoldina also made much about humility, but it cannot be deduced from this that she had taken this doctrine directly from St. Bernard. There is a passage in her **Spiritual Journal**, however, that seems to indicate the stamp of the saint, regarding humility. This was inserted into her first course of Retreat, noted in 1801, while Leopoldina was in Rome:

... All that one does amounts to nothing if there is not humility...humility is something like a cruet which contains all the other virtues, which without this virtue, leak outside and are lost...¹⁸¹

Here, as has been said, it seems clear enough that there is here St. Bernard's literal influence. Some themes of the doctrine of the saint are present in Leopoldina's spirituality: humility, love of God, devotion to the mysteries of Christ's life and to the Blessed Virgin, which are characteristic expressions in St. Bernard, but which also sustain a most important rule for Leopoldina. Between these two, therefore, there is a communion of life that is very evident and much more efficacious than any literal testimony.



¹⁸⁰P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, II, pp. 32-45.

¹⁸¹G.S., 1801, f. 20.

II. COUNSELORS AND CONFESSORS

Presentation

Leopoldina experienced a great difficulty in speaking about her own “interior life.” Her preference would have been to conserve all within herself, because to make known her own personal sentiments seemed to her to be comparable of taking off the cork of a bottle of liquor.

Furthermore, she much feared deceiving herself. She did retain a rather negative self-image; she considered herself to be a sinner. Hence, she would have recourse to her spiritual director, from whom she hoped to come to know the most suitable means of always making progress in the ways of God. Spiritual direction for Leopoldina, is only an external help, since she remained firmly convinced that the authentic Director of souls is God, and He alone is the Lord of His spirit.

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1. Fr. Nicholas von Diessbach [1732-1798]

One of Leopoldina’s characteristics was her attitude of detachment in her relationships with her spiritual guides, especially when one thinks of the obedience that she gave in their regard. Many times there appears in her **Spiritual Journal** Leopoldina’s desire to bind herself by private vows to this obedience¹⁸², even though she had experienced real difficulties with the first of her spiritual directors, Fr. Nicholas Diessbach ¹⁸³.

This most upright and learned religious came to know Leopoldina at the Royal Court of Vienna, where he had gone to prepare for the arrival of Pius VIth, in 1782. Fr. Diessbach’s intense activity in that period did not remain fruitless, even if he did not succeed in changing the ideas that circulated in the official circles of the Court. The Emperor Joseph II ordered

¹⁸²G.S., 1811, f. 70.

¹⁸³Nicholas Joseph Albert von Diessbach was born in Berne on February 15, 1732, of a Calvinistic patrician family. He was converted to Catholicism in 1754 and was taken by Charles Emmanuel III, King of Sardinia, as the commandant of a regiment and military instructor of his son, Victor Amadeo III. He married in 1755 with daughter of the Consul of Spain, at Nice, M. de Saint-Pierre. However, he was very soon widowed and in 1759 he entrusted his only daughter to the Monastery of the Visitation [where she died as a Religious, in 1777]. He entered the Company of Jesus. Having completed his Novitiate in Genoa, he was ordained a priest on September 22, 1764, by the Bishop of Lausanne. This was the beginning of an intense apostolic life, which continued even after the suppression of the Company of Jesus. He exercised the ministry at Milan, and then in Turin, where he came to know Bruno Lanteri, the Founder of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin, of whom he served as spiritual director. He left for Vienna in 1782 to prepare for the arrival of Pius VIth, and remained there, then, for the rest of his life. In 1796, the episcopal see of Lausanne-Geneva was offered to him, but he turned it down. At Friburgh, during the French invasion of 1798 he was attacked by soldiers during the exercise of his ministry, and was seriously wounded. Having recovered somewhat from this, he returned to Vienna where he died on December 22, of that same year.

He was a great preacher and above all a writer, and organizer of Catholics, in the struggle against the atheistic and anti-religious press. For this scope, he founded in 1776 a Pious Association of Catholics, that was perfected by means of Christian Friendship, that arose in Turin in 1778, and 1780. [cf. G. DeRosa, “Dalla Restaurazione all’eta’ giolittiana”, n: *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia...*, pp. 13-95.

showed by impeccable from exterior appearances,, but counseled by his ministers, he remained obstinately firm in his positions regarding religious reform. Joseph II thus had the sad glory of having his name associated with the Royalism of which he was profoundly imbued¹⁸⁴.

To combat these ideas, Fr. Diessbach diffused among the people a short work in that he himself had composed in Turin: *Qu'est-ce que le Pape* ¹⁸⁵, with the intention of raising a barrier against the enemies of the Church. This short book drew the attention of these same Royalists and their most noted representative, Joseph Valentine Eybel [1741-1805], a sectarian priest who had already been excommunicated because of his Anti-Roman theories at the University of Vienna. He, too, had published a tract, entitled: *Que'est-ce que le Pape?* which was placed on the Index by a Papal Brief in 1786.

In addition to this Royalism and Josephinism there was also another enemy to combat in the Court of Vienna, and this from the point of view of the theology of Grace: Jansenism. This was precisely a field of activity of the first order for Fr. Diessbach, who decided to remain in Vienna, even after the departure of the Pope¹⁸⁶.

At the death of Joseph II, that took place in 1790, there succeeded to the Imperial Throne, his brother, the Great Duke Leopoldo II, who moved the Court from Florence to Vienna. This is how Leopoldina found herself at the imperial Court of Vienna as instructress of the last three archdukes, to teach them the French language. Having completed this mission, Leopoldina was admitted into the service of the Archduchess Clementina, who then became the wife of the King of Naples¹⁸⁷.

Fr. Diessbach, in the meantime, had been named Confessor at the Court¹⁸⁸. From her recollections, there has been nothing handed down regarding the content of the conversations that Leopoldina had with her spiritual director. The brief accounts handed on let us see, however, that the Jesuit did exercise a profound influence on Leopoldina's life and spirit . One brief word from him sufficed to bring her tranquility and to have disappear those doubts which disturbed her conscience. Her recollections speak of her "delicate conscience"¹⁸⁹. Fr. Diessbach, under this aspect, never indulged Leopoldina. For no reason whatsoever would he permit her to come to confession unless 15 days had transpired, and if the young woman would have manifested to him in the meantime her doubts in writing. The religious would respond inflexibly: 'confess to our Lord, and receive Holy Communion'¹⁹⁰. In this school, Leopoldina learned to deny her own will, and it would be said, how to go against her own nature.

There is an episode in Leopoldina's life which sheds some light on her spiritual director and the docility to the entire trial of the penitent. The Archduchess Maria Anna, after the death of the Emperor Leopold II, her father, was named the Abbess of the Chapter of the

¹⁸⁴G. DeBertier de Sauvigny, "La Restauration [1800-1848]", in: *Nouvelle histoire de l'Eglise...*, IV, p. 157.

¹⁸⁵A. P. Frutaz, "Diessbach", in: *Enciclopedia cattolica ...* col. 1578.

¹⁸⁶L. Cristiani, *Un pretre redoute' de Napolen...*, pp/ 29-31.

¹⁸⁷M. Canossa, *Epoche ...*, f. 5-6.

¹⁸⁸E. Puppa, *Cenni biografici ...* p. 22.

¹⁸⁹M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f. 7.

¹⁹⁰M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f. 7.

Canonesses of Prague. Leopoldina was then 19 years of age, and followed the Princess to that city, as one of her Maids of Honor¹⁹¹. In this new situation, Leopoldina had the responsibility of receiving the “Memoranda” of those who were making an appeal to the Archduchess’ goodness, to obtain some help or other. Her duty was that of making sure that these appeals were based on real need, in order to bring some help to them. Leopoldina extended her charity towards everyone, even to priests and religious who had emigrated from France in great numbers. Among these, who were the most disorientated, appeared the Trappists and the Trappestines, since they did not benefit by the protection of the Austrian government. The Archduchess, Maria Anna, took up their cause with her brother, Francis I, the Emperor of Austria and obtained the permission to offer them hospitality within the confines of the city for some months¹⁹²

Leopoldina Naudet, whose responsibility it was to look after these refugees, visited them and comforted them with her exquisite charity. In the meantime, deep within her own spirit there sprang to life a secret attraction for the Trappist life and even after the departure of those religious, she conserved in her heart the desire to abandon the world. This seemed to her to be the type of life fully in accord with her own temperament¹⁹³. Some years later, she would confess in her **Spiritual Journal** that her inclination attracted her to an order in which silence would be practiced¹⁹⁴. This did not remain merely on the level of desire. Leopoldina wanted to experiment concretely with her own resources, distancing from herself all that was not strictly necessary¹⁹⁵.

At this point, her spiritual director intervened - after a conversation, the only one she ever registered in her reminiscences, and he ordered Leopoldina to abandon the idea of the Trappist life, because the plans of God in her regard were different¹⁹⁶. The nature of Fr. Diessbach’s intuition that would so cut off Leopoldina’s personal plan, is not known. It might be that he had the idea of beginning a feminine institution with the Ignatian spirit¹⁹⁷. It is certain that he had a kind of warrior’s spirit, an apostolate of the spoken and written word, one who trained souls¹⁹⁸. The fact is that he was a man who understood his own times and worked with all his energies to defend the Church and her teachings. There were even those who referred to his work as an “extremist enterprise”¹⁹⁹. By this term was doubtlessly intended that his was a spontaneous movement, very much like the secret societies of his time.

After the suppression of the Jesuits [1773], Fr. Diessbach remained in Turin, where for two years he exercised his ministry. He was well known as a preacher, one who had a trained tongue and who could preach with the same facility in French, as well as in Italian and German. To his ministry as a preacher, following 1773, he added also that of a writer and one who spread abroad solid teaching. For this purpose he founded at Turin, between the years

¹⁹¹M.Canossa, *Epoche ...*, f. 5.

¹⁹²M.Caonssa, *Epoche...*, f. 8.

¹⁹³S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f.5.

¹⁹⁴G.S., 1800, f. 29.

¹⁹⁵Letter of Luisa, the Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Rome, April 26, 1833. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

¹⁹⁶S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 5.

¹⁹⁷*Relazione dell’origine e dei progressi delle Dilette di Gesu’...*, f. 17.

¹⁹⁸L. Cristiani, *Un pretre redute; de Natpleon...*, p. 21.

¹⁹⁹G. deBertier, De Sauvigny, “La Restauration”, in: *Nouvelle histoire de l’Eligse ... IV*, p. 130.

1778-1780, the society of the “Christian Friendship”²⁰⁰. A few years later, another society cropped up along-side this one, called “Priestly Friendship”, with the scope of preparing the young clergy who were living outside of seminaries, for the preaching of Parish Missions and the Spiritual Exercises, according to the Ignatian method and to the apostolate of a good press²⁰¹.

To facilitate the activity of those associated with the “Christian Friendship”, Fr. Diessbach established in the principal cities libraries of good books. When he moved on to Vienna, he succeeded in creating a library there, which very soon became an important one and produced some truly wonderful results²⁰². It is not known for certain whether Leopoldina played an active role in these movements founded by her spiritual director. It would not be too far-fetched to imagine this to be true, since in reality, Mother Leopoldina received much from the spirit and from the endeavors of Fr. Diessbach.

The recollections of those times point out that she was an educated woman, and hardly would a subject come up that she would give the impression as being as one who “could hold her own, and therefore, it always seemed that she that was both excellent and poised, without ever manifesting any pretensions on her part...”²⁰³. In another place, this same sources notes that Leopoldina had her own particular attraction. A single reassuring glance from her was often sufficient to encourage those around her²⁰⁴. As far as her own somewhat uncertain and unsure spirit are concerned, as may be noted in her first encounters with Fr. Diessbach, she was so successful in conquering herself that she would come to note her own admiration regarding her manner of conducting herself in life at Court. She stated that hers was an attitude of distrust regarding the dangers offered by that world and that she did not know how to understand how anyone could come through them unscathed²⁰⁵. It is not difficult to note in these lines the determining influence of Fr. Diessbach.

There is another fact that sheds some light on the spiritual influence in her life by Fr. Diessbach. In order to combat the rigorism of Jansenism, he made use of the works of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori²⁰⁶ and he made this author known among the people with incomparable zeal. To this day there are conserved in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family St. Alphonsus’ works, considered to be texts that had been used by Mother Naudet²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁰This was a secret Catholic society founded in Turin between 1778 and 1780. The purpose of this association was the spread of a good press to combat the lack of religion and to safeguard the integrity of the faith and good customs. The society was composed of twelve members, called “Christian Friends”, six men, both lay and priests, and six women, who came from the aristocratic circles and who were well educated. The part of the direction was reserved to the men. [cf. Pii Bruononis Lanteri, Fondatoris Congregationis Oblatorum M. V. [+1830], *Positio super introductione Causae et super virtutibus*, , S. Rituum Congregatio, Sectio Historica, n. 63. Citta’ del Vaticano 1945, Doc. XX, p. 93, ff.]

²⁰¹A.P. Frutaz, “Amicizia Sacerdotale”, in: *Enciclopedia cattolica...*, I, col. 1066.

²⁰²A. Guidee, *Vie du R. P. Varin...*, p. 44, note 1.

²⁰³S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 3.

²⁰⁴S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 18.

²⁰⁵**G.S.**, 1811, f.58.

²⁰⁶A. P. Frutaz, “Diessbach”, in: *Enciclopedia cattolica ...*, IV, col.1578.

²⁰⁷A. de Liguori, St., *Novena del S. Natale colle meditazioni*, 1766.

Another common characteristic between the master and the disciple is the preference given to the *Spiritual Exercises*, according to the Ignatian method. From the very first pages of her **Spiritual Journal** there is noted this preference. It can be supposed that Fr. Diessbach was the first Jesuit that Leopoldina had met along her spiritual journey. She certainly would not have known them in the Monastery of St. Frediano, among the Benedictine Nuns, and even less at Soissons, where Jansenist ideas circulated. The fact is apparent that by 1801, Leopoldina had already been conquered by the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius ²⁰⁸ and it is precisely in this period of time that she had come to know Fr. Diessbach.

As regards Fr. Diessbach's apostolic plan, there are some affinities with Mother Naudet's work. Having given up the idea of becoming a Trappistine, Leopoldina founded an Institute, whose scope was education, and she herself becomes an educator. Furthermore, she spread among her own acquaintances books of every type, newspaper and short works. Sometimes she is borrowing them, and other times, distributing without obligation²⁰⁹. It would almost seem that there can be seen in her an active member of the "Christian Friendship" group. Fr. Bertoni's letters ²¹⁰ and those of Madalene di Canossa ²¹¹ testify to this apostolate of the good press apparently exercised by Mother Naudet²¹².

It is not guess-work, therefore, to repeat that Fr. Diessbach's influence on Mother Naudet had a determining effect. From the Trappistine that she personally would have liked to become, she became rather an educator and apostle.

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²⁰⁸G.S., 1801, f. 18.

²⁰⁹M. Canossa, *Memorie*, f. 31, 32.

²¹⁰G. Stofella, *Epistolario ...*, pp. 197, 208, 232, 248.

²¹¹Letter of Madalene di Canossa to her niece Matilda, a religious among the Sisters of the Holy Family, August 14, 1830, doc. 626, Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

²¹² Fr. Bertoni, in one letter dated "The Second Feast of Easter 1828", suggested to Mother Naudet to loan the work written by Joseph de Maistre, entitled: *Du Pape*, to Fr. Anthony Cesari, so that he might comment upon it. [G. Stofella, *Epistolario ...*, pp. 230-231.

2. Fr. Nicholas Paccanari [1773-1820 ?]

Her **Spiritual Journal** opens with an examination of conscience, that is quite detailed, which Leopoldina addressed in the year 1800, to her new spiritual director, Fr. Nicholas Paccanari²¹³. His was a spontaneous spirit, full of exuberance, a lover of the truth, but also uncertain regarding the necessity and the benefits of spiritual direction. Leopoldina manifested her hesitancy speaking of a temptation in this regard. In the past, she thought that God alone

²¹³Nicholas Paccanari was born in Trent in 1773. He first chose the business world as his profession, but later embraced the military and was a sergeant in the cavalry at Castel S. Angelo. Returning later to the business world, and after having been cheated by an associate, he was forced into living as a wandering salesman. During this period he was transferred to Rome and attended the Oratory of a Fr. Caravita, a very zealous, Italian, ex-Jesuit.

Under the spiritual direction of Fr. Dalpino, the missionary of Rome, he believed that he experienced the calling by the Lord to bring the Company of Jesus back into life. With this scope in mind, he made a pilgrimage to Loreto, where he compiled the Rules of the “Company of the Faith.” Returning then to Rome and gathering around himself a number of young people, he communicated to them his enthusiasm and his new rules. In 1797, after having obtained the approval for this new Society from Cardinal Della Somaglia, he was elected Superior and received from his companions their profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and submission to the Supreme Pontiff.

He then moved to Siena to visit the Pope, a prisoner there in the Convent of St. Justina. He obtained from him many privileges and a rescript in which the new society, founded by himself, was called “the Company of the Fathers of the Faith of Jesus.”

He then came to hear of a society that was something like his own already in existence in Germany, established by a Fr. Tornely and Fr. Varin, and he decided to try to unite the both groups, if that would be possible. To facilitate this undertaking, he left anew, this time for Vienna, where he was enthusiastically received by the Emperor, Francis II. He met there Fr. Varin, and they agreed to the fusion of the Society of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, with that of the Fathers of the Faith [April 18, 1779]. This new institution took the name of the Society of the Faith of Jesus. In August of that same year, he went then to Prague to meet with the Archduchess Maria Anna, to establish there a foundation of that institute of virgins, concerning which he had some kind of vision at Loreto. It is the Archduchess herself and her two ladies in waiting, Luisa and Leopoldina Naudet who accepted Fr. Paccanari’s invitation and they became the first stones of this new spiritual building, which arose with the name “the Beloved of Jesus.”

Fr. Paccanari then returned to Vienna, and there he received minor orders, in that previously he had only been tonsured. Then he decided to transfer the “Beloved” to Italy, and precisely, to Padua.

Leopoldina left first to find a dwelling suitable for the Archduchess, Maria Anna. These new companions of Paccanari desired to be united in some way with the Jesuits in White Russia, but he made the decision not to take this step to achieve such a union, and decided instead, to come to Italy, where the other members of the “Beloved” were already living. He reached them in Padua, in the locality known as the “Dimesse.” It was here that Paccanari, without any formation or study, received priestly ordination from the Bishop of Cremona. After having wandered across Venice and the Marche, he finally established himself in Rome, in the former Convent of the Theatines of St. Silvester near the Quirinal.

The Society of the Faith then spread to Germany, France, Holland and England. Very soon, however, there were dissatisfaction and suspicions regarding their Father General. The first to separate themselves from him were his followers in England, led by a Fr. Rozaven, which took place in 1803. Then, the followers in France, with Fr. Varin, in 1804. Finally, those of Switzerland and Holland followed suit in 1806. Some of the Italian Fathers began to separate themselves from Fr. Paccanari and brought very serious accusations up against him. In 1804, the Pope ordered a process to be initiated against him to examine the accusations against him. This situation dragged on for a number of years, also because of the retractions of some of his accusers. However, in July of 1808, Fr. Paccanari was condemned by the Holy Office, and sentenced to 10 years of confinement in Castel S. Angelo. From this time onward, nothing certain is known of him. The Company of the Faith then passed under the direction of a Fr. Rigoletti, and ceased to exist in 1814, following the restoration of the Company of Jesus. [cf. J. Cretineau-Joly, *Histoire religieuse politique et litteraire de la Compagnie de Jesus*, V, pp. 503-505; A. Guidee, *Vie du R. P. Joseph Varin* ..., pp. 48-61; 94-99; 323- 335].

had to operate in her and that human beings could not be of much help to her²¹⁴. However, she came to understand that the spiritual journey is a long and difficult ascent and that it would be a very grave imprudence to adventure this without an expert spiritual guide. She came to understand further that it is easy to be deceived regarding oneself, because of a certain self-centeredness that each one experiences²¹⁵. Therefore, she entrusted herself to Fr. Paccanari, thinking that he was indeed “an extraordinary man”²¹⁶.

At first, Leopoldina allowed herself to be transported by enthusiasm and faulted herself for not having profited from the help that God offered her by means of her director. She even came to the point of confessing that she had found in him the guide that from her infancy she had desired²¹⁷. However, in but a question of months, since already in June 1800, her view is that she wanted to take a few steps backward in his regard, and to manifest to Fr. Paccanari only that which would be a matter of confession²¹⁸. This concession she had already asked him two months earlier, that is, in April, while she was with the “Dimesse” in Padua²¹⁹, but he had directed her to write out whatever she did not want to say verbally to him²²⁰.

It cost Leopoldina dearly to manifest the obstacles that she experienced in virtue’s path, the means that she employed to conquer her own nature, and above all the graces that the Lord worked in her interior life²²¹. This, in fact, was one of the first spiritual means proposed by Fr. Paccanari to the “Beloved of Jesus”²²². At the beginning, also Leopoldina obeyed and sent to Fr. Paccanari, from her Retreat in Vanzo²²³, some of her most precious spiritual letters, that are of incomparable openness²²⁴. However, when Fr. Paccanari and the other “Beloved of Jesus” reached her at the Retreat of the community known as the “Dimesse”, she felt that it was superfluous to expose verbally, or in writing, whatever they could already know. Fr. Paccanari did not accede to Leopoldina’s request. He conceded to her only the exemption from the oral part of the manifestation, demanding, however, from her that she continue her written reports. For Leopoldina, the only response now was obedience.

Her **Spiritual Journal** dating from this period offers clear testimony of all this. After a particularly challenging effort to overcome her natural repugnance, Leopoldina expressed the state of her soul, even to her analysis of the motives that induced her to speak about herself²²⁵. She manifested the obstacles that her nature put up in opposition to virtue, the means that she

²¹⁴G.S., 1800, f. 2.

²¹⁵A. Tanquery, *Compendio di teologia ascetica e mistica*, p. 333.

²¹⁶G. Moroni, *Dizionario...*, L. p. 90, under “Paccanari.”

²¹⁷G.S., 1800, f.2.

²¹⁸G.S., 1800, f. 9.

²¹⁹In March of 1800, Leopoldina went from the Conservatory of Vanzo to the Convent of the “Dimesse”, to prepare the way there the Archduchess, Mariia Anna, who was to arrive from Vienna with other members of the “Dilette” [cf. *Relazione dell’Origine e dei Progressi delle Dilette di Gesu...*, f. 93.]

²²⁰G.S., 1800, f. 9.

²²¹G.S., 1800, f. 9.

²²²*Relazione dell’Origine e dei Progressi delle Dilette di Gesu’...*, f. 41.

²²³Leopoldina had departed from Vienna for the Conservatory of Vanzo, in September 1799, and remained there in solitude and prayer until March of the following year.

²²⁴*Relazione dell’Origine e dei Progressi delle Dilette di Gesu’...*, f. 71-79.

²²⁵G.S., 1800, f. 9.

employed to overcome these, the spiritual means she used and her life of faith²²⁶. This very revealing page, together with a few others dating from this time, reveal the consistency of the contacts between Leopoldina and Fr. Paccanari, about whom already some criticisms were being whispered about²²⁷.

In this study, there does not seem any place to enter into the details of the problems involving Fr. Paccanari which, for that matter, have no direct bearing on Leopoldina, even though she was involuntarily involved, as a member of the society of the “Beloved of Jesus.” From her **Spiritual Journal** it is not even possible to know just exactly what did Leopoldina think of her spiritual director. There is only one passage that hints at a rather precarious situation, an attitude of correction, or of encouragement of the disciple toward her spiritual guide. This is contained on a paper written in 1801 and which it might be beneficial to treat in its entirety, given the importance of its content:

...You understand quite well, my Father, that my prayers are for you, for you, for whom I maintain all the attachment that I can have for anyone who is not my one Love, that is, God. However, my attachment is based on Him. This has been the reason of my having so many times afflicted you against the sentiments of my heart, but following the desires of my spirit, when all tend to see you as truly holy and to contribute to this in so far as I can. In the manner that I may have afflicted you with my speaking, my spirit was directed toward eternity and not toward the short period of time of this wretched life; and because I desire that you and I seek only those consolations that are in God, in Whom only they are found, and thus to be one day blessed in eternity, after having been mortified for Him. I feel that this is for me still quite hard; and it is only a small thing that I have resolved to make the sacrifice of so much things, that being spiritual, I ardently desired, but with excessive ardor. And in fact I was not able to have them, because I was not indifferent in their regard. I say therefore, that it is hard; but, the saints supported life with patience, and death with pleasure; this is what I also desire.

I ask your pardon, my Father, for whatever I did, or said that brought you displeasure. You now know what my motive was and will pardon me for the intentions that I had. The means, and the manner I employed were not good; but all came from a zeal that would want immediately that which was ardently desired. Pardon me, then, I beg you. Please do me the charity of responding to me, as you said you would to me yesterday during confession. I hope that my sincerity has not been displeasing to you: I have believed this to be my duty, to speak to you as I have just done...²²⁸

Any comment in the face of such a sincere and revealing confession seems useless. Leopoldina noticed that something was not right in her relationship with her spiritual director and courageously admitted it to herself, and let him know about it, and she was ready to accept whatever he would ask her to do. The situation was very slow in developing. Leopoldina was not able to contain within herself the bitterness that she experienced in the face of human injustice. She no longer knew whom to believe. In this uncertainty, she appealed to God, the only One Who could know what it was that she had suffered from the time she found herself a member of the “Dilette”²²⁹. There returned to her mind the unjust things that had been said regarding herself, and rather than rebelling against them, she

²²⁶G.S., 1800, f. 10-11.

²²⁷On July 3, 1802, a Fr. Vincent Carraro, Confessor of the “Dimesse” of Padua, presented a declaration concerning Fr. Paccanari, in which he placed in evidence his conduct which was seen to be not that edifying and “the confidence with which he treated” the “Dilette” [cf. Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Regolari (Jesuits), n. 58, f. 163.]

²²⁸G.S., 1802, f. 33-34.

²²⁹G.S., 1802, f. 38.

confessed her own lack of fidelity to the love of God, for Whom “all suffering is justice”²³⁰. Later she came to realize that the memory of these past events always disturbed her deeply, and so she resolved not to listen any more to this voice of memories, being content to pray for the spiritual good of those persons, who in their weakness had made her suffer²³¹. Among these, it is licit to think that Leopoldina had numbered Fr. Paccanari, her own spiritual director, among these. The last lines of her **Spiritual Journal** manifest this. In these, Leopoldina let it understood that she would have many things to say to justify herself but that she did not want to manifest them, because she left to God the task of judging her on the last day. And she concludes making an allusion to the purity of intention with which she committed herself to her tasks²³².

From this point on in her **Spiritual Journal**, there follow three years of silence. Then, in 1805 and 1806²³³ there are found bits of copied letters, and then, three more years of silence and finally, the beginning of a long series of passages, which reveal the spiritual wealth of this soul, so much tried by human events²³⁴. It was during this time that there unfolded the campaign of persecution against Fr. Paccanari. Among the items of accusation leveled against him were also some very grave insinuations regarding his relationship with the “Dilette”²³⁵, and especially because of his manner of conversing with them, sessions that were carried on even until late at night, both at Padua with the community of the “Dimesse”, and also at Spoleto, in the house of Count Pianciani²³⁶. In one of these reports it is stated that Fr. Paccanari used to go out in a carriage with the Archduchess and Leopoldina. While Leopoldina was living in the Villa Zinelli, near Venice, she recommended to the mistress of the house not to allow her to go out alone with Fr. Paccanari²³⁷. These are only hints, but in that sea of accusations they could arouse many whispered conversations. However, no one mentioned any further, Leopoldina and her group of the “Beloved of Jesus”, which she brought with her from Padua, to Murano, and then to Verona. One very important comment to make is that some of the early accusers against Fr. Paccanari later became Leopoldina’s counselors and admirers of her virtue, after her death²³⁸.

Regarding Fr. Paccanari, it is very difficult to make any judgment, as more than a century and half have passed since his death. However, it cannot be denied that he caused quite a reaction at his sudden appearance on the scene. He was young, eloquent, and even

²³⁰G.S., 1802, f. 38.

²³¹G.S., 1802, f. 38.

²³²G.S., 1802, f. 39.

²³³G.S., 1805-1806, f. 40-41.

²³⁴G.S., 1811-1813, f. 42, ff.

²³⁵Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Regolari (Jesuits), n. 57, 289.

²³⁶The testimony of the Canon Luigi Mozzi SJ, regarding Fr. Nicholas Paccanari, Arch. Rom. Soc. Jesu, Paccanari, 4, XI, f. 24-25.

²³⁷Arch/ Segeto Vat., Regolari (Jesuits), n. 58, f. 104 b.

²³⁸Fr. Rozaven maintained an epistolary correspondence with Leopoldina suggesting to her counsels both pertaining spiritual direction, as well as for her new Institute, that arose with the name of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Fr. Mignani was Leopoldina’s confessor in Rome, while he was conducting the case against Fr. Paccanari. In 1835, in giving back to Luisa Naudet some documents that had been loaned to him, Fr. Mignani praised the “virtues and holiness of Mother Leopoldina, your most sweet sister” [cf. Letter of Luisa to the Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Rome, December 18, 1835, Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona].

though without any real formation, he knew how to capture the sympathy of those who approached him ²³⁹.

Even Leopoldina was rather completely taken in by the force of his discourses. In her first meeting with Fr. Paccanari, she had no intention of following his desires regarding the new Institute²⁴⁰. She had gone to him originally to see whether he would be able to come to understand her spiritually, since she always had a powerful hesitation of manifesting her heart, fearing the human sentiments that arise often between director and spiritual disciples²⁴¹. However, Fr. Paccanari truly understood Leopoldina and saw that if the Archduchess could be useful to him for material assistance²⁴², this young lady in waiting could become the first member of the “Beloved of Jesus.”

It was Leopoldina herself who was favored when it came time to elect the superior of the new Society²⁴³. Again it is Leopoldina who is the first to leave for Italy and to prepare for the later arrival of the Archduchess. And later, when in France, another branch of the “Beloved of Jesus” arose, Fr. Paccanari thought of sending Leopoldina to form the new religious, according to the spirit of the Society²⁴⁴. In reality, this never took place because Fr. Varin [1769-1850, following a trip to Rome, heard of the grave suspicions regarding the rectitude of Fr. Paccanari and Fr. Rozaven finally clarified the situation for him²⁴⁵. Thus, both separated themselves from Fr. Paccanari and the “Beloved of Jesus” in France, and remained independent from those in Rome²⁴⁶. Fr. Paccanari resisted this abandonment with all his

²³⁹J. Cretineau-Joly, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jesus*, V, p. 103.

²⁴⁰*Relazione dell’Origine e dei Progressi delle Dilette di Gesu’...*, f. 20.

²⁴¹*Relazione dell’Origine e dei Progressi delle Dilette di Gesu’...*f. 20-21.

²⁴²G. Moroni, *Dizionario...*, L., p. 90, under the heading “Paccanari”.

²⁴³*Relazione dell’Origine e dei Progressi delle Dilette di Gesu’ ...*, f. 40.

²⁴⁴Letter of Fr. Paccanari to Fr. Varin, August 21, 1801, in: *Copia delle lettere piu’ interessanti del Rev.mo P.Gen. della Compagnia della Fede di Gesu’*, Arch. Prov. Veneto-Mediol. S.J., Milano.

²⁴⁵Joseph Varin was born in Besancon, February 7, 1769 of a family whose members pertained to the civil magistrate. From his earliest years, he manifested an ardent and sensitive heart. By the age of 16, most of his time was spent with horses, the hunt, trips and adventures. Despite his extreme vivacity, he felt budding in his heart the desire to consecrate himself to God, and he entered the Seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, in which he had as his master the sage and virtuous Fr. Emory, for whom Fr. Varin would conserve until his death a filial tenderness. However, this more sedentary way of life did not set well with him, and so after three years of life at St. Sulpice, he had to return to his family.

He then took up a military career, and enrolled first in the army of Conde’ and then among the hussars of Choiseul. Just by accident he went to Vanloo and met there four of his old companions of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, by the names of Broglio, Leblanc, Xavier and Eleanore de Tournely. They managed to convince him to remain with them, and to dedicate himself to the service of God. There thus arose the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus [1794].

While the Society was getting larger and had spread into Germany, under the direction of Tournely and of Varin, there arose in Italy the Company of the Faith, the work of Fr. Paccanari. In 1799, the two societies united and the new institution took the name of the Society of the Faith of Jesus. Fr. Paccanari was named the Father General, and Fr. Varin was named the Prepositus of the Company in France. Having separated from Fr. Paccanari in 1804, Fr. Varin continued to work in the Company until the year 1807, when the Company of the faith was suppressed by order of Napoleon Bonaparte. After the restoration of the Company of Jesus, he became a Jesuit. He died in Paris on April 19, 1850.

Joseph Varin cooperated in the foundation of three religious institutes for women: The Madames of the Sacred Heart of St. Sophia Barat, the religious of the Congregation of Our Lady, of St. Julia Billiard and the Sisters of the Holy Family, of Madame Jacoulet. [cf. A. Guidee, *Vie du R. P. Varin*, ...pp. 1-155.

²⁴⁶Bauhard, *Istoria della Maddre Barat...*, Libro I, p. 79.

strength, even though Pope Pius VII and the ex-Jesuits were much inclined to it and counseled this to all the Fathers of the Faith ²⁴⁷. The followers of Fr. Paccanari in Italy did not know which way to go ²⁴⁸. Finally, Fr. Paccanari was condemned by the Holy Office.

He had rendered great services to the Church and to the Company of Jesus. He had once a great number of followers, but then became an obstacle for the Holy See. With his mania for movement and for getting involved in business matters, he caused for himself more than one series of difficulties²⁴⁹. Furthermore, there were those who believed that he, under the appearance of promoting new workers for the Gospel for the future Company of Jesus, actually was trying to impede its restoration, which by that time was so much desired and awaited by so many²⁵⁰.

In fact, when in 1804, when the Company of Jesus was reestablished in Naples, by the authority of the Holy Father, Pope Pius VII, Fr. Paccanari, if he had genuinely wanted to recognize the Company, he would have had an excellent opportunity to do so. All that he would have had to do would have been to offer himself and his companions loyally in order to begin to live under the new superiors, according to the rules and genuine spirit of St. Ignatius. He rather chose to continue to the utmost of his own possibilities his own Institute, even though many of his companions had already abandoned him in order to enter the Company of Jesus ²⁵¹. The tradition that followed had remained favorable to Fr. Paccanari. He had begun his own Institute with excellent and upright intentions, but then was overtaken by criticisms and calumnies²⁵².

Leopoldina also buried this sad chapter in her life, almost as though Fr. Paccanari had never existed for her. Her central concern became that of her spiritual daughters. This is what we learn from them as they prepared some items for the discourse honoring the first anniversary of the death of their Foundress. In this, nothing emerged from that period in which Leopoldina had been a member of the “Beloved of Jesus”²⁵³.

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²⁴⁷J. Cretineau-Joly, *Histoire...*, V, p. 505.

²⁴⁸P. Zinelli, Letter of February 14, 1807. Arch. Segreto Vat., Regolari (Jesuits), n. 57, f. 118.

²⁴⁹J. Cretineau-Joly, *Histoire...*, V, p. 505.

²⁵⁰P. Galletti, *Brevi memorie intorno alla Compagnia di Gesu'*, .. p. 72.

²⁵¹p. Galletti, *Brevi memorie intorno alla Compagnia dei Gesu;...*, p. 87.

²⁵²G. Moroni, *Dizionario...*, p. 91, under the caption “Paccanari.”

²⁵³From a letter of Luisa Naudet to the Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Rome, July 8, 1835. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

3. St. Gaspar Bertoni [1777-1853]

On January 9, 1811, Leopoldina wrote her reflections on some sheets of paper which were entitled by her, for the first time, with the word: *Journal*. And this is the most important section of her entire **Spiritual Journal**, both regarding its content, as well as the more evident logical connection among the entries ²⁵⁴

In this period [1808-1816], Leopoldina was a guest in the Canossa Retreat ²⁵⁵. At that time, the Confessor assigned there was the young priest, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni ²⁵⁶.

The personal meeting of Mother Naudet with Fr. Gaspar surely took place during her very first days of residence in Verona. However, the full meeting of souls took place on January 9, 1811, when Leopoldina, obeying an interior inspiration, chose Fr. Bertoni as her spiritual director²⁵⁷. The first entry that Leopoldina then made in her **Journal**, after this meeting, was a justification for herself and before God of being once more in her life committed to an "external help". From this passage, it seems clear that Leopoldina would not have wanted to come out of her interior solitude, in which she seemed to have found her desired peace, if God Himself had not intervened with an inspiration, that she would choose that particular director²⁵⁸.

By this date, it had already been three years during which she had been able to appreciate from close at hand and personally the Confessor of the Canossa Retreat, but she had not yet been decided to ask him to be her director. Her experience with Fr. Paccanari and

²⁵⁴G.S., 1811, f. 44.

²⁵⁵The "Canossa Retreat" was the old monastery dedicated to Sts. Joseph and Fidentius. It was large and peaceful, situated on the banks of the Adige River. Up until 1806, it belonged to the Discalced Hermit Nuns, who at that time, went to live at St. George's in Verona. After long and torturous negotiations Madeline di Canossa obtained from the Vice Regent, Eugene Beauharnais the "Decree of Ownership". On May 10th, she was able to enter there with her companions, to begin her charitable work. [cf. T. Piccari, *Sola con Dio solo ...*, pp. 229-231].

²⁵⁶Gaspar Bertoni was born in Verona on October 9, 1777, of a distinguished family. He frequented with utmost profit the municipal schools of Verona, and met there among the better known teachers of that era, Fr. Anthony Cesari and Fr. Louis Fortis, the future Superior General of the reconstituted Company of Jesus. He was vested in the ecclesiastical habit in 1796, and completed his studies for the priesthood in the Seminary of Verona. He received priestly ordination from Bishop Andrew Avogadro, on September 20, 1800.

In 1802, he began the work of the Oratories, Marian Recreation Centers, in his home Parish of St. Paul's in the Campo Marzio section of Verona, for the purpose of forming the youth in the practice of the Catholic religion.

In 1808, when Madalene di Canossa withdrew to St. Joseph's, in order to begin her Institute known as the "Daughters of Charity". Fr. Bertoni was named their first spiritual confessor. It is here that he met Leopoldina Naudet, of whom he was then spiritual director until 1819, and for all of her life, he remained her counselor and collaborator in the foundation of the "Sisters of the Holy Family."

In 1810, the Ordinary of Verona, Bishop Liruti appointed Fr. Bertoni with the spiritual direction of the seminarians, and, in 1812, the task of Vice Rector in the Seminary. In the period of his life, Fr. Bertoni fell into a recurring illness. He was also at this time dedicated to the preaching of the Parish Missions and Retreats.

In 1816, he took up residence with a few companions in a residence known as the "Stimate" [because of the nearby Church, dedicated to the Stigmata of St. Francis]. He opened a tuition-free school there for the children of the poor, and began his Congregation of Priests of the sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He died in Verona on June 12, 1853. [cf. G. Fiorio, *Vita del ven. servo di Dio, don Gaspare Bertoni*, Verona 1922

²⁵⁷G.S., 1811, f. 4.

²⁵⁸G.S., 1811, f. 44.

the years spent in the Corsini Palace were still vivid in her spirit. She ceded to this inspiration only when it seemed to her that she understood from the Lord that He was asking her to entrust herself to another person, and that Fr. Bertoni could be of service as a sure channel to the carrying out of the divine Will²⁵⁹.

Her **Spiritual Journal** does not reveal the priest's name as accepted to be her spiritual guide, but it is easy to discover it from other sources. In fact, in the last months of 1812, there began an epistolary correspondence between Fr. Bertoni and Mother Naudet that would continue, with some interruptions, until 1834²⁶⁰. Furthermore, precisely in those years, on some days, as on the 12th of January 1811, in harmony with what Leopoldina wrote in her **Journal**, Fr. Bertoni wrote in his own *Private Memorial*: the felt that he should

...not study for the spiritual direction of "N.N.... but you ought to direct yourself to the source of all light. Thus, this will serve you very well. You ought never to precede, but always follow the ways of the Lord, Who will illumine you and will suggest to you, once recourse to Him has been made, and with this, He will direct your progress and correspondence...²⁶¹

In this way, it is easy to identify in the person of Fr. Bertoni, Leopoldina's new spiritual guide. From this moment begins for Leopoldina a new and more intense spiritual life. It would suffice to peruse the pages of her **Journal** of this period to follow step by step the progress of her pathway she traversed under Fr. Bertoni's guidance. The first exercise that he suggested to her is that of the presence of God²⁶². Leopoldina seems to have possessed already for some time this gift of the presence of God, since she confesses:

...I feel almost sensibly his continuous presence within me; and that He remains with me, not as though I were standing at His side, which then would necessitate my turning toward Him, in order to address Him. Rather, I feel Him within me, together with me in the manner that it seems to me to be in Him...²⁶³

As Fr. Bertoni became more aware of the progress that Leopoldina was making in this exercise of the presence of God, he suggested to her a new and more demanding examen, committing her to model herself directly on the example of Christ ²⁶⁴. This was a giant step forward for Leopoldina; but, she still did not seem satisfied. She came to understand that the Lord wished to work in her spirit and alone. Her sole concern had to be that of not interfering God's work ²⁶⁵. But her view that God's minister, in her opinion, always followed the divine will in her regard, renewed in her the desire, experienced also other times, of binding herself with the vow of obedience to her spiritual director²⁶⁶. She understood, however, that the vow could become for her a human bond, a means of assurance, while the Lord wanted from her a complete abandonment²⁶⁷.

²⁵⁹G.S., 1811, f. 44.

²⁶⁰This documentation occupies a notable section of the volume prepared by Fr. Stofella, *Epistolario*, ..., pp. 13-290.

²⁶¹G. Stofella, *Il memoriale privato del ven. Gaspar Bertoni*, ..., p. 175.

²⁶²G.S., 1811, f. 44.

²⁶³G.S., 1811, f. 44.

²⁶⁴G.S., 1811, f. 51.

²⁶⁵G.S., 1811, f. 66.

²⁶⁶G.S., 1811, f. 71.

²⁶⁷G.S., 1811, f. 71.

Leopoldina found herself thus in full accord with the Bertonian spirituality, which moves totally “in an atmosphere of perfect abandonment into the hands of God”²⁶⁸. In the meantime, her spiritual director’s activity became ever more intense. He wished to move the soul of his disciple to perfect union with God. Leopoldina noted all these stages in her **Journal**. Once again, there was proposed to her a new examination that would be even more demanding:

... he prescribed for the particular examen union with God in prayer... (then noted an additional challenge)...from this examen, I passed to that of union with God in all my activities...²⁶⁹.

From the moment that Fr. Bertoni took over the direction of her soul, Leopoldina traveled a long way, that even she would not even understand how it had been possible for her to cover all those stages²⁷⁰. In the midst of this entire operation of grace, Leopoldina never forgot what work the Lord had placed in her hands. It is precisely in this time that there developed her decisive orientation toward the Sisters of the Holy Family . More and more, the former community, “the Beloved of Jesus”²⁷¹, were taking shape in Leopoldina’s mind as the “Sisters of the Holy Family.” This was a slow passage that not even she was able to trace in all its particulars ²⁷². Fr. Bertoni was able to give her truly wise counsels in this regard. He wished more than all else that Leopoldina might place solid foundations for this work of the Lord. • Therefore, he prescribed for her to commit one hour each day to the examination of various constitutions and to establish with greater precision her own purpose, and then to proceed with the means²⁷³.

Leopoldina obeyed God’s minister, and dedicated an established time for the study of rules, while the pages of the **Spiritual Journal** remained blank. At the beginning of 1812, Leopoldina reduced this composition to the careful inscription of two closely fitted columns on one sheet, two monthly reports which, in the absence of any analytical exposition of each day, these do offer a more synthetic view of Leopoldina’s two-fold activity²⁷⁴. God’s minister collaborated with her from the very first writing down of her constitutions, not only with exhortations and counsels, but with summaries, translations, revisions, and discussions of writings regarding the new rules, in addition to his accompanying her in his prayers and the celebration of Masses²⁷⁵.

In order to know Fr. Bertoni’s efforts in Leopoldina’s behalf, it would be necessary to review the numerous letters that he began writing to her, by the end of 1812. In this period, there were some real challenging times for Leopoldina, who had by now become well accustomed to the wisdom of Fr. Bertoni’s prudent guidance²⁷⁶. Her **Spiritual Journal**, is

²⁶⁸N. Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono...*, p. 11.

²⁶⁹G.S., 1811, f. 78.

²⁷⁰G.S., 1811, f. 57.

²⁷¹G.S., 1811, f. 72.

²⁷²G.S., 1811, f. 58.

²⁷³G.S., 1811, f. 75.

²⁷⁴G.S., 1812, f. 85.

²⁷⁵G. Stofella, *Epistolario...* pp. 32; 33-34; 87-92; 114-115, passim.

²⁷⁶In October of 1812, Fr. Bertoni came down with a mortal illness, that gave grave concern to all who knew him. In his most difficult days, his old philosophy teacher, Fr. Louis Fortis, came to comfort him [cf. *IL Bertoniano*, a monthly periodical reserved to the Stigmatines, XVth year, Verona 1930, Supplement to n.1, pp. 334-335].

silent here and then seems to begin all over again. Its exterior appearance also changed, with her short sentences, sudden spurts of ideas, with a stop and start style. There appears now even a concrete fact, a reference to a “certain person who has been ill” and one to whom Leopoldina was so indebted, both because of her spiritual progress, as well as for the “advantage of her Institute”²⁷⁷. That person who had been struck down by this very serious illness, was Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, and he would never again know perfect health²⁷⁸. Because of this state of his health, and the new responsibilities entrusted to him by the Bishop of Verona²⁷⁹, Fr. Gaspar was forced to give up even his limited role of confessor at the Canossa Retreat. However, Leopoldina got permission that he would still come back to St. Joseph’s to assist her and her special companions²⁸⁰.

Leopoldina’s suffering was not only motivated by the loss of her spiritual director, to whom she felt so obliged, but also from the fact that for some period of time prior it seemed to her that she had heard an interior sentiment that assured her of a long assistance on the part of Fr. Bertoni. Her reasoning was that if that voice had been false, she would have to deduce that all of her other interior illustrations were likewise deceptive, according to which she had thus far conducted her life ²⁸¹. Once her director had been restored somewhat to health, Leopoldina wrote to him, recounting to him all that was going on in her soul. Fr. Bertoni’s response ²⁸² opened a series of almost 200 letters that serve to document a very interesting journey of spiritual direction²⁸³.

Fr. Bertoni had kept in his heart Mother Naudet’s personal situation and that of her institution: he was fully in accord with her ideas ²⁸⁴. He helped her not only in the spiritual formation of her companions, with the work of his ministry, but also in the cultural formation of those who were to be assigned to teaching. And he did all this with a more vivid zeal than

²⁷⁷G.S., 1812, f. 96.

²⁷⁸N. Dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono...*, p. 10.

²⁷⁹Having come down with this very serious illness in October of 1812, Fr. Bertoni was subsequently transferred in a more stable manner and with greater responsibilities to the direction of the souls in the diocesan seminary.

For the Canossa Retreat, Fr. Matthew Farinati was named confessor in the place of Fr. Bertoni. However, Leopoldina obtained special permission from the Bishop for Fr. Bertoni to continue coming to the Canossa Retreat to guide her and her companions [cf. G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, pp. 24-33].

²⁸⁰At this Canossa Retreat, from 1808 on, there lived together two distinct groups of women: one was led by Madalene di Canossa, who was the official owner of the property; the other was headed by Leopoldina Naudet, who was their superior. Although they were not lacking in certain common aspirations, there was always between the two groups differences of purposes and means [cf. G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, pp. 83-84].

²⁸¹G.S., 1812, f. 96.

²⁸²G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, pp. 23-24.

²⁸³This *Epistolario* is divided into two neatly separate parts. The first part includes the letters of spiritual direction and counsels regarding the writing of her constitutions and the formation of religious sisters. The second part, on the other hand, makes reference only to practical problems, connected with the approbation of her Institute, with the exception of one letter [cf. G. Stofella, *Epistolario*, ... pp. 221-222]. In this, it is noted that Fr. Bertoni was being requested with insistence by Mother Naudet that he might suggest a norm to follow in her passive prayer. This separation between the two parts coincides more or less with the abandonment, on Fr. Bertoni’s part, of the spiritual direction of Mother Naudet, that happened in the year 1819. There can also be noted a difference in style. While these letters are always respectful and cordial, in the second part they are more dry and also fearful, with even the formulae of introduction changing. Rather than his usual “My dear Mother”, Fr. Bertoni then writes to her as” Most Illustrious Mother.”

²⁸⁴G. Stofella, *Note per servire alla storia del Ven. Servo di Dio, Don Gaspare Bertoni*, without any indication of place or date. Series IV, p. 287.

if her undertaking had been his own²⁸⁵. It was not any exaggeration that Leopoldina later would say that her Institute is the work of Fr. Bertoni²⁸⁶.

At the beginning of 1813, while her spiritual director was taking up his ministry once again, her **Journal** presents Leopoldina to us as totally absorbed in God, desirous of “living by the spirit, and in spiritualizing all things” as to remain always fixed in God ²⁸⁷. This inspiration was approved by Fr. Bertoni in these words:

... The method that you are following in prayer is excellent, as the Lord Himself has made known: ‘only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her’ ...²⁸⁸.

Therefore, in her **Spiritual Journal** she is silent for an entire month. In this silence there is raised the voice of the minister of God in advising her that there is material to continue on in it. He, in fact, was very pleased with Leopoldina and that manner with which the Lord had illumined her “to receive the visit of His Divine Majesty”²⁸⁹.

Therefore, her **Spiritual Journal** took note of her retreat in March 1813. As Leopoldina was not able to count on the spiritual assistance of her spiritual director, she made up for this by asking him instructions and orientations. Fr. Bertoni, who was penetrated profoundly with the Ignatian spirit, came to her help with very precious suggestions. He led her to understand that every method, no matter how perfect, has only the function of a means and as soon as there arises any obstacle to a more free union with God, it should be abandoned ²⁹⁰. In the meantime, Leopoldina was advancing all the while in her union with God, according to the intention proposed in these Exercises. She experienced herself totally absorbed in God, in the quiet of her own faculties, in joy and love, so much so as to allow herself to express herself in phases such as this one: “... The Lord has opened up my heart more and more to follow Him by the paths of love...”²⁹¹.

On March 11, 1813, her **Spiritual Journal** became even more laconic beyond her usual style, and totally generic²⁹². This shift in style was in response to one of Fr. Bertoni’s suggestions who was counseling her to note “very briefly the lights she received” from the Lord²⁹³. Thus, Leopoldina’s **Journal** reproduces and also surpasses this laconic style evidenced by Fr. Gaspar himself in his own *Memoriale Privato*²⁹⁴. In this same period, though, the epistolary correspondence between director and penitent assumes a greater interest. This correspondence, even when it is concentrating on something totally different, always seems imbued with the spirit of that “holy abandonment”. that was so characteristic of Fr. Bertoni’s own spirituality²⁹⁵. Mother Naudet found herself right at home in this way of

²⁸⁵G. Stofella, *Epistolario...* , pp. 25-27.

²⁸⁶G. Stofella, *Epistolario*, pp. 166-167.

²⁸⁷**G.S.**, 1813, f. 100.

²⁸⁸G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 48.

²⁸⁹G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 67.

²⁹⁰G. Stofella, *Epistolario ...*, p. 71.

²⁹¹**G.S.**, 1813, f. 105.

²⁹²**G.S.**, 1813, f. 106.

²⁹³G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 71.

²⁹⁴*Vita Cristiana*, Ascetico-Mystical Review, XII th year, Florence 1953, fasc. III, pp. 265-275.

²⁹⁵N. dalle Vedove, *Un modello di santo abbandono...*, pp. 199, ff.

abandonment. Especially in prayer she no longer has any sentiment concerning herself, not even those with reference to her own perfection: all is now entrusted into the hands of God²⁹⁶.

Leopoldina could not even have imagined that the direction of a priest who was so expert in the ways of grace would one day be taken from her²⁹⁷. However, in May of 1819, Fr. Bertoni once more relapsed into a very serious illness. In this occasion, Leopoldina came to understand that he had come to the decision of ending for good his spiritual direction of her²⁹⁸. She could hardly believe that she would be left without her guide for her own spiritual life and for that of her work. When she saw that every recourse had proven fruitless, she turned to God in an act of total abandonment to His will²⁹⁹.

Fr. Bertoni, while always maintaining a relationship of charity and Christian gentleness toward Leopoldina and her Institute, remained firm in his refusal³⁰⁰. He remained disposed to give her counsel regarding material matters, school concerns, and even on her rules. But, when any reference was made to her spiritual care, or that of her companions, she only received negative replies, even though Leopoldina's appeals in this regard were insistent³⁰¹. When she appealed to him that he might at least indicate to her to whom she ought to have recourse, Fr. Bertoni responded to her inflexibly:

...as it is also true for the director, it is necessary to raise our eyes to the Master. He knows His own; He distributes His servants as, when, where He wills, ... and when He says: 'It is enough!' to someone, that person cannot say any further: 'still more.' But, it is necessary, as it is most necessary, to look for another, and God will have him step forward, and would create such a person on the spot...³⁰².

In truth, for Leopoldina another director did not come forward like Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, even if there were not lacking to her with the passing of time spiritual counselors of holiness and doctrine³⁰³

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²⁹⁶G.S., 1811, f. 58.

²⁹⁷On November 9, 1816, she began her institute in the former monastery named for the Sisters of St. Teresa who once lived there, near the Piazza Cittadella, in Verona. Fr. Bertoni, a few days earlier, has come with a few companions of his to the neighboring building named for the Stigmata of St. Francis, to begin there his Congregation for men. Thus, there was ended the impediment of the journey that Fr. Bertoni had to undertake in order to reach the Retreat of St. Joseph.

²⁹⁸G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p.148.

²⁹⁹G.S., 1820, f. 108.

³⁰⁰G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, pp. 159-160.

³⁰¹Leopoldina continued to insist with Fr. Bertoni because she was convinced that she had not caused this change in him, and would like at least to have known the reason for his refusals (cf. G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 150)

³⁰²G. Stofella, *Epistolario*, ... pp. 243-244.

³⁰³Amng Leopoldina's counsellors, the following are to be remembered: Fr. Luois Fusari [+ 1822], for many years the suprior of the Oratorian Fathrs of St. Philip Neri in Verona; Fr. John Rozaven [1772-1851], Jesuit, and Fr. John Roothaan [1785-1853], Superior General of the Company of Jesus from 1829-1853.

4. Two Jesuits: Fr. Ludovicus John Rozaven [1772-1851] & Fr. John Roothaan [1785-1853]

During the actual composition of her Constitutions, Leopoldina was assisted, in addition by Fr. Bertoni, also by two eminent Jesuits: Fr. John Rozaven³⁰⁴ and Fr. John Roothaan³⁰⁵. Leopoldina's **Spiritual Journal** makes no mention of these eminent counselors, but there do remain several letters³⁰⁶ that give clear testimony on their efforts in behalf of Mother Naudet.

In 1815, Leopoldina wrote to Fr. Rozaven, informing him of what had happened to her and to the few members of the "Beloved of Jesus" who were left, and whom she had followed from Rome to Verona, after the disappearance of Fr. Paccanari. From her letter³⁰⁷ it is clear that Fr. Rozaven, while a member of the now defunct "Company of the Faith", had enjoyed good contacts with Leopoldina. With every probability, he would have known her since 1797, when the Archduchess Maria Anna, through the intervention of Princess Louise of Conde', took under her protection "the Fathers of the Sacred Heart", who had taken refuge in

³⁰⁴John Rozaven of Leyssegues was born at Quimper, in France, on March 9, 1772. He fled into exile at the beginning of the French Revolution, and in 1797, he was accepted by Fr. Varin, into the Society of the Sacred Heart, at Hagenbruun. After the fusion of the Society with the Company of the Faith, he was sent to England. Separating himself from Fr. Paccanari, in 1804 he joined the Jesuits in White Russia. Here, he taught philosophy in the college of Peterburgh and had a significant part in the movement of return to the Catholic Church, which was manifested in the Moscovite society. At the moment of the expulsion of the Jesuits from Russia [1820], he was entrusted by the General of the Order to defend his confreres from the accusations leveled against them. In 1820, he participated in the quality of Vice Provincial in France, in the 26th General Congregation of the Company. He has named the Assistant for France of Fr. Louis Fortis, and held this charge until his death, which took place in Rome, on April 2, 1851.

Fr. Rozaven was one of the most outstanding members that the Company had in the first decades of the 19th century, He was an illustrious writer and philosopher, despite his numerous occupations, he found the time to follow the doctrinal questions which agitated the Church at that time. In the controversy with Lamennais, he played the role of conciliator. He wished above all that there be respected the glory of the author of the *Indifference en matiere de Religions*. In Rome [1824], these two sons of Brittany met but were unable to come to an understanding [cf. A. Guidee, *Vie du R. P. Joseph Varin...*, pp. 223-235; J. Creteineau-Joly, *Histoire...*, VI, pp. 165-166].

³⁰⁵John Roothaan was born in Amsterdam, of Catholic parents, on November 23, 1785. He entered the Novitiate of the Jesuits in Donaburg, in Russia, and remained there for the entire period of his studies. After the expulsion of the Company of Jesus from Russia [1820], he exercised his ministry to preaching in Switzerland. In the period from 1823-1829, he was Director of the College of Turin, and after having been for some months, Vice-Provincial in Italy, he was elected Superior General of the Company on July 9, 1829. He remained in this position until his death, which happened in Rome on May 8, 1853.

Under his Generalate the Company had a great development and exercised, as it had done in the past, a vast activity in all fields of the scholastic life. He gave a new impulse to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, of which he made an excellent Italian translation; he adapted the *Ratio Studiorum* [the Jesuit Program of Studies] to the changing times, and greatly developed the Missions, both on the Parish level as well as in foreign lands.

Fr. Roothaan loved study and prayer, teaching and the apostolate. A man of profound humility and extreme docility to grace, he maintained always, notwithstanding his serious occupations of his Generalate, an habitual union with God. The characteristic of his spirituality consists in accepting all events from a supernatural point of view, with an indomitable confidence in God [cf. P. Pirri, *P. Giovanni Roothaan, XXI^o Generale of the Company of Jesus...*; J. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus...*, p. 460-468.

³⁰⁶Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³⁰⁷This is a part of a letter which Leopoldina wrote in French to Fr. Rozaven, dated March 7, 1815. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

Hagenbruun because of the war-time events³⁰⁸. Fr. Rozaven was among these refugees³⁰⁹. When the fusion of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart and the Society of the Faith occurred, Fr. Rozaven was in England, where he met a little later, Leopoldina's sister, Luisa Naudet, for the purpose of the foundation of a branch of the "Beloved of Jesus"³¹⁰. In England, Fr. Rozaven had taken up the cause of the interests of this group called "the Beloved of Jesus", to such an extent that he won the praises of their superior General, Fr. Nicholas Paccanari³¹¹.

A further meeting with Leopoldina happened in 1802, on the occasion of the First General Congregation of the Company of the Faith. For these sessions there were invited the superiors of Italy, France and England. This Congregation lasted from August 6th to the 15th. Along with Fr. Paccanari, and the other Fathers, there were admitted also the Archduchess Maria Anna and the superior of the "Beloved of Jesus" of Rome, Mother Leopoldina Naudet³¹².

Having departed for London, after the closing of this meeting, Fr. Rozaven immediately returned to Rome, to make a report concerning the very serious charges that he had heard regarding Fr. Paccanari. Once again, he met Leopoldina on this occasion, and one can only imagine the state of her soul. Fr. Rozaven, in fact, had come to interrogate the "Beloved of Jesus" of Rome, and reached a better understanding of the accusations that had been leveled against Fr. Paccanari³¹³. Leopoldina's **Spiritual Diary** of this period does not reveal the intimate sufferings of Leopoldina, unwillingly involved in this grave matter, but it is certain that in those days, so full of agitation, that "she shed many tears"³¹⁴.

Following this painful matter, for some period the contacts between Fr. Rozaven and Mother Leopoldina were interrupted. In the year 1815, these began again in a very tranquil and confidential tone³¹⁵. On the part of Fr. Rozaven, there can be noted his real interest for Mother Naudet's endeavor and his personal remembrance of her in prayer³¹⁶. On her part, however, there is instead in addition to her confidence and esteem, the desire to have him come to know how the Lord saved her "in the midst of the tempest". Leopoldina also expressed the hope of being able to have a very open conversation with the learned Jesuit, in order to have from him the encouragement and the counsel regarding the work that the Lord had entrusted to her.

³⁰⁸J. Cretineau-Joly, *Histoire..*, V, pp. 502-503.

³⁰⁹After the arrival of "the Fathers of the Sacred Heart" in Hagenbruun, they began to work at the reorganization of studies. Fr. Rozaven was entrusted with the teaching of philosophy. [cf. A. Guidee, *Vie du R.P. Varin...*, p. 47].

³¹⁰Letter of Fr. Paccanari to Fr. Varin, dated December 19, 1801. (cf. *Copia delle lettere piu' interessanti scritte dal Rev.mo P. Gen. della Compagnia della Fede di Gesu'*, Archives of the Venice-Milan Province of the Jesuits. Milano).

³¹¹Letter of Fr. Paccanari to Fr. Varin, of August 2 1802. (cf. *Copia delle lettere piu' interessanti scritte dal Rev.mo P. Gen. della Compagnia della Fede di Gesu'*, . Jesuit Archives of the Veneto-Milan Province. Milan).

³¹²P. Galletti, *Brevi memorie intorno alla Compagnia di Gesu' in Italia...*, p. 86.

³¹³A> Guidee, *Vie du R. P. Varin...*, p. 95.

³¹⁴The deposition of Fr. Peter Rigoletti. Secret Archives of the Vatican. Regulars (Jesuits), n. 57, f. 300.

³¹⁵Extract of one of Leopoldina's letters to Fr. Rozaven, dated March 7, 1815. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³¹⁶These sentiments are expressed indirectly by Mother Leopoldina, at the beginning of her letter cited above.

As can be noted, the earlier events of Rome had not in any way upset the relationship between Leopoldina and Fr. Rozaven. It seems rather that precisely on that occasion, they had been able to come to know each other and to the experience of mutual esteem. Fr. Rozaven's response to this letter has not come down to us. This gap, however, is overcome by meeting Fr. Rozaven again in 1820, through an epistolary relationship that will last until Leopoldina's death.

The first letter of Fr. Rozaven³¹⁷ reached Leopoldina in Verona and allows one to understand that other letters had been written earlier. The fundamental theme, from the beginning, is the possible union of Mother Naudet's Institute and that of Sophie Barat³¹⁸. Leopoldina had followed with interest the unfolding of the Madames of the sacred Heart and already in 1812 hoped that the two branches of the "Beloved", that of Amiens and that of Italy, might form a single Institute³¹⁹. When she learned that the Madames of the Sacred Heart had intended to open a house in Rome, Leopoldina was convinced that the opportune moment had come, but before making any step, she consulted Fr. Rozaven, who was managing Mother Barat's initiatives in Rome³²⁰. The Jesuit's response was not long in coming. He informed Leopoldina about the spirit of the "Madames", and advised her that there remained two paths from which she had to choose: either to unite herself simply to those of France, since the rules were the same - or, to wait a little while longer and then petition the Holy See the faculty of living with the same Rule, but independently from the Congregation in France. He personally was inclined toward the second choice, because he thought it would be more suitable to be united not with the Rules, but more with charity³²¹.

For her part, however, Leopoldina did not wish to assume the responsibility of this choice when she heard that Mother Barat's community was about to be approved by the Pope, and once again, she had recourse to Fr. Rozaven³²². She prefaced her letter with a manifestation of the present state of her soul, which indicates clearly the level of holy abandonment she had by now reached. Therefore, she declared that she was disposed to union with the "Madames" because in that way there would be canceled her name from the endeavor that the Lord Himself had seemed to initiate. In the end, however, she also stated that she was

³¹⁷Letter of Fr. Rozaven to Leopoldina, November 30, 1820. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³¹⁸When Mother Barat entered to become part of the "Madames of the Faith and of Christian Education", the Society depended on Fr. Paccanari, in his role as Superior General of the Company of the Faith and of the "Beloved of Jesus." Fr. Varin, in fact, recounted to her the story of the life and death of Fr. Tournely. He communicated to her the revelations, the "plans", and the predictions of this extraordinary man. He showed her how these predictions had already begun to be realized for the foundation that the Archduchess Marianna had achieved a short time before in Rome. France then insistently requested the same benefit and the Father declared to his humble daughter that God was calling her to cooperate in this institution [cf. Baunard, *Istoria della Madre Barat...*, Book I, p. 42]. Furthermore, when it was necessary at Amiens to substitute Mother Loquet with a new superior, one was sent from the house of the "Beloved" in Rome, as official Visitator, in the person of Luisa Naudet, Leopoldina's sister, and on her suggestion, Mother Barat was elected superior.[cf. Baunard, *Istoria della Madre Brat...*, I, p. 63.]. It is only natural, then, that Leopoldina would think about the possible union of the two Institutes.

³¹⁹G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, pp. 34-37.

³²⁰Baunard, *Istoria della Madre Barat...* Book VI, p. 398.

³²¹Fr. Rozaven's letter to Leopoldina, January 24, 1824. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³²²The Brief of Approbation was signed by Pope Leo XII, on December 22, 1826.

disposed also to remain separated, “not wanting anything else in all this other than what God wanted and that which would be better”³²³.

Fr. Rozaven accompanied Leopoldina in this entire enterprise and furnished her with all the clarifications that he judged opportune. Practically, however, this union became impossible as long as the Austrian government had remained intolerant of all dependence and of any tie with France. Leopoldina was fully cognizant of this and decided to await “remaining united in spirit and in heart”, until the time might arrive “to form but a single body”³²⁴.

Another attempt at union took place in 1833, when Sophie Barat was in Rome. The intermediary was as always, Fr. Rozaven. He informed Mother Naudet of a possible visit of Mother Barat to Verona, in order to conclude the matter³²⁵. However, Mother Barat, after a short stay in Parma, reached Chamberry, by way of Turin, without passing through Verona³²⁶. Thus vanished the hope of a possible union and Leopoldina set to work to apply with the means at her disposal to obtain approbation for the Sisters of the Holy Family.

In this entire enterprise, too, Fr. Rozaven was of great assistance to her. He guided Leopoldina to come to know the Father General of the Company of Jesus, Fr. John Roothaan. In a letter of 1830, he announced to Leopoldina the election of the new Father General, telling her that he was “young, active and zealous. There was every hope that under his Generalate the Company would spread”³²⁷. Fr. Rozaven had known Fr. Roothaan at the Academy of Polock, in Russia, of which he was the Prefect, when the future Father General had taken his examinations, with a very happy result for the teaching of Greek and Hebrew³²⁸. From that moment on, there was established between the two Jesuits a profound bond of esteem, even though they were of different ages. When it was a matter of adapting the Program of Studies for the sciences of White Russia, Fr. Rozaven, from Petersburg where he was, sought suggestions also from the young Fr. Roothaan, who had already manifested a rare experience in this matter³²⁹.

The most evident proof of the esteem and confidence that reigned between the two learned Jesuits is noted in the fact that Fr. Roothaan, as soon as he was elected General of the Company, named Fr. Rozaven as Assistant of the Province of France³³⁰, a charge he carried out until his death. It was not difficult, therefore, for Fr. Rozaven to introduce Leopoldina to the new Father General of the Company of Jesus. His work could be most valid for the eventual approbation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The reminiscences register faithfully the occasion of this introduction:

... in the beginning of the year 1834, Divine Providence disposed that Madame Luisa Naudet should make the acquaintance of the Very Rev. Fr. John Roothaan, Prepositus General of the Company of Jesus. She

³²³Extract of a Letter from Leopoldina to Fr. Rozaven, without date. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³²⁴Extract of a Letter from Leopoldina to Fr. Rozavn, without date. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³²⁵Fr. Rozaven’s letter to Lepoldina, March 2, 1833. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³²⁶Baunard, *Istoria della Madre Barat...*, Book VII, p. 70.

³²⁷Letter of Fr. Rozaven to Leopoldina, January 14, 1830. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³²⁸P. Pirri, *P. Giovanni Roothaan...*, p. 88.

³²⁹P. Piri, *P. Giovanni Roothaan...*, p. 94.

³³⁰P. Pirri, *P. Giovanni Roothaan...*, p. 160.

opened her spirit to him, and with great decision beseeched him to take an interest in the matters of the Institute of the Holy Family...Having then come to the knowledge of how justly the reputation of his Most Reverend Paternity had been esteemed by the most eminent Cardinals because of the prudence and sensibility in which he is so rightly held, she interceded with him in the name of the Foundress to make known his sentiments to the Congregation³³¹, regarding the rule of manifestation³³² and the authority of the Mother Superior, on those matters that the difficulties which principally concerned the most eminent examiners³³³. This is what the Venerable Foundress humbly begs by letter³³⁴.

It seems almost strange that such an unexpected opening should occur, for such a delicate matter. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that Leopoldina had had indirect contacts with Fr. Roothaan,, due to the representation of the Jesuits in Verona.. Fr. Rozaven in fact he thanked her a number of times by letter, also in the name of the Fr. General³³⁵, for her interest in behalf of the Company of Jesus..

Unfortunately, there are no testimonies that have come down to us regarding the specific intervention of Mother Naudet in behalf of the Jesuits. However, it would suffice to think that because of her interest in their regard, that her own negotiations for the civil approbation of Leopoldina's Institute ran the risk of being convolved by the aversion that the government had toward the Company of Jesus³³⁶.

In the light of these antecedents, it is natural that a request of assistance addressed to Fr. Roothaan, on the part of Leopoldina might find a response that was little heartening. He, however, did not want to act personally before the Sacred Congregation, as had been suggested to him, since he feared that he might aggravate the situation. He counseled her rather to send to the Cardinal examiners further explanations on the arguments in question,

³³¹The Sacred Congregation of Religious.

³³²With this Rule, the religious sisters would be obliged to manifest to their Superior, in the limits of possibility, the sentiments of their spirit. This rendering of an account, therefore, would not have required the confession of sins, but rather the manifestation of their natural inclinations and the gifts of grace, so that the Superior could with greater facility guide the Sisters in the life of perfection, and to entrust to them offices more in accord with their capacities. This Rule had already been approved by the Holy See for the Salesian Sisters [cf. L. Naudet, Responses to the obsequious observations of the most eminent Cardinals regarding the Constitutions of the Sisters of the Holy Family. October 1833. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona].

³³³The Cardinal Examiners were: Odescalchi, Lambruschini and Sala [cf. the Letter of Cardinal Odescalchi to Luigia Naudet, September 8, 1833. The original is conserved in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona].

³³⁴*Memorie intorno alla Pontificia approvazione dell'Istituto delle Sorelle della Sacra Famiglia*, 1835. This fascicle is retained as a manuscript in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.]

³³⁵Letter of Fr. Rozaven to Leopoldina, January 1830. The original is kept in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³³⁶This incident had been caused by Fr. Peter Albertini, a noble Veronese priest, defender of the Jesuits. A state employee, a certain Doctor Zermann, believed that it was in her best interests to advise Mother Naudet of the danger she was running: "... keep under advisement that clearly what is happening due to your efforts in harmony with those of the Reverend Fr. Albertini for the foundation of the Jesuits. Since you have not discontinued the service of that lawyer who offers his work for the above mentioned priest, you would never be able to obtain any facilitation, because there is fear that from your example that this might serve the Jesuits to assume the attitude of expecting some different result..." [Letter of Sir Peter Zermann to Leopoldina. September 27, 1831. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona].

which “would dissipate well the clouds and obscurities occasioned by the necessary lack in the Constitutions”³³⁷.

Leopoldina received Fr. Roothaan’s suggestion and set about the task of writing up an “Instruction on the manner of how to render an account of one’s soul to the Superior”, and sent this to the Father General, so that he might add his corrections³³⁸. After having read and considered attentively her rendition of the Declaration, Fr. Roothaan sent it back to Mother Naudet with his approval:

...What you have sent me as a further explanation of the point on the rendering of one’s conscience is excellent. If you deem it helpful to send along something also on that other point, regarding the perpetuity of the Mother Superior General in office, this would be good. For the rest, be at peace. For a long time now, no one has mentioned your situation. And this is perhaps better. In this way, in case there were any shadows over the matter, these will dissipate in time, for anyone who goes slowly, will proceed in a healthy manner”³³⁹.

Mother Naudet did not have the time to respond to Fr. Roothaan’s request, because she died rather suddenly a few days after having received his letter. Her first Assistant, Mother Maria Bussetti³⁴⁰, hastened to give the notice of her death to the Cardinals and also to the Father General. Fr. Roothaan responded almost immediately by letter³⁴¹ and expressed himself as having profound sentiments of veneration and esteem for Mother Naudet. Furthermore, he also promised her spiritual daughters that he would still help them with his counsel and with his efforts to obtain the formal approbation of the Constitutions. He assured them at the same time that “the Institute had already been approved in its substance”³⁴².

These expressions did not remain merely as words, because Fr. Roothaan intervened with the Cardinals until there was obtained the Canonical Erection of Mother Naudet’s Institute³⁴³.

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³³⁷Copy of a letter of Fr. Roothaan, to Leopoldina, March 17, 1834, in: *Memorie intorno alla Pontificia approvazione dell’Istituto delle Sorelle della Sacra Famiglia*, 1835, manuscript in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³³⁸The original is in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³³⁹Fr. Roothaan’s Letter to Leopoldina. August 8, 1834. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³⁴⁰Maria Bussetti, was born in Padua, on November 17, 1777, and was among the first to join up with Mother Naudet for the foundation of the “Beloved of Jesus”. She was with Leopoldina in Verona in the Canossa Retreat and then at St. Teresa’s Convent. She was elected the Mother General of the Community at the death of Mother Naudet. She resigned from office in 1839; and died in 1849.

³⁴¹Letter from Fr. Roothaan to Mother Maria Bussetti, September 5, 1834. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³⁴²The Brief of Approbation was signed by Pope Gregory XVI, on December 20, 1833.

³⁴³The ceremony of the Canonical Erection of the Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Family took place in Verona, in the Monastery of St. Teresa, on February 2, 1835. It was presided over by Bishop Joseph Grasser, Ordinary of Verona

III. SPIRITUAL MODELS

1. Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ constitutes a universal model of holiness, and as such, He cannot be imitated in all His completeness, by human beings, who are so limited of themselves. In assuming a human nature, Christ intended to give to men and women a most perfect exemplar of all the virtues. He is therefore, the unique Model of Christian holiness, and, at the same time, the author of redemption³⁴⁴. In reality, however, it happens that every soul becomes taken up with specific virtues of Christ since it is impossible to embrace them all³⁴⁵. The practice of the Ignatian *Exercises* led Leopoldina to the discovery of the humanity of Christ and the mysteries of his earthy life, but above all moved her to the imitation of His examples.

In the *Exercises*, much insistence is given to the role of Christ in so far as He is the “Meritorious Cause” of our sanctification. In a special manner, He is presented as the “Exemplary Cause”. the Model of all holiness. To love Christ, then, means a generous fidelity in measuring our loves up to His³⁴⁶. Leopoldina had been conquered by this ideal and aspired solely to be in conformity with Christ, with the Christ of flesh and blood, as presented by the Evangelists, in the slightest details of his earthy life, poor, hidden, obedient. She comprehended that in order to arrive at this she first had to know, to meditate on the life of the Redeemer, “since it is difficult to consider Him without feeling oneself drawn by Him”³⁴⁷.

In the beginning, Leopoldina did not propose for herself to imitate some specific virtue of Christ. Her Particular examen which was suggested to her, guided her to orientate her entire life toward Christ, to act as He acted, without any specific goal³⁴⁸:

...It was said to me to begin the Particular Examen on these words of St. Gregory: *In his every action, he looks always toward Him [Christ], and directs toward Him the rectitude of his life, recognizing that He has come on earth to recompose through His humanity, the number and the grace of His elect.*³⁴⁹

This practical exercise did not leave Leopoldina indifferent, but rather awakened in her the desire “to learn from, and to imitate such a model”³⁵⁰. Her meditation on the life of Christ made her progress on an equal pace with the knowledge of her own imperfections, for which she noted the necessity of correcting all her actions and “to order them according ...to His life”³⁵¹. It soon dawned on Leopoldina that before setting out on the following of

³⁴⁴C. Marmion, *Cristo, vita dell'anima...*, pp.43-44.

³⁴⁵C. Marmion, *Cristo, ideale del sacerdote...*, p. 185.

³⁴⁶J. DeGuibert, *Spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus ...*, pp. 123-124.

³⁴⁷G.S., 1811, f.51.

³⁴⁸Leopoldina is referring here to her spiritual director, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni.

³⁴⁹G.S., 1811, f. 51: the passage is taken from the work: *In primum Regum*, , Book II, c. II, 41, which is in the Appendix of the *Opera Omnia* of St. Gregory the Great: *In omni quod agit semper ad ipsum respicit et vitae suae in rectitudinem in eo dirigit quem per assumptam humanitatem ad componendum electorum speciem venisse recognovit...*

³⁵⁰G.S., 1811, f. 51.

³⁵¹G.S.,1811, f. 61.

Christ it is always necessary to renounce oneself and to be freed “from the many remnants of sins and inconstancies in virtue..”³⁵².

Characteristic in her is “detachment” as a premise to “the following of Christ”. When, in 1797, she had made the decision to enter La Trappe, first of all, she took measure of her own abilities, by depriving herself of all that was superfluous and even of some necessities, as though she wished by this to indicate the total abnegation of herself, that she would have to realize in consecrating herself definitively to Christ³⁵³. Leopoldina, in her own view, was never able to reach this goal, even though she had “the weapons in hand”³⁵⁴. This was an expression that she never tired of using as she minutely rummaged through the wandering maze of her own being in order to destroy any waywardness there in. Each time that she would enter into herself, she would find these obstacles more vivid than ever³⁵⁵.

It may be that this was precisely Leopoldina’s personality, in this continuous struggle to root out her defects and acquire virtue, to conform herself authentically to Christ, since “... love seeks likeness, and if, therefore, I love Jesus, I have to be like Him”³⁵⁶. The Christ she wished to imitate, as authentic, poor, humiliated, suffering, Who has become incarnate to do the Father’s Will and to redeem humanity. There thus begins to take shape for her the particular aspect, in the Divine Person of Christ, which Leopoldina wanted to imitate and to reproduce in herself:

...The Lord dictated to me sentiments of fervor and desire to go attentively investigating that which He did before beginning His active life in order to be able to follow in His footsteps... In contemplating Him, I admired His humility. I begged Him to infuse into me this virtue, of which I am so lacking...³⁵⁷

The humiliation to which the Son of God, made man, submitted Himself, profoundly struck Leopoldina. Across the pages of her **Spiritual Journal** she never ceases to express her wonder and confusion in the presence of an example that is so strong. Meditating on the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, she thought of Christ’s humiliation, Who submitted Himself to the Jewish laws, as all others of his contemporaries³⁵⁸.

In Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan she was struck immediately with the sentiments of Christ’s humility. This humility, though, according to Leopoldina, is not an end in itself, but is an indispensable condition in order to have the predilection of God and to be glorified by Him. In fact:

... despite the humiliations and annihilation of Jesus, the eternal Father of heaven took care in every principal encounter to exalt Him and to make Him known to some person for that which He truly was...³⁵⁹.

³⁵²G.S., 1811, f. 60.

³⁵³M. Canossa, *Epoche ...*, 1835, f. 9.

³⁵⁴G.S., 1801, f. 18.

³⁵⁵G.S., 1801, f. 19.

³⁵⁶G.S., 1811, f.65.

³⁵⁷G.S., 1811, f. 62.

³⁵⁸G.S., 1811, f. 60.

³⁵⁹G.S., 1811, f. 60.

This did not happen for Jesus alone, but also for all those who will follow His examples:

...do not ever give up the reflection that the same happens to all those who follow Jesus in His humiliations...³⁶⁰.

After having contemplated the humiliated Christ, Leopoldina descended to the practical, personal application Her prayer, therefore, did not remain on a purely theoretical level. In her imitation of Jesus, she wished “to work with the spirit of genuine humility”³⁶¹ and by means of this continuous exercise she hoped to arrive at “the hidden life in God with Jesus”. This expression recalls a passage from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians³⁶², and seems to reproduce the entire life of Christ: passion, death and resurrection.

To live in God is Leopoldina’s intimate aspiration from her early youth. Now it seems that having achieved this ideal that constitutes the foundation of every Christian life since she concludes enthusiastically “the joy of this”³⁶³, concerning this hidden life in God with Christ in an atmosphere that is totally supernatural. But Leopoldina did not want to enjoy all alone this interior joy. To follow Christ is not for her some kind of an isolated fact, a personal problem, as it is rather “the Glory of His most high name, one’s own sanctification and the salvation of souls”³⁶⁴.

Along-side the humiliated Christ, Leopoldina contemplated the poor and obedient Christ.

It has already been noted how poverty and detachment from earthly goods constituted for her a premise to her following of Christ. This concept can find an explanation in the fact that Leopoldina had almost always lived commitment to the Royal Court and, therefore, she could have been struck even further in considering even more the privation and the poverty of Jesus Christ. All these aspects however, are but the consequence of her state of self emptying, through which she wished to subject herself to her Savior, in His assuming human nature. There is no isolated moment of the life of Christ in which, according to Leopoldina, He would not have given an example of poverty, “... since Jesus Christ, our Lord, had chosen to have poverty as His inseparable companion from his birth in a stable until His death on the Cross...”³⁶⁵.

In this matter of poverty, Leopoldina remained inflexible. She was not content to choose this for herself, or to contemplate it simply as part of Christ’s life, but she asked this of all those who expressed the intention to become a part of her Institute:

³⁶⁰G.S., 1811, f. 62.

³⁶¹G.S., 1811, f. 61.

³⁶²The passage that Leopoldina seems to have in mind among the words of St. Paul might be these: “... *you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God...* [cf. Col 3:3].

³⁶³G.S., 1813, f. 107.

³⁶⁴G.S., 1827, f. 119.

³⁶⁵*Original Constitutions*, Part II, c. IV, 1. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

...Jesus Christ, our Lord, states in His Gospel that blessed are the poor of spirit, because of them is the reign of heaven. The Sisters of the Holy Family will procure first of all this poverty that is so necessary for the acquisition of the Reign of Heaven and will love it even tenderly in its effects...³⁶⁶.

As can be noted, Leopoldina's ideal remains always very concrete. For her, beautiful expressions did not suffice, nor affections of the senses regarding it; she always needed concreteness, not only for what pertains to the observance of the divine law, "but even in the counsels of Jesus Christ"³⁶⁷.

In so far as poverty is concerned, Leopoldina is convinced that it does not consist only in not possessing, but much more in the interior disposition of indifference, detachment, despoilment of one's own will. Leopoldina never placed the question to herself whether it was better to possess or not. For her, there exists but one problem, that of God's glory. All the rest, even poverty, "is only relative to the greater glory of God."

Jesus Christ finally offered Leopoldina an example of perfect obedience. She remained confused regarding Jesus' precision in fulfilling every point of the laws and customs: He came into the world to establish new ones³⁶⁸. There is a particular moment in Christ's life that really struck Leopoldina, from the point of view of her obedience. An entire page of her **Spiritual Journal** did not suffice to contain all her reflections in this regard. Leopoldina was meditating on the words directed by Jesus to His Blessed Mother, when she finally found Him in the Temple, among the doctors. The episode was quite familiar to her, since she did not feel the need to write out the biblical passage. She only wrote: "... *Did you not know that I had to be about My Father's business..?*"³⁶⁹ Jesus' response interested Leopoldina, especially for the practical advantage she was able to derive from it. In fact, she proposed to repeat often to herself these words of Jesus:

...When my own self-love would like to be that which comes to dominate, when my own nature will seek its own comforts, when human respect dominates in my activities, I will look to see what are the Father's attitudes Who is in heaven and in conformity to that Rule, I will work, not wishing to have any other rule..³⁷⁰.

It should be brought out that Leopoldina found herself in a difficult situation for the practice of obedience. She is the Foundress of an Institute and therefore, did not have superiors whom she had to obey. Her discomfort in this regard is easy to note through the pages of her **Spiritual Journal**. Sometimes it seems as that she wanted to supply for this lack with a vow of obedience to her spiritual director³⁷¹. On other occasions, however, her conviction is that she should depend more directly on God, since this requires that she "be abandoned in Him and submitted to Him without limits"³⁷². In the end, Leopoldina discovers that she has an example in Christ, also in this regard. On Meditating on the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and reflecting for a long time on the significance of the words: *The old*

³⁶⁶*Original Constitutions*, Part II, c. IV, I. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

³⁶⁷*G.S.*, 1811, f. 65.

³⁶⁸*G.S.*, 1811, f. 62.

³⁶⁹*G.S.*, 1811, f. 61.

³⁷⁰*G.S.*, 1811, f. 61.

³⁷¹*G.S.*, 1811, f. 70-71; 1712, f. 96.

³⁷²*G.S.*, 1811, f. 71.

man carried the child, and the child governed the old man ³⁷³ - in her thought, she believed that this same thing could happen to her. In appearances, she was the one who had the responsibility of “directing this undertaking”, with regard to her companions, “but He really will be its Head” ³⁷⁴, as it happened to the aged Simeon. Christ served Leopoldina as her model to resolve the problem of her command, in the key of obedience.

However, Christ did not remain for Leopoldina as a simple model to be imitated down to the least details. His is a life that she was to bring into her own, a vibrant interiority to be engrafted into her, and thus, one’s entire life would not suffice to reach this ideal. Her **Spiritual Journal** closes with this incessant yearning: “... Meditate often the life of Jesus Christ, and study there His spirit to imitate His virtues” ³⁷⁵.

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2. Mary Most Holy

According to some authors, Mary has a place in the Christian spiritual life for whom there is no substitute. After Jesus Christ, Mary is a perfect model and full of attraction, given her functions of Mediatrix of Graces and as Mother of Jesus and of all human beings ³⁷⁶.

Leopoldina was profoundly rooted in this doctrine: from her childhood years she would have recourse to Mary to obtain help and protection³⁷⁷. In her **Spiritual Journal** there is often noted her recourse to the Blessed Mother, while there remains almost always implicit the desire to imitate the particular virtues of the Blessed Virgin. There is only one passage in which there appears clearly that Leopoldina found a model to imitate in Mary Most Holy. It is inserted among her reflections from her retreat in May of 1811. Leopoldina had meditated on the first miracle accomplished by Jesus in Cana of Galilee [Jn 2:1-11]. Stopping on this to analyze the Blessed Mother’s attitude, as the principal protagonist with Jesus, in the Gospel episode, she was struck above all by “the simple expression of the Blessed Virgin regarding the need of those newlyweds” ³⁷⁸. Leopoldina much admired Mary so that she concluded enthusiastically: “A Model of our prayers.”

However, Leopoldina did not dally over any one particular aspect of the Blessed Mother. In the passage cited above, she did not draw a practical teaching for herself. What drew her more was Mary’s interior attitude, a constant availability to the Father’s Will. In fact, she formulated these resolutions:

³⁷³G.S., 1811, f. 81.

³⁷⁴G.S., 1811, f. 81.

³⁷⁵G.S., 1831, f. 121.

³⁷⁶C. Marmion, *Ciristo nella vita dell’anima...*, pp. 514-554.

³⁷⁷After many years, Leopoldina remembered that, from her youth, she was much devoted to the Blessed Mother and recited her Office in her honor (cf. G.S., 1801, f. 26.).

³⁷⁸G.S., 1821, f. 63.

... to represent my own needs by means of Mary with simplicity and confidence with patience, waiting for that moment of the Lord, in the meantime doing that which he wills and that which He inspires us to do...³⁷⁹.

For Leopoldina, the Blessed Mother is a creature always and totally recollected in God, attentive to the almost imperceptible appeals of grace, to which she wanted to correspond with all the love of which she was capable. It is easy to note, in this perspective Leopoldina's spiritual ideal and also the justification of her life, tending always to discover that which the Lord wants of her. The first entries in her **Spiritual Journal** express efficaciously this desire:

...I feel that which I ought to do, and to put it with even greater truthfulness, I feel but without knowing with clarity in what it consists. I see that I place the impediments, with my wretchedness, to this knowledge and in the same time, to the carrying out of that which I would know...³⁸⁰.

The Blessed Mother on her part does not place obstacles to the action of grace, but rather presents to Leopoldina the model of the soul, who seeks all the means to make herself worthy. From the moment of her Immaculate Conception, until her very last breath, the life of the Blessed Mother was totally a response of love for the Lord. Leopoldina contemplated with commotion these interior dispositions and proposed for herself and for her daughters the imitation of Mary's precautions in order to conserve in her this first grace received and the attentive cooperation to all those that would follow later...³⁸¹.

Following along these reflections, Leopoldina explained in what Mary's "precautions" were, in order to guard the gifts of God. These can be summarized as "vigilance", in "retreat" from the world in "solitude" in which "one occupies herself totally with God", and in "the attention to all that can be pleasing to God and to make this acceptable in His eyes"³⁸². In these treatises, Leopoldina seems to have wanted to delineate her own spiritual physiognomy. It is not, therefore, one single virtue that attracts her admiration, but the entire life of the Madonna in its essence. It might almost be said that Leopoldina wished to be like the Blessed Mother, she wanted to imitate her above all in her relationship with God, since she consider Mary to be always directed toward Him.

Meditating on the Mystery of the Nativity of Christ, she confesses that she is more greatly struck by "Mary Most Holy", intent on the contemplation of her divine Son and more occupied with Him, than on what she personally was suffering³⁸³. Leopoldina would like to reach this spiritual goal, but sometimes her exterior occupations absorb her and disturb her. Then, she turned to the Blessed Mother and asked her to be herself "the principal Superior of the Institute", and to wish to watch over everything so that all might result in the glory of God³⁸⁴.

³⁷⁹G.S., 1811, f. 63.

³⁸⁰G.S., 1800, f. 1.

³⁸¹*Conferenze Spirituali*, f. 168.

³⁸²*Conferenze Sirituali*, f. 163.

³⁸³G.S., 1811, f. 60.

³⁸⁴G.S., 1811, f. 72.

Only once in her **Spiritual Journal** does Leopoldina zero in on a particular virtue of the Blessed Mother. It is a touch of hers that emphasizes her preferences regarding a characteristic virtue: humility. Meditating on the Mystery of the Incarnation and reflecting on the motives that had made the choice of God fall on the Virgin, Leopoldina adds:

...I admired in Mary Most Holy her humility, her hidden life, her recollection. I stopped to ponder this and I came to know the most sure disposition for the greater graces and favors of heaven...³⁸⁵.

However, the exterior attitude which, according to Leopoldina, assumes the entire life of the Mother of God is that expressed in her response to the Angel at the moment of the Annunciation: *Behold the Handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to Your word* [Lk 1:38]. In these words there arises a program of life for herself, and for her Sisters of the Holy Family. In the Spiritual Conferences and in her individual meetings with the Sisters, Leopoldina would repeat often to her daughters:

... know that this ejaculation ³⁸⁶ has been chosen by us not simply to have it on our lips and to say it, but rather to remind us with the very words of that which we have proposed to ourselves in embracing this Institute...³⁸⁷

It is a hard program, the one that Leopoldina mapped out for her daughters:

...to be poor of ourselves, despoiled of all self-will, affections, desire, that would tend more to one side rather than to another in the choice of the means to arrive at our end, but to leave to God the care of fulfilling in us His most lovable will, saying with all confidence: 'Behold your handmaid, let Your will be done in me..' ³⁸⁸.

This choice shows concretely what importance Leopoldina attributes to the model of perfection presented by the Madonna, and how such a model is but a means to unite one to the Will of God.

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3. St. Joseph

The figure of St. Joseph sustains an important role in the spiritual life of Mother Leopoldina Naudet. In her **Spiritual Journal** he is named for the first time in 1800, while Leopoldina is at Spoleto and is invoked under the title of "Advocate"³⁸⁹. It is difficult to establish with certainty how Leopoldina arrived at her knowledge of this saint. The reminiscences attribute to St. Joseph the merit of having orientated Leopoldina towards the

³⁸⁵G.S.,

³⁸⁶The actual words that form the ejaculation are a bit modified with respect to the Gospel text. Leopoldina had learned them in this form when she was still a member of the "Beloved of Jesus."

³⁸⁷*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 25.

³⁸⁸*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 25.

³⁸⁹G.S., 1800, f. 16.

Holy Family. It is said, in fact, that “in all her needs, the Holy Family was her refuge and she would have recourse almost always by means of her most beloved St. Joseph”³⁹⁰

In fact, in her **Spiritual Journal**, St. Joseph appears a long time before the “Holy Family”, even though with the passing of time he is always seen in his relationship to it. It can be noted that Leopoldina would have recourse to St. Joseph out of “sympathy”. Since she found in him those interior dispositions that she, too, would experience. In 1811, on the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, while she was immersed in her contemplation of the mystery, Leopoldina expresses herself in this manner:

... among the sentiments that I had was the pleasure that I experienced in those very ones that St. Joseph knew of, for the special devotion that I have toward this saint, He has made on me such an impression and affection of devotion thinking in recollection, admiration and other sentiments that this blessed saint had in contemplating Jesus ..³⁹¹

What struck Leopoldina in the life of St. Joseph is therefore his recollection and contemplation of Jesus, two characteristics which strongly illumine Mother Naudet’s spiritual physiognomy. Leopoldina had always loved silence and prayer. By nature, she was inclined toward these, as she herself confesses often in her **Spiritual Journal**, so much so as to be orientated toward an “order where silence is practiced”³⁹².

Even though she renounced this ideal, following the counsel of her spiritual director, there remained always in the depths of her soul a supreme yearning for the interior life and for recollection. The contemplation of St. Joseph awakened in her this hidden desire, especially when she found herself almost overwhelmed by exterior occupations and business matters, connected with the foundation of a new Institute. The saint presented to her, therefore, a model to copy faithfully: “the interior life of St. Joseph serves me greatly in order to gain also for myself some sentiments”³⁹³ These expressions leave no doubt about the function exercised by St. Joseph in the spiritual life of Mother Naudet. This is not a matter of devotion alone, but of an interior need which only with great difficulty could the manuals of piety suggest.

It is known, in this regard, that in the first half of the 19th century, there were numerous publications of works of a practical nature and collections of pious exercises in honor of St. Joseph³⁹⁴. One of the most popular of these books was available to Leopoldina. The copy that we still possess bears a handwritten note that is very significant:

...This was much used by the Servant of the Lord, Mother Leopoldina Naudet, Foundress and first Superior of the Institute of the Holy Family, and was kept by her in her room because of the frequent use that she made of it, as she was most devoted to this saint...³⁹⁵.

³⁹⁰M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 33.

³⁹¹G.S., 1811, f. 49.

³⁹²G.S., 1801, f. 29.

³⁹³G.S., 1811, f. 49.

³⁹⁴J. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus ...*, pp. 383-374.

³⁹⁵This is an old manual of piety, “furnished with examples”. The author is one of those few cited by DeGuibert, in his *Spiritualite de la Compagnie de Jesus...*, p. 324; A. Patrignani, *Il divoto di S. Giuseppe*, Florence 1803.

Leopoldina found, therefore, in St. Joseph a model and a protector for her interior life. In October of 1812, Leopoldina experienced a very strong inclination toward solitude, especially when her external duties were so terribly intense. At this time, in fact, she had to give her attention to the two communities living together at St. Joseph's Retreat: hers and that of Mother di Canossa³⁹⁶. Leopoldina came to understand that the Lord was calling her not so much to exterior solitude, but to something even more demanding, to an "interior solitude"³⁹⁷, which she was being called to in order to unite herself definitively with the Lord, in order to enjoy a more intimate familiarity with Him³⁹⁸.

When she reached these spiritual heights, Leopoldina felt that she was incapable of keeping for a long time the incalculable treasure of interior solitude. In the confident quest for some protector, to whom she could entrust the task of keeping from her spiritually and all dangers, her choice fell on St. Joseph:

... recommending myself later to St. Joseph and praying to him that as he was always my protector for the interior life, he might also be for this internal solitude which the Lord was asking of me. I thought that he could be my guardian and I beseeched him to exercise this office, since I am not able to accomplish this myself...³⁹⁹.

This apparently sudden choice on Leopoldina's part reached maturity in her meditation on the figure and on the functions of the saint, as these are presented by the gospel passages. The salient points that she took into consideration are above all, the Nativity, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the Flight into Egypt. In these episodes, Leopoldina discovered St. Joseph always abandoned to the father's will in perfect peace and tranquility of soul.

She would pause with predilection to contemplate his unchanging strength, even in the face of unexpected orders and challenging situations, as happened in their Flight into Egypt. Leopoldina could do no less than envy these interior dispositions and to ask for them insistently for herself:

... I experienced sentiments of good pleasure in my admiring the glorious St. Joseph and his peace, his continuous contemplation of Jesus and Mary...⁴⁰⁰.

Leopoldina had an original intuition regarding St. Joseph. one that she was not able to express earlier, since in the manuals of devotions there is always attributed to St. Joseph the role of "protector" of the interior life. This fact demonstrates anew how Leopoldina had profoundly radicated in her spirit her "sympathy" for St. Joseph, particularly from his contemplative aspect. This was already evident to her from the very beginnings of the foundation of the "Beloved of Jesus." The spiritual director at that time, was Fr. Nicholas

³⁹⁶From August 1812 to October of 1813, Madalene di Canossa was busy in Venice in negotiations to found one of her works, which would embrace like the one in Verona, the three branches of charitable works: that of visits to hospitals, the civil and moral education of youth, and the teaching of catechism in the parishes [T. Piccari, *Sola con Dio solo...*p. 243]

³⁹⁷G.S., 1812, f. 93.

³⁹⁸G.S., 1812, f. 93.

³⁹⁹G.S., 1812, f. 94.

⁴⁰⁰G.S., 1811, f. 61.

Paccanari, and he had sought to orient her for the new mission, proposing to her as the virtue to practice that of zeal⁴⁰¹.

Leopoldina was conscious of the necessity of acquiring such a virtue and applied herself to it with her commitment. In her resolutions for the year 1802, she insisted much on zeal and promised to herself to "exercise it with all her soul, and for her neighbor. She sought above all from the Lord that this zeal be discreet and prudent"⁴⁰². After nearly ten years, when she was by then directed toward the establishment of an Institute of mixed life, that is, both contemplative and active, she returned anew on the necessity of acquiring the virtue of zeal. What is surprising is the fact that Leopoldina returned to contemplate once more a model of this virtue in St. Joseph.

There is no doubt that St. Joseph was authentically endowed with zeal, but it is not in him a virtue that is that evident. Perhaps a more evident choice might be St. Francis Xavier, a saint well known to Leopoldina, and also under this aspect⁴⁰³. In St. Joseph she saw, together with his zeal, "diligence and total care according to the spirit of Jesus"⁴⁰⁴. Leopoldina was conquered by the delicacy of this zeal, which responds perfectly to the resolution she made in 1802, and therefore concludes: "I thought that he could serve as the norm of zeal for the glory of God"⁴⁰⁵.

Along-side her desire for interior solitude, there gradually developed in her that of the glory of God. However, St. Joseph lost nothing of his luster in his role for her as protector and model. Deepening her meditation on the Holy Family, to whom she decided to consecrate her new Institute, she thought that

... St. Joseph would help with more things. On the one hand this was because he was totally intent on the contemplation of Jesus and Mary, having them always with her in the occupations of the active life, and yet would not leave her ever in this contemplation, thus wondrously uniting both aspects. She thought that this is what she needed to imitate him. The other aspect that drew her was the fact that he was the head of the household...⁴⁰⁶.

From this time on, St. Joseph will be the exemplar for Leopoldina and the Sisters of the Holy Family. She would entrust to him "all the interests of her soul... and those of her Instate..."⁴⁰⁷.

In Leopoldina's spiritual life, however, there reigned supreme that one fundamental model, that of Jesus Christ. All the others are relative to Him and but a means to lead her to Christ. She affirms this herself, meditating on the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple: "... it seemed to me to see Jesus as the light, Who illumined these two saintly personalities"⁴⁰⁸:

⁴⁰¹G.S., 1802, f. 36.

⁴⁰²G.S., 1802, f. 36.

⁴⁰³Leopoldina on the principal feasts of the year, was accustomed to give spiritual conferences to the community, relative to the theme of the day. Among her conferences, there is one for the feast of St. Francis Xavir [cf. *Conferenze spirituali* ms. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.]

⁴⁰⁴G.S., 1811, f. 60.

⁴⁰⁵G.S., 1811, f. 60.

⁴⁰⁶G.S., 1811, f. 81.

⁴⁰⁷G.S., 1811, f. 51.

⁴⁰⁸G.S., 1811, f. 60.

Joseph and Mary. Leopoldina loved to ponder on her imitation of St. Joseph, because he was so close to Jesus Christ, during his earthly life, thus achieving a wondrous harmony between contemplation and action.

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4. St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556]

Leopoldina was conquered by the Ignatian spirituality while she was still at the Royal Court of Vienna. Her recollections, however, do not speak of this in an explicit manner. However, the fact that Leopoldina abandoned the idea of the Trappesines and then entered to be a member of the “Beloved of Jesus”, seems to imply this fact, while in the meantime, changes were being worked out in the depths of her soul. Furthermore, her first spiritual director, Fr. Nicholas von Diessbach was an ex-Jesuit and one fervent in the spirit of St. Ignatius. The spiritual influence exercised by St. Ignatius on Leopoldina is characterized under two aspects. The ascetical life of the saint became the individual model for Mother Naudet, while for her community, the Company of Jesus became the model for the Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

St. Ignatius appears from the very first pages of her **Spiritual Journal** and is characterized from the outset in his function as “advocate”⁴⁰⁹. This first reference, however, has only a relative importance, since it treats of a simple request of protection for a day of recollection. Towards 1820, however, the name of St. Ignatius returns anew, but in a much more significant context. It was inserted in fact in the Act of Abandonment that Mother Naudet composed “after fifteen months of continuous disturbance”⁴¹⁰, caused by the sudden interruption of her spiritual direction, on the part of Fr. Bertoni. This is a most important document in Leopoldina’s spiritual life. In this Act of Abandonment, Leopoldina exposes to God the state of her own soul, and therefore proposes to entrust herself completely to His divine will, certain of being helped in all occasions. At the end, she seals the document with these words:

...that which I ask of You through the merits of Mary Most Holy, of Your Mother to whom You can refuse nothing of what I ask You, and through those of St. Joseph, Your adoptive Father and of my advocate, St. Ignatius...⁴¹¹

The preference given to St Ignatius and the possessive pronoun “my” placed before his name, allow the reader to understand easily the relationship of spirituality that were had between this saint and Leopoldina. Another significant reference, with regard to the functions exercised by St. Ignatius in Leopoldina’s life, is given in one of Fr. Bertoni’s letters. At Mother Naudet’s request, he had consented that she write to him, “... treating of an isolated matter...provided that you, Mother, would not mind waiting a little for the answer”⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹G.S., 1800, f. 16.

⁴¹⁰G.S., 1820, f. 108.

⁴¹¹G.S., 1820, f. 108.

⁴¹²G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 221.

Leopoldina did not hesitate at all. She wrote immediately to Fr. Bertoni, exposing to him a certain question of hers regarding the norms to follow, when in prayer she felt herself overwhelmed, even to the point of the abandonment of the senses. Fr. Bertoni's response is clear and to the point: "...Since God is our end, it is necessary that by mind and intention we dwell in Him..."⁴¹³. However, Fr. Bertoni cautions Leopoldina not to abandon herself to prayer,

"...since it is proper to work in the serving of this God Who is so good, to help Him in His great endeavor... If you want an example, you will find him in St. Ignatius, whom you wish to imitate. He left the sweet solitude [of Manresa], in which he had enjoyed such sweet contacts with his Lord and the most sweet contemplation, for the more vibrant and efficacious action in the midst of this world..."⁴¹⁴.

Leopoldina's model is drawn perfectly along the lines of this response from Fr. Bertoni. Certainly he was aware of the spirituality and of the preferences of his former disciple and, even at a distance of some years ⁴¹⁵, he remembered how to remind her of those examples of holiness that had been proposed to her to imitate.

What the more greatly drew Leopoldina, in St. Ignatius' life, is the strong character, his sincere and intransigent decisions, the power of reflection and introspection, the sense of values and exact relationships between the end and the means, but most especially, his ardor in loving Christ and in serving Him with all perfection ⁴¹⁶.

In her Retreat of May 1816, Leopoldina contemplated:

"... Jesus in the house of Herod... so disdained and derided. [Leopoldina here experienced a great confusion because of her own pride. She recognizes that she is still full of defects, even though she feels that she would like to love Christ and to conform herself to Him. She sought, therefore, a model, to whom she could refer for practical and expeditious teachings] ...I then thought that up until now I had proceeded with involved means and that from now on it should not be thus. I fixed in my heart the example of St. Ignatius who precisely had struggled with pride and worldly honor; but very quickly to emend himself, he took on strong means, that very soon cut these defects off, and put them to death; hence, I propose to look out for what would by that which could destroy these in me the more securely and with great courage, I will put these into practice..." ⁴¹⁷.

As is seen, Leopoldina does not stop at some sterile contemplation, but places herself immediately into activity to better herself, following the example of St. Ignatius.

When she had to set to work to the compiling of her Constitutions for her own Institute, Leopoldina once more turned to St. Ignatius and took her inspiration from his Constitutions. Naturally, one could not simply copy, unchanged, the Ignatian model into a feminine community. Hence, she decided to copy literally the Rules and Constitutions of St. Ignatius and to make in them, in the form of annotations, those changes, or explanations that

⁴¹³G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 222.

⁴¹⁴G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 222.

⁴¹⁵Fr. Bertoni had interrupted his spiritual direction of her in 1819. When he responds to Mother Naudet here it is already in the year 1828.

⁴¹⁶These are the virtues emphasized in J. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite; de la Compagnie de Jesus...*, pp. 54-56.

⁴¹⁷**G.S.**, 1811, f. 65.

seem the most opportune or necessary...⁴¹⁸. Leopoldina did not hide her preferences for the Company of Jesus, even though she knew they were going through “very obscure times”⁴¹⁹, particularly as regards the Jesuits themselves. Her counselors, too, were well aware of the spirit that inspired her soul, to the extent that Fr. Bertoni could affirm with such assurance, in referring to Mother Naudet’s Institute that “if this undertaking is to please God - just as is the case with its good model: the Company of Jesus - it will have to know contradiction from its birth until its end...”⁴²⁰.

St. Ignatius is furthermore the model that Leopoldina proposed for her Sisters of the Holy Family. In her Spiritual Conferences she often made reference to the example of the saint, especially to inculcate in the Sisters the virtue of humility. There is to be noted her persistent repetition in this regard. In fact, she took up the same argument of humility in two conferences, as this was proposed by St. Ignatius, as he appeared in a vision attribute to St. Mary Magdaline de’ Pazzi ⁴²¹. Leopoldina never tired of repeating that “this virtue is like the oil in the lamps, and as oil fills the entire vessel, so humility ought to fill the entire religious person”⁴²².

There is noted here Leopoldina’s continual refrain on some characteristic virtues of her own spirituality. In addition to humility she saw in St. Ignatius another example of virtue and represents this with insistence with her daughters:

... the ordinary theme of St. Ignatius’ Domestic Exhortations was that of dashing one’s own will at the foot of the Cross of Christ, and of dominating there one’s passions and their effects...⁴²³.

Leopoldina penetrated into the essence of the Ignatian spirituality, especially when she explained in her Conferences that

...St. Ignatius wanted to make clear to the Novices on their first entrance into the house what step they were taking, by coming from the world to the Company. He wanted them to understand that it was not for some stable and permanent success, if they did not take this step with these two feet: that of the will and of judgment, ready to be subjected to the decisions of the one who took the place of Christ, and would govern them...⁴²⁴.

Leopoldina greatly admired this spirit and established it in her own Constitutions, for all that concerns obedience:

“... The Sisters of the Holy Family will seek the greater perfection in this virtue which will be their characteristic...”⁴²⁵

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⁴¹⁸*Memorie per l’Istituto*, by Leopoldina Naudet, in the form of manuscript, kept in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁴¹⁹G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 176.

⁴²⁰G. Stofella, *Epistolario...*, p. 122.

⁴²¹*Conferenze spirituali...*f. 7, 150.

⁴²²*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 150.

⁴²³*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 11.

⁴²⁴*Conferenze spirituali*, f.13.

⁴²⁵*Original Constitutions*, Part II, c. 6, l. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

5. St. John the Baptist

St. John the Baptist does not have the same importance as the other spiritual models, since he appears only once in her **Spiritual Journal** and there are no other testimonies that would confirm this particular attraction experienced by Mother Naudet. However, from the mere fact of his sudden appearance, even if it gives every evidence of being casual, is evidence of the strong impact the saint made on Leopoldina's spirituality. The encounter with the saint is indicated in her **Spiritual Journal**: "... Tuesday - today is the Fast of St. John the Baptist..."⁴²⁶. So, it is not of her own initiative that Leopoldina approached St. John the Baptist and that she meditates on his life. However, as soon as she penetrated into the spirit of the saint, she experienced that she was taken over by an internal inspiration: "... there took over me the spirit of mortification and penance which he exercised, although he was already sanctified even before being born..."⁴²⁷.

The austerity of the saint aroused Leopoldina's admiration, but did not move her to imitate it. There is another aspect, however, in the life of St. John the Baptist that attracted her more strongly, since she felt that she could not sustain the corporal austerities because of her own weak health:

...I pondered over another aspect of the life of the saint, and this I pondered. This makes one think of the greater mortification that he offered, in being so close to Jesus Christ and yet, remained in the desert..."⁴²⁸.

This physical distance from Jesus, which was willed and suffered, overwhelmed Leopoldina's spirit and made her think of this saint as the greatest of the martyrs⁴²⁹. One might hear in these reflections of Leopoldina a nostalgic recollection of her old preference for the cloistered life, which by this point she had abandoned forever. Now, her task was to set about the establishing of a new order of ideas; she was being called to keep accounts with the daily material concerns, for which she foresees that she does not have all the time desired to commit herself to prayer.

The example of St. John the Baptist shook her from these sentiments, which might have, perhaps, if allowed to run free excessively, led her to a kind of spiritual pride and led her to return to the reality of her new life:

"... I thought that I can take him as the model in that which pertains to the active life, that life which takes away the facility of remaining as much as one would like at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament..."⁴³⁰

As soon as she had completed the sacrifice of her natural inclinations, Leopoldina found herself elevated in spirit to a totally supernatural sphere. She came to understand that one can be united to Christ even in the midst of the most intense occupations, provided that

⁴²⁶G.S., 1800, f. 7.

⁴²⁷G.S., 1800, f. 7.

⁴²⁸G.S., 1800, f. 7.

⁴²⁹G.S., 1800, f. 7.

⁴³⁰G.S., 1800, f. 7.

one's intentions in every undertaking are directed to Him. In fact, even though St. John the Baptist remained far away from the Lord with his bodily presence he would always be united to Him in all that he did, and would have addressed all to Him"⁴³¹.

St. John the Baptist thus assisted Leopoldina to accomplish a spiritual process of fundamental importance. With the example of his life, he showed her that interior union with Christ is more real and perhaps even more meritorious than external union, which would be the fruit only of a natural inclination.

Analyzing her own sentiments, Leopoldina recognized that she had received from the Lord

...the grace of enjoying continuously His divine presence ... and of internal union with Him⁴³², but without ever having made use of it in order to keep herself united to him in her material occupations. There was in her a kind of fracture in her spiritual life, between prayer and activities. St. John the Baptist offered her a model of perfect unity and so, she concluded her reflections with a strong appeal: "... I have prayed to the saint to obtain for me the spirit of penance and to work always with the end of God in view and the perfection that this requires..."⁴³³.

On these sure foundations, Leopoldina would construct the edifice of her own personal holiness.

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⁴³¹G.S., 1800, f. 7.

⁴³²G.S., 1800, f. 7.

⁴³³G.S., 1800, f. 8.

IV. CHARACTERISTIC VIRTUES

Presentation:

Leopoldina's spiritual physiognomy is that of a person specially illumined by the virtues she lived. She was an individual who experienced in all its extension the gospel commitment. This was the situation of Mother Leopoldina Naudet. It is evident that she did not neglect any virtue. Holiness needs to shine forth in all the expressions of the spirit, even in the most insignificant, or hidden, in the eyes of other human beings. However, there are always some virtues that are more apparent, which constitute the proper character of each spirituality, and these can be considered as informing and inspiring all the others. In the case of Mother Naudet, the accent needs to be placed on the virtues of **Hope**, **Humility** and **Obedience**.

* * * * *

1. Hope

In Leopoldina's spirituality the virtue of hope is placed in a special light with respect to her other virtues. It must be understood in the beginning, however, that in her **Spiritual Journal** different words are used to indicate hope, words such as "confidence", "trust". Substantially, these indicate the same virtue, as contained in the concept of "hope", defined as a theological virtue infused by God into the will, through which we confide with certainty to obtain eternal life and the means necessary to arrive there with the help of God⁴³⁴. It might even be said that the term "hope" is more doctrinal, and consequently, more solemn, while the other words such as "confidence", "trust", are more common, more accessible. "Confidence" especially seems to indicate a form of loving familiarity with God. Leopoldina uses with some preference the term "confidence", substituting near the end of her writings with that of "abandonment", as the superior expression of "hope" and "confidence" in God.

The theme of confidence in God presents a particular interest in the spirituality of the early 19th century. It is known that the rise of this religious attitude can be determined by diverse factors. Above all, one might consider it as a reaction against the pessimism of Jansenism, in which the fundamental religious sentiment is expressed as a cry of anguish in the presence of divine justice⁴³⁵.

Under another aspect, "confidence" might be seen as the natural consequence of those "better days" which the Catholic religion enjoyed at the first beginnings of the 19th century. In fact appreciation for religion in those years is undeniable, particularly in the Catholic countries, this being determined to some extent by the current of Romanticism. There can be noted an authentic return towards Christianity on the part of society itself, which the rationalism of the 18th century had distanced⁴³⁶. In this connection a historian of spirituality

⁴³⁴A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione* ..., p. 584.

⁴³⁵G. DeBertier de Sauvigny, "La Restauration [1800-1848]", in: *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise...*, IV, p. 452.

⁴³⁶G. DeBertir de Sauvigny, "La Restauration [1800-1848]", in: *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise...*, IV, p. 444.

has written that “the young and romantic habit in which Chateaubriand vested the Church procured for this the favor and the sympathy of the grand public”⁴³⁷.

In this spiritual climate, it is licit to suppose that the hearts of Catholics were finally abandoned to a serene attitude of confidence in God, which still one more time - in their view - had intervened in behalf of her people, saving it from the scourge of the revolution.

Apart from these general considerations, it is possible to find in the personal story of Mother Naudet an important element to justify in her the primacy of this confidence in God over the other virtues, which are also likewise present in her spirituality.

What led me to this reflection is a characteristic attitude of Leopoldina which is particularly manifest in her love for retirement and silence. This desire for solitude is no indication of any misanthropy because it is always accompanied by the hope of finding God in it. Leopoldina seems to be one of those souls for whom the interior life is so rich that she may have experienced somewhat less the need of human relationships⁴³⁸. On the other hand, her family atmosphere had made Mother Naudet feel the lack of the more intimate affections.

Her mother died when she was only three, and she spent her childhood in the rather austere climate of the Convent of St. Fredian, in Florence, then in that of Soissons, France. Then, at the age of fourteen, her father died, and thus there remained to her in this world only her sister Luisa, with whom she did share the anguish of being completely orphaned. It is true that the Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany, took care of the two children and brought them into his own household as the instructresses of the last three archdukes. However, these splendors of the Imperial Court would never suffice to supply for the absence of family bonds.

Her quest for God, her desire to be trustingly abandoned to His infinite love can, therefore also be in Leopoldina something of a compensation of that which nature had taken from her. To strengthen this sentiment of detachment from creatures and of confidence in God alone contributed also the very unhappy episode of the condemnation of Fr. Paccanari and the consequent abolishment of the “Society of the Beloved of Jesus”, of which Leopoldina was the first superior. Her **Spiritual Journal** maintains a delicate silence on all this, but it is easy to imagine the interior drama Leopoldina experienced. From a passage in one letter, from an unknown source, noted in her **Spiritual Journal** in 1806, it becomes clear that Leopoldina came out of these troubling events with a profound sentiment of confidence in God. The anonymous correspondent in fact, writes:

...in your last letter I read many facts concerning your spirit, which give me consolation in seeing how you conquer in the combat of nature. The courage and superior strength which you receive is a manifest proof of the readiness with which you ought to offer this all to the Lord, to fulfill His will. Now, as I said to you, you will begin to know even more the necessity of having an entire confidence in God and to state more clearly, a genuine need to be blindly abandoned into His hands...⁴³⁹.

⁴³⁷A. Prandi, “Correnti e figure della spiritualità cattolica nei sec. XIX e XX”, in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia della umanità*, ... V, p. 98.

⁴³⁸A. Roldan, *Ascetica e psicologia...*, p. 131.

⁴³⁹G.S., 1806, f. 41.

Her personal psychology seems therefore, to be the most convincing to justify the determining presence of “confidence” in Leopoldina’s spirituality. Furthermore there may be noted in this virtue, as St. Thomas Aquinas indicates, an unbreakable bond with magnanimity, the virtue of the strong and of the people of faith⁴⁴⁰. Confidence thus seems to constitute a condition of virtue for the magnanimous and the robust hope with which the soul directs itself to the achievement of its ends. And when these purposes are identified with the realization of a spiritual endeavor, or with one’s own personal holiness, it is evident that there is need a great confidence to be stimulated into activity⁴⁴¹.

Leopoldina was most conscious of this virtue, as she could say of herself

...since confidence is to be my characteristic virtue, and also that of the Institute, there will have to be difficult situations and those in which matters might seem humanly impossible to handle, because this virtue must be exercised precisely in the area of what is arduous...⁴⁴².

Now, should one want to describe what place this virtue occupies the Leopoldina’s spiritual experience, one could make use solely of the historical, biographical and above all, the autobiographical data. The reminiscences hold that for Leopoldina

... hope in God was her entire comfort, and the more she saw herself abandoned by others, the more did confidence and hope increase in her, that not even untoward happenings, and even disgrace could never weaken her...⁴⁴³.

Beyond doubt there is attributed to this testimony only a relative value, keeping in mind that this could have been dictated by the affection and recognition of a daughter toward her own spiritual mother. Even more significant in this regard, is a passage from Leopoldina herself, in which, even though she was bringing out some negative aspects concerning herself, she places in evidence the great confidence she entertained toward the Lord. In order not to take away her entire and spontaneous freshness, it would be better to present her text here:

...I come, o Lord, to confess before You my ingratitude. I feel this with all the more force, because I have been inspired to this knowledge by Your goodness.

Yes, my God, the feeling that when I want to turn my spirit and my mind to You, to leave behind my misery and weakness, I find You in the depths of my heart, ready not only to listen to me and to pardon me, as the sinner which I am, but also to assure me that always, despite my ingratitude and negligence in serving You, You have been with me in the particular manner that makes me feel the most intimate union with You: I feel that I am received by You ever afresh in this confidence, with a sort of attraction that seems to me that You maintain and address toward me. more than anything I do in Your regard. This reopens my eyes toward myself, and makes me see the abyss of misery, which I am....⁴⁴⁴.

As can be seen, Leopoldina does not hide her own sense of wretchedness. At the same time, however, she shows that her relationship with God is based on a loving confidence.

⁴⁴⁰M. Viller, “Confiance”, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualite’*..., II, 2, col. 1405-1406.

⁴⁴¹M. Viller, “Confiance”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite’*, II, 2, col. 1404-1406.

⁴⁴²M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 9.

⁴⁴³S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 12.

⁴⁴⁴G.S., 1800, f. 14.

If one were to seek to discern where does Leopoldina's virtue of hope come from, the response would have to be that it is a "gratuitous gift" from God. On the other hand, it is likewise true that the more a soul progresses in the way of perfection, so much the more does it feel the need of cultivating the virtue of hope, intensifying, in so far as one can, confidence in God and in His holy assistance ⁴⁴⁵

From the very beginning of her religious life, Leopoldina realized that God willed from her acts of trust. In 1811, she sought to take up again this interior need of hers, shedding some light on the motives because of which she hoped:

... the Lord wants from me acts of trust and abandonment, which lead not so much to the general cognition of His omnipotence to liberate my soul from all evil, but gives almost an assurance in His goodness and love...⁴⁴⁶

Leopoldina was convinced that the first means of nourishing this hope consists in not opposing any obstacle to it: "...He wishes that there be no impediment to that confidence and trust that He wants of me..."⁴⁴⁷. This means, however, remained in a negative context and only indirectly did it favor the virtue itself. However, Leopoldina went to the very root of the problem. Analyzing her interior life, she noted that hope could never remain without the support of faith:

... It is the faith that enables me to move ahead, and the Lord gives me the grace to consider everything in him, and according to His plan. This is what for some time now He has been working in me, with ever greater frankness, because I trust all the more in God, and I fear creatures all the less...⁴⁴⁸.

Sustained by faith, Leopoldina's confidence was directed not to other human beings, but toward God.

The spiritual authors customarily distinguished in the virtue of hope, the primary material object, constituted by eternal beatitude; the formal object, which is God Himself, in so far as the Objective Beatitude of man, and the formal motive, which is the assisting omnipotence of the merciful God, Who is faithful to His promises ⁴⁴⁹.

In her **Spiritual Journal** she emphasized the more the last two aspects. God, for Leopoldina, is all, "the Abyss of all" ⁴⁵⁰, the "principal center of all" ⁴⁵¹, "Paradise" ⁴⁵², "the Omnipotent and the author of every good" ⁴⁵³, and "He Alone Who has the right to our affections" ⁴⁵⁴.

⁴⁴⁵A. RoyoMARin, *teologia della perfezione...*, p. 588.

⁴⁴⁶G.S., 1811, f. 67.

⁴⁴⁷G.S., 1811, f. 68.

⁴⁴⁸G.S., 1801, f. 27.

⁴⁴⁹A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione...*, p. 584.

⁴⁵⁰G.S., 1811, f. 74.

⁴⁵¹G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁴⁵²G.S., 1815, f. 110.

⁴⁵³G.S., 1811, f. 73.

⁴⁵⁴G.S., 1802, f. 38.

In her **Spiritual Journal**, there is placed in evidence the formal motive of hope. Above all, Leopoldina went out of her way to have understood that other human beings are absolutely extraneous to her confidence - rather, the more she experienced herself to be alone with God, so much the more did her trust increase. This phenomenon is verifiable also in relationship to those persons, who, humanly speaking, were the most suited to nourish in her the virtue of hope, as for example, Fr. Bertoni. In his Letters of spiritual direction, he returns with special predilection on the theme of abandonment and of confidence in God: this he sought to suggest also in others⁴⁵⁵.

Although she was most grateful toward her spiritual director, Leopoldina understood that he was but an “external help”, while it is God Who acts in the depths of one’s soul. Therefore, whenever she found herself momentarily deprived of the assistance of her spiritual guide, she did not lose heart. God Himself seemed to comfort her: “... This time you are deprived of help; I will be the One to help you...”⁴⁵⁶. Leopoldina understood this teaching of the Lord and full of enthusiasm, exclaimed:

... these words gave me strong trust and hope and it seemed to me that my heart was opening up, even enjoying the lack of external help...”⁴⁵⁷

On another occasion, she would note:

... I experienced great trust in God for that which I had to take up, supporting myself only on Him, with even sensible consolation that I did not have anyone else...⁴⁵⁸.

Keeping in mind that Leopoldina confided solely in God, it can be shown with a certain facility that the formal motive of her hope rested above all on God’s merciful omnipotence and His fidelity to His promises. In 1808, she writes:

... remember, o Lord, the promises that I have heard often which You made within my heart, that You will be that You will be with me in all that You want of me, that You will help me, and that I should not fear...⁴⁵⁹.

Almost in every entry in her **Spiritual Journal**, there returns this concept of her confidence on God. Sometimes Leopoldina expresses her trust in the Blessed Mother, or in St. Joseph⁴⁶⁰ - but, it is above all, in God in Whom she trusts; in His infinite goodness and mercy. On one occasion she writes, “... humiliate me and trust in the goodness and mercy of God...”⁴⁶¹. In another passage, there is noted: “...I trusted in divine help and mercy...”⁴⁶². And again: “... I experienced myself responding by the Lord that I should entrust myself to His mercy, from Whom I have had so many proofs...”⁴⁶³.

⁴⁵⁵G. Florio, *Lo spirito del Venerabile D. Gaspare Bertoni...*, p. 58.

⁴⁵⁶G.S., 1813, f. 101.

⁴⁵⁷G.S., 1813, f.101.

⁴⁵⁸G.S., 1811, f. 82.

⁴⁵⁹G.S., 1800, f. 13.

⁴⁶⁰G.S., 1820, f. 108.

⁴⁶¹G.S., 1811, f. 66.

⁴⁶²G.S., 1811, f. 65.

⁴⁶³G.S., 1811, f. 47.

It is interesting further to see in what circumstances Leopoldina would manifest to God this sentiment of confidence. The response comes always in her **Spiritual Journal**: "... Trust in God both as regards my spirit, as also my bodily strength..."⁴⁶⁴. Hers was a total, complete confidence into the hands of God. But, it is especially in her spiritual progress that Leopoldina expressed an unlimited confidence in God's mercy. When she would note sensibly within herself the presence of God, she did not become presumptuous, or proud. Precisely at such times, she would have recourse to the mercy of God, as though not to be afraid of the spiritual heights that she had attained. A passage from her **Spiritual Journal** in 1811 expresses with surprising clarity Leopoldina's attitude:

"...Setting myself to pray one day, it seemed to me that I heard the Lord say that He wanted that we should be like two intimate friends, that one would think for the other; that He would think of all that I would need, and that I must concern myself solely about Him, for the sole motive of His glory and to give Him pleasure. I experienced joy at these words and intimate abandonment in God. In the greater part of the prayer that I offered, these sentiments occupied me and it seemed to me that I was standing in the presence of God as something wonderful ... I stand there then, with recognition of all that I am, but with trust that His omnipotence could make use of my person to accomplish great things in His service..."⁴⁶⁵.

Confidence is the bridge between Leopoldina and God, which became all the more necessary the more she proceeded toward union with God.

The spiritual authors say that the most important characteristic of hope, in proficient souls, is precisely that of advancing with great trust in the ways of union with God⁴⁶⁶. This pathway is not always easy. Leopoldina noted this herself many times, since she was not able to emphasize solely the contemplative side of her life. Her exterior occupations often made claims on her presence as an active and vigilant superior. This situation seemed to impede her from the full repose "in God" and "that which He wanted in such an absolute manner"⁴⁶⁷, that is, the complete possessions of her powers. Leopoldina shows herself to be here, extremely concrete: to act, she needs "some of her own potencies". However, the Lord assures her that "to live and advance in her enterprise, after having totally abandoned herself to Him, without any more making use of her own abilities, this demands great courage, faith, and trust in Him"⁴⁶⁸. Leopoldina was followed step by step by the mercy of God, in the path that she had to accomplish in order to arrive at the complete abandonment of herself into infinite love. In 1811, she wrote:

... in my prayer this morning the Lord drew me to Himself with sentiments of confidence, having me understand that in that which He wants from me to carry out, this is the sentiment which is the most necessary for me and that I have nothing to fear: only the loss of this trust and confidence in Him...⁴⁶⁹.

The invitation of the Lord is always such so that Leopoldina was moved to say: "...He leads me to abandon myself all the more to Him and to remain unmovable in His hands..."⁴⁷⁰.

⁴⁶⁴G.S., 1811, f. 80.

⁴⁶⁵G.S., 1811, f. 70.

⁴⁶⁶A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione...*, p. 589.

⁴⁶⁷G.S., 1811, f. 70.

⁴⁶⁸G.S., 1811, f. 50.

⁴⁶⁹G.S., 1811, f. 78.

⁴⁷⁰G.S., 1813, f. 100.

Another aspect of Leopoldina's confidence is in regard to her Institute. Here, too, her **Spiritual Journal** becomes our ally:

... this confidence I experienced in a particular manner concerning the endeavor that the Lord has placed into my hands for which it seems to me that I ought to be so sure that I should not feel anything and that even should the most contrary event happen, keeping myself riveted on God, I will overcome all...⁴⁷¹

When Leopoldina jotted these lines there did not seem to be any probability that she could ever withdraw with her companions to found an Institute different from that of Mother di Canossa. The spiritual edifice, however, was well drawn out in her heart. She had laid solid foundations, following her interior aspirations. When she had scarcely begun the composition of her Constitutions, Leopoldina expressed herself in these terms:

... it seemed to me that the Lord did not wish that temporal interests should enter into this, as it seemed to me that He was to take care of these, as the Gospel states ⁴⁷², that is, to handle these things as something added on, but He does not will that I should handle them myself but should ask Him. And it seemed to me that there is a difference whenever He wished me to recommend these to Him, and therefore, He admonished me to trust and to abandon myself without wasting a thought...⁴⁷³.

The essential for her, consists in the spiritual structure of the work and in the formation of its members. Of all the rest, the Lord Himself would take care. In fact, in 1812, she wrote:

...it seemed to me that He was saying to me that such should be my trust in Him regarding this Institute that even in those occasions where I could not overcome the obstacles, that I should hope that He would take care of it all, even performing miracles...⁴⁷⁴.

Leopoldina's confidence regarding the Institute still draws wonder, in that it was always so spontaneous and so absolute, without her failing in any way, by inertia. In her retreat of March 1813, Leopoldina meditated on "The End of Man", and, in particular, "of the Sister". She comprehended that she had been chosen by God to establish a work of such great glory for Him. This reflection, however, did not overwhelm her, as might be expected, due to her profound humility. She simply recognized that the Lord, in choosing her, had not paid attention to her "enormous faults", and contemporaneously opened her heart to an even greater trust, since the Lord Himself seemed to reassure her: "... I will do all, you look only toward Me, so that you will always take action following My Will" ⁴⁷⁵.

The ascetical effort that Leopoldina applied for the sake of realizing her spiritual edifice, which she would eventually call the "Institute of the Holy Family", is right here, summarized in this command from the Lord. Leopoldina was cognizant of her own responsibility before her companions, and placed at their disposition her whole self, and often:

⁴⁷¹G.S., 1813, f. 100.

⁴⁷²The Gospel passage to which Leopoldina refers seems to be Mt 6:33: "*Set your hearts on the kingdom first and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well...*"

⁴⁷³G.S., 1811, f. 51.

⁴⁷⁴G.S., 1812, f. 85.

⁴⁷⁵G.S., 1813, f. 101.

... reminded them that, as St. Ignatius desired, that all would accomplish whatever pertained to the service of God, His glory and the salvation of one's neighbors, as though everything depended on us...⁴⁷⁶.

The motivating power behind such boldness is unveiled in an expression of hers noted in her **Spiritual Journal**:

...I practiced supreme trust in God, that would be necessary in order to make me conform to whatever the need was, since all of this is His undertaking ...⁴⁷⁷.

This sentiment of confidence, guarded and nourished, produced in Leopoldina marvelous effects, among which were interior peace and security. The spiritual authors, too, are in agreement in asserting that in perfect souls, hope in God generates inalterable peace and serenity, and nothing can disturb the calm of their spirit ⁴⁷⁸In the premise to her Act of Abandonment composed in 1820, Leopoldina expressed herself this way: "... this confidence that has rendered me in very many encounters so quiet and tranquil in the midst of tribulations... " ⁴⁷⁹. And in another place: "...I found myself in an internal disposition of peace and trust..."⁴⁸⁰. Not content in having in herself these dispositions, she sought to cultivate them among her daughters. Suggesting to them that, after having done on our part all that is possible, were sought: to commit ourselves to Him with quiet, as though we had nothing to do, saying that it is more fitting for the gentiles to have to change and be disturbed for that which happens⁴⁸¹.

Furthermore, confidence favored in Leopoldina the virtue of humility. Then, she abandoned herself in God, the more did she recognize her own nothingness and this increased her trust::

...these sentiments of confidence and trust in the Lord followed me in all my undertakings and in the measure that this increased, there developed also a genuine sentiment regarding myself, of my own misery and lack of ability and it seemed to me that one helped the other...⁴⁸².

It is interesting to note how "confidence" and "humility" form the perfect pair especially in relation to mystical prayer, when the soul is found elevated to a supernatural and mysterious life. It is precisely in these cases, that Leopoldina allowed herself to be transported with more vehemence of sentiments of humility and trust, so much so that it is not possible to discern which of the true was predominant in her. Some passages from her **Spiritual Journal** of 1812 shed light with sufficient clarity this aspect of Leopoldina's spirituality:

...in prayer after lunch, making themselves stronger and render these sentiments more vivid [i.e., of trust and total abandonment] expressed about oneself, there was united a great desire of total self - annihilation and self-emptying...⁴⁸³.

⁴⁷⁶S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 12.

⁴⁷⁷G.S., 1813, f. 102.

⁴⁷⁸A. Royo Marin, *Teologia ...*, p. 590

⁴⁷⁹G.S., 1820, f. 108.

⁴⁸⁰G.S., 1801, f. 31.

⁴⁸¹S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f.12.

⁴⁸²G.S., 1813, f. 85.

At this point, one might think that the conquest of confidence could not have cost Leopoldina much, since she always found in it consolation and help in difficulties. There is demonstrated rather that such virtue required from her an ascetical struggle that was not indifferent. It would suffice to ponder a confession of hers recorded in her **Spiritual Journal** to realize this:

...my spirit was brought into uniformity and my will felt itself moved to embrace whatever trial the Lord might ask of me with all confidence in Him, against every repugnance of my own nature...⁴⁸⁴

More than once Leopoldina accused herself of having failed in confidence: "... on that day, the trust that I have in the Lord was not as strong.." ⁴⁸⁵. Although only superficial, her disturbance is nonetheless, quite evident. She confesses it herself: "...I felt in the center of my soul the most firm trust and hope, but was oppressed on the surface, and little relief was I able to draw.." ⁴⁸⁶. She even came to the point of admitting: "... it seemed to me that I was leaving that way of charity and love in God that He wills that I should follow..." ⁴⁸⁷.

The indirect cause of this uncertainty is supplied by her spiritual director, who had to give up her spiritual direction⁴⁸⁸. The upsetment, however, did not consist for her in finding herself deprived of a spiritual guide to whom she owed a huge debt of gratitude, as rather in feeling herself deceived by the interior voice, that had been assuring to her during the long assistance offered to her by Fr. Bertoni. Should she accede to the falsity of that voice, she would then have to think that all of her interior illustrations were deceptive, and it was according to these that she always regulated herself. Thus, it can be noted, the reason for her suffering was very deep, so much so that it drew from her this anguished comment: "... O Lord, if those words which You said to me at that time are not to be verified, should I, then, fear deception of all the other things that You have led me to understand?"⁴⁸⁹.

One can properly conclude, then, that it was precisely what she thought were what she "lacked" that rendered stable in her, her trust in the Lord and to transform this into a sentiment of heroic abandonment. To convalidate this affirmation it seems most opportune to offer here a page from her **Spiritual Journal**, in which Leopoldina unwittingly offers an "apologia" for herself and her confidence in God: her Act of Abandonment:

... As I am confused, o my Lord, after being far from that abandonment in You which You wish for me, I ask Your pardon a thousand times; and from this moment, I abandon all of my interests into Your hands, entrusting myself entirely to Your infinite goodness, sure that You have greater care and concern for me and for those matters You have entrusted to me, than anything that I could have of myself. And so, from now on, I want to live without anguish and fears, to do all that I can for You, to serve you, and to make You loved and served by others, more than I would be able to achieve alone. I wish to keep before my mind that of working for Your glory and in Your holy service, and You think of me. I need a guide for

⁴⁸³G.S., 1812, f. 86.

⁴⁸⁴G.S., 1811, f. 72.

⁴⁸⁵G.S., 1812, f. 96.

⁴⁸⁶G.S., 1812, f. 96.

⁴⁸⁷G.S., 1812, f. 98.

⁴⁸⁸Fr. Bertoni temporarily suspended the spiritual direction of Mother Naudet in 1812, due to a very serious illness. In 1819, however, he discontinued definitively her direction, since it was incompatible with the Constitutions of the Institute founded by him.

⁴⁸⁹G.S., 1812, f. 96.

myself, and for this undertaking. Think of us, my Love; I abandon to You everything. You can, You know, and You will, and this suffices for me to be sure of what You will do. Give me your holy love, zeal for Your glory and increase always more in me my trust in You; that which I ask of You through the merits of Mary Most Holy, of your Mother to whom You can refuse nothing of what she asks You. and for those of St. Joseph, your adoptive Father, and of my advocate, St. Ignatius...⁴⁹⁰.

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2. Humility

The virtue of humility is one of the most evident in Mother Leopoldina's spirituality. From her spiritual writings it is possible to see how this virtue is not only the result of the profound knowledge of her own being, in which she thinks of herself as a "nothing" in the presence of God who is for her "everything." But, humility in her is also a consequence of her contemplation of Christ, humiliated and disdained. Writing to her daughters, Leopoldina expresses her experience on humility with great clarity:

..This last mentioned, which seems so difficult to acquire, is the fruit of self-knowledge Ask it of God and with this light, you will find it more easily...⁴⁹¹

The spiritual authors maintain that humility is above all light, knowledge and truth⁴⁹². According to St. Bernard, who resumes St. Augustine's thought, humility is truth and it follows out from the sincere and real knowledge of ourselves, of that which we are, and of that little that we are worth in ourselves⁴⁹³. Leopoldina moved in this direction. Humility in her view, is something that is profoundly interior. In this regard, it is very significant to ponder a passage of her Spiritual Conferences in which she recommends to her daughters:

...remind yourselves often of this: one is worth just as much as she stands before God, and nothing more. Ponder well these words, meditating on them attentively, and should there ever come the thought of raising yourselves up, or of applauding something you may have done that seems good, repeat these words to yourselves ... You are what God sees you to be, and nothing more...⁴⁹⁴

According to Leopoldina, even our better actions are always a bit infected with our own wretchedness, in which we share. We are even capable of obscuring the lights that God sends to us, since we are only "poverty and lacking all good"⁴⁹⁵.

At first sight it would seem that the reader might almost be tempted to accuse Leopoldina of pessimism, because in reality she did have a rather negative perception of herself. She was much inclined to fathom more deeply into her own nothingness and to recognize her own wretchedness of which she is made up, being all the more convinced that "the genuine and only humility... is based on the knowledge of ourselves and it grows and

⁴⁹⁰G.S., 1820, f. 108.

⁴⁹¹Letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet to the "Beloved" of Mantua, March 12, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁴⁹²A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione...*, p. 733.

⁴⁹³P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, II, p. 37.

⁴⁹⁴*Conferene spirituali* f.151.

⁴⁹⁵Letter of Mother Naudet to the "Beloved" of Mantua, March 12, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

intensifies in the measure that we enter more minutely into the depths of this self-knowledge”⁴⁹⁶. Penetrated herself by such knowledge, Leopoldina did not fold in on herself to weep for her own wretchedness, even though she did know some suffering because of her own lowly state. However, she would immediately turn toward God in Whom she found all perfection

It is a continuing entering into one’s own nothingness, for the purpose then of rising up to God, always with greater intensity and clarity. The motive, then, for which Leopoldina indulged in the consideration of her own abysmal poverty as a created being is not pessimism, but the joy of experiencing her extreme need for God. In one passage of her **Spiritual Journal**, in fact, she expresses herself thus:

...It seemed to me that I am as nothing afloat in that Everything and I desired all the more to remain there to find Him Who alone is. I consoled myself in not being because He is Everything, and in not having anything, because He has all....⁴⁹⁷.

And in a letter she wrote to Fr. Rozaven:

...that which I feel the most is a sentiment of rejoicing in God, of that which is in Him, His infinite perfections, and I love the humiliation in which I find myself before Him. It pleases me to be nothing, because He is everything..⁴⁹⁸

Expressions such as these dissipate every question of pessimism and demonstrate that Leopoldina’s humility does not derive from the virtue of temperance, as some authors would hold⁴⁹⁹. It would seem rather that hers was a humility born of an intimate relationship with the theological virtues, with a certain character of worship and veneration of God, so that it would seem closer to the virtue of religion⁵⁰⁰. However, contemporary authors, while affirming the close bond existing between the virtue of humility and that of religion, explain that while in “religion” reverential fear is expressed as an act of cult and of recognition toward God, whereas in the virtue of humility the soul inclines before the greatness of God, in an attitude of total submission⁵⁰¹.

In Leopoldina, the concept of “separation” is very clear. According to St. Thomas, in order to know oneself well, it is necessary to know how to distinguish that which belongs to God and that which belongs to us: all the good comes from God and pertains solely to Him, while the evil is that which is defective, and this proceeds from the human being, and therefore it is our own property⁵⁰². Leopoldina, being unable to deny the graces received from the Lord, from her infancy, avoids falling into pride and the confusion of the truth, by making a neat separation in her own being. This is not the accomplishment of a single day, as is evident. At the beginning of her consecration to God, in 1801, in examining herself on humility, had to confess:

⁴⁹⁶*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 185.

⁴⁹⁷*G.S.*, 1811, f. 74.

⁴⁹⁸Copy of a letter written in French to Fr. Rozaven, without date. Through some certain indications it might be placed around the year 1828. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁴⁹⁹A. Royo Marín, *Teologia della perfezione* ..., p. 733.

⁵⁰⁰G. Marmion, *Cristo ideale del monaco*..., pp.214-219.

⁵⁰¹P. Adnes, “Humilite”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*..., VII, col. 1167.

⁵⁰²A. Tanquary, *Compendio di teologia ascetica e mistica*, p. 694.

...1. -Far from loving situations of disgrace, it displeases me if they do not have, or demonstrate they do not have, that esteem of me that I desire, deceiving and rather even desiring to deceive, since I expect an esteem from others regarding myself that I do not have of myself, because I know that I am unworthy of them.

2. - I hide my defects as much as I can, if I should ever commit them in front of others. This displeases me very much, and concerning all this I ask pardon regarding my commitment, that it makes no difference that my companions should see that I have so many defects, and thus I deprive myself of the humiliation that I could have.

3. - Not doing anything really that is good, I do not have the occasion to make this known, and have too much self love to speak of this should accomplish it. But, when I am accused of something, that I begin with these considerations, and I talk and speak about myself to make excuses and to make it clearly known that I am innocent, so much so that when this moment has passed, examining myself, which I do, I have to be embarrassed...⁵⁰³

However, after the experience of many years of religious life, she could not manifest such sentiments any more. A passage from her **Spiritual Journal** of 1827 presents us with a soul well established in humility, and which knows itself in a profound manner. Such knowledge, however, as the spiritual authors state⁵⁰⁴, is not of a psychological nature, introspective and reflective of oneself. It is above all a certainty in the light of faith that derives from God. Leopoldina expresses this will in her personal struggles::

... I see a total separation between that which the Lord through His mercy works in me, and that which I do, which is evil. From this perspective I never depart, but what is more it is a very clear truth which I know more by faith, than through humility. I am persuaded that from one moment to another I am just dull, if the Lord does not come to my assistance; but also this conviction is through a faith that I really can no longer call that, because it is a clear insight; and I have experienced this many times.

I am afraid of some self-satisfaction for something good that I might do, sure that, since it is not mine, the Lord in an instant could raise me up through His holy grace, and then there is nothing that I can accomplish of myself. All this I can touch by hand, and therefore it does seem to me to be the knowledge of experience which is according to the faith. I love to speak about my misery and wretchedness. It seems to me that I would take pleasure that all that others would see in me would be the same that I see, provided that this was the truth and that glory be rendered to God.

I really suffer if I hear that just for having attended to the task that the Lord has deigned to entrust to me, that others would bestow some praise on me. I would wish, that in whatever I do, all might see that the Lord does it all Himself; and it seems to me that I would enjoy more if all would understand that I am capable of nothing. I am like a rusty old machine, that does not really work unless the Lord moves it, and even then quite badly at best, because it resists, and is good for nothing in itself. And it is the mercy of this good Lord if he does not throw it all into the fire. It is not, though, as happens in the truly humble, that I love to be disdained. No; most likely that would never please me, but it is because I rejoice that God be glorified and thus it seems to me that He is more greatly praised when they would understand these above noted truths...⁵⁰⁵.

It should be clarified that for Leopoldina, as for all of Christian piety⁵⁰⁶, the knowledge, even if it is that which comes “from the first truth, which is God”⁵⁰⁷, this is not the only way to arrive at humility. The contemplation of Christ, humiliated and disdained, is

⁵⁰³G.S., 1801, f. 20.

⁵⁰⁴P. Adnes, “Humilite”, in : *Dictionnaire de spiritualite’...*, VII, cl. 1185.

⁵⁰⁵G.S., 1827, f. 120.

⁵⁰⁶P. Adnes, “Humilite”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite’...*, VII, col. 1185.

⁵⁰⁷G.S., 1811, f. 72.

not yet the most perfect path. From the contemplation, in fact, there arises the desire for imitation, of conformity, of participation, through which, according to the spiritual authors, this form of humility is the most perfect, because it springs from love ⁵⁰⁸.

It would suffice to select from various passages, here and there, in her **Spiritual Journal** to discover this need of Leopoldina. In 1811, she wrote:

...The Lord inspired me with sentiments of fervor, and a desire to continue attentively investigating that which He did before beginning His active life, to be able to follow in His footsteps. I attached myself to Him more closely.. In contemplating, I admired His humility. I besought Him to defend in Me this virtue, of which I am lacking...⁵⁰⁹.

In 1813, there is again the contemplation of the Incarnate word that moved her to desire humility:

... I made the second meditation on the Incarnation. I made acts of gratitude toward the Lord and of desire of humility seeing the abasement of a God, and my pride brought about my own confusion...⁵¹⁰.

In 1827, she accused herself of not applying herself very much in her meditation of the humility of Jesus both in His Incarnation and Nativity, but immediately comprehended that the cause could have been in her reading the meditation, while she experienced more recollection when “she pondered again” that which she had meditated on ⁵¹¹.

It is important to bring out that Leopoldina’s humility is always accompanied by a great confidence in God. There can be no doubt under this aspect, since she herself clarifies this issue, when speaking to her daughters:

... This thought and sentiment of mine is that there can be no true humility unless it is accompanied by confidence, nor any true and solid confidence without humility, so that I have perfection in one of these virtues depend on the other. It seems to me that I would always be lacking something in the one unless it has the other as its companion...⁵¹².

The reader finds frequently in Leopoldina’s writing the words “miserable, wretched”, directed toward herself. However, along-side this always is her confident recourse to God: “... the good God Who is rich in mercy, abounds in this continually in my regard, who nonetheless is wretched..” ⁵¹³. When the Lord bestowed on her His graces, especially with regard to the mystical life, Leopoldina’s attitude is always the same: “...I humbled myself and I allowed myself to form acts of love towards Him...⁵¹⁴. On each occasion, my spirit “found itself humble before God, but full of confidence ...” ⁵¹⁵.

Leopoldina’s humility assumes another character whenever it is in relationship with fraternal charity. It seems that there cannot exist genuine common life without humility. For this, she recommended to her daughters:

⁵⁰⁸P. Adnes, “Humilite”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite...*, VII, col. 1185.

⁵⁰⁹G.S., 1811, f. 62.

⁵¹⁰G.S., 1813, f. 104.

⁵¹¹G.S., 1827, f. 120.

⁵¹²*Conferenze spirituali*, f. 185.

⁵¹³Copy of her letter to Fr. Rozaven, 1818. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

⁵¹⁴G.S., 1813, f. 103.

⁵¹⁵G.S., 1811, f. 72.

... If you have humility and consider each of yourselves as the last of all, then it will be that charity will be the better observed, because then there will be no contention, but each of you will lower herself before the others, and you will not have that preoccupation that your view should prevail over that of your companion. Ultimately, by means of this you will make your union a genuine paradise where each one will find herself content and have nothing to regret regarding the superiority that someone else might want to have over you, but there will be true union and charity...⁵¹⁶

This does not imply that Leopoldina was content in nourishing these sentiments in others. From her **Spiritual Journal** it is noted that she herself was the first to have lived and suffered these truths. When, in fact, she humbled herself as not even being capable of knowing in any depth her own wretchedness, there sprang to life spontaneously her need of loving and esteeming her companions, because she saw that “they are much further advanced before the Lord.”⁵¹⁷ For Leopoldina, mutual esteem was facilitated by self-knowledge, in that when one sees her own wretchedness, spontaneously there could be noted the virtue of others, and they would come to be esteemed⁵¹⁸.

The indications of humility on the part of Leopoldina herself are so frequent and natural that one might legitimately ask how is it that she could reach such a degree of that virtue. She humbled herself in any manifestations of esteem that she might receive from others⁵¹⁹; in adversities⁵²⁰; in recognizing her own defects⁵²¹. This she would do before her companions, to whom, :”...I say...Pray to the Lord for me, poor and wretched that I am, so that ... I may not be like those mountains which received immediately from heaven the dew, but which then send it to the valleys and while these flourish and are more healthy, the mountains remain arid and dry...”⁵²².

However, Leopoldina humbled herself primarily before God. There cannot be denied her primacy in her relationship with God, for that which pertains to humility. On the other hand, the spiritual authors affirm that “humility is a virtue that derives from temperance, which is inclined to restrain the disordered appetite of one’s own excellence giving us the just knowledge of our own smallness and wretchedness, principally in our relationship to God”⁵²³. According to St. Thomas, this “relationship to God” constitutes the most profound root of humility⁵²⁴.

For Leopoldina, the virtue of humility, conceived in this way, is a genuine necessity, since “all that is done is nothing if there is not humility in it”⁵²⁵. There can be no other virtue if humility is absent, as this serves as a kind of custodian for all the others. And to explain

⁵¹⁶Letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet to the “Beloved” of Mantua, January 28, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵¹⁷G.S., 1800, f. 1.

⁵¹⁸Letter of Mother Naudet to the “Beloved” of Mantua. January 28, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵¹⁹Letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet to the “Beloved” of Mantua. March 12, 1808.

⁵²⁰G.S., 1820, f. 118.

⁵²¹G.S., 1802., f. 36.

⁵²²Letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet to the “Beloved” of Mantua, March 12, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵²³A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione ...*, p. 733.

⁵²⁴C. Marmion, *Cristo ideale del monaco...*, p.223.

⁵²⁵G.S., 1801, f. 20.

this concept, Leopoldina offers a significant similitude. She says that if in a soul there were present even all the other virtues, but without humility,

... it would be the same as if in a palace there were jewels and precious objects but there was lacking the door to close them in and to keep them. Then naturally they would be in constant danger of being stolen. Say the same about a soul that does not have humility as the guardian.⁵²⁶

There is noted in Leopoldina also that Ignatian concept of “foundation” regarding the virtue of humility. In his view, in fact, anyone who would want to tend toward a great perfection and to advance in the way of holiness would have to go very deep along the path of humility which is the genuine ‘foundation’ without which one would fall at the least wind⁵²⁷.

To comprehend what account Leopoldina made of the virtue of humility, it would be necessary to reflect on the spirit of the Institute founded by her. In 1811, while in prayer, the Lord illuminated her regarding the spirit of the Institute. Leopoldina noted:

... He inspired me moreover with the desires to establish all with deep roots of humility and it seemed to me that to these needed to be added an intellectual insight into the depths of humility, over which such a great edifice would have to be planted, like the ideal of this Institute, that I desired with supreme ardor that it be great before God and as little as is possible before the eyes of other human beings...⁵²⁸

From this, it may be seen how humility is not merely something personal to Leopoldina, but it is a community need, collective: the Institute, as such, had to be based on the foundation of humility. Already in 1808, she cultivated in her heart this desire of humility. Writing to her daughters, she remarked:

...On this proposal of humility, I will give you a reflection which for some time I have been making and this is beyond the general necessity that there is for this virtue, the Lord wills it particularly for our Institute, to which He sends many humiliations and it is clear that He does not will for it any other foundations...⁵²⁹.

Finally, Leopoldina made quite concrete these aspirations in the Constitutions of the Institute. The chapter on humility is placed right after the one on charity and therefore, even before the treatment of the three vows and the other virtues. She insisted on the concept of the “foundation of all the other virtues”, on the necessity of grasping the humility from the “Heart of Jesus, Who of this virtue in a special manner, He wants to be our Master.” Then, she concludes:

... and just as from the interior proceed the external actions, the Sister will strive to be penetrated by their nothingness and to feel lowly regarding themselves, each one considering that she is the least of all...⁵³⁰.

In another place, she recommends to her religious to consider it to be a special grace that of being called to the “divine service”, and to consider themselves as “useless servants” [Lk 17:10]; of being disposed to carry out with “humility of heart...the most lowly services,

⁵²⁶G.S., 1801, f. 20.

⁵²⁷*Conferenze spirituali*, v. 185.

⁵²⁸G.S., 1811, f. 83.

⁵²⁹Letter of Mother Naudet, to the “Beloved” of Mantua. March 12, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵³⁰Original Constitutions, Part II, c. III, 1. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

and to be “content that their defects are known to the superior and that these be presented to her, by anyone who would see them committed...”⁵³¹.

In the part of the Constitutions regarding study, she returns again, and with greater insistence, to the virtue of humility:

...They will apply themselves in this time of their studies to exercise themselves in humility, since it would be better for them and for their neighbor to be deprived of study, than of virtue and humility is that which can make them receive from God the necessary lights for the acquisition of authentic wisdom...⁵³².

To understand the importance and the gravity of these prescriptions it is necessary to keep in mind the essentially educative finality of Mother Naudet’s Institute. In fact, the principal means with which the religious unfolded their external activity were:

1. The education of the young girls, boarding within the house.
2. That gratuity of the poor girls, and those well to do, who come each day to the schools.
3. The instruction of young girls in the parishes [in which the Institute is established], who do not come to our schools; when they have to be prepared to come to the Most Holy Sacraments of Penance, Confirmation and Eucharist.
4. The Spiritual Exercises [given by suitable priests, approved by the Ordinary], which they will strive to provide in the course of the year for those persons who might wish to retire in our house for this purpose, and to procure this in a place set aside, apart from the community, the convent and the schools...⁵³³.

At the conclusion of this research, it seems interesting to see how Mother Leopoldina was judged by her contemporaries, especially with regard to humility. The Confessor of the Community testified

... how very precise she was in manifesting herself, and in not maintaining her own judgment, and on the other hand, she was known for hiding her virtues with a rare humility. This virtue was very profound in her and was the foundation of all her other virtues ...She considered herself in a very lowly manner, and such was the gift that God had bestowed on her of this virtue that it seemed almost impossible for her to be proud.. ‘It seems impossible to me to be proud’, these are the words that she said to me many times...⁵³⁴.

Her secretary, Matilda di Canossa, stated that Leopoldina’s great humility led her to fear her own judgment, therefore, she would easily abandon it. She suffered from a very marked “timidity” and “sensibility” that would surprise her especially in matters of little importance. Just as soon as she would realize this, she would laugh a bit at herself, with expressions such as: “... How wretched you are, Leopoldina! The Lord clearly wills that you see that you are good for nothing, and that it is He Who accomplishes all in you!”⁵³⁵.

⁵³¹Original Constitutions, Part II, c. III, 2. Archives of the sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵³²Original Constitutions, Part III, c. 1, 3. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵³³Original Constitutions. The compendium of the Plan of the Institute, c. 4. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona

⁵³⁴Letter of Fr. Charles Maria Maggio to Matilda di Canossa, from Reggio, November 16, 1841. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵³⁵M. di Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 27-28.

Lastly, Leopoldina's confidant, Sophia Gagnere⁵³⁶, stated that:

...from all that she would say and think of herself, this soul, much in love with humility, it can be noted to what degree of perfection she had arrived and how much this virtue was deeply radicated in her heart...⁵³⁷.

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⁵³⁶The biography of this Sister is narrated n: A. Pighi, *Un episodio della rivoluzione francese* Verona 1892.

⁵³⁷S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 48.

3. Obedience

In Leopoldina's spirituality, the virtue of obedience occupies a notable place, since it is the fruit of a personal conquest, much supported by the grace of God.

From her **Spiritual Journal**, there emerges an attitude that seems not very accepting toward the point of view of others. Sometimes her intellect lingers in examining the reasons for which something is commanded, and then is slow to submit, if she is not "persuaded". All of this is made manifest by Leopoldina with much simplicity and truth:

... This grace that was granted me that of comprehending the value of obedience, I recognize it, all the more so that not having a fearful character, nor of asking everything, nor of allowing myself to be guided in everything,, only with difficulty would I be persuaded concerning the practice of this virtue...⁵³⁸.

On another occasion, Leopoldina wrote:

... in those matters where I do have a superior who commands me, my own judgment is not persuaded and wishes to be so. It wishes this satisfaction and if I am not really convinced, obedience seems repugnant and I seek with words to set aside certain matters and if I can, even to see to it that the final decision will be what pleases me and is in accord with my view...⁵³⁹.

Continuing in the psychological analysis of her own sentiments, with respect to obedience, Leopoldina makes an even more interesting confession, in so far as she succeeds in penetrating into the essence of the problem, and to discover the secret mover of her inspirations:

...It is true that I do not do this with the intention of doing my own will, and for the reason of not wanting to obey, but through a presumption that makes me believe and that I see more clearly the truth of the matter, and that I personally have more experience concerning it...⁵⁴⁰.

Therefore, Leopoldina of her own nature, is not much inclined toward obedience, but she does appreciate its worth, because she discovers in this virtue means of approaching and being more pleasing to God. It is He, in fact, who guides her to the perfection of obedience with a pedagogical method that is most indicated for her spirit. Other human beings often would not have succeeded in persuading her; the Lord, however, Leopoldina writes in her **Spiritual Journal**:

... has bestowed on me a new grace ... He has given me such light that all the explanations that I could have read or felt about this would not have been capable to convince me of this manner...⁵⁴¹.

From this moment, Leopoldina would not discuss obedience. Her greatest concern would be "... of losing those encounters... of exercising this virtue of obedience and of having them more often..."⁵⁴².

In her experience of obedience, as in all the other virtues, Leopoldina shows that she had her eye fixed on the ultimate goal: God. In fact, she wrote:

⁵³⁸M. di Canossa, *Memorie...*, f.24.

⁵³⁹G.S., 1801, f. 21.

⁵⁴⁰G.S., 1801, f. 21.

⁵⁴¹M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 24.

⁵⁴²G.S., 1811, f. 77.

...I resolved for myself to carry it out punctually and to follow the stimuli that the Lord grants me regarding this virtue which He makes me love with the consideration that this places Him and is what He wants...⁵⁴³.

It is evident from this passage that Leopoldina's obedience is at the service of charity: she obeys because God wants it of her. In order to arrive at the point of uniting her will to that of God. Leopoldina feels powerfully the dominion of God over her own being and is cognizant of the submission that creatures owe Him, as such.

According to the spiritual authors, this principle constitutes the foundation of the virtue of obedience⁵⁴⁴. It seems that Leopoldina perceived this direct relationship with God in a sensible manner, to the extent that she was not even aware of its presence. And when the Lord suggests to her to entrust herself to a spiritual guide, she could do no less than to express her own disappointment:

... I exposed the desires that I had to obey, but all the while it seemed to me that the Lord had wished up until then that I should obey Him alone. However, now it seemed to me that He wanted me to have an external assistance. I explained my difficulties were that I have a certain pleasure regarding God and Him alone in all things, and for this reason in a moment of prayer while I was saying to the Lord that I was all right in His regard, I heard Him respond that it was for me to be in an even better situation that He wanted this of me...⁵⁴⁵.

This command came to inaugurate a new relationship of obedience between Leopoldina and the Minister of God. After her first resistances, she was reassured on the part of the Lord that spiritual direction remained for her merely as a means to lead her more rapidly toward her goal, and then Leopoldina bent her own will and completely entrusted herself to the Minister of God.

At this point, it can be asked what was the reason why Leopoldina was so hesitant in accepting a spiritual director, as though she were totally in the dark regarding the benefits that could be obtained for her own spiritual development. It is known, though, that even in the past, she had profited by this means. To clarify this equivocation, it seems opportune to place in evidence the diversity of relationships between the first spiritual direction, as noted in her **Spiritual Journal**, with Fr. Paccanari, and that enthusiasm she showed regarding her new director. She openly confesses that she found in him that which from her childhood she had always desired. She promises to do all that he would command her, but at the same time, she is full of uncertainties and doubts. She does not succeed in manifesting to him her own interior life and needs to have recourse to obedience in order to overcome the repugnance that she experiences in the act of placing in writing her spiritual experiences⁵⁴⁶.

With Fr. Bertoni, however, the exact opposite happens. At the beginning, she did not wish to submit herself to this because it seemed to her that God would then no longer enjoy absolute dominion over her spirit. However, when she finally abandoned herself to God's Will, opening her heart to her spiritual director she came to experience an indescribable peace. She seems to have overcome even the difficulties of oral expression, except "for certain most

⁵⁴³G.S., 1811, f. 77.

⁵⁴⁴A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione...*, p. 668.

⁵⁴⁵G.S., 1811, f. 44

⁵⁴⁶G.S., 1800, f. 9.

intimate communications and of a manner very difficult to express, such as in those in which the soul loses itself”⁵⁴⁷.

On the other hand, Leopoldina did not feel as though she was at fault before the Lord for such silence, since it seemed to her “only just that there should be some secrets between Him and her soul”⁵⁴⁸. As soon as she had begun spiritual direction with Fr. Bertoni, Leopoldina experienced the necessity of obeying him in all, as God’s representative. There even came the thought “that the vow would have more merit... and would provide greater facility in the execution”⁵⁴⁹. As can be noted, Leopoldina had already made much progress on the way of obedience. The memoirs state:

... The great esteem that she had for this virtue made it possible that she desired to oblige herself with the vow of obedience to her own confessor to be able to be sure that in her activity and not to have doubts, nor fears...⁵⁵⁰.

God, on his part, did not wish Leopoldina’s vow to oblige her to root herself the more in obedience. He made her understand that there is a more perfect means, namely that of experiencing oneself bound indissolubly to the divine will, since also the director had to refer to this will and not act on his private judgment. Leopoldina, as was her custom, remained satisfied with the impartial lesson from the Lord. In fact, she wrote::

... He inspired me with a recognition and intellectual understanding of the mediated origin that had from Him this obedience and submission, that I was to offer his minister, and it seemed to me that I had a greater duty than if I had by my spontaneous vow obliged myself to this...⁵⁵¹

Leopoldina, then, seemed to excuse herself with the Lord for having desired to bind herself by a vow of obedience to her spiritual director, placing in emphasis that even in this, she had looked solely toward Him, for the sake of serving Him always the more, and of demonstrating to Him her sentiments toward the virtue of obedience. She experienced herself interiorally disposed to a “total submission”, and, hence, she believed that she found in the vow “a greater help to carry it out and security in doing it”⁵⁵². This obedience, however, could have its limits, regarding its duration and its extension, because it was offered in relation to human being. Leopoldina, however, comprehended that God willed from her an absolute dependence. He had noted by this level of her development the demands of the divine dominion over her, and could not withdraw herself.

However, she did not walk in the dark. A sudden intuition illuminated her spirit, which was already disposed to carry out the will of God:

... This cognition was extended even to the duration of this obedience, making me understand the Lord Who could not reverse Himself except with very manifest signs of His will... with which He had already made His will known to me; different from the vow, to which there would be a determined time and placed also within the limits that the Lord does not want that there should be placed here. He wishes that I

⁵⁴⁷G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁵⁴⁸G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁵⁴⁹G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁵⁵⁰S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 42.

⁵⁵¹G.S., 1811, f. 71.

⁵⁵²G.S., 1811, f. 71.

remain in Him, abandoned to Him, and that this be without confines that would be imposed by others who would also have to depend on Him...⁵⁵³.

In this manner, Leopoldina found that she had to obey at one and the same time, both God and His minister. This is a real commitment, but not difficult, because according to Mother Naudet there can never be a real discordance between the two commands. A year later, that is, in 1812, the Lord returned to confirm for her that which she He had made her understand: ‘...the duty that I must obey that person [Fr. Bertoni], by His command; [the minister] has to take the place of the obedience that I would have had to promise to Him...’⁵⁵⁴.

However, Leopoldina did not have to be encouraged toward obedience. She had acquired an interior attitude all the more open to the divine will, and hence she could remark with all sincerity: “... the Lord knows that I am disposed to everything that He would suggest or have me understand, through His minister, and that I do not desire anything else, but to please Him...”⁵⁵⁵.

Another remarkable feature of Leopoldina’s obedience flows from the relationship with the Institute founded by her and with the members who made it up. As superior and foundress, Leopoldina came to find herself in a critical position with regard to obedience. Often there may be noted her concern in this regard, as recorded in her **Spiritual Journal**. In 1811, when she had just begun the composition of her Constitutions, she wrote:

... Regarding the end that I must now have in mind in everything [which is the founding of that Institute, the care of which the Lord has entrusted to me], I experience very powerful desires just to draw up the enterprise according to the manner that He wills, so much so that I would like in all things, no matter how insignificant they may be, to be assured that they are such as to please Him in a very certain way, and not to make any movement in any direction of my own taste and fancy, nor to regulate myself according to my own spirit. This is what I fear. I really believe I can remedy this with obedience, which will make me sure of the divine will...⁵⁵⁶.

Leopoldina did not intend to found a work according to her own personal desires. She did not even consider herself to be a foundress, but simply “an agent who must remain ready to follow solely the orders of her master”⁵⁵⁷. Her spiritual testament expresses even more energetically this concept:

... I wish that there would never be given to me, either verbally, or in writing, this title [of Foundress]. There are so many proofs for those whom I will leave still living at my death, that I say it only for those who will come afterwards, and who might here of the mistake...that I was just among the first to be employed in this...⁵⁵⁸.

The fact that she had chosen, from the very beginning of her undertaking, that Jesus would be the superior⁵⁵⁹, and the Blessed Mother as the first superior⁵⁶⁰, shows that

⁵⁵³G.S., 1811, f. 71.

⁵⁵⁴G.S., 1812, f. 96.

⁵⁵⁵G.S., 1813, f. 104.

⁵⁵⁶G.S., 1811, f. 79.

⁵⁵⁷G.S., 1813, f. 99.

⁵⁵⁸*Spiritual Testament* of Mother Leopoldina Naudet. manuscript in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵⁵⁹G.S., 1811, f. 81; [f. 121].

⁵⁶⁰G.S., 1811, f. 81.

Leopoldina always had the attitude of obedience regarding her Institute. She might be defined as “a superior who obeyed”, without any fear of forcing the issue or exaggerations. One passage from her **Spiritual Journal** in 1821 unveils openly Leopoldina’s ideals regarding her obedience as superior:

...Having established Jesus as the Superior of this Institute,, to consider Him in a particularly manner precisely as such, and to obey Him with exactness, and to receive all matters, all that happens over the course of the day, as His orders, and to fulfill them with reverence and with diligence...⁵⁶¹.

There would suffice a rapid glance to gather the nuances of obedience included in this confession of Leopoldina. She, in fact, “was most obedient to the rule that she established, and she would never dispense herself from it other than for health reasons which would force her to do this. She gave in this the prime example...”⁵⁶². From her part, Leopoldina gave this witness in her spiritual testament:

...I pray for the love of God, that all the superiors who may come after me that they will not follow the examples that I have given, that they should not look so much to what I have done, but rather to the Constitutions and the common rules and those particulars of their office...⁵⁶³.

In order to obtain a complete view of Leopoldina’s obedience it would be helpful to consider how she was able to inculcate it in the members of the Institute founded by her. The memories of her are in agreement in stating that

...the characteristic virtue of the Institute founded by the meritorious Mother Leopoldina Naudet seem to have been obedience, including in this all the other virtues...⁵⁶⁴

In another place it is recorded:

... she assigned it as the characteristic virtue of the Sisters of the Holy Family in their rules. She herself then practiced it with all precision [in all that was fitting for her role as superior]...⁵⁶⁵.

This final entry allows the reader to understand how Leopoldina did not ponder much on the exterior obedience as she did rather on that internal spirit that ought to animate the letter of the rule. And this is what she often recommended to her daughters on all occasions. In one letter to the “Beloved” of Mantua, this is how she expressed herself:

...be humble, obedient, detached from all, and particularly from yourselves ...; it is often said that the habit does not make the monk, so, too, it is not the following of some daily method which renders one “Beloved”, but rather the perfect observance of the rules and the application that commits one to follow the spirit that is proper to this Institute...⁵⁶⁶.

⁵⁶¹G.S., 1831, f.121.

⁵⁶²S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 44.

⁵⁶³*Spiritual Tstament* of Mother Leopoldina Naudet. Manuscript in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵⁶⁴S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 41.

⁵⁶⁵S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 24.

⁵⁶⁶Letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet to the “Beloved” of Mantua, Januar 28, 1808. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

Lastly, the Constitutions are a most important document to know Leopoldina's thoughts concerning obedience. As St. Ignatius, she, too, asks of her daughters a total and perfect obedience:

...They will not content themselves to obey only the external work, but they will submit their intellects to bring their will into uniformity with that of the superior...⁵⁶⁷.

Before arriving at the imposition of something that difficult, Leopoldina, perhaps because of her personal experience, in addition to the teaching of St. Ignatius, enunciates the motives of obedience and the advantages that can be derived from it:

... The Sisters of the Holy Family will seek the greater perfection in this virtue, which will be their characteristic:

1. For the love and devotion that they profess towards the Holy Family.
2. Because the sacrifice of themselves would be imperfect, if there should be lacking the most noble part which is their will.
3. Because the means with which they will commit themselves for the salvation of their neighbors are so varied, this obedience which subjects the whole person to God and for love of this same God for their Superiors, it is all the more necessary for them to allow themselves to be regulated in the exercise of these external endeavors...⁵⁶⁸

There can be noted, especially in the third paragraph, how obedience is linked to the apostolic purpose of the Institute, according to the Ignatian intuition ⁵⁶⁹. In the first two paragraphs, however, Leopoldina shows her feminine psychology with her most personal nuances. In fact she strives to convince her daughters on the importance of obedience in relationship to the Holy Family, to whom they are consecrated, underlining the positive side of the virtue, understood not only as a "renunciation", but rather as "the oblation of the most noble part which is their will".

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⁵⁶⁷Original Constitutions, Part II, c. V, 3. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵⁶⁸Original Constitutions, Part II, c. V, 1. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵⁶⁹G. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus*, p.138.

V. SPECIAL DEVOTIONS

Presentation

Mother Naudet's spirituality is translated concretely into practices and forms of devotion, rich in doctrinal content. The Memoirs tell us that Leopoldina "... did not have those devotions in any languid or weak manner, but hers were of a strong and inflamed charity..."⁵⁷⁰

1. Eucharistic Worship

The fundamental nucleus of her piety was orientated toward the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. This unfolded in an atmosphere of adoration, reparation, contemplation and desire of conformity. Particular expressions of such devotions were her love for the Eucharist, and her worship of the Sacred Heart. Along-side these, a most special place would be found for her very special devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to St. Joseph, and to the Holy Family. There developed, therefore, in Leopoldina's piety, a harmony of devotional motives, although not all have the same doctrinal value.

This statement might seem somewhat arbitrary, at first sight. However, it is not easy, as Fr. Rozaven wrote, to harmonize "St. Joseph with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of Mary, as this just does not fit"⁵⁷¹. However, Leopoldina was challenged to clarify this apparent equivocation, and she would state:

...I have always found in myself a single devotion, which is that of Jesus; and my heart is so much concentrated there that that devotion that I have for Mary and St. Joseph are but relative to those of Jesus, our Lord...⁵⁷².

In this explanation, Leopoldina expresses a fundamental psychological characteristic of her spirit that consists in the desire to unify and simplify.

From the historical point of view, Mother Naudet breathed the climate of the time in which she lived. Only in her decision for the Sacred Family does she place herself in a particular dimension. However, as will be sought to point out as this work unfolds, this devotion always flowed precisely from a tendency of hers to simplification.

In the first half of the 19th Century, there began to appear a piety which translated into reparation in the adoration of the Eucharistic mystery⁵⁷³. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the object of so many accusations on the part of the Jansenist, had a development beyond all comparisons, both for the role that this devotion was destined to sustain in the piety of the faithful as well as for its place in the official devotion of the Church⁵⁷⁴. Marian piety

⁵⁷⁰S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f.50.

⁵⁷¹Letter of Fr. Rozaven to Mother Leopoldina Naudet, July 3, 1827. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵⁷²Mother Leopoldina Naudet's letter to Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. [cf. G. Stofella, *Epistolario...* p. 237].

⁵⁷³A. Prandi, "Correnti e figure della spiritualita' cattolica nei sec. XIX e XX", in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanita'...*, V, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁴J. DeGuibert, *la spiritualite' de la Compagnie de Jesus...*, p. 387.

was also strictly defended and propagated especially where the Redemptorists were active⁵⁷⁵, while devotion to St. Joseph continued to spread not only among distinct groups, but also among the faithful⁵⁷⁶. A characteristic note of the spirituality of this period is its openness to the ecclesial sense. In fact, there was developing in each of the faithful a genuine form of ecclesial piety, in the desire of serving the Church and this through exterior undertakings, or with personal sacrifice and prayer⁵⁷⁷.

Now, this study will seek to shed some light on the particular developments that these orientations assumed in Leopoldina's spirituality. Correctly one historian of spirituality states that every believer must work out a choice to accept one devotion rather than some other and this responds to certain psychological criteria, in addition to the interior inspiration of the Holy Spirit⁵⁷⁸. We will try here, then, to discover just exactly what those psychological tendencies were in Leopoldina that directed her piety toward her devotion to the Eucharist.

To reassume the interior life of this woman, two words would suffice: love and prayer. Here would be summarized her entire spiritual experience and from this perspective, then, will spring into life her apostolic commitment in the bosom of the Church. It has already been stated in another place, that one cannot try to grasp Leopoldina's spirituality by coming through some determined spiritual school. There is noted in her a certain independence from "methods"⁵⁷⁹, and this is so even when being directed by her spiritual guides. Rather, what does result from all this is doubtlessly clear, that hers was a very personal relationship with God, her directly waiting on Him to obtain directions and suggestions. This attitude of interior listening demands a continuous union with God which finds its most favorable climate in prayer and in Eucharistic communion.

The memories state regarding Leopoldina that

...the greatest of her consolations was to receive Him sacramentally, that which she always did as often as she could and that this was permitted to her, that is, even every day, from the time she left the world...⁵⁸⁰.

If this biographical data is inserted within the historical context in which Leopoldina spent her childhood it will be easier to gather its importance and singularity.

According to the historians, in the second half of the 18th century there would flourish in France a spirituality with rigorist tendencies, impregnated with Jansenism⁵⁸¹ and therefore one that was decidedly contrary to frequent communion. Leopoldina found herself in this environment to complete her own education. In the Monastery of Soissons, "unfortunately when the two Naudet sisters arrived Jansenism had been introduced there which infiltrated

⁵⁷⁵A. Prandi, "Correnti e figure della spiritualita' cattolica nei secolo XIX e XX," in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanita'...*, V, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁶J. DeGuibert, *La spiritualite' de la Compagnie de la Compagnie de Jesus...* p. 283.

⁵⁷⁷A. Prandi, "Correnti e figure della spiritualita' cattolica nei sec. XIX e XX" in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanita'...*, V, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁸E. Bertaud - A. Rayez, "Devotions", in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'...*, III, col. 749.

⁵⁷⁹G.S., 1813, f. 101.

⁵⁸⁰S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 50-51.

⁵⁸¹P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, IV, p. 49.

everything”⁵⁸². Leopoldina’s Eucharistic piety aroused the diffidence of the confessors, as these, too, were steeped in Jansenist tendencies, but in the end it was granted to the young girl to approach Holy Communion, according to her desires, “as her virtues were well known and appreciated”⁵⁸³.

So, her devotion toward the Eucharist was one that was very personal and interior. It is said that she thought of it as a special grace that she had always lived close “to the divine sacrament”, since also in the royal chapels the Eucharist was conserved⁵⁸⁴. However, it was not merely the physical closeness that interested Leopoldina, as rather the possibility of being more often before the Most Holy Sacrament. The recollections state that “it would always have been with the object of her delights, if the multiple tasks that she had to perform in the interests of her Institute, and her poor health had not impeded her”⁵⁸⁵. In this connection, it is well known that she would have desired perpetual adoration, and even nocturnal. However, out of discretion she saw that this would be incompatible with the varied activities of Religious Sisters, and thus it was limited to some special circumstances. In the Constitutions she prescribed that adoration be made

...at least on the Feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament with its entire Octave, and the Feast of the Sacred Heart; every First Friday of the month and all those of the month of March; also the anniversary of the date when the Most Blessed Sacrament was placed in the Church of the Monastery, or the Convent where they live, and every other time that the Superior might judge that it would be possible, without prejudice to the health and duties of the Sisters...⁵⁸⁶.

With good reason, then, her secretary, Matilde di Canossa could refer to Leopoldina as “a tender love of the divine Eucharist”⁵⁸⁷.

The means to express this love of hers was “Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament” is constituted principally by her prayer. This was not some methodical prayer, as of the Ignatian type, in which one would proceed point by point, and with order, involving all the faculties of the soul⁵⁸⁸. Hers does not seem to have been a prayer of affective tonality, similar to that of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, one that would tend toward a certain sweetness and sensibility, even to the point of tears⁵⁸⁹. Leopoldina’s prayer “in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament” seems rather to be something of a prelude of that Eucharistic devotion attributed to St. Peter Julian Eymard [1811-1858], which means, a prayer of intimacy, of faith, of love and contemplation, even though this does not always assume that character of cult, of homage, and particularly adoration⁵⁹⁰.

⁵⁸²M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f. 2.

⁵⁸³M. Canossa, *Epoche...*, f.3.

⁵⁸⁴M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 29.

⁵⁸⁵S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 50.

⁵⁸⁶The Compendium of the Plan of the Original Constitutions, c. 11. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁵⁸⁷M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 29.

⁵⁸⁸E. Ancilli, “La preghiera nei grandi mistici del 1500”, in: *La preghiera...*, II, pp. 612-613.

⁵⁸⁹P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, IV, p. 476.

⁵⁹⁰E.C. Nunez, “La preghiera in S. Pietro Giuliano Eymard”, in: *La preghiera...*, II, p. 717.

There are numerous entries in her **Spiritual Journal** that lead us to suppose that the Eucharist constitutes the fundamental element of Mother Naudet's mystical experience.

The Eucharist is considered by mystical theology as the Sacrament of the personal presence of Christ and that of love in a unique manner⁵⁹¹. With this, there is not intended that the only one welcome to approach the Eucharistic Banquet would be the Christian who is already a mystic. The spiritual authors insist on the fact that there is necessary "the experience through which the mystic comes to perceive spiritually the sacramental reality"⁵⁹².

There is an entry in her **Spiritual Journal** that is very explicit in this regard:

...every day is like Holy Thursday. During Mass during which I was going to receive Holy Communion, thinking of the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament, I was drawn in spirit to the Cenacle, and in contemplation of all that took place there, I felt within the greatest sweetness, but really strongly being drawn outside of myself...⁵⁹³.

On another occasion, Leopoldina confessed that she had been consoled by the Lord

...at the moment of the elevation during Holy Mass, because I was adoring Him with sentiments of a vivid faith which He then communicated to me, united to a most particular realization that He gave me concerning His omnipotence ... He gave me light and animated my confidence ...⁵⁹⁴.

At almost every entry of her **Spiritual Journal** expressions such as these are found, and so it can be stated that it is precisely in the presence of the Eucharist that Leopoldina received her most outstanding graces. Her Eucharistic-contemplative prayer was not for her an isolated exercise, but this is the very core of her interior life. The attraction of her spirit is the act that gives tonality to all of her spiritual activity. Naturally, this attitude of prayer presupposes her gradated ascetical life on the part of her soul. In a passage from her **Spiritual Journal** of 1800, reflecting on the life of St. John the Baptist, Leopoldina concludes in this way:

...I thought of taking him for my model in what pertains to the active life, a life that takes away the facility of staying as long as one would like before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament...⁵⁹⁵.

Therefore, one may speak of a progressive development and a spiritual itinerary in Leopoldina's Eucharistic prayer.

At the beginning of the religious life, the times of prayer are well determined, following one after another in orderly fashion, balanced in with one's external occupations. The spiritual authors explain that when the spirit takes the initiative to go forward to meet God, it also always needs external structures, those means, which in a certain manner, condition and nourish the prayer. But, when the soul, deeply trained in prayer, experiences

⁵⁹¹E. Longpre, "Eucharistie et experience mystique", in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'...*, IV, 2, , col. 1588-1589.

⁵⁹²A. Stolz, *La teologia della mistica...*, p. 54.

⁵⁹³G.S., 1812, f. 86.

⁵⁹⁴G.S., 1811, f. 57.

⁵⁹⁵G.S., 1800, f. 7.

that peace of faith in the continual presence of God within oneself, it no longer needs external means to feed the prayer⁵⁹⁶

For Leopoldina this progressive simplification was realized especially in her personal contact with the Eucharist. From the first, the Lord exhorted her not to limit the time of prayer, after Holy Communion⁵⁹⁷, as though to imply that He is the source of grace. Leopoldina favored this inspiration and very soon had to note the wonderful progress she experienced in the matter of prayer. In 1812, she wrote:

...At Holy Communion today the fervor continued with which the Lord had excited in me the day before during prayer and it seemed to me that I saw clearly, but intellectually, that in everything He would do the most...I desired to be transformed totally into Him, seeing that every strength and capacity in my undertakings cannot come from me, but from him...⁵⁹⁸

At this point of her spiritual journey, it can be said with the authors that it is no longer the human effort, in which the initiative in prayer departs prevalently from the believer, but it is all on the divine initiative. It is God Himself Who reaches out to the soul and there prevail the divine initiatives⁵⁹⁹. In a note of 1812, Leopoldina expressed in a wondrous manner God's intervention in her soul. The most salient fact is constituted by her "feeling, experiencing" the action of God. She was no longer desiring" that it would come as in the past:

...I felt the strong desire to love Him more; so much so that it seemed that union with Him no longer satisfied me, but my heart sought something further; and it seemed to me that there was a transformation. I no longer felt myself united to Him, but engulfed in God and I could no longer do anything other than loving and enjoying Him...⁶⁰⁰.

As can be noted, the contemplative-mystical aspect of Leopoldina's Eucharistic prayer is evident in her **Spiritual Journal**. Less explicit, on the other hand, is her dimension of reparation. With this, one cannot say that this is totally absent in Leopoldina's prayer. The reminiscences contain some significant expressions. For example, it is noted that when Leopoldina

...experienced any profanation committed against this mystery, she was thoroughly horrified ... With most special periods of adoration, acts of love, and profound bows, she tried to make up for the injuries that from human ingratitude Jesus received in the Sacrament of the Altar. She practiced particular acts and prescribed these for her daughters on the occasion that any sacrileges might have been committed...⁶⁰¹.

In another place, she says she

... suffered harm to her health even whenever she would hear the account of sacrileges and profanations committed against this most august sacrament...⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁶A. Anastasio del Ss. Rosario, "Unita' e varieta' della preghiera", in: *La preghiera...*, III, pp. 508-510

⁵⁹⁷G.S., 1811, f. 78.

⁵⁹⁸G.S., 1812, f. 90.

⁵⁹⁹A. Anastasio del Ss. Rosario, "Unita' e varieta' della preghiera", in" *La preghiera...*, III, pp. 508-510.

⁶⁰⁰G.S., 1812, f. 90.

⁶⁰¹M. Canossa, *Memorie...*, f. 29.

⁶⁰²S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 51.

...In brief, in all occasions she showed consistently a sublime and tender love that she had for this adorable mystery and she handed this on to the best of her ability to all, first by her own example, and then with her words and fervent exhortations...⁶⁰³.

At this point, it does not seem to be bold in the least to state that her love for the Eucharist does not just constitute one of Leopoldina's special devotions, but rather that this one is the very soul of her piety and the most authentic expression of her spirituality.

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2. The Holy Family

The importance of the devotion to the Holy Family, Mother Naudet's spiritual life, requires a brief historical research, to understand how she became inserted into this cultural expression and what it meant for her and for her Institute.

The motives upon which she founded her devotion to the Holy Family are illustrated by Mother Leopoldina Naudet in one of her letters to Fr. Bertoni:

... In bringing out the Holy Family, I would like to accentuate the most loving Heart of Jesus, and that of Mary and then St. Joseph, as the one conversing most familiarly with Jesus and Mary, having attained so to speak, in those most holy hearts that charity toward God and towards his neighbor...⁶⁰⁴.

In the Holy Family, therefore, Leopoldina saw three great devotions coming together: that to the Heart of Jesus, to the Heart of Mary and to St. Joseph.

Separately these expressions of cult were always present in Leopoldina's piety and they found a promoter in her first spiritual director, Fr. Nicholas di Diessbach. This priest, in instituting his organization known as the "Christian Friendship" [in Turin, 1778-1780], he proposed to its associates a profound devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to Mary Most Holy and to St. Joseph ⁶⁰⁵. As has already been said, it is not possible to know for certain whether Leopoldina pertained to this organization, the "Christian Friendship". What is known, however, is the spiritual imprint of Fr. Diessbach which left evident traces in Leopoldina's religious experience. The great importance given to the interior life, to prayer, to spiritual reading and to the Ignatian *Exercises*, are all characteristics of the organization of the "Christian Friendship" ⁶⁰⁶. Furthermore, these would be traits for the members of the Institute founded by Mother Naudet.

In Leopoldina's piety, there can be noted a certain continuity of expression, especially for that which pertains to the Devotion to the Sacred Heart. In fact, the "Beloved of Jesus" were consecrated to the "Service of God" on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, of the year

⁶⁰³S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f. 51.

⁶⁰⁴G. Stofella, *Epistolario ...*, p.237.

⁶⁰⁵L. Cristiani, *Un pretre redoute' de Napoleon...*, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁶L. Cristiani, *Un pretre redoute' de Napoleon...*, p. 48.

1798⁶⁰⁷. In 1800, there is found the first testimony in her **Spiritual Journal**. Leopoldina states that she had assisted at

... a function in honor of the Sacred Heart, and I experienced a very great interior joy, in seeing homage rendered to the Divine Heart of my Lord, Jesus Christ ...⁶⁰⁸.

It seems that one can see in this devotion of Leopoldina certain Eucharistic under-currents, since also in the reminiscences there is a hint made to her "very great devotion to the divine Heart of Jesus"⁶⁰⁹, which in reality, the insistence is given to the Eucharist. One explanation of this fact, I believe can be found in a manual of piety used by Mother Naudet. In the preface, the author states that "all this devotion does not consist, properly speaking, in anything other than loving ardently Jesus Christ, Who we have ceaselessly with us in the adorable Eucharist"⁶¹⁰.

As for what pertains to Leopoldina's Marian devotion, it is necessary to emphasize that this is not simply mentioned in passing in her **Spiritual Journal**. There are very numerous expressions, and they bring to the fore a filial, affectionate piety towards the Mother of God, but there is also implied a respectful veneration. In her retreat of 1801, Leopoldina recognized that she "had received a great quantity of graces from this, our Mother..."⁶¹¹. Her **Spiritual Journal** does not spell out explicitly what these graces were. Only one of them is noted, perhaps because it was so much on her mind:

...I was reminded then with supreme gratitude of that grace which was bestowed on me during all those years that I was in the world, that of giving me such a purity of mind, even though later in the convent⁶¹² I had to read so many novels, and other things, and yet there never came to me the least bad thought..⁶¹³.

Leopoldina was rendered conscious of such a grace all the while she lived in the royal court. But, after her consecration to God, reflecting on her past life, she comprehended the inestimable value of that "purity of mind" and she was convinced that it was a special grace from the Blessed Mother, in return for the devotion that she had always demonstrated toward her. In fact, she wrote:

...I remembered that even as a little girl I had a great devotion toward Mary Most Holy and that all the time that I had been in the Convent, I prayed the Office every day and committed my companions to do the same ...⁶¹⁴.

With the passing of the years, there increased ever more in the heart of Leopoldina worship for the Blessed Mother. In 1832, she requested and obtained from Rome through the offices of Fr. Charles Maria Maggi [1798-1865], Confessor to the community, that in the

⁶⁰⁷cf. *Relaione della origine e dei progressi delle Dilette di Gesu'*, ... f. 22.

⁶⁰⁸G.S., 1800, f. 5/

⁶⁰⁹S. Gagnere, *Memorie...*, f.52.

⁶¹⁰*La divozione al sacro Cuore di nostro Signore Gesu' Cristo...*, p. 21.

⁶¹¹G.S., 1801, f. 25.

⁶¹²By "Convent" here is meant that Monastery of Our Lady of Soissons, in which Leopoldina finished her education.

⁶¹³G.S., 1801, f. 26.

⁶¹⁴G.S., 1801, f. 26.

diocese of Verona there might be celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the First Sunday after the Octave of the Assumption, with its own proper Mass and Office⁶¹⁵.

Leopoldina's Marian piety seemed to express itself with every greater sincerity and spontaneity in the difficult moments of her life. In fact, when she began her delicate work on the Constitutions she placed it all under the protection of the Blessed Mother⁶¹⁶, and she entrusted to her ailing companions, certain to obtain from her their cure:

... Today is the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary and I experienced much confidence that there could be granted to me the grace that I had requested, and I beseeched her to be herself the Superior of the Institute and that she would protect the entire enterprise in a manner that all would result for the glory of God...⁶¹⁷.

However, the most delicate nuances of Leopoldina's Marian devotion are contained in a passage from a letter of hers in 1804, to her confidant, Sophia Gagnere:

... Pray very much to the good God for me, my dear Sophia, pray for His undertaking, and believe that I will do the same for you, placing you in the loving Heart of Mary, whom I pray will protect you and assist you in the difficulties that we find along the path of perfection. It is there that I find my repose from all lack of quiet, and it is there that I will see you in safety...⁶¹⁸

Regarding her devotion to St. Joseph, her **Spiritual Journal** is also rather explicit. The saint appears for the first time in 1800, in the quality of her "Advocate" and it is quite evident already that he already holds a privileged place in Leopoldina's prayer⁶¹⁹. In 1811, there is registered in her **Spiritual Journal** the beginning of "the month of March, dedicated to St. Joseph"⁶²⁰. On this occasion, Leopoldina entrusted to him all her own spiritual "interests" and those of her Institute.

It has already been pointed out that St. Joseph was considered by Leopoldina as the model of her interior life ⁶²¹, while with the passing of time, he was also considered by her to be the guardian of internal solitude ⁶²² and the model of contemplation of Jesus and Mary ⁶²³.

At this point, however there had already taken place her synthesis of these three devotions in that one which can be called "Leopoldina's devotion": the Holy Family. It is interesting to note that Leopoldina arrived at the Holy Family through the "mediation" of St. Joseph. This happened in 1811, while she was meditating on the Flight into Egypt. After having stopped to consider "the glorious St. Joseph, his peace, his contemplation of Jesus and

⁶¹⁵E. Puppa, *Cenni biografici...*, p.1.

⁶¹⁶G.S., 1811, f. 75.

⁶¹⁷G.S., 1811, f. 72.

⁶¹⁸Letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet, to Sophia Gagnere, Roma, 1804. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁶¹⁹G.S., 1800, f. 16.

⁶²⁰G.S., 1811, f. 51.

⁶²¹G.S., 1811, f. 48.

⁶²²G.S., 1812, f. 94.

⁶²³G.S., 1811, f. 81.

Mary”, Leopoldina experienced being taken over by a profound commotion, and she exclaimed: “The Holy Family is my special devotion”⁶²⁴.

This rather sudden reference to the Holy Family seems almost strange. They are named for the first time, and already it is clear that the Holy Family does occupy a central place in Leopoldina’s spirituality: it is indeed “her devotion”. It seems to develop out of the religious experience of Mother Naudet, and that there is an evolution of the devotional theme similar to that which took place in the general history of spirituality, regarding the devotion to the Holy Family.

According to one spiritual author⁶²⁵, the attention of the writers on the Holy Family gradually peaked after the 14th century; for only then were the three holy persons no longer considered separately, but began to be recognized *par excellence*, as a “Family”. The historical reality of this little society, however, was already contained wholly in the Gospel which, with a few words, but with great precision, presents as untied, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The difficulty of the spiritual writers consisted in the fact that there did not exist, either for the Greek language, nor for the Germanic, or neo-Latin languages, a term that would designate exclusively the group formed by the father, mother and offspring. The *Dictionnaire de l’Academie Francaise* [1864], under the term *famille* includes all those who are related by blood. Only toward the end of the 17th century, in the popular language did the term “family” begin to assume its present meaning. It can be said, therefore, that “family” in the modern meaning of the term, is a rather recent discovery and a few tracts on the history of the devotion to the Holy Family that present it by means of this relatively late appreciation for the semantic evolution of the term “family.”

The writers who were the first to take into consideration the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth, these same celebrated the praises of St. Joseph and they contributed to the increase of worship to him⁶²⁶. These were St. Bernard [1090-1153], John Gerson [1363-1429] and St. Bernardine of Siena [1363-1444].

St. Bernard offers a few considerations on the domestic life of Jesus, commenting on the well-known verse, *and He was subject to them* [Lk 2:51]. This expression served Bernard to draw points of meditation on His humility and on his own admiration directed further to Jesus and to the Virgin, singly considered, even though he does recognize the greatness of St. Joseph⁶²⁷.

John Le Charlier de Gerson sought to place in full light the sublime figure of St. Joseph and emphasized the familiarity that existed between Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He did not think of them as separated, from the moment that the sublimity of St. Joseph derives

⁶²⁴G.S., 1811, f. 61.

⁶²⁵I. Noye, “Famille [devotion a’ la sainte Famille]”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite’...* V, col.80-83.

⁶²⁶P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite’ chretienne...*, II, pp. 519-524.

⁶²⁷St. Bernardi Abbaatis, *De Laudibus Virginis Matris, Missus est*, in: Migne P.L., vol. 183, p. 60, n.7.

totally from the intimate communion with the other two persons, with which he constituted that which he called a “terrestrial Trinity”⁶²⁸.

This is not the Holy Family, because Gerson does not yet use this term, but nothing is missing from the small society, which is already complete in the spirit and in the mind of the writer. The chancellor of Paris places in motion all his resources so that the Church might institute an official feast in honor of St. Joseph and wrote three letters for this purpose⁶²⁹. However, it is interesting to make more precise that the feast should recall to mind “the virginal espousals” and had these three inspirations: the excellence of the just Joseph; the honor and love of his spouse, Mary; the humanity and the benignity of the Savior, Jesus, *who was subject to them*.⁶³⁰

The first, however, to use the expression, *the Holy Family*, seems to have been St. Bernardine of Siena.

The humble Franciscan spoke with devout affection of the familiar intimacy between Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In him, the concept of *Holy Family* appears by now very clearly and this leads one to think that the faithful, to whom he addressed himself, would have nourished a certain devotion, even though without having a full realization of this⁶³¹. St. Bernardine, too, in fact, spoke indirectly of the *Holy Family*, teaching the people to love and praise St. Joseph⁶³².

Gerson and St. Bernardine have, therefore, indicated the path to follow for all the other writers who, according to the historians of spirituality⁶³³, have treated of the intimate life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

A short work by a Jerome Graziano of the Mother of God, a Carmelite, offers a particular interest. This was written in Spanish in 1597, and was translated into Italian by Sulpicio Mancini⁶³⁴. The author is not cited much in the texts of spirituality, but he is remembered in a manual of piety compiled by Joseph Anthony Parignani, a Jesuit⁶³⁵. The almost unknown author is referred to as among “the writers who out of devotion for St. Joseph have written about him”, and he bore the name of “Brother Jerome..., and he, too, was one of the most zealous writers of St. Joseph, a worthy son also in this part of the seraphic mother, St. Teresa⁶³⁶.”

⁶²⁸J. Gersonii, “Exhortatio ad Ducem Bituria, Anno Domini 1413, ut solemnizetur Festum Sancti Joseph virginalis sponsi beatae Mariae; Epistola ad quaedam ut celebretur Festum Sancti Joseph; Alia epistola eiusdem cancelarii de eodem”, in: *Opera omnia*, Hagae Comitum 1728 2, IV, col. 729-736.

⁶²⁹P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, II, pp.520-521.

⁶³⁰J. Gersonii, “Alia epistola eiusdem cancelarii...”, col. 732-736.

⁶³¹St. Bernardini Senensis, “Sermo de Sancto Josepho Sponso B. Virginia”, in: *Sermones Eximii...*, Venice 1745, IV, art. II, p.234.

⁶³²P. Pourrat, *La spiritualite' chretienne...*, II, p. 522.

⁶³³I. Noye, “Famille [devotion a' la saiante Famille]”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'...*, V, col. 85.

⁶³⁴G. Graziano della Madre di Dio, *Vita di S. Gioseffo, gloriosissimo sposo della Madre di Dio*, Brescia 1606.

⁶³⁵G. Patrignani, *Il divoto di S. Giuseppe*, Florence 1803.

⁶³⁶G. Patrignani, *Il divoto di S. Giuseppe...*, p. 137.

I believe that it is opportune to consider these little works, because they were read and meditated on by Leopoldina and also because they supply precious indications regarding devotion to St. Joseph and therefore, to the Holy Family.

Fr. Jerome Graziano opens with a significant verse: ... *since Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was espoused to Joseph...* [Mt 1:18], in which he seems to bring out already a story of the Holy Family, basing himself on the gospel sources and presenting the three personalities already united. The writer, however, seems to have been inspired already by the idea of the Trinity and with a new thrust, and a fervor proper of his own land, exclaims:

...Blessed, praised and glorified be God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one essence and a Trinity of Persons, and may glory be given to all the inhabitants of Heaven, for having given to us down here on earth three such persons, as Jesus, Mary and Joseph...⁶³⁷

Then, the author seeks to explain the correspondence between Jesus, Mary and Joseph, with the three divine Persons:

... Mary is like the Eternal Father in being the Mother of her Only Begotten Son...Jesus is understood as the Divine Word ... finally Joseph is like the Holy Spirit, in being also he, the spouse of Mary...⁶³⁸.

However, the most evident fact in this work is that in treating of the “grandeur and virtue” of St. Joseph, the writer refers always to all three of the persons composing the Holy Family, even though this term never appears. The Spanish Carmelite loves to indulge his “familiarity” and “conversation” that Joseph could have had with Jesus and Mary ⁶³⁹, but above all he is convinced that “whoever honors and praises St. Joseph, honors also Jesus and Mary; since from Jesus and Mary redounds whatever Joseph has in himself that is good...”⁶⁴⁰.

Beyond any doubt, in these texts Leopoldina who “if she had such an understanding with St. Joseph”⁶⁴¹, must have found nourishment for her piety and an open pathway for her encounter with the Holy Family.

In the writers considered thus far, however, there is not yet found the precise term of the *Holy Family*. This moved me to continue the work of research following the indications of the manual of piety that Leopoldina used. At a certain point there appears a new name, “Fr. Cartagena” ⁶⁴², who composed thirteen homilies in praise of St. Joseph⁶⁴³. The first page of the text, containing these “Homilies”, is already of itself significant, since in bears on the top of the page, a miniature of the Holy Family.

⁶³⁷G. Graziano della Madre di Dio, *Vita di S. Gioseffo...*, p. 1.

⁶³⁸G. Graziano della Madre di Dio, *Vita di S. Gioseffo...*, p. 2.

⁶³⁹G. Graziano della Madre di Dio, *Vita di S. Gioseffo...*, p. 38.

⁶⁴⁰G. Graziano della Madre di Dio, *Vita di S. Gioseffo...*, p. 2.

⁶⁴¹Letter of Madeline di Canossa, to Laopoldina Naudet, May 22, 1829. • Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁶⁴²John Cartagena [+ 1617], a Franciscan theologian, who had first belonged to the Company of Jesus. From Spain, the land of his origin, he was sent to Rome, where he exercised an important role in the retinue of Pope Paul V [cf. A. Amman, “Jean de Carthage”, in: *Dictionnaire de la Theologie Catholique...* XVIII, 1, col. 754-755.

⁶⁴³A. Patrignani, *Il divoto di S. Giuseppe...*, p. 143.

Fr. Cartagena, too, places his emphasis on St. Joseph; being devoted to him is something very pleasing to Jesus and Mary, and he will always be the *Head of this Holy Family*. Finally, there is discovered the much desired “Holy Family.” To this, Fr. Cartagena directs himself in order to obtain from God whatever grace needed and he invites the faithful to climb this ladder:... *from Joseph to the Virgin, from the Virgin to Christ, from Christ to the Father*. If Jesus has merits before the Father, and Mary before the Son, Joseph can show to both *his calluses and signs of hard work, which for their necessities, he endured in working at his trade as a carpenter...* ⁶⁴⁴.

However, it is not possible to be certain where Leopoldina had encountered for the first time the expression, *Holy Family*. In the manual of piety, already cited several times, there is also found the Holy Family⁶⁴⁵, already employed by St. Bernardine. In the *Menologio* of the Jesuits, there is found but one time the expression the *divine Family*⁶⁴⁶. This *Menologio*, according to a tradition of the Sisters of the Holy Family used to be read in the Refectory all during dinner and supper. Leopoldina must have known well the various biographical episodes, since she did quote in her **Spiritual Journal** a passage indicative of devotion to the Holy family. This passage was inserted in the context of a celebrated fact in the history of the Jesuits, because it reveals the intimate relationship between Jesus, Mary and the Company ⁶⁴⁷. The three sacred persons, in fact, would have appeared to a Lay Brother, Peter Basto [+ 1645], Missionary in Kalabar, and in the act of taking their leave from him, supposedly pronounced these words: “We founded the Society of Jesus” ⁶⁴⁸ - words found in Leopoldina’s **Spiritual Journal**.

Peter Basto, however, is remembered in the *Menologio* because of his devotion to St. Joseph, and not to the Holy Family, which is revealed only in the reported expression: *we founded the Company*. Mother Naudet seems to have reflected on this fact in order to draw her logical and personal conclusions. She, too, begins with her devotion for St. Joseph:

... in prayer, thinking of the devotion that the Lord gave me for the glorious St. Joseph and of the graces which, by means of this saint, He has sent me, there came to me these words: *We founded the Society of Jesus* and it seemed to me that the Lord had given me devotion to the sacred family, that it serve as a pledge of wanting all that He wills, also with these means to found the Society, which he has placed in my heart to work with such zeal....⁶⁴⁹

Here one may note that the devotion to the Holy Family had undergone an evolution in Mother Naudet’s spirituality. It is no longer a matter of her personal piety, but rather of a cultic expression on the community level. In fact, she herself would make clear to Fr.

⁶⁴⁴Ioanne de Carthagenae, “De Culto et devotione erga B. Virg. et D. Joseph, homilia XIII, libro XVIII, p. 60, n. 313, in: *Homiliae Catholicae de sacris arcanis deiparae Mariae et Josephi*, Romae 1611.

⁶⁴⁵A. Patrignani, *Il divoto di S. Giuseppe...*, pp. 408 & 411.

⁶⁴⁶A. Patrignani, *Menologio...*, IV, [index of the matters], p. xxiii.

⁶⁴⁷G. Petazzi, *Il Mistero della Compagnia di Gesu’*, Milano 1934, p.122.

⁶⁴⁸A. Patrignani, *Menologio...*, I, p.3.

⁶⁴⁹G.S., 1815, f. 109.

Rozaven: "... the devotion that we have adopted is that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of the Sacred Heart of Mary and of St. Joseph, in brief, the Holy Family"⁶⁵⁰

The passage from the personal aspect to that of the community dimension is easily documented through a passage in her **Spiritual Journal**:

...During prayer, I had the thought of placing the institute under the protection of the Holy Family, and of taking hold of whatever needs to be done for this, the imitation of Jesus Christ, both in His hidden life as well as in His public life...⁶⁵¹.

It seems evident that while for her personal choice of devotion to the Holy Family, on the part of Mother Naudet, the psychological component could be added. For the community aspect, though, there seems valid only the spiritual element, that which the historians of spirituality call the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Who is able to offer an intuition into the needs of a soul and of an historical period⁶⁵². And as for manifesting how propitious was the devotion to the Holy Family at the beginnings of the 19th century is easily comprehensible. It was a brand new world that had ushered forth from the French Revolution. Justly, one writer stated that like Noah, coming out of the Ark, would not have found the world so changed, as a person coming out of the 18th century would have landed without preparation into the 19th. The sun was setting on one civilization and it could already foresee that a new society was dawning⁶⁵³.

The Holy Family, then, was the model of life and of work that the Church could propose to human beings, the components of this society. They seemed to be separating themselves more and more from religion. From this point of view, Mother Naudet seemed finally to be opened up to that "ecclesial sense" that was characteristic of that epoch and to be inserted into the religious movement, in which there is made ever more evident the relationship between the spiritual life and the social commitment⁶⁵⁴. The Holy Spirit, and more precisely Jesus Christ, in His two lives, His private and public dimensions, constituted for Leopoldina a model and a devotion to propose to the members of her new Institute.

Under the devotional aspect, Mother Naudet found herself a bit ahead of her times, with respect to the other Founders and Foundresses of the 19th century. It is true that in the 17th century the devotion to the Holy Family was not one of enthusiasm, or for individual piety. From a purely individual manifestation, this passed over to a more organized veneration, even though still local and somewhat limited. Through the work especially of the Jesuits [and this is significant for Mother Naudet], there spread throughout Europe a few confraternities with particular statutes. In addition, numerous treatises on the Holy Family began to appear, but, prior to the 19th century, these all spoke of the three Persons separately, without considering their community and drawing from this union a spirituality⁶⁵⁵. It would

⁶⁵⁰Copy of a letter of Mother Leopoldina Naudet to Fr. Rozaven, June 15, 1827. Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona.

⁶⁵¹G.S., 1811, f. 78.

⁶⁵²E. Bertaud - A. Rayez, "Devotions", in : *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'*..., III, col. 749-752.

⁶⁵³G. de Bertier de Sauvigny, "La Restauration [1800-1848], in: *Nouvelle histoire de l'Eglise*..., IV, p. 265.

⁶⁵⁴A. Prandi, "Correnti e figure della spiritualita' cattolica nei secoli XIX e XX", in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanita'*..., V, p. 97.

⁶⁵⁵I.Noye, "Famille [devotion a' la sainte Famille], in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite'*..., V, p. 90.

suffice to give a glance at the work of Sandini⁶⁵⁶, whose work bears the rather pompous title: *The History of the Holy Family*, to take into account this reality. The text is divided into three distinct parts:

- 1st Part: *Concerning Christ the Lord, savior of the Human Race*. [21 chapters];
 2nd Part: *Concerning Mary the Virgin, the Mother of Christ* [8 chapters];
 3rd Part: *Concerning Joseph, the Spouse of Mary the Virgin, Father of Christ* [1 chapter].

I cited this text because it certainly circulated in the Veronese Province. It bears, in fact, certain hand-written annotations, as the name of the owner, Fr. Gilardoni ⁶⁵⁷.

It is important to note, lastly, that the intention of these writers toward the group constituted by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, was intensified after a particular consideration on the figure of St. Joseph. And especially, when treating of him, the works usually developed the hidden life of the “three” of Nazareth ⁶⁵⁸.

This same phenomenon was manifested in Mother Leopoldina’s piety, When she would pause to consider in a particular manner St. Joseph’s life, which for her consisted in the continuous contemplation of Jesus and Mary, her spirit opened up the synthesis, and she no longer sees the three distinct persons, but a unique reality: the Holy family. From 1811, Leopoldina’s mind and heart turned toward the Holy Family. And when she will take up the matter of the new Institute, Mother Naudet’s thought will pause anew on the Holy family, which had by now become the core of her piety and the prime mover of her apostolic endeavor.

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⁶⁵⁶A. sandini, *Historiae Familiae Sacrae, ex antiquis monumentis collecta*, Padua 1734.

⁶⁵⁷Joseph Maria Gilardoni, was the Pastor of St. Martin’s B.A. and a collaborator of the Bishop of Verona, His Excellency, Innocent Liruti [1741-1827].

⁶⁵⁸I. Noye, “Famille [devotion a’ la Sainte Famille]”, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualite’...*, V, col. 85.

VI. Mystical Experience

In Mother Naudet's religious experience there is totally lacking the spectacular side, that which believers sometimes remember the more. Her spiritual life passed entirely under silence between her soul and God. Absolutely extraneous to Leopoldina's experience are those extraordinary phenomena of the cognoscitive, affective and corporal order⁶⁵⁹. Her **Spiritual Journal**, however, seems to betray Leopoldina's interior secret, allowing some characteristic signs to appear of her mystical life, as the interior "locutions" and her "transport of love." Sometimes it seems to be simply a matter of expression, as in the case of 1813, in which Leopoldina notes: "... it seems to me that I heard these words: do not slow down in forming those continuous acts of love..."⁶⁶⁰. On other occasions it seems that she is dealing with "interior communication", very similar to the phenomenon called by the spiritual authors an intellectual vision⁶⁶¹. Still in 1813,, Leopoldina wrote:

...it seemed to me that I had comprehended, or to put it better, seen, felt and tasted the love that the Lord has for my soul, a love which demands from me a supreme caution and exquisite diligence ... It seemed to me that I saw the Lord within me and that to this He challenged me and said to me that even for those failures that I have committed, He will not reject me...⁶⁶².

While she does make known these "locutions", Leopoldina also felt the need to confess her own lack of ability: "...there are certain very intimate communications and of a nature that is difficult to render, that are such that the soul loses itself in these..."⁶⁶³. Here it should be pointed out that her soul seems to have touched the Infinite, and therefore she can only stutter whenever she tries to communicate an experience which, "by definition, is incommunicable..."⁶⁶⁴.

As for what pertains to her "transport of love", Leopoldina is still even less explicit. Several times in her **Spiritual Journal**, she registers this phenomenon, but always in passing. In 1811, Leopoldina wrote:

...This evening I experienced even greater yearning. I made continuous acts of love toward the Lord, and I experienced also sensible effects, ardor, accelerated palpitation of my heart, and I had to look for other thoughts to be able to quiet these down and to go to sleep...⁶⁶⁵.

A few days later she confessed:

... I felt that love cannot remain inactive and always seeks more. This yearning procured for me in this prayer a more accelerated motion in the palpitation of my heart and breathing...⁶⁶⁶.

It seems as though Leopoldina had understood that God was calling her to the mystical state, in which love alone could be her guide and condition of life. In a passage of her **Spiritual Journal** of 1812, it seems as though Leopoldina's soul paused, with an interior

⁶⁵⁹G. Schryver, *I principi della vita spirituale...*, pp. 232-233.

⁶⁶⁰G.S., 1813, f. 107.

⁶⁶¹R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Perfection Chretienne et contemplation...*, II, p. 551.

⁶⁶²G.S., 1813, f. 104.

⁶⁶³G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁶⁶⁴I. Gobry, *L'esperienza mistica ...*, p. 98.

⁶⁶⁵G.S., 1811, f. 50.

⁶⁶⁶G.S., 1822, f. 50.

unusual intensity. Her habitual discretion and sobriety of style does not succeed in smothering the exhilaration provoked by love:

... in prayer today I experienced again the enkindling of my heart with charity, but instead of rejoicing in this feeling, it seemed to me that this only increased the desire to be even the more enkindled, and whenever I would experience a movement this strong that impeded my breathing, nonetheless I was still not satiated and it seemed to me that I had not yet hardly begun to love the Lord...⁶⁶⁷.

After this brief exposition of particular mystical phenomena, it is better to clarify that for Leopoldina these are but “signs” of a more interior spiritual experience and they were not considered by her as indispensable for the mystical life. Mother Naudet, rather, as all mystics, according to the view of the spiritual authors⁶⁶⁸, dreaded the spectacular and all this seemed to draw one from the order of nature. There is some testimony of this in an episode registered in her **Spiritual Journal** in the year 1812:

... thinking during Mass, at which I was to receive Holy Communion, on the institution of the Most Holy Sacrament, I was drawn in spirit to the Cenacle, and in contemplation of what happened there, I experienced within myself great sweetness, but was strongly drawn outside of myself, but in the act in which I interiorally abandoned myself, and gave in to the power and the sweetness of this attraction. I felt as though this was being communicated also to the body, and I began to be no longer aware of myself, and I distracted myself through a fear by reason of my nature...⁶⁶⁹.

This passage opens up the supposition that Leopoldina resisted an ecstasy/ Her mystical life is totally involved in union with God; this is a union that tends toward transformation by means of charity. From a confession of hers in her **Spiritual Journal**, in 1812 it seemed as though Mother Naudet had arrived at the dizzying heights of love. In fact, she noted:

... in prayer today, I internalized very much on sentiments of love toward God. I experienced strong sentiments of loving Him ever more, so much so that it seemed to me no longer to satisfy me union with Him, but something even more did my heart seek and it seemed that this would be transformation. I felt no longer united but rather enveloped in God, and I could not do anything else other than love and enjoy Him...⁶⁷⁰.

Before arriving at this spiritual height, it is comprehensible that the soul would have had to overcome difficulties, that is, to have passed through the two classical ways that lead to the mystical life: the purgative and the illuminative ways⁶⁷¹. Under this aspect, her **Spiritual Journal** does not give us any indication. From her autobiographical notes, Mother Naudet always presents herself as the supreme simplifier. It seems that for her, all is reduced to the negative part, to her purification of heart:

... in prayer the Lord led me to understand the great purity that He wishes that my soul be embellished, and, in a particular manner, that total despoilment of all self-love and taking pleasure in those things demanded of me...⁶⁷².

⁶⁶⁷G.S., 1812, f. 91.

⁶⁶⁸A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione cristiana...*, pp. 849-850.

⁶⁶⁹G.S., 11812, f. 87.

⁶⁷⁰G.S., 1812, f. 90.

⁶⁷¹R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Perfection chretienne et contemplation...*, I, p. 175.

⁶⁷²G.S., 1811, f. 51.

This first spiritual step which, according to the authors, translates the personal effort of a human being, and pertains properly to the ascetical path. It tends to free the spirit from every sensible attachment in order to render one capable of being orientated toward God. But, if the initiative of purification begins with God, ore than from the human soul, then one should speak of mystical purification.

In Leopoldina's case it is evident that the first agent is God, and her soul only seconded His attractions and obeyed His orders. It suffices to open her **Spiritual Journal** to realize this reality. In 1811, there can be found noted:

... As I know that purity, nothingness, despoilment, death of myself will make me arrive all the sooner, so, I love all that gives me light to achieve these, only paying attention to the height where I am to arrive, and not paying attention to the path, which with such courage I begin, all the more when I know how good the Lord is and how much He helps me. This is all the more so that it seems to me that it is not my own efforts that need to be undertaken, but He does it all, as I know that He is in all things...⁶⁷³.

The positive part, however, of Leopoldina's spiritual journey was worked out in her docility to the voice of the Holy Spirit, Who made Himself heard in the depth of her interior life. Purification of heart and the interior life are the two poles around which Mother's Naudet's spiritual experiences revolved. Her entire **Spiritual Journal** is pervaded with a profound and intense desire for the interior life, lived in the intimacy with God alone. There is almost a continual nostalgic return to Leopoldina's earlier ideal, that of the Trappistine life. Her exterior conditions have changed, but the essence of the ideal remained in Mother Naudet's spirit. The tabernacle became for her a mysterious "La Trappe". It is here that her soul lived the ineffable experiences of the mystical life. Christ, present in the Eucharist, is the Model to Whom Leopoldina wished to conform her own life, so much so that at a certain point in her **Spiritual Journal**, this expression: is noted: "... Love seeks similarity. If, therefore, I love Jesus, I have to be like Him"⁶⁷⁴. And after some time, she could confess:

... during prayer in these days, out of a certain habit I used internally with the Lord the usual expressions: that I want that He be alone in me, that I want to be all His, and the like..., but I already was experiencing this, that it is no longer that I have to tend toward this, with wishing that He be within me. It is no longer I, since I no longer exist, but, in the dwelling which is His, I must will that there should no longer enter anything that is mine...⁶⁷⁵.

Before the tabernacle, Leopoldina spent hours and hours in profound adoration. In these moments, her soul no longer had cognition of time, and she experienced being transported into the supernatural and when, the sentiment had passed, she wished to speak of the Absolute that she seemed to have perceived, and she could not find the words to express herself. According to a contemporary author, the mystics are unable to speak of God, "but of themselves, their reflections and the happenings that accompanied and followed their encounter with Him"⁶⁷⁶.

This should not be surprising, because it is a matter of extraneous facts, that are beyond human abilities. No one can achieve these by human strength alone, even though one should reach the most sublime virtues, or go through life in penance and prayer. In Leopoldina

⁶⁷³G.S., 1811, f. 51.

⁶⁷⁴G.S., 1811, f. 65.

⁶⁷⁵G.S., 1811, f. 51.

⁶⁷⁶E. Balducci, "Esperienza della vita divina...", in: *Il Soprannaturale*, p. 435.

this concepts appears with much clarity. In a passage from her **Spiritual Journal**, in the year 1812, she wrote:

... He had me come to know that I ought not doubt when I experience those effects which come from Him, since He alone can work them out, and with human strength alone, one cannot achieve them. I was reminded in fact, that when He is not the one drawing me toward Him, then in vain do I recollect myself, and no matter how hard I seek fervor, I do not find it, when it is not He to give it to me...⁶⁷⁷

It seems that here, Leopoldina is referring to that “marvelous mystical experience”, superior to the common vocation of human beings. According to mystical theologians, this state depends on a special grace, from an inspiration and an illumination, through which the soul is rendered docile by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit⁶⁷⁸. It is undeniable that in her **Spiritual Journal** there are noted certain data, such to enable us to suppose an exceptional call to her on the part of God. The most important, that which the authors maintain is the first fundamental characteristic of mystical union is the presence of God, experienced in the intimacy of one’s spirit⁶⁷⁹. Leopoldina does confess that she had received this gift from the beginning of her religious life:

... The Lord granted me this grace to enjoy continuously His divine presence in my heart and internal union with Him. But, this is His gift...⁶⁸⁰.

Even when the soul is distanced for some time from the exercise of this presence, as seems to have happened to her in 1802, the challenges of grace are all the more insistent, so much so that Leopoldina is forced to confess:

...He made me experience each time that I turned within myself in prayer, or other exercises, an internal recollection that it seemed to me always that God was within me ready for when it would please me to be attentive to Him...⁶⁸¹.

In 1811, when the direction received from Fr. Bertoni contributed to intensify Mother Naudet’s spiritual life, her **Spiritual Journal** reports significant passages in this regard. It seems that for some time, her soul was “engulfed and totally lost in the Lord, not doing anything other than receive and love...”⁶⁸². This is a new experience for Leopoldina; but, above all, one that is inexpressible. In fact, she wrote:

...it would be impossible to express these sentiments and affections, these communications that are so intimate and prolonged excite in my heart. The effects of these can be felt, and therefore, those two and one half hours passed quickly...⁶⁸³.

From this passage just quoted one could establish with certainty that Mother Naudet, at least in certain moments, was admitted to this mystical union. Her spirit came out from these experiences so exhilarated that her language noted in her **Spiritual Journal** seems to rise up

⁶⁷⁷G.S., 1812, f. 87.

⁶⁷⁸R. Garrigou Lagrange, *Perfection Chretienne et contemplation...*, I, p. 192.

⁶⁷⁹A. Poulain, *Des graces d’oraison...*, pp. 69-70.

⁶⁸⁰G.S., 1800, f. 7-8.

⁶⁸¹G.S., 1802, f. 38.

⁶⁸²G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁶⁸³G.S., 1811, f. 44.

in tone and becomes even symbolic, without disturbing Leopoldina's proper and sober style. In these instants, the presence of God became for her soul a kind of "hedge" that protects the "inner center":

... The Lord made me realize also that in order to guard that center where He dwells within my soul, that "center" in which God dwells, it was fitting that He place there a hedge... A few days later, as it had been proscribed for me as my particular examen the consideration always of the presence of God and to do that which is known to Please Him I came to realize, with beginning to practice this, that it would be that hedge which externally could guard that center...⁶⁸⁴.

This sudden burst of symbolism in Mother Naudet's writing style should not produce any surprise. According to a contemporary author, the mystic, in living such a totally personal and ineffable experience, in the effort to construct some image of one's relationship with God, which has been of inspiration and totally enveloped the soul, cannot find adequate language, and thus has recourse to symbolism⁶⁸⁵. In Leopoldina this phenomenon does not assume much importance; the sole exception is that of 1811, when, for the first time, she seems to have had an experience similar to that of St. Paul, enraptured up to the third heaven, where he heard the ineffable words that it is not licit for any human being to exclaim them [cf. 2 Co 12:2-4].

Lastly, there should be noted that the presence of God in the mystical state does not consist so much in "thinking of God", but more in the "experience" that one really enters into communication with Him⁶⁸⁶. Leopoldina expresses herself this way regarding that state:

... I experienced in a noticeable manner His continuous presence within me, and that He does not remain with me, as though at my side, which would then make it necessary for me to turn toward Him, but I feel Him within me, together with me, in a manner that it seems to me that I am in Him...⁶⁸⁷.

It is evident that here it is not so much a matter of a union obtained with personal effort, but rather the first gift that God places in a soul whom he wishes to lead along the mystical paths. It seems therefore that it could be concluded through Leopoldina's religious experience, with a passage from Lallement [1587-1633]:

... when, after a long practice of purity of heart, God enters into a soul and there reveals Himself openly with the gift of His holy presence, which is the beginning of the supernatural gifts, the soul then experiences such happiness in this state that it seems to be person to have not ever even have known or loved the Lord...⁶⁸⁸

It can, therefore, be affirmed that Mother Naudet's religious experience does present some mystical forms, documented not so much by exterior phenomena such as visions or revelations, as rather by that which constitutes the essence of the mystical state: passive purification, and the presence of God, truly experienced by the soul, such as to establish with Him a direct contact, and without the formal mediation of concepts. Under this aspect, Mother Naudet does not enter into that species of spiritual *koine*, typical of the first half of

⁶⁸⁴G.S., 1814, f. 44.

⁶⁸⁵P. Emmanuel, "La consideration de l'extase", in: *Polarite' du symbole...*, p. 81.

⁶⁸⁶A. Poullain, *Des graces d'oraison...*, p. 70.

⁶⁸⁷G.S., 1811, f. 44.

⁶⁸⁸L. Lallement, *La dottrina spirituale...*, p. 417.

the 19th century⁶⁸⁹. Her interior story is summarized in her accentuated inclination for the mystical life, which always maintains the primacy, even when Mother Naudet made it correspond to her apostolic endeavors.

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⁶⁸⁹A. Prandi, “Correnti e figure della spiritualita’ cattolica nei sec. XIX e XX”, in: *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell’umanita’...*, V, p. 97.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this work, it seems that it can be stated that Mother Naudet's personality flows forth from her writings, that are stamped with her individual traits that are quite pronounced. It is noted how in her spiritual formation, a number of schools influenced her make-up: the Ignatian, the Carmelite and the Salesian. From an attentive reading of her **Spiritual Journal**, however, there comes to the fore also the fact that Mother Leopoldina did not follow passively these spiritual orientations, but she vivified them, and made them her own. The "divine service" and the Ignatian *Exercises*, prayer, obedience and the interior peace of the reformer of Carmel, her "simplicity" and "charity" of St. Francis de Sales are motives that interweave and fuse in Mother Naudet's religious experience. Her spiritual life is furthermore illumined by the virtue of hope, in its two-fold aspect of confidence and abandonment, by humility as a genuine knowledge of oneself, and by obedience, as that means of conformity to the Will of God.

The worship of the Eucharist and the devotion to the Holy Family translate concretely Mother Leopoldina's intense piety. It is here that there is discovered her soul, and in which there is summarized her entire spiritual experience. Her Eucharistic-contemplative prayer seems to constitute for Mother Naudet the very heart of her interior life, the attraction of her spirit and that act that gives tonality to her entire spiritual undertaking.

Her devotion to the Holy Family, chosen as the model of both the contemplative and active life, for herself and for her Institute, opened Leopoldina up to the "ecclesial sense", so characteristic of the spirituality of the period and inserted her into the religious movement in which there was made ever more evident the relationship between the spiritual life and a social commitment. The most salient fact of this woman is, however, that of not ever feeling obliged to one spiritual method over another, but in allowing herself to be guided interiorly by a piety of listening to the divine voice. After God had made Himself known in some experiential manner, from her childhood, she sought and experienced Him in an ineffable manner in mystical union, constituted for Mother Naudet, the sole goal, to Whom she directed her most profound desires. Her exterior activity, indeed valued and esteemed as the means of procuring the "greater glory of God", never succeeded in obscuring the primacy of contemplation.

Rather, it is proper to her contemplation which, according to Mother Naudet, flowed from the "fruitful union" of her apostolic work in the bosom of the Church. It seemed therefore that one could approach the person of Mother Naudet in that "very numerous company of women of exquisite spirituality and apostolic ardor who enriched the Church of the 19th century of religious institutions and families.

What truly strikes one is that there is hardly a single one of these new foundations which did not propose for itself, at least in part, the exercise of the active apostolate. This vocation can be discovered above all in looking at the personal lives of these foundresses. The case is not rare of one who would believe she was being called to contemplation, and that also at the price of renunciation, she directed instead her own charity toward the effective assistance of the sick, toward orphans, to young women in danger and to their

instruction and religious education⁶⁹⁰. Mother Leopoldina Naudet, too, gave up her much dreamed of cloister in order to found an institution of mixed life, in which contemplation found its exterior projection in the work of education in behalf of the youth.

The End

⁶⁹⁰A. Prandi, ~"Correnti e figure della spiritualita' cattolica nei sec. XIX e XX", in: *La Chiesa Cattolica nella storia dell'umanita'...*, V, p. 119.

A. APPENDIX

[a] There is presented here Mother Naudet's Library, subdivided into these sections: Spiritual Works; Books of Devotion; Other works, and then texts without authors

[b] The authors, or texts that bear the little cross [+] were those works for the private use of Mother Naudet and which bear within them some hand-written jotting of the Foundress.

1. Her Library

- ALETOFILO, Pacifico *Trattati della confidenza critiana*, Venezia 1751.
- ANGELICO DAL PORTO DI FERMO, *Gesu' Cristo modello di una religiosa*, Fermo 1793
Roma 1796.
- AUGUSTINE, St. *Le divote meditazioni*, Venezia 1594, 1753.
Meditazioni, soliloqui e manuale, Modena 1713.
Le confessioni, Venezia 1746, 1752; Bassano 1803.
Delle confessioni, a cura di P. Gagliardi, Venezia 1762.
Le veglie, a cura di Giulio G.D. , Venezia 1806 - Bassano 1816.
Serroni, Milano 1820.
- AURIEMMA, T., *Stanza dell'anima nelle piaghe di Gesu'*, Venezia 1691, 1732, 1755
[Only the 1st part].
- BADIA C. F., *Panegirici e ragionamenti ed orazioni diverse*, Venezia 1750.
- BAGNATI, S. *Apparato eucaristico*. Venezia 1792 [2°].
- BAMBACARI, C.N., *Meditazioni, divisae per le tre vie, purgativa, illuminativa, ed unitiva*. Venezia 1740, 1745.
- BARBUGLI, D., *Lezioni spirituali ad uso delle monache*, Bassano 1766, 1788.
- BARCELLONA, A. *Le felicità dei santi*. Palermo 1800 [in three volumes].
- BARTOLOMEO DELLA CITTA' DI CASTELLO, *Dialogo dell'unione spirituale di Dio con l'anima*. Venezia 1693.
- BASSANIN, F. *La religiosa in tre stati di novizia, di professa, e di conversa*.
Venezia 1731, 1739.
- BAUDRAND, *L'ame intrieure ou conduite spirituelle dans les voies de Dieu*.
Paris 1829.
- BERNARD, St. *Lettere*,. Roma 1736.
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B. ANTHOLOGY OF MOTHER NAUDET'S SPIRITUAL JOURNAL

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*. A cura di M. Bonato e R. Accordini. Verona: Della Scala Edizioni 1999, 227 pp.]

1. Rome, Corsini Palace, October-November 1801

God Alone!

It is very difficult for me to speak of my own interior life, and so it is about all that is within me. Certain matters, it seems to me, that are so much a part of the deepest self, that they can hardly be explained in the way one experiences them.

Then, as far as doubts are concerned, it seems to me that one merits more in not manifesting them; I will not speak of them all, but those which I do have, which are few, in order to have something to say. Because, then it would seem to me that I would suffer something. This is all the more true that they are not matters which disturb me and that I feel that it would favor myself love if I were to take certain actions with greater security.

Then, as a general rule, that inclination of mine to be silent regarding what is deep within me, it seems to me that it is more for a sentiment that I have, that interior matters that are manifested, are something like a bottle of liquor, which once the cork is removed, it evaporates. Moreover, this could all be from my own self-love, because I am convinced of my own wretchedness and that I am burdened with many defects. Yet, it surprises me that the Lord does endow me with lights and good sentiments, so I think that in you it should have the same effects. I do not know which way to decide this.

I have a nature that bears with it great obstacles to virtue, but I pay little attention to it, but rather to the contrary virtue. Since thinking about my defects has never helped me very much, since there are so many of them, and they discourage me. So, it seems to me that my passions are within me like so many angry dogs that have been chained up; and I often pray to the Lord to hold back these chains very strongly so that they do not come out, and this is what I think would happen often. This does irritate me, and I feel this principally in my nature

These miseries of mine appear to me as a mass of mud. I do not pay much attention to them, because it seems to me that is they are so radicated in me that I would just become even more muddy. It helps me much to overcome myself and to seek outside of myself the help of God.

The helps that I do find in the spiritual life, I draw them from a great confidence in God and from a faith of persuasion that the Lord has conceded these to me for a long time, so that I see all ordained by God for my own profit, and I strive to draw on them, as I am persuaded that this is His will. And even if my memory places before my mind the wrongs that I have received, these do not make me resentful, persuaded as I am of this good.

Only with difficulty can I explain this faith because it permeates everything and is my continuous life. I hope everything because of this; I never pray to the Lord without this conviction. It is an internal security that I am being heard, because I have experienced great

proofs that a prayer offered with this intimate trust that God bestows His graces in order to further this principle, obtains all.

On this, and generally regarding this faith, I have never experienced any temptation, and consequently, no merit either since this does not seem to be in me as a virtue. It is rather a persuasion of divine things and of those spiritual gifts that pertain to virtue. This helps me very much in the midst of these internal battles that I sometimes experience.

This life of faith, however, sometimes places me in doubt regarding the motive for my activities, because those few virtues that I do exercise, I do this because I do believe that I cannot succeed in the things that I desire if I do not practice them. How would it be: the purity of intention that I do try to have in all that I do and which I say thinking that the good I desire that might derive from my actions cannot happen if it is not accompanied by this purity of intention. And I do fear that even the slightest aspect that I might be lacking, because I see clearly that my actions do not succeed. Yet, as has happened to me many times, when I do have that purity of intention and when I have exercised it out of the desire for good, even though at the beginning the results may not have been very promising, and that I had to suffer some set-backs, I did have to recognize that then the effect is that which I desired speaking thus about every matter.

It is faith that enables me to move ahead, and the Lord grants me this grace to consider all things in him and according to Him. This is what from a time and from then on, He has made active in me the more that frankness, because I trust more in God and fear much less the creatures.

I often have temptations, particularly those of thoughts, regarding which, however, for a certain time, I do not pay much attention. It is the horror of vice about which the devil has tormented my thoughts, and this has helped me much and is still helping me. This is the use that I have taken to recite right away the *Hail Mary* in the very moment that I think of the least reality that is not God.

This habit gives me no difficulty, what I mean is, costs me no effort. It is now something so natural to me, and presents itself just as quickly as a thought would. I do this deep within, without it being noticed. Sometimes I have to do this about forty times a day, because the devil probes, and when he has finished with one temptation, he starts all over again. And I really laugh at him, and we play to see who will tire first.

There are times when it will be enough for me to say only these words, *Hail Mary*, so that my mind will not be upset any further. I believe that one conquers more over the devil by joking with him, than with trying to enter into discussion with him, even if the discussion is organized to send him away.

The method that I use to conquer the internal restlessness and upsetment is that of being persuaded that what gives disturbance to the soul comes from the devil [that is what St. Teresa says and which I have always taken for my rule]. Thus, when something begins to bother me, even if underneath it there is hidden a mantle of good, and that I might experience many things through this, and a zeal which stimulates me, I do not believe that this is really

disrupting to me. And with all sincerity and confidence I address myself to the Lord of not being able to accomplish that good, because I am accompanied by a disturbance that is not totally pure and that it is His holy Will that I am doing. Thus, I am able to slip away from this annoyance, with which I would not be able to overcome. I consider this matter a temptation until the bother passes away.

My health, which I place in some jeopardy in having to do often some things which are against the common observance, as getting up later, and other such matters, and the discomfort that my duty is to live this, since the fact is that I am indeed attached to the rule and I would like to be an example of it. I cannot be content with my own words, so this has given me food for thought for some time to say this to you, regarding the need I experience. In this way, I would work with greater security with the approval that this would give me. However, seeing that I experience more difficulty in doing this by myself, and deciding what I need, from this I am more oriented not to speak of such things.

It thus happens in this same way the thousand and one things that pertain to me personally, and where I would have pleasure in obtaining a response and security. The thought comes that I suffer more if I do not do it, and this comes to me: and all these things I accept as a cross, even though they merit only the name of little crosses. But, since I am not good at carrying those that are larger, I try not to let the little ones slip away. And from the moment that I take whatever happens in that sense, then I no longer feel their weight.

I have another cross, which, though, I do not feel very much. This is my own ready judgment and my freedom of spirit.

I love the one as well as the other; but at the same time that I love them, they keep me in humility and lowly, because I think often of the deception that these might bring me in judging myself that I might have to say everything to you, in order not to fall into this mistake. However, I am not good for consulting and I am accustomed to regulate myself according to the internal sentiment that I have of reality.

As a result, it seems to me that should I wish to begin getting direction, I would be bound and much more limited in thinking and acting. The reason is that thinking over many matters, that pass by internally, and I do not give them much attention. This could never be if I had to express these to someone else.

My own self-love torments me very much. I do not give much heed to virtue - what I mean by this is that my failures that I have committed regarding them have given me an internal persuasion and one that is rooted in my wretchedness and the evil inclination of my nature. The end result of all this is that it has given me that diffidence concerning myself, and a great compassion for my neighbor, with whom whenever I have discussed my defects, I have always found more virtue in others than that which I have. However, myself love ...

To put it better, I have a certain peace in the clarity with which it seems to me that I look at reality, and of the rightness that I feel that I have in making judgments about them. However, this self love keeps me very low, because I fear in the punishment for the

satisfaction that I experience on occasion. Thus, the Lord takes from me this gift, that I know comes from Him.

And since I esteem Him so much, I also fear very much to lose Him, because I believe that the Lord in His mercy and to humble my pride, has allowed that I should experience the failings that I have committed, and the evil which is within me. It is He alone Who sustains me not to commit any more serious faults, for which I have every disposition within my own nature.

From the time that I made this reflection, the Lord has bestowed on me that fear of which I have spoken, and it is so clear that it seems to me that I could in a moment lose that clarity of mind so easily as one would lose a pin: and this helps me very much.

What I have said above regarding what happens to me in other temptations - that is, that the Lord has me find the remedy, and of this I am accustomed to say nothing. I desire, therefore, to know whether this is enough, or if I should get advice in these matters and regarding the temptations, which with these helps, pass me by soon.

For the last year, or so, that I have made a great effort regarding myself, with the help of God, I find that I am more at peace in morale. And since I feel deeply every mortification, in the place of the effort that I made other times in my imagination, and the harm from the weakness that I experienced in this, I am trying to sacrifice right away to the Lord all these things, so that I fall into those defects.

However, my nature is so perverse, that each time that I feel sensibly this passage that brings my morale to the physical level, and this always does me more or less some harm. This is for me a great humiliation.

Some time ago, there came to me the great temptation to afflict myself and to think that there were those struggles over myself that rendered my health so weak, but the Lord at that moment came to my assistance. I protested that I would rather have died than to leave a moment for conquering myself. I thought that this was a cross for me, and the thought of this brings me always some respite.

I do not know if I can beg the Lord to save me from all this, because I hold it more dear to suffer in the heart than in the spirit. And I do experience a great hope in God and I will never be impeded from this to work for Him. Whenever it is that I would have to work for Him, He would help me. In fact, for that very little that I do accomplish, now for my own companions, my health has not impeded me, and this is for me a relief. I have always desired humiliations and mortifications, despite the fact that I take them so badly, because I hoped to overcome that repugnance. But, now I confess that even when it comes to me to desire this, I remain quiet, because I know that these do not accomplish any good. While with a thought I arrive more easily at the victory over myself than with all the mortifications that might be given me, which irritate me more than help me.

I have been this way since my infancy and have seen the effects of this. These were, as now, that my health suffered from them very much. All this I have to say to my own confusion, nor can I even explain to myself from where all this comes.

My own will I feel that it is continually tending toward God in all, but I cannot, however, act that it always perform according to His goodness. Rather, I very often find that I do precisely that which I do not want. And I believe that I am all the culpable, since this is not contrary in me toward the good, rather I find myself often very strong in this direction.

I do lack submission of judgment because of the defect of language, because as you yourself know all too well, I have always been one to speak little, and therefore my inclination has drawn me to an order where silence would be practiced. But, from the moment that I am in this order, I have striven to overcome this. And it happens to me that when I am either in the time of recreation, or at work, do look for expressions to show that I have overcome this. But, this is true: that when they say something that happens regarding you, I find it very difficult not being able to respond, and to say that which is indeed according to the truth.

I do know that this is a great defect; but I take it more as self-love than a defect of speaking much. On this matter, I do not want to make much judgment, and I leave it to you.

It also happens that there comes the desire to speak when certain statements are made. Since I do have a good memory there naturally comes to me to say what I have learned, or read. I would like to know whether it would not be good to remain silent also on those occasions, for my own greater humility and mortification.

Another matter that torments me is that every two or three months, as also on the anniversaries, there comes back to my mind with a very strong force all that I have suffered from the time I have been a member of the "Beloved of Jesus." Every word that you have said to me [not those for ordinary mortification, but those unjust things that you have believed and said of me], that is, all that has taken place in my life from the moment that I separated myself from the love of God alone [and regarding this, it has all been most just]. However, this recollection gives me a certain compassion regarding myself, that I do not like, nor absolutely do I want to have it. I work against this as much as I can, but I feel some times, really every single time as I have said, a greater difficulty in trying to overcome it, because it is accompanied by a certain melancholy.

To the glory of God which wisely regulates everything, I ought to say, however, that this is diminishing with each passing day, and whenever I do suffer it, I have greater force of reasoning to conquer myself. And I hope that it will all pass as time does.

For what pertains to my zeal, I am endowed with much for others, and particularly for my companions. As a result, every good thought that comes to me, every desire for perfection in virtue, all the graces that the Lord bestows on me, it seems to me that these are all for their advantage and in consideration of my own charge. As a result I have such confidence in this that it seems to me that the Lord has protected me to the extent of my need.

I keep in my heart the good of all. I do whatever I can to increase their fervor in the practice of those virtues of which they stand in need. Since there was a period of time in which [my own sins were the reason for this] that I did not see all the fruit that I desired, I employed prayer and prayers, that whatever they might cost, they are always efficacious, because of my confidence in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, through which I obtain everything.

For about a year now the Lord consoles me regarding the zeal that I have for my companions, and I bless him and thank Him each day. I do not explain here all that I would like to do in order to give vent to this, for the Lord has given me grandiose desires: but from obedience I await that which I ought to do.

I find myself in an internal disposition of peace and trust, and persuasion that the Lord wants me to be holy, and that for this, He gives me so many stimuli, inspirations, and advice. I do not lose a moment from the thought and sentiment of the presence of God.

At the same time, in this depth of my soul there is also the view of my miseries. Regarding the past ones, it seems to me that the Lord inspires me to make use of them as the foundation of holiness, as there is still present the humiliation that these caused me, the knowledge of myself that they have given me and the diffidence that I feel that I should make use of with all assurance.

However, I am also in great fear of those that I might commit in the future, now that I find myself armed with the experience and with so many lights, as still with the interior strength to take a good look at myself that I want to suffer whatever there will be, in order to avoid the least imperfection regarding the past.

This fear makes me think that I could [if in place of following the path that the Lord wills for me, that is, that of mortification, I should come to weakness] I would be capable in place of the holiness that the Lord wants me to see, serve this world as an example of ingratitude with my infidelities, meriting that the Lord should take away from me His lights, and thus either abandoned altogether, or very little sustained, I would fall into every vice, every excess, that even right now I see that I am capable of them all. And then, I would see eternal damnation.

The eternal truths are always present to me. I do not ever meditate on them, nor do I read any book about them; however, in all things I think of them and am in great fear when I have committed some infidelity against the Lord. These infidelities are also the source of certain dread that I do have and the fears, which I did not use to have. However, I do fear of dying in these infidelities, as it seems to me that with all the dispositions and aids of the Lord that I do have, I am more culpable and obliged to more than others may be.

If it should ever happen that I do not practice mortification, and this leads me to some merely human sensibility, I feel correction coming in prayer. This is very bitter for me, because it offends that love that God wants from me. And this bitterness remains then and gives me some suffering, and as a result I would willingly perform any sacrifice whatsoever than to have the Lord finding fault with me.

My own self-love and my weakness do indeed make suffer at time. However, whenever I am so afflicted, this is not something that remains, and it does not have that depth and intensity of displeasure which I experience in what I have spoken of above, and I cannot even make a comparison concerning them.

In suffering anything at all, there is always some relief. And it is greater to offer this to the Lord to lessen my faults, etc. But, when I have been unfaithful to God, and feel that the Lord regrets having a spouse who is so weak, and who corresponds so badly, this wounds me in a way that I cannot even express. It is not that I am scrupulous about this, as one who believes that she has sinned. Nonetheless, it does hurt me and it seems that it is too little, for one being consecrated to God, simply to avoid sin.

Gratitude is the sentiment that has always been the greatest in me. Considering myself to have been so benefitted by God, and then having before me my own ingratitude, this has moved me, and I am unbearable even to myself when I do not correspond. It seems at times that all creatures ought to place themselves against me to find fault with me.

This sentiment also brings a danger to me humanly speaking: the reason is because I am so grateful for the good that has been bestowed upon me. However, this gratitude that is proposed to me, I have in the manner that I think is the more advantageous, that is, for my own soul. By praying to the Lord and by asking Him for what He abundantly bestows all that is for His love, I do not demonstrate. And He, Who has every good and is rich in mercy, will surely do this.

You understand clearly, Father, that my prayers are for you. For you have all the attachment that I can have toward one who is not my sole love, that is, God. However, this attachment of mine is based on God. This is why I have been so many times afflicted against the sentiments of my heart. Following, though, the desires of my spirit, which all tend to see it as truly holy and to contribute to it as much as I can.

As a result, while being of some affliction with my words, my spirit is directed toward eternity, and not toward the short period of this wretched life. And because I desire that you and you seek only that consolation that is in God, in Whom alone it is truly found, and thus to be one day blessed in eternity, after having been mortified for Him.

I feel that it is still hard for me, and it is only a short time that I am resolved to make the sacrifice of so many things that are spiritual, which I so ardently desire. And in fact, I have not been able to have them, because I was not indifferent regarding them. I say, therefore, that it is hard. However, the Saints supported life patiently, and death with pleasure; this is what I also desire.

I ask your pardon, my Father, for all that I have said and hope that it is not displeasing to you. You now know my motive and will pardon me for the intention that I had. The means, the manner were bad; but this has all come from a zeal that would want immediately that which she ardently desires. Pardon me, then, I beg you. Please do me the charity to respond to me, just as you said that you would do yesterday during my confession. I hope that my

sincerity does not displease you: I felt that I had to do this, since you said to me that I should do this.

As for my duty which concerns the enterprise to which the Lord has called me, be sure that I will be faithful to it, and that in addition to the duty I experience, there will be great pleasure in carrying this out according to your direction and assisted by your counsels: in brief, I really want to be a saint with the help of God, and this through the means of virtue. I am still far from it; but God can do all things: this, too, is a miracle.

Please answer me, Father, with all frankness. Do not hold back, in that you have my soul in your hands. From the sentiments that you expressed to me in confession, I trust that you will say what is best for me in this, and I will submit myself to it.

Your most obedient daughter in Christ,

Leopoldina Naudet

A Devotee of Jesus

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[cf. Leopoldina NAUDET *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp. 52-63]

2. Thursday, January 10, 1811

During prayer tonight, the Lord kept me two and a half hours. This time passed in continuous communication. It seemed to me that the Lord was consoling me for having wanted to submit myself to outside assistance. This was all to say to us also to be justified, in making me understand that He would not have asked this of me under any other person, and that he is the only one under whom He asks this as what He wants from me, assuring me that He wished to be Himself the Master of my spirit.

He led me to understand that to help me all that I need do is ask counsel from Him, and to trust that He would give me His light. I came to understand then the good of this, and I experienced supreme consolation that all had come from the Lord, as the center and principle of all. It seemed to me that He was saying that in order to direct me there is not needed knowledge, because only one reality is at work in me, that is, love - this is the principal operation. He would like also to assist this, which can also be drawn from the same font, that is, from God, and not so much from knowledge. So, I ought not be asking anyone for counsel, but await all from Him.

It would be impossible to express how many sentiments and affections, these very intimate and prolonged communications excited in my heart. The effects of them were noticeable, and therefore, those two and one half hours passed very quickly.

Different from all the other prayers that up until now I had offered, when this time [in which it seemed to me to be engulfed and totally lost in the Lord, doing nothing other than to receive and to love] had passed, it seemed that He had made of this a summary, in which I knew that the principal things were those that I had said.

So, as usually I can make no other account of such prayer other than to say what I experienced, that I loved, that I rejoiced, that I wished to love even more, and to unite myself with love, etc., I knew that my having made some summary of this with the help of the Lord, it was precisely that He wished that I would give some account of it.

I have not contradicted. Moved only by the actual affection, I said to the Lord that there are certain things which seemed to me to be of lesser importance, and that it seems only just that there are some secrets between Him and the soul. These would be those certain communications that are the more intimate and a kind that is difficult to render, so much does the soul lose itself in them.

On the following day, the Lord led me to understand that in order to guard that center where He dwells within my soul, it was fitting that there be put up a protecting hedge. It seemed to me in the name that ought to signify mortification - and since my health did not permit me to make any, I made instead this reflection.

But I know that the Lord does not demand penances of me, but rather but rather guards it. That which one cannot do except by means of the virtues then these can protect that charity which the Lord has placed in the soul.

A few days later, since it had been prescribed for me as a particular examen that of considering myself always in the presence of God, and to do that which is known to be according to His pleasure, I knew with beginning to practice this that this would be that protecting barrier which externally could protect that center.

In prayer, the Lord led me to understand my ingratitude in those continual failings which I commit regarding this examen. He gave me a great desire to expose that which I would have to be corrected for in my ingratitude toward God in this particular area, since this is even greater than what I sense in a noticeable way regarding His continual presence within me. He is not with me as though He were standing at my side, For then it would be necessary to turn myself toward Him. But, I experience Him within me, and at the same time, with me as it seems to me that I am in Him. Since, then, I am unable to work without Him, so I should not be lacking even in the actual reflection and activity.

One night I asked the Lord, after an hour or two of prayer, the permission to go to bed, fearing that the length of my vigil might be damaging to my health, and thus I would not be able to serve Him the next day. I heard in response these words: 'I want you as the slave of love, and not of your health'. I made no other reply.

In another prayer, the Lord led me to understand that I must always have charity, love toward Him as the principle, the cause or end of every word, of every movement, of my least operation.

The Lord gave me a great desire to be corrected even externally for my ingratitude, whenever I commit some failure regarding the particular examen. It seemed to me that it would be a respite, that which engaged me somewhat from exposing it - but, then I did it anyway.

In another prayer, the Lord made me understand that I should humbly await, and receive those helps that he will be to assist me to give me by means of his ministry and not to have the presumption to demand these, which my pride would easily do. However, I can under the title of charity ask him to assist me in my desire that I have of pleasing the Lord. Another day, it seemed to me that I understood that I no longer had the use of my faculties, but that the Lord had taken them over benignly. Hence, I was only able to think, or to understand what He wanted, and to remember only that which He recalled to my mind, and to love, by willing only Him.

He gave me great desires to increase and to aspire ever onward, without pausing. Regarding this, I made known to the Lord that not even my intentions are good to do that which now is made known to me, that is, the duty that I have of moving myself and working only for the sake of pleasing Him, and that I all this I do commit many failings. I begged Him, therefore, that just as He had already taken over the use of my powers, thus he might place me in a sweet necessity of not being able to do anything materially, without His activating my aim and will to please Him.

[Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*. o.c., pp. 93-96].

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3. Wednesday, February 27, 1811

At Holy Communion, I renewed my desire of following the inspirations of the Lord with a very sublime fidelity, and to listen to them also with that respectful silence and attention, that I might not lose anything of them. I made a sincere resolution concerning these things, as the Lord brought me to understand that He wanted these of me.

In prayer, the Lord made me understand that to live and to make progress in my undertakings with having abandoned everything to Him, without any more feeling the use of my own powers, it is necessary to have great courage, faith and confidence in Him. And there was explained to me the occasions in which each one of these virtues is necessary in order to maintain oneself constantly in this path.

It seemed to me in another moment that the Lord had given me sentiments of gratitude toward Him, in my coming to know that the faculty that I experience comes totally from His

grace, and not from the thing itself, and therefore for a moment, the difficulty of this was made clear.

The Lord showed me further how many gifts and lights He would communicate to my soul: but, He wills that I be the more despoiled of myself and totally unencumbered of any self-satisfaction.

[cf. Leopoldina, Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., p. 107]

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4. **The Retreat of May 1811. Meditation on the FLIGHT INTO EGYPT**

I experienced sentiments of satisfaction in admiring the glorious St. Joseph, his peace, his continuous contemplation of Jesus and Mary. And since this absorbed his whole attention, without his informing himself of that which is happening through the world, God has already taken care of this sacred triennium, and sends to him and angel.

Joseph receives the order of departure with the same submission, etc.: -

I stopped for a while to contemplate these holy personages on their journey, with some commotion, since the Holy Family is my special devotion.

Then, noting the poverty and deprivation, their companions, of every comfort, I desired anew to be delivered from so many things that seemed necessary to me, and which bring me more confusion than even in my meditating on the life of the divine Redeemer.

I resolved to proceed eliminating as much as I can, and experiencing little by little also those things that once seemed necessary for my health. There dawned on me the concern of not increasing those things that might then become necessary for me, when I was about to embrace the religious state. And I thought that now I ought to put aside all the more, because of that more particular perfection to which I feel myself called.

[Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, i.c, pp. 125-126].

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5. Journal 1811

I finished the Retreat on June 2nd, the Feast of Pentecost.

Following the retreat, I experienced greater desires to seek solely the divine glory, without mixing in any more of my own self-interests.

In presenting myself to the Lord in prayer and in experiencing that usual joy in finding myself in His divine presence, and being able to occupy myself solely with Him, I experienced this difference: that in the place of imagining that there were no longer in this world any other than God and myself, now I feel the duty that there is no longer even myself, but just God. I came to will no longer any thought concerning myself and nothing for myself, but all for His glory. I am not even looking for my own spiritual advantage, and I want only to live for God and for His glory.

Placing myself one day in prayer, it seemed that I heard the Lord say that He willed that we become two intimate friends, who would think one of the other: that He would think totally for me, and that I ought to occupy myself solely with Him, for the sole motive of His glory and to give Him pleasure. I experienced joy at these words, and intimate abandonment in God.

In the greater part of the prayers that I offer, these sentiments occupy me, and I seemed to remain in the presence of God, as something wretched. Nonetheless, He wanted me to work and to render myself suited for His glory.

I am then cognizant of what I am, but with trust in God, thinking that His Omnipotence may make use of my most miserable person, for great things in His service.

It seemed to me at times impossible, having come to understand that the Lord gives me light to see how very great is the abyss of my misery. However, I try to pay more attention to His omnipotence and mercy, than of anything that may be in me that could induce fear within me.

At times, I experience a particular satisfaction and a great consolation when I think that the Lord wants one day to be served by us, and to find among us His delights. I desired then that whatever He wants, be really done by us, and that He be continuously loved and glorified by us in every direction that would be possible for His creatures.

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp. 142m f.]

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6. March 1812

In prayer today, I felt myself immersed in God, with the desire of His Holy Spirit, and to be so imbued by this that my every action, my every thought, my every word might be by Him directed.

It seemed to be to be like a sponge, all full of this Holy Spirit; and I asked the Lord that He give me help, that after prayer there be conserved in me the effect of this. Thus He granted me to experience, to see more clearly how easily I fall into self-love [not occupying myself totally with Him, with touching only my own nothingness, and so that I would feel that He is guiding me as by the hand in everything] should He not place the remedy against all this, and should He withdraw Himself even for a moment from me with his noticeable presence...[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., p. 168]

And this caused all the more my gratitude toward Him and the penetration of my own nothingness, but always with a sense of joy and consolation, to find already everything in God. [ib. p. 169].

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7. July 1812

In prayer today, I once again experienced my heart being enkindled in charity. However, instead of rejoicing in the experience, it seemed to me that all this only increased in me the desire to be even more enkindled. And then, I experienced a very strong. And as I experienced this rather strong movement which impeded my breathing and yet I was not satisfied, and it seemed to me that I had not even yet begun to love the Lord..

These desires the Lord increased in my heart that I desired continuously to love and to burn of this love.

I thought, then, of them throughout almost the entire month and in prayer these occupied me and penetrated my whole being. [cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., p. 175].

I experienced the desire that He might hasten the moment of being able to labor in that manner. I exposed to Him the snares and bonds in which we now find ourselves, which become more heavy for more in proportion to His making me understand the Plan of this Institute. It seems to me that this would give Him so much glory and serve or the Sanctification of so many souls.

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8. November 1813

Immersed in charity. While my sentiment remains in this, it conserved more easily the neatness of soul. Desire of this. It seemed to me that I heard these words: *Do not slow down in forming continuous acts of love.*

Having come to know that I must never separate myself from the quiet and tranquility of spirit, not even over the defects of my companions, since I have an excessively natural yearning to correct them. [o.c., p. 203].

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9. Letter to Pope Pius VII - April 1, 1815

Most Blessed Father,

With this very humble letter of mine, I take the liberty of presenting myself at the feet of Your Holiness, to expose to you the desires of my poor heart, which are all intent on corresponding to the divine call to follow the divine Will with a perfect obedience to Your Holiness.

Since I am deprived of every human support, at the death of the Archduchess, I have a greater trust in God, Who, in His works, finds pleasure in choosing the weakest and most vile instruments in order to make His glory shine out the more.

And knowing that what could assure me of presumption in this confidence of mine, would be the Apostolic Blessing of His Vicar on earth. I hasten to ask for this, placing before the feet of Your Holiness our small union. This was a two-fold consolation for me in having obtained this from Your Holiness in that time in which You were undergoing a glorious slavery in Savona.

Encouraged and animated by this, with my companions we have continued to practice that which we had already made known to you regarding the internal spirit and the education of the youth. I did not lose any time in drawing up a plan, according to this end and manner. In this it would seem that God would be served by us, with the hope of carrying this out in happier times, for our Holy Religion.

Now, once again, I place before Your feet this small union of ours, begging Your Holiness once more to bless it, so that by this means, everything will be done by us, with ever greater assurance, according to the Lord's Will and His pure glory. We supplicate in this same act Your Holiness to grant to me the faculty of acquiring a certain locale in an ecclesiastical region, previously taken over by the past Government, or to receive it, gratuitously having come to me, as has already been offered to me.

In this we will experience even more what we have established for ourselves to observe, hence, thus have deployed our resources and all we own, boldly to place all before the examination and approbation of Your Holiness. With most profound veneration, I kiss your most holy feet.

Most Blessed Father
of Your Holiness,

Verona, April 1, 1815.

I am, Your most humble and most obedient

Servant Leopoldina Naudet.

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp. 205-207].

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10. 1820 – Act of Abandonment

Confused, o my Lord, are being distanced from that abandonment in You which You wish from me, I ask Your pardon a thousand times. And from this moment, and for always, I abandon all my interests into Your hands, trusting myself entirely into Your infinite goodness, sure that You have more concern and thought for me and of all that You have entrusted to me, than anything that I could ever have myself. Therefore, from now on, I wish to live without anguish and fear, and to do all that I will be able to accomplish for You, in order to serve You and to make You loved and served, as much as will be possible to me, by others.

I wish to keep the thought of working for Your glory and Your holy service: and You keep me in mind.

I need a guide, both for myself and for this holy Undertaking. Think of us, my Love. To You I abandon everything. You can, You know, and You will, and this suffices for me to be certain that You will act.

Give me Your holy love through the merits of Mary Most Holy, of her who is Your Mother, to whom You can refuse nothing of what she asks of You, and through those of St. Joseph, Your Foster-Father and of my advocate, St. Ignatius.

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp. 214, f]

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11. [1820] - A Prayer

Remember, o my soul, how great is your misery and that when the Lord has put you to the test, you have been slack, weak and agitated by a thousand thoughts and anguish. You are tired of suffering and found yourself in a turbulent sea. Your anguished spirit and in the midst of the waves of temptation seemed as though it would go under.

Your faculties were occupied in that which saddened you. Your memory crucified you by recollections of the past.

Your intellect represented to you all that could give weight to your tribulation. Your will brought you to desire the end of all this and to tire you of suffering and its duration.

This, then, is what you are, and even worse than what is noted here.

So, when the Lord once more will give you the grace of peace and quiet of spirit, remember that it is His gift and that in all that pertains to you, you are the most wretched and vile creature that there is in this world.

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp. 214, f.]

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12. Retreat of 1827 - Monday, October 29, 1827

... I see a total separation between that which the Lord through His Mercy achieves in me and that which I do myself, which is evil. From this view, I will never depart.

But what is more, this is through a clear truth that I know by faith, as well as by humility. I am convinced that from one moment to another I am rather dense, if the Lord does not come to my aid. But, even this is through a faith, that I cannot even call this, because it is a clear view. And I have experienced it many times.

I am afraid of taking pleasure in something of good that I might accomplish, sure that this would not be of me, and the Lord could raise me up in an instant by His holy grace, His help and then I could do nothing more.

All that I touch with my hand and, therefore, it seems to me to be a knowledge of experience, which as according to faith.

I love to speak of my misery and worthlessness. It seems to me that I would take pleasure that all would see in me that which I see, but that the truth be known and glory rendered to God.

I suffer, if I experience that this much awaited Enterprise that the Lord has deigned to entrust to me, brings me some praise because of it. I would wish that, like I do, all might see that the Lord Himself accomplishes all. And it seems to me that I would rejoice very much if all would understand that I am not capable of anything and am but a rusty machine, that only works when the Lord moves it, and even then, rather badly, because it puts up resistance and is good for nothing: and it is the mercy of this good Lord, that He does not throw it all in the fire.

However, it is not, as what happens in the humble, that I love disdain. No, perhaps this would not please me. But, it is because I rejoice that God is glorified and because it seems to me that He be all the more so, if these above mentioned truths are grasped.

In fact, in this, as in all the rest, I see that I have no virtue, not even that which St. Thomas calls that of the first and lowest grade, in which the most common acts are produced.

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp.219, f.]

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13. Reform - 1831

[cf. Leopoldina Naudet, *Memorie Secrète*, o.c., pp. 221-221]

A profound genuflection to the ground, possibly before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Eyes lowered and supreme reverence in prayer.

To foresee, in so far as this will be possible, all business the night before, and as soon as I am dressed, to go to adore the Most Blessed Sacrament and to pray.

To look ahead on all that has to be done with quiet and diligence, as I put some order into them. Both in planning about them, and in attending to them, to give an eye to the Lord within me, those drawing from Him the inspirations and to work out charity.

Do not give the least hint of regret, if something is lacking to me, or if something that might have served me, is done poorly. If I might be prejudged, then to say it with quiet and to remember often that this is a charity that they do for me and it assists me in that of which I stand in need.

To make often my meditation on the life of Jesus Christ and to study His Spirit there in order to imitate His virtues.

Having established Jesus as the Superior of this Institute, I, in a particular manner, will consider Him to be this, and as such, to obey Him with exactness and to receive all that has to be done, all that happens during the day as His orders, with reverence, and to carry them out with diligence.

To avoid speaking of my neighbor, doing this only for the good when I might see that I can do this. To make excuses whenever I will hear bad spoken of, and to mortify my own judgment, which easily falls into judging the actions of my neighbor.

If I will ever be in the necessity of having to say something, regarding the defects of some person, to keep vigil over myself and to be attentive not to surpass right limits. What matters is that charity be kept whether in speaking, or in keeping silent.

With my companions, I will use charity in every manner, either with listening to them, without showing any annoyance, nor in giving the impression that I would be rather doing something else, denying myself, and not following my own wishes, that might be moving me to do something else.

Try to foresee the needs of my companions whenever I can, to foresee should they have some need of me. And I will do all that I can not to fail to assist them, having them render their account in that time that this should be done. And give the conferences.

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The End