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**LEOPOLDINA NAUDET AND GASPAR BERTONI:  
THEIR COMMON SPIRITUALITY OF ABANDONMENT**

**An Exercise for the Baccalaureate in Theology**

**by**

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## PREFACE

The first reason for which I chose to work on this short research project was that of my affection and gratitude toward my Mother Foundress, Leopoldina Naudet. In living the spirituality of absolute Abandonment, she has taught me how, with respect to God, one cannot just go “to a certain point” and no further: He gives all to you, and in exchange, He wants everything back, but from the perspective of love.

My second motive has been curiosity. One cannot read the writings of Mother Leopoldina, or about her, without running into the name, the person and the spirituality of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni.

One comes to understand that it is indispensable to know this man, to make the effort to approach him if you wish to have a more complete knowledge of Mother Naudet.

Therefore, you read, you compare data, episodes, events, autobiographical writings, correspondence of spiritual direction and, finally, you realize that between Mother Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar there is a spiritual union so profound that nothing, and no one could cancel this out. Theirs was a union willed by the Lord, which, while it bound two persons spiritually, it is that they would be closer to Him, that they might come to know and love Him the more.

Among the many characteristics they had in common, there emerges in a most particular manner, the way of Abandonment, in the sense in which the classical writers treat of it: “a loving self-surrender.”

Mother Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar not only walked, but ran along this pathway, realizing on both sides that they were dealing with a person who was an expert in Abandonment.

It needs to be brought out that all this was not lived in some kind of an unreal climate. Their spiritual involvement was also one on the operative, affective and human levels. The principle of authentic Abandonment is this one: “Work as though it all depended on you, with the certainty that all is realized by God.”

The reading of the “Spiritual Diary”, of the “Private Memorial” and of the Bertoni-Naudet Correspondence gradually introduced me into the climate of a sought-for Abandonment, one that was breathed and deeply lived by these two personalities.

Theirs is the Abandonment of spiritual childhood which consists in the total handing over of one’s own freedom to God with the thrust of all the powers of soul, especially those of love:

*... Reverend Mother, you should give way only to love, and offer yourself over freely to love, which means to be very prompt in doing what you come to know is pleasing to God, and not out of fear, but primarily out of love. Love is not afraid of anything ... It abandons itself whole-heartedly to God... [1].*

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1. Joseph STOFELLA, *Epistolario del Ven. Servo di Dio, Don Gaspare Bertoni. Fondatore dei preti delle SS. Stimate*, Verona 1954, March 6, 1813, p. 76

## PREMISE

In this effort of research, I have limited myself to the reading of the “Spiritual Diary” of Mother Leopoldina, to the “Private Memorial” of Fr. Gaspar, and to their common Correspondence, from the perspective of Abandonment.

Two persons, already well along the path of Abandonment met, on a day fixed by Providence, in a very precise moment of their spiritual history, and proceed along together on their journey.

- Through their personal writings, I seek to understand the importance and the significance of their meeting, the interpersonal dialogue that was begun and brought forward, and the point of arrival of this spiritual way of Abandonment [ *Chapter I* ].

- Since the characteristic of Abandonment is strongly present in these writings, it seemed to be opportune to bring out their history [ *Chapter II* ].

- But what is Abandonment? What do theologians say concerning its nature, its foundations, the elements which make it up ? [ *Chapter III* ].

- The comparison between that which the authors say about it, and what Mother Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar wrote about Abandonment, give every assurance of its truth [ *Chapter IV* ].

- Have Mother Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar written solely about Abandonment? The testimonies of the time affirm that to whatever is written about Abandonment, corresponded always to their practice of Abandonment, and often to an heroic degree. [ *Chapter V* ].

## CHAPTER ONE

### MOTHER LEOPOLDINA NAUDET and Fr. GASPAR BERTONI: TWO SOULS CALLED TO TRAVEL TOGETHER THE SPIRITUAL PATH OF ABANDONMENT

... More than ever it is necessary to proceed following in the footsteps assigned to us by Divine Providence that goes on ahead of us ..." [2].

Reading today the "History of Salvation" as this was realized in the lives of Leopoldina Naudet and in Gaspar Bertoni, we can certainly state that they had effectively set out on their journey where Providence had left its traces.

Florence, Soissons, Vienna, Prague, Rome, Loreto, Padua, Venice sign the stages of a long journey that brought Leopoldina to meet in Verona, Fr. Gaspar.

#### 1. Who Leopoldina Naudet and Fr. Gaspar Bertoni are, and how they met.

Leopoldina Naudet was born in Florence on May 31, 1773, of a family of French origin, who had come to Florence following the Hapsburgs of Lorraine. She completed her education in both Florence and Soissons in France. She followed the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold, to the Court of Vienna, as the teacher of the last three Arch Dukes.

She was at Prague with the Archduchess Maria Anna [3], named Abbess of the Canonesses of St. George [4].

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2. J. STOFELLA, *Epistolario....*, Verona 1954. August 1825, p. 183.

3. Maria Anna was born in Florence in 1770, of the Grand Duke Leopold I. He was elected Emperor at the death of his brother Joseph II, and transported the Court from Florence to Vienna in 1790, but he died there in 1792. His son, Francis II, succeeded him, and he was the brother of Maria Anna. She then moved to Prague, where she remained until 1799, to that time when she decided to come to Italy for the development of the religious Society known as the *Dilette di Gesù* [the "Beloved of Jesus"]. She met Pope Pius VII a number of times in Venice, Padua, Loreto and at Recanati. She became established in Rome in February of 1801. After the rather unfortunate matter regarding Fr. Paccanari, which also embroiled the entire Institute of the 'Beloved of Jesus', she left Rome on October 26, 1808. After stops in Gorizia and in Lubiana, she took up residence in Hungary, where Tennesvar died on October 1, 1819. [cf. N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Dalla Corte al Chiostro, Donna Leopoldina Naudet, fondatrice delle Sorelle della S. Famiglia*, Verona 1954, p. 43.

4. The noble chapter of the Canonesses of St. George was founded in Hradschin near Prague, by the Empress Maria Teresa, who governed the Empire of Austria from 1745 until 1780. This group was established for women of the high nobility who wished to live a monastic life. The Foundress had dictated a Rule of Life for them, and to which the Canonesses were obliged to live. They had been set up in imitation of the Chapters of Canons Regular. They lived in community a pronounced two vows of chastity and obedience. The day regime of the Canonesses consisted in the recitation of the Divine Office, taking care of sacred vestments and assisting in the works of the Church, especially those of charity. The Canonesses were ruled by a superior who had full jurisdictional powers over the members of the Chapter and she enjoyed special privileges. For the Teresian Chapter of Prague, the Abbess always had to be an Archduchess and she remained in office as long as she did not marry. Should she marry, she would leave the Chapter [cf. N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Dalla Corte al Chiostro...*, o.c., p. 46].

In Rome, collaborating with Fr. Nicolo' Paccanari [5] and the Archduchess, she organized the community known as the "Beloved of Jesus."

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5. Nicolo' Paccanari was born in Trent in 1773. He was first dedicated to the life of commerce, then he embraced military service and became a sergeant in the group quartered at Castel S. Angelo. On his discharge from the military, he went back to the commercial life, where he was deceived by a partner. He was reduced to the life of a wandering merchant. During this period of his life, he came to Rome, and began attending the Oratory conducted by Fr. Caravita, an Italian former Jesuit. Under the spiritual direction of Fr. Dalpino, a missionary to the city, he believed that he was being called by the Lord to re-establish the Company of Jesus. With this scope in mind, he made a pilgrimage to Loreto, where he drew up the rules of an institute called the "Company of Faith."

On his return to Rome, he was able to attract some young men to follow this new way of life, and he communicated to them his own enthusiasm and the rules he had drawn up. In 1797, he obtained the approval for his Society from Cardinal Della Somaglia. Paccanari was elected superior and received the profession from his companions of their vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and submission to the Supreme Pontiff.

He then moved on to Siena to visit the Pope, who was imprisoned in the Convent of St. Justina. Paccanari obtained from the Pope many privileges and even a rescript in which this new Society which he personally had founded and which was to be called "the Company of the Fathers of the Faith of Jesus". He then came to know of a similar Society which was already existing in Germany, being established by Fr. Torneley and Fr. Varin. He decided that the two societies could be fused, if this could prove possible. To facilitate this undertaking, he left immediately for Vienna, where he was enthusiastically received by the Emperor Francis II.

While there, he did meet with Fr. Varin, and they agreed together on this fusion of the Society of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, with that of the Fathers of the Faith [April 18, 1779]. The new institution assumed the name of the *Society of the Faith of Jesus*. In August of that same year, he went to Prague, to meet with the Archduchess Maria Anna, to achieve the foundation of that institute of virgins, which he had seen operative in Loreto. The Archduchess and the two ladies in waiting, Luisa and Leopoldina, took up the invitation of Paccanari and became the first members of this new spiritual edifice, that was arising with the name "the Beloved of Jesus."

Returning then to Vienna, Paccanari received the Minor Orders. Then, he decided to move the community, "the Beloved of Jesus", to Italy, and more specifically to Padua. Leopoldina left first for the purpose of finding there a suitable place for the Archduchess Maria Anna. The new companions of Paccanari then desired to join the Jesuits of White Russia but it did not seem that he took any concrete steps to make this union a reality. So, he decided instead to return to Italy where the 'Beloved of Jesus' were already established. He eventually reached them in the Convent of the "Dimesse" .

Here, even though he did not have any cultural or religious formation, he received the Priestly Order from the Bishop of Cremona. After having wandered somewhat throughout the regions of Venice and the 'Marche', he established himself in Rome, in the old Monastery of the Theatines of San Silvestro near the Quirinale. His 'Society of the Faith' was spreading through Germany, France, Holland and England.

Very soon, however, many objections arose within their ranks, and some real suspicions regarding their Father General. The first group to separate themselves to join up with the Jesuits in Russia were his former followers from England. The head at this time was Fr. Rozaven in 1803. Then, the followers of France separated themselves with Fr. Varin in 1804; finally those of Switzerland and Holland in 1806. The Italian Fathers, too, began to separate themselves from Fr. Paccanari, and to level against him some very serious charges. In 1804, the Pope ordered a process to be initiated against Fr. Paccanari to ponder some of the charges against him.

This situation dragged on for several years, also because of the retractions of some of the accusers. In July of 1808, Fr. Paccanari was condemned by the Holy Office to ten years of confinement in Castel S. Angelo. The Company of the Faith then passed under the direction of Fr. Rigoletti, and then ceased to exist altogether with the restoration of the Company of Jesus [cf. J. CRETINAU-JOLY, *Histoire religieuse, politique, et litteraire de la Compagnie de Jesus*, Paris 1845, pp. 503-505; A. GUIDEE, *Vie di R. P. Joseph Varin*, Paris 1854, pp. 48-61; 94-99; 323-325].



In Verona, Leopoldina was first the guest, and then the collaborator of Magdalena di Canossa [6], from 1808 until 1816. Then, from 1816 until her death on August 17, 1834, she dedicated herself entirely to the formation of the ‘Sisters of the Holy Family’. This was a religious congregation that came into being from her desire to serve God and the Church [7].

In this undertaking of hers, the assistance given to her by Fr. Gaspar BERTONI, was both capable and indispensable. He was born in Verona on October 9, 1777, of a respectable family, remembered in public acts of ancient vintage. [8]. Until he reached the age of 18, he attended the municipal schools of St. Sebastian. Then, for five years, he attended the theological courses in the Seminary.

He was ordained a priest in 1800 when he began a ministry among the youth of the city. He went looking for them along the streets of Verona, to instruct them and assist them in any manner that he could. He established the Marian Cohorts, established tuition-free schools, and assisted the young boys in both the arts and the trades, with a very specialized program, all the while proposing to them the ideal of the Christian life.

In 1808, he was appointed the first Confessor of St. Joseph’s [9] Convent. It was there that he first met Leopoldina, and then spiritually accompanied her along the way of Holy Abandonment, in the foundation of her Congregation of the “Sisters of the Holy Family.”

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6. Magdalena di Canossa was born in Verona on March 1, 1774. When she was five years old, her father died. When she reached age 7, her mother remarried and went with her new husband, the Marquis Edoardo Zenetti, to Mantua. In her earlier years, she was thinking of becoming a Carmelite, but under the advice of Fr. Peter Leonardi [1769-1844] she became more dedicated to think of the sick and the young and abandoned young women. From what results from the last letters of Fr. Luigi Libera [1738-1800], her spiritual director, already in July 1799 she began to show interest in two young orphans, and to her first Convent in the area of the Filippini Sisters. In 1802, rather precise documents inform us that there was a house also in the area of San Zeno’s. In 1816, she appealed to Napoleon - and actually received from him - the monastery of Sts. Joseph and Fidentius. There, she entered leaving behind her family. She was accompanied by Leopoldina Naudet, who remained with her until 1816. There she became oriented toward the foundation of an Institute that would be called *the Daughters of Charity*, a Congregation of the active life, dedicated to the well being of young girls and to the service of the poor. The Institute was approved by Pope Leo XII on December 23, 1828. Magdalena died in 1835 [cf. N. DALLE VEDOVE,, *Dalla Corte al Chiostro*, o.c., pp. 179, f.].

7. Metilda CANOSSA, niece of Magdalena, *Epoche della vita della Ven. Fondatrice delle Sorelle della S. Famiglia*, fasc. ms., doc. 39, f. 7.

8. N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, Roma 1975, p. 9.

9. St. Joseph’s Convent, is the same as the old Monastery dedicated to Sts. Joseph and Fidentius, in the section near St. Zeno’s, once belonged to the Sisters Hermits of St. Augustine, who then moved to St. George’s of Verona in 1806, following the decree that unified some of these groups. It was able to hold about 100 contemplative nuns. Magdalena di Canossa concluded the contract of purchase on April 1, 1808, the very day on which the document was drawn up and signed by the Vice Regent, EUGENIO BEAUHARMAIS, called the Decree of Cession. [cf. N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Dalla Corte al Chiostro*, o.c., p. 185].

Guided by the Spirit of God, he also was committed at this time to the foundation of the Stigmatines, as “Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops.

By 1810, he had been appointed spiritual director of the Seminary, and was sought by all as a ‘real angel of counsel.’

He was a priest of incessant prayer, one who loved the Crucified, and who considered suffering and illness which accompanied him from the age of 35, until his death on June 12, 1853 as ‘the School of God.’

In this school, Fr. Gaspar continued his activity as teacher, preacher of the Spiritual Exercises, and most especially, as Spiritual Director.

## 2. Spiritual Dialogue as the Path to Abandonment

This is the dimension of Spiritual Director that Leopoldina discovered in Fr. Gaspar after three years of going to confession to him. Divine Providence, which watches over the lives of its children, intervened in a way to assist both to enter into dialogue and to undertake that path of Holy Abandonment, characterizing their spirituality.

*It is a great advantage for spiritual undertakings, to find two united in the same sentiment [11].*

Fr. Bertoni had written this in his “Private Memorial”. This proved to be of great advantage in the confirmation of this relationship that was totally spiritual, which led him and Leopoldina to the highest realms of holiness. This had both its source and goal in

*filial and confident abandonment into the hands of God, even in the most difficult circumstances of life. [12].*

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10. N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Un modello di Santo Abbandono*, Verona 1951 [cf. pp. 9-10]

11. G. BERTONI, *Il Memoriale Privato*, [1808-1813], in: *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Roma 1962, vol. IV, fasc. I, December 20, 1808, p. 88.

12. G.P. DE PAOLI, *La malattia come tempo di grazia*, in: *Saggi sullo Spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, Verona 1983 [cf. pp. . 30, ff.].

Fr. Bertoni found in Mother Naudet a soul most desirous as he was, of an interior life, that of giving oneself to God, in the full conformity to the Divine Good Pleasure, and of being most docile to Holy Abandonment.

Theirs was a relationship truly willed by the Lord. It is the Lord Himself Who ordained Leopoldina to choose this 'external help' of Fr. Gaspar, so that she could stand better with the Lord. Hence, she could not exempt herself from obeying.

In her 'Spiritual Diary, begun on January 9, 1811', which was the same evening of her first meeting with her new guide. Leopoldina expressed herself as follows:

*I exposed to him the desires that I had of obeying, and that it had seemed to me that it could be that the Lord might have wished that up until then I would do this to Him alone. Now, however, it seems to me as though He wanted for me an outside help. I expressed my difficulties and there was a certain joy that I had committed all to God alone. So, in a moment of Prayer, that seemed to be saying to the Lord that I stood so well with Him, but now I heard myself respond that it was for me to deepen my relationship with Him and that He wanted this. I exposed how this obedience was rendered, and that to assist, to bring better to the outside these internal operations, it was established in this manner that I would make use of this as a means, and to keep my eye on the final goal [13].*

From these last few words of Leopoldina's Diary here, the reader is able to see that after an initial meeting with Fr. Gaspar: that he could only be of benefit as a simple means, a mere instrument, but that the over all concentration needs to remain fixed only on the final end, God Himself.

Before the Tabernacle, Leopoldina renewed her submission to the Will of God, and in her nocturnal prayer, the Lord repaid her for her availability:

*During the night, I prayed, and the Lord kept me at it for two and one half hours. This passed in continuing communication. It seemed to me that the Lord was consoling me that I accepted submitting myself for external help. I could almost say that this passed being justified, by making me realize that He would not have asked this of me under any other person and that He did it only because the one to whom I have submitted my spiritual life, follows that which He wants of me, assuring me that He wants to be the Master of my spirit [14].*

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13. L. NAUDET, *Spiritual Diary* [1800-1831]. Vol. ms., Doc. 124, A.G.S.F., January 9, 1811. f. 44. From August 31, 1805, Mother Naudet had not made any entries in her *Spiritual Diary*. However, after her meeting with Fr. Bertoni on January 9, 1811, she began a new series of jottings.

14. *ib.*, January 10, 1811, f. 44.

The Lord Himself, then, seems to have confirmed this bonding of two souls, who were being called to traverse the same spiritual journey.

Thus, the personal "Diary" of Leopoldina became the mirror in which there was reflected also what was happening in Fr. Bertoni's life.

Furthermore, the meeting with Mother Naudet of January 9, 1811 proved to be an important event also for Fr. Bertoni. The basis for this is also that it had been six months since he had written in his "Private Memorial", and this following entry may be found right after meeting with Leopoldina:

*January 12, 1811. While it may not be necessary for you to study for the direction of N.N., you do need to turn to the source of Light. This will do much good also for yourself. You must not precede, but follow the Lord,*

*Who illumines her, and will suggest to you, once you have made recourse, to have her proceed and correspond. [15].*

There needs to be noted here the perfect analogy between the light received by Fr. Bertoni and that already communicated in the nocturnal Prayer of Mother Naudet:

*It seemed to me that He was saying that to direct me, it was not Learning that was so necessary, because only one reality is really at work within me, and that is Love. This is the principal operation. You need help in this which alone can be drawn from the same font, that is, from God, and not from Learning. So, you must not seek any counsel, but to await all from Him. [16].*

Fr. Bertoni found no difficulty in following this indication. In fact, this brought him to formulate a most important principle of the spiritual life which he received in an internal locution. It then became a characteristic of his entire life:

*You must never precede, but always follow the Lord [17].*

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15. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., January 12, 1811, p. 175.

16. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., January 10, 1811, f. 44.

17. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., January 12, 1811, p. 175.

There is thus explained the choice of Fr. Gaspar as her Spiritual Director: because he 'follows' the same paths of Abandonment, since he was responding to the same spiritual needs experienced by Leopoldina:

*I have to think only of loving Him and to follow what He wants of me, and leave all the rest to Him [18]*

The quest for the Lord and of all that is the more pleasing to Him is also the constant exercise of Fr. Bertoni himself. As a result, the spiritual guide that Mother Naudet accepted in the faith, was an expert in Abandonment, and will serve her as a kind of path-finder along the ways of holiness.

*Reverend Mother, you ought always to aim as high as you can in this spiritual endeavor. Remaining and resting always on Him, you are in this world only corporally, thus spiritualizing by this your every action, your every activity. ...How blessed is anyone who is thus able to forget all else, and to remember only the Lord alone! [19].*

God alone is the Author of our sanctification, the unique Source of the Light and Love, the Master of the Spirit. So:

*I ought always to have charity, love for God as the principle, cause and purpose of my every word, movement and activity [20].*

And Fr. Bertoni emphasizes:

*Blessed is anyone who loses himself in this Abyss! Whoever throws himself courageously and ship-wrecked into this ocean! A child is never more secure as when asleep, draped around his mother's neck, and abandons every thought and concern for himself. He does not look around, he does not listen, he does not speak. His Mother sees for him, she listens and speaks and works in his behalf. And whenever she chooses, she knows how to awaken him, remaining so close to him [21].*

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18. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., October 12, 1812, f. 95.

19. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario*, December 1, 1812, p. 31.

20. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., f. 45

21. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario*, o.c., August 21, 1813, p. 96

This practice of allowing God to do all is for both Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar what was the most ordinary and habitual way of acting, their constant attitude. Their very manner of speaking expresses their being 'engulfed' in God:

*All that God does is always the best ...Let us trust in Him always* [22].

*Let us leave it up to God. He knows how to intervene, and will do so on His own account* [23].

*Trust in God* [24].

*Let us leave the concern up to God, for He both sees us and for us* [25].

These are the 'refrains' that Fr. Gaspar suggested to Leopoldina. In her availability to 'her Lord' she declared:

*Behold Your handmaid, may Your will be done in me* [26]

*I adore the Divine Will and submit myself to It* [27].

*Should it be pleasing to my Lord... If the Lord wills ... If it is pleasing to my Love ...* [28].

*To You, o Lord, I abandon all. You can, You know how and You will and this suffices for me to be sure that You will intervene* [29].

Fr. Bertoni and Mother Naudet not only wrote and spoke about Abandonment, but they practiced it. They manifested an instinct being ready to take on every encounter with daily events 'according to the way the Lord works it all out'. They were convinced that He could arrive at that point even where His servants were not able to achieve.

One example might suffice for the many, but it is the most significant. Fr. Gaspar accompanies Leopoldina from 1811 until 1819. At this latter date, he endured a very serious illness that led him to understand that he could no longer continue in her spiritual direction. As he entered her life in a very humble manner, this is also the style employed to go out of it, always obedient, as he was, to the indications of his Lord and Master.

*Whenever He says, this is enough to someone, he can never respond:  
How about a little bit more?* [30].

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22. ib., December 14, 1812, p. 37.

23. ib. February 28, 1813, p. 68.

24. ib., December 1819, p.151.

25. ib., August 1825, p. 182.

26. L. NAUDET, *Conferenze Spirituali* [1801-1833], notebook of ms, Doc. 37, AGSF, f. 39.

27. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., April 1830, p. 271.

28. METILDA CANNOSSA, *Epoche...*, o.c., f. 6.

29. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., July 1820, f. 108.

30. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., August 28, 1828, p. 244.

It is very easy to imagine the difficulty in which Leopoldina suddenly found herself, but once again she found in this a precious occasion to grow in Abandonment, and she noted:

*Trust in God, trust fully in God...* [31].

Now without the support of Fr. Gaspar, Leopoldina first thought it was next to impossible to go on without guidance. However, after a long period of real suffering, she arrived at the determination of completing the conclusive Act of her mystical ascent: her “Act of Abandonment”:

*I am confused, o my Lord, in having distanced myself from Abandonment in You, which is what You want of me. I ask Your pardon a thousand times over, and from this moment, and for always, I abandon all my interests into Your hands....* [32]

## Conclusion

The common characteristic of the spirituality of Leopoldina Naudet and Fr. Gaspar Bertoni is their perfect conformity to God’s Will: for both of them this was both His gift to them and their own correspondence to this.

Leopoldina writes:

*... the helps that I have been receiving in my spiritual life, I receive them from a great faith that the Lord has given to me.* [33].

Fr. Bertoni’s thought is:

*Whoever is drawn by the Spirit to a way of greater perfection, as by being abandoned in all things to God, should not react if others of lesser virtue make use of more humble means, but which are also good* [34].

The perfect conformity to the Will of God is realized when ‘with it one is abandoned in everything and for everything to the Will of God, in a way that one would neither desire anything else, nor strive to obtain it, unless in this endeavor, one would perfectly carry out the divine will. This includes all that an individual is duty-bound to do, as well as with all that might happen in his life’ [35].

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31. ib., October 16, 1825, p. 185.

32. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., July 1820, f. 108.

33. ib., June 25, 1800, f. 10.

34. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., October 12, 1808, p. 63.

35. A. RODRIGUEZ, *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtu’ cristiane*, Verona 1840, p. 283, P.VIII, c. III, 1.

St. Francis de Sales, in speaking of the death of our own wills required by the state of Holy Abandonment, states that we ought to render ourselves malleable and manageable to the Divine Good Pleasure, as though we were wax, without our own desiring and wanting anything else. It is necessary to leave all up to God to will and to do with us as it will please Him. Our response is to abandon to Him our every anxiety, because we are in His thoughts [36].

In Fr. Bertoni we find this realized in a perfect manner. It was always in accord with this style that he formed those to whom he offered his spiritual direction.

*Let us leave it up to God, for He knows what to do, and will do it according to His own designs [37].*

This sense of complete Abandonment is also for Mother Naudet as her natural habitat. Especially in her prayer she no longer experienced any self-centered sentiment, not even one in reference to her own holiness: she had placed all in God's hands:

*In Communion and in prayer, I was much occupied in seeking out everything and all perfection, for the pure object of giving glory to God and serving His love, not being concerned about my own profit, but purely for Him. [38].*

She found a kindred spirit in this expression of Bossuet: 'If there is anything capable of rendering a heart free, of opening it wide it is that perfect Abandonment to God and to His Will [39].

When they reached the end of their spiritual journey, Leopoldina Naudet and Gaspar Bertoni could say with all truth: 'I want only what God wants' - and this is perfect abandonment.

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36. FRANCIS de SALES, *Il Teotimo*, IX, XIV, p. 226. Padova 1791.

37. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario*, o.c., February 28, 1813.

38. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., May 1811.

39. C. FABRO, *Un Sacerdote ecclesiale: Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, Verona 1975, p. 24.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**THE PERSONAL WRITINGS OF MOTHER LEOPOLDINA NAUDET**  
**AND FR. GASPAR BERTONI**

The confirmation of a story lived, in accord with the teaching of the full availability to God’s Plan, and of that continual quest for ‘that which God wills’, may be found in the personal writings of Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar. This means the “Spiritual Diary” of Mother Naudet, and in the “Private Memorial” and the collection of letters, authored by Fr. Bertoni.

**1. History of the Writings**

**1.1 The “Spiritual Diary” of Leopoldina Naudet**

**\* Title**

There is no over-all title to her jottings. She had never intended making a single body of her writings. This task was left up to the Sisters who followed her.

Since there was no intention on her part to write a unified work, evidently there would not be any title to her notebooks. However, the various parts of the work do have titles:

|                  |                  |             |
|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| PERSONAL MATTERS | May 31. 1800     | First Part  |
| RETREATS         | October 10, 1801 | Second Part |
| JOURNAL          | January 9, 1811  | Third Part  |

The entire composition is known among the Sisters of the Holy Family as the *Giornale Spirituale*, because the term seems more coherent with its contents, and also because this is the title Leopoldina herself used to refer to it. This is known from her own notes in it that she wrote on the day she began her spiritual journey under her new guide, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni.

**\* Chronology**

The “Spiritual Diary” runs from May 31, 1800 until October 7, 1831. Leopoldina continued making entries in this “Journal” from the time she was 27 years of age, up until she was 58, just three years prior to her death.

The booklet is something like a clear photograph of Leopoldina’s spiritual life, if one does not pay too much heed to its extensive gaps.

Despite these, however, the over-all unity of the work remains evident. In reading this “Spiritual Diary” it is always possible to follow the various stages of Leopoldina’s spiritual pilgrimage.

\* **Purpose in Writing it**

She wrote under obedience. A good part of her "Spiritual Diary" she wrote in order to obey a precise order of her spiritual director, Fr. Nicolo' Paccanari. However, she continued writing during those long periods of time when she no longer had a spiritual director. For this phase of her composition, she documented for herself the gifts she was receiving from the Lord.

\* **For Whom it was intended**

This "Spiritual Diary" was meant for the attentive reading of her own spiritual director, when Fr. Paccanari held this position in her life. However, the possibility that she also wrote to have material ready for her later meetings with Fr. Bertoni, so that she could discuss with him her problems and concerns noted in writing, should not be excluded. It is a fact that several of Leopoldina's letters to Fr. Gaspar treat of her challenges of a spiritual nature.

\* **Composition of the "Spiritual Diary"**

Leopoldina's style in this journal may be termed "immediate". Her jottings do not follow any general theme being developed, but simply note down the various experiences of her spiritual life.

Evidence of this might be noted in one of her letters to Fr. Paccanari and another one to Pius VII, which represent particular situations. We find, as well, personal impressions experienced during her Retreats, that also manifest this spontaneous character of her journal. With the year 1812, there are more entries as the months went by [through January, February, March].

In a general way, the notebook is made up of notes, most likely written at the close of any given day. The unity of the work is derived from the thought expressed, in that the whole is a fragmentary composition. It is up to the reader to make a synthesis at the end of the work.

A unifying link is discernible, a composite whole does exist. This, however, does not result so much from the writings in themselves, or from the intention of the writer, but much more from the continuity of her spiritual life founded on the complete Abandonment of herself into the hands of God. To this was joined a boundless confidence in the goodness and mercy of her Heavenly Patron, "in that I do not want to know any more about myself, but only to rest continuously in God" [40].

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40. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 26, 1811, f. 54.

## 1.2 The “Private Memorial” of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni

### \* Title

This is not what Fr. Gaspar called it, but from someone who gathered the material and included this hand-written note-book in with the rest of the documentation of the First Ordinary Informative Process for the Cause of his Beatification. Fr. Gaspar simply began this “Memorial” of his without any title with the name of a month: the month of July in 1808. The question has always remained: would there have been some other jottings of his that would have preceded this one?

### \* Chronology

The “Private Memorial” extends from July 2, 1808 until June 26, 1813. Fr. Bertoni did make entries into this booklet, but not regularly. For the five years, he covers only twenty pages.

“However, with all of its gaps, with the shortness of the period of his life that it covers, with the fragmentary nature of its entries... with its deliberate conciseness, the note-book does offer some idea of the spiritual activity of the man who compiled it, on his own, under the eye of God, from the age of 31 until he was 36. This “Memorial” does offer clear indications to be able to grasp something of his earlier activity, while at the same time offering well founded hopes for his future greatness” [41].

### \* Purpose in Writing it

Fr. Bertoni seems to have written with the same purposes in mind as those noted by his patron and model, St. Ignatius of Loyola:

*To take note of the benefits received from God, not only to impress them the more indelibly into his memory, but to discover in them, by re-reading them every once in a while, ever new stimulus to love God with all one's heart* [42]

### \* For Whom it was intended

The “Private Memorial” was meant for Fr. Bertoni himself, for the benefit of his own soul, even though what he has left behind is a fundamental lesson: the cultivation of the interior life, the necessary pre-requisite for all fruit in the apostolic life.

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41. G. STOFELLA, *Commento al ‘Memoriale Privato’ di Gaspare Bertoni*, in: *Collectanea Stigmatina*, vol. IV, f. 1°, Roma 1968, p. 3.

42. I. LOYOLA, *Diario Spirituale*, Firenze 1859, Presentation

\* **Composition of the “Private Memorial”**

The booklet is made up of brief notes, thoughts jotted down, extracts of conferences, summaries of his readings and meditations, spiritual reflections, patristic principles, and other such scattered entries. There are not lacking various indications of graces received, and of personal prayer. There have also been included certain practical norms for discernment of spirits and about a dozen outlines of Lenten sermons.

Of particular significance are Fr. Bertoni’s recollections of his First Holy Communion, long years before. He makes allusion to “real poverty” accepted in his home ‘joyfully’. He remembers the sudden appearance of his Bishop while he was in St. Paul’s Church teaching catechism to adults. He also notes his personal devotion to Mary Immaculate and to the Sacred Heart.

However, what strikes the reader the most in this “Memorial” is Fr. Bertoni’s deepest interior efforts at his own spiritual journey. He shows himself to be resolutely committed to the practice of *Holy Abandonment*, to which he is convinced that he is called by a special vocation, as is clear from his entry of October 12, 1808:

*Whoever is drawn by the Spirit to a path of greater perfection,, such as being totally abandoned to God....” [43].*

### 1.3 The Epistolary [A Collection of his Letters]

\* **General Premise**

This Collection of Letters, mostly from Fr. Bertoni to Mother Naudet, is entitled *L’Epistolario di Don Gaspare Bertoni*. It was published in Verona in 1954, edited by Fr. Joseph Stofella, a Stigmatine.

The *Epistolario* is made up of the following:

- about 200 letters, or fragments of letters, of Fr. Bertoni to Mother Naudet;
- a few letters addressed to the Sister Superior who succeeded Leopoldina;
- a few “remnants” of the Bertoni-Fr. Bragato correspondence;
- other bits of letters of Fr. Bertoni’s correspondence, with:
  - \* the Holy See
  - \* the Bishops of Verona
  - \* particular individuals

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43. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., October 12, 1808, p. 63.

- \* Founders/Foundresses of other Religious Institutes:  
     Magdalena di Canossa  
     The Counts Cavanis of Venice  
     Fr. Anthony Rosmini.

The letters of Fr. Bertoni to Mother Naudet are a substantial part of the *Epistolary*, not only because of the large number of them, but also because of their content. They are sublimely pervaded by the spirit of Holy Abandonment.

#### \* **Chronology**

The Bertoni-Naudet *Epistolary* begins with his letter of November 16, 1812, and concludes with one dated July 4, 1834.

The letters, and the fragments of letters, are divided into two neatly distinct parts, with also a gap that stretches from September 17, 1820 until the first days of November 1812. This is that period of time when Fr. Bertoni gave up the spiritual direction of Mother Naudet.

#### \* **Content**

From 1812 to 1819 the letters are those of spiritual direction and they might be compared to an enchanting flower-garden for their vitality and spiritual wisdom.

From 1822 until 1834 they are letters that treat of the most varied problems: those regarding vocations, domestic matters, suggestions of a juridical nature pertaining to the process of her obtaining approbation for her religious community. In addition, there are particulars pertaining to language, literary concerns, juridical, philosophical questions, and even a few thoughts regarding engineering.

It is the whole sweep of existence that is treated and presented with firmness and always with a very human and Christian outlook. However, even when the *Epistolario Bertoni-Naudet* treats of other matters, it is always imbued with that attention to be given to just what precisely is it that God would want.

*It is therefore the spirit of Holy Abandonment in all things to the will of the Lord, both that of what is already previously 'signified,' while including those events that seem to just happen, which are also under the 'divine will of good pleasure.' The spirit is an active as well as passive abandonment, motivated always by love. It constantly urges one onward to an interior life without short-cuts, one that is outstandingly supernatural and leading to the continuous increase of the three theological virtues. It is based on humility, even to that underlying tranquil disposition of going wherever He may indicate, whenever He might*

*say: "Go!" - as well as to come whenever He might say: "Come!" - even to the point of genuine sacrifice. This is all lived with the most holy ideal, simply that God's most holy, most just and most perfect will be done [44].*

## **2. Conclusion**

Abandonment, Holy Abandonment, Divine Abandonment, Perfect Abandonment, Absolute Abandonment... these are all terms that recur on almost every page of the writings of Leopoldina and those of Fr. Gaspar. What is the meaning, the scope, the foundation of Abandonment?

This is the question directed toward the classical authors. From their response we will understand how Leopoldina Naudet and Fr. Gaspar Bertoni did not follow a path of their own imagination. They followed the high-way proposed by the Heavenly Father to Jesus Christ. From Him, they came to appreciate His 'Yes' to the Incarnation and His 'Amen' to the Cross. This is the way which the Spirit proposes to all those who, in Christ, become "New Creatures."

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44. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario*, o.c., Introduction, p. 21.

## CHAPTER THREE ABANDONMENT IN GOD

### 1. Nature of Abandonment

#### 1.1 Meaning of the Term

The term 'Abandonment' can have two meanings: one that is passive and one that is active. The soul can be either really, or only apparently abandoned by God, or abandoned to God.

Abandonment in the active sense is defined by Dom Lehodey as "a conformity to the Divine Good Pleasure, but a conformity that springs from love and is borne to a sublime level". [45]. The equivalent Latin translation for the term Abandonment is "resignation", or the "handing of oneself over" to God. In this sense it is used by Thomas a' Kempis in his *Imitation of Christ* and by other representatives of the *Devotio Moderna*.

#### 1.2 Sphere of Abandonment

Our spiritual life is a work accomplished by two, a work achieved by two wills: the Will of God and our own. Since the Will of God has the principal role in our sanctification, to it pertains the direction and the initiative of the whole undertaking. Our will should depend in everything on the Will of God, it should bring itself into conformity with this, as St. Alphonsus states: "to uniform ours wills with that of God, this is the supreme summit of perfection".

The Will of God can be termed "Signified", or the Will of "Divine Good Pleasure". The "Signified" Will of God is clearly and explicitly manifested by the Commandments of God and of the Church, by the counsels, by inspirations, rules and customs, by the commands and orders of superiors. The Will of "Divine Good Pleasure" of God is made known to us through events and in all that happens: sickness, death, suffering, joys, both good and ill fortune, unforeseen events.

To be submitted to the Signified Divine Will does not really call for Abandonment, but obedience, the normal means of reaching perfection. The proper sphere of Abandonment are all those events that depend on God's Will of Good Pleasure. Its sphere is immense, because even where the Divine Will of Sign intervenes, there is ample space for the exercise of Abandonment.

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45. M. VILLER, *Abandon*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite'*, Tom, I, Paris 1937, col. 3

However, there is no opposition between the Will of Sign and the Will of Good Pleasure, and should there ever seem to be one, it is the Signified Divine Will that gives meaning to the Divine Will of Good Pleasure [46].

### **1.3 Abandonment and Indifference**

Indifference is a virtue that prepares for Abandonment and, in this sense, St. Ignatius describes it in the fundamental meditation of the Spiritual Exercises. Indifference supposes the human will attentive to the divine will - the human being expresses the readiness to undertake whatever the Divine Good Pleasure indicates.

This Indifference has no other purpose once the Will of Good Pleasure has become manifested to the human soul. However, Indifference is a virtue that is so connected to Abandonment that St. Francis de Sales calls Abandonment a “Holy Indifference.” [47].

## **2. Foundations of Abandonment**

### **2.1 The Example of Christ and Scripture**

Abandonment, like all the Christian virtues, has its source in the Gospel and in the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ. In many texts St. Francis de Sales represents Jesus Christ as the model of Abandonment in the various stages of His earthly sojourn: in the crib, His infancy, during the flight into Egypt, but above all, at the conclusion of the Passion when He turns toward His Father, saying: “Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit” [48].

The Gospel recommends Abandonment to God in temporal matters [Mt 6:25-34’ Lk 12:22-31]. St. Peter counsels Christians to thrust on God their every concern, that He might take care of them [I P 5:7-8]. Bossuet saw in these words the signs of a perfect Abandonment [49]. The expression of the Lord’s Prayer: Thy Will be done” can serve as the model of Abandonment.

“Do not ask that your own will be fulfilled: this is not yet fully in conformity to the will of God. In your prayer, use the expression ‘ That Your will be done in me’, because God seeks in everything your entire good and that which is useful for your soul” [50].

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46. ib., col. 3-5

47. ib., col. 3-6

48. ib., col. 6

49. ib., col. 6

50. ib., col. 6



## 2..2 The Providence of God

G. Gay writes: “I call the foundations of a Holy Abandonment those dogmatic truths on which there is based for us the duty of abandoning ourselves to God. There are two principal such truths:

1. the will of God is the sovereign cause of all that happens in the world;
2. this will of God that is irresistible and sovereign is also good in itself and benevolent for us” [51].

“Do not do anything other than through the powerful will of God, whether this means allowing events to happen, or leaving it up to God to accomplish” [52].

In brief, God holds in His own hand each created will, and when these act against the divine will, when they seem to go against His plans, they do nothing other than tend toward those ultimate purposes which He has already previously established. However, if the wisdom of God governs and directs all things, we must conclude with St. Augustine that “in our lives nothing happens merely through casual circumstances..., but all that takes place against our will, we know that it comes from the will of God, from His Providence, from the order that He has established, from that consent which He gives and from those laws that He has established” [53].

As a consequence, secondary causes, those which we experience directly, have us perceive and see God in all that happens. St. Augustine noted: “God is so good that even evil can serve Him for good purposes. He would not have permitted evil to come about if He had not been able to utilize it through His own sovereign goodness: [54].

The glory of God to which all divine actions are ordained, coincides fully with my personal good, but not always with what appears to be good, but without any doubt regarding authentic good. Paul’s opinion when he writes that “we know that by turning everything to their good, God cooperates with all those who love him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose [Rm 8:28].

“The will of God is the one authentic rule of the Christian ... He is intimately persuaded that God does not will anything, does not permit anything, which does not turn to the advantage of those whom He loves...” [55].

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51. G. Gay, *Vita e virtu' cristiane considerate nello stato religioso*. vol. 3, Padova 1940, pp. 158-164.

52. M. VILLER, *Abandon*, o.c., col. 7

53. *ib.*, col. 7.

54. *ib.*, col. 7.

55. *ib.*, col. 8.

This foundation of Abandonment is so secure that Fr. Innocent Le Masson concludes that “there is nothing more reasonable than Abandonment to the Good Pleasure of God. The reason is that Abandonment places us into a natural accord of reason with the principle that converts everything regarding us into virtue, merit and blessing. All which in our view has to be, is all done with God’s will, and since He is our Sovereign Master, He will always accomplish well His will, despite ours...” [56].

### 3. Elements and Effects of Abandonment

#### 3.1 The Virtues that accompany Abandonment

Dom Lehodey calls the foundations of Abandonment those virtues which imply detachment, faith, confidence in Providence and the honor of God [57]. Bossuet sees in the act of Abandonment: “... a composite of the acts of the most perfect faith, and the most complete and the most abandoned hope and the most pure and faithful love” [58]. deCaussade teaches that “the state of Abandonment is a mixture of faith, hope and charity in one single act that unites the heart to God and to His action” [59]. Piny calls the way of Abandonment ‘that one in which there is exercised the most vivid faith, where there is practiced the better hope, and where pure love is lived. In this there is exercised justice and patience. It is the most penitential of ways, and the most crucifying [60]. Bernies makes of Abandonment “a synthesis of all the theological and moral virtues” [61]. For all these authors, the indispensable virtues for Abandonment are renunciation and love.

#### a. Renunciation

To be abandoned to God it is necessary to begin with abandoning oneself. It is for this reason that the classical descriptions of Abandonment are strongly tinted with abnegation! The “resignation” of the Imitation of Christ is a middle way between abnegation of oneself and the gift of self, and is an amalgam of the both of them.

The Abandonment described by St. Francis de Sales coincides with abnegation and the gift of self to God: “It is necessary to know that to abandon our soul and to allow ourselves to be taken over, there is no other way that to abandon and to surrender our own will to give it over to God” [62].

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56. ib., col. 8.

57. ib., col. 9.

58. ib., col. 9.

59. J..P. deCAUSSADE, *Traite’ de l’Abandon a’ la Providence divine*, Paris 1870, p. 759

60. M. VILLER, *Abandon...*, o.c., col. 9

61. ib., col. 9

62. ib., col. 9

This detachment includes all the desires in so far as “it is not necessary to ask anything, to refuse anything, but to abandon oneself into the arms of Divine Providence, without allowing any other desire to surface except that of willing that which God wills of us” [63]. Bossuet stated that “this act liberates the whole person for God” [[64].

To hand oneself over so totally to God it is necessary not only to believe in His goodness, in His love, but further, to entrust oneself completely to Him. All of this, however, is but the beginning of Abandonment. To commit oneself over to God without reservations, love is needed.

### c. Love

Love is indispensable for Abandonment. It is necessary to love in order to be abandoned, and to abandon oneself in order to love. The reason is because Abandonment is the most complete expression of perfect love.

St. Paul of the Cross calls Abandonment “the most perfect reality, the treasure of all treasures” [65]. St. Francis de Sales sings its praises when he writes that “Abandonment is the virtue of virtues, the chrism of charity, the sweet odor of humility, the merit of patience, the fiat of perseverance... it is the sole virtue worthy of being practiced by the most beloved friends of God” [66]. Fenelon, in a most beautiful letter addressed to one of his spiritual daughters, the Carmelite, Sister Carlotta of St. Cyprian, dated March 10, 1696, wrote that “Abandonment is nothing other than pure love, always, but most especially, in times of trial:

*It is proper to those most passionate lovers to love so strongly that no difficulty can slow them down, no danger lead them to give it up, not even death itself...in being almost totally forgetful of self, they do all, they suffer all, they dare all, to bring happiness and to be united to the one they love [67].*

### 3.2 The Object of Abandonment

Abandonment extends to everything, “to the past, to the present and to the future. It addresses itself to the body and to all its conditions, to the world with its limits and qualities; to good and to evil; to the benevolence and malice of human beings; to death, to time and to eternity” [68]. It has the same extension as

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63. ib., col. 9.

64. ib., col. 9.

65. ib., col. 9

66. ib., col. 10

67. G. BERTONI, *Pagine di vita cristiana*, Vicenza 1947, p. 238.

68. M. VILLER, *Abandon*, o.c., col. 11.

Providence, from Which nothing escapes. The Saints abandon themselves to God completely.

St. Gertrude responded to the Lord who proposed to her to choose between health and sickness, that she preferred to follow the divine will in everything. St. Francis de Sales, in a letter dated January 16, 1603, wrote: "I implore you, as the Psalmist, say often to God: 'I am Yours, save me!' And like Magdeline at the feet of the Risen Lord explained: 'Rabbi!' And then leave it all up to Him. He will work out with you, in you and even by means of you and for you the hallowing of His Name, to which be honor and glory"[69]

### 3.3 The Conditions of Genuine Abandonment

Abandonment should be active, and not exclusive, that is, open to all the other virtues.

#### a. Active

"There does not exist, nor could there, any truly passive virtue." [70]. Though God created us without us, He does not will to sanctify us without us. Our sanctification ought to be contemporaneously the work of grace and of our free cooperation. Abandonment, therefore, does not dispense us from the effort.

"To act little and to stand and look at God is to tempt God" [71]. "To abandon oneself to God without doing on one's own part all that one could accomplish is laxism and carelessness" [72].

St. Francis de Sales in recommending to St. Jeanne de Chantal a "loving falling asleep" into the arms of the Lord, immediately added: "without your ever giving up cooperating carefully with holy grace through the exercise of the virtues and those occasions which present themselves" [73].

To keep the soul in this loving and confident communion in God, very active efforts need to be brought to bear because Abandonment does not alleviate what is repugnant. It is not exempt from those very challenging interior battles and does not impede one's feeling suffering.

In our spiritual life it is necessary to maintain the balance between Abandonment to God and one's own personal commitment. St. Ignatius stated: "Entrust yourselves to God. Act as though the successes of each activity depended

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69. ib., col. 11

70. Pope LEO XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae*, Apostolic Letter, in ASS, Vol. XXXI. Rome 1898-99, p. 476.

71. VILLER, *Abandon...*, o.c., col. 13.

72. ib., col. 13.

73. ib., col. 14.

completely on you and nothing on God, and all the while, in dedicating your entire attention on the outcome, do not count on this, because only God can do all, and you can do nothing” [74].

St. Charles Borromeo fully reached this ideal. “In every matter he had such a confidence in Divine Providence that it seemed as though he did not base any hope on his own human diligence. Yet, on the other hand, he committed such personal attention, dedication, creativity, constancy, one time as well as always, to whatever it was he was doing, so much so that it would be said that he was counting absolutely on divine help” [75].

#### **b. Non Exclusive**

Abandonment does not take the place of all the other virtues, but accompanies them. It has an important place in perfection, but is not of itself that perfection. Defending deCaussade’s teaching, Ramiere notes that “he did not pretend to write a complete tract on Christian perfection, but wished only to bring out the advantages of a special virtue and of a particular state. It is true that Abandonment is the essential basis of holiness and that this is one and the same holiness. It is true that deCaussade did not absolutely think that he was saying to all Christians that this is all that they should do in order to save their souls.

Believers would be deceived in believing if they thought that they were dispensed from doing what is not brought up in order to attach themselves solely to this great challenge of Abandonment. Nonetheless, theology has justly and eloquently brought out its unique importance” [76].

Abandonment is not the first virtue recommended to all, for every circumstance. This might be the impression one would receive from some of the phrases of Pliny, deCaussade, and even from St. Francis de Sales, when they are isolated from their context and it seems that an absolute value is given to it. It is necessary to keep always in mind that special state of the individuals to whom their letters and writings were destined. “It would be a major mistake to apply to the entire existence of a soul those special rules intended for saints in passing situations” [77].

### **3.4 The Fruits of Abandonment.**

According to the classical authors, the fruits of Abandonment which confirm all the others, are freedom peace and joy.

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74. ib., col. 15.

75. ib., col. 15.

76. ib., col. 16.

77. ib., col. 16.

### a. Freedom

Freedom is the principal good that Jesus has come to bring on earth: The truth will make you free: [ cf. Jn 9:32]. If you are true children of the Father you will be truly free [cf. Jn 8:36].

Bossuet wrote that “if there is one reality that is capable of rendering a human soul free and of enabling it to breathe at its own comfort, this would be the complete Abandonment to God’s will [78].

- Abandonment renders human beings *free from themselves* , in so far as it suppresses anxious thoughts about oneself, eliminates scruples, detaches the heart from all else, so that one would not will anything other than God Himself.

- Abandonment renders human beings *free in their dealings with others*.

“No human respect stops us. The judgments of others, their criticisms, their caricatures, their malice no longer matter to us, or at least, they do not have the strength of taking us from our path” [79].

-Abandonment renders human beings *free in their relationship with God*.

“Willing only what God wills, without scheming, without reverting to one’s own interests, accepting whatever happens, fusing one’s own choices with those of God, thus accepting freely all that comes from Him” [80].

### b. Peace

Peace has its source in the gift that a human being makes by giving him/herself to God. “Peace is the tranquility of order”, says St. Augustine: “it is the sovereign gift of God to a person. This is the peace of God Himself” [81].

“Do not ask for anything, nor refuse anything of what there is in religious life and this holy indifference will conserve you in the peace of your eternal Spouse” [82].

“All is willed by God, this is what needs to be repeated without ceasing, in order not to allow oneself to give in to melancholy or upsetting recriminations” [83].

In fact, useless fears vanish when one performs an act of complete abandonment in God. “Do not think on what will happen tomorrow, because the Eternal Father Himself, who is taking care of you today, will do this tomorrow and always” [84]. Abandonment insures peace, but a peace that is genuinely divine.

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78. ib., col. 17.

79. ib., col. 18.

80. ib., col. 18,

81. C. GAY, *Vita e virtù cristiane...*, o.c., p. 191

82. M. VILLER, *Abandon...*, o.c., col. 19.

83. ib., col. 18-19.

84. ib., col. 19.

**c. Joy**

Abandonment is the cause of joy, and the act of Abandonment assures the soul of perfect tranquility. Nothing disconcerts us or saddens us more than when we do not will what God wills!

**4. The Practice of Abandonment****4.1 Abandonment is not the Path meant for All**

“There is a way that is universally fitting for every class of person and, therefore, everyone in particular is not called to follow the path of this total Abandonment to the divine will “ [85]. As a result, the way of Holy Abandonment should not be counseled indiscriminately in the same manner, to all persons. DeCausade, in his treatise, speaks of Abandonment both as a “virtue”, and as a “state.” The “virtue” of Abandonment is possible for all Christians, while the “state” of Holy Abandonment is reserved to those souls whose conduct God Himself takes in hand. Only God can place a soul in the “state” of Holy Abandonment.

Abandonment as a “virtue” is nothing more than the conformity to God’s Will, the exercise of which consists in carrying out all that God commands and in accepting all that He sends, not only as He wills it, but because He wills it. The “virtue” of Abandonment is necessary for every Christian for one’s own sanctification.

The “state” of Abandonment is a state to which only a very limited number of souls achieves. This may be not because others have not been called, but because the greater part of those whom God does call do not respond to the invitations of grace” [86].

**4.2 The Degrees of Abandonment**

Along each person’s path-way to sanctification, while the action of God increases, that of the human soul diminishes, to the point that the faithful soul comes to the point of not placing any further obstacle in the way of the divine operation. This means that Abandonment is diversified at every stage of the spiritual life. There is at least a minimum exercise of Abandonment that is necessary for every soul - and a total Abandonment which cannot be practiced without a specific call from God [87].

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85. ib., col. 20

86. ib., col. 20

87. ib., col. .20.

### 4.3 The Way and the State of Abandonment

Abandonment increases in the measure according to which one proceeds along the path to sanctification. It is necessary to recognize the attraction of God and to follow this faithfully, even if the path takes different turns according to the individuals. If all, or almost all arrive at the goal, this does not happen in the same instant, because some are attracted from the very beginning of their spiritual journey, while others are only called later on.

Even more wondrous is the “state” of Holy Abandonment. “There are souls, among those whom the Lord leads by this path, that His divine Goodness has so extraordinarily deprived of every satisfaction, desire and sentiment. For these, it is most difficult for them to express themselves, because what is going on in the depths of themselves is so delicate and imperceptible that they simply do not know how to speak of it. They arrive at the point of being content to pronounce, every once in a while, some word or other of Abandonment and of confidence and of remaining in reverence before the Lord [88].

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88. ib., col. 22.



**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**ABANDONMENT IN THE PERSONAL WRITINGS**  
**of**  
**LEOPOLDINA NAUDET AND FR. GASPAR BERTONI**

**1. Nature of Abandonment**

The classical authors defined Abandonment as “a conformity to the Divine Good Pleasure born of love” [89].

a. The writings of Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar simply abound in expressions of *loving conformity* :

*I then made new acts of Abandonment, not really wanting to know any more concerning myself, and to repose continually in God* [90].

*When the Lord attracts, it is not proper to look elsewhere, but only to follow Him to the extent that this pleases Him* [91].

b. Therefore, it is the spirit of Holy Abandonment to the Will of the Lord in everything, whether Signified of His Will of Good Pleasure:

*We ought to carry out that Divine Will which is called ‘Signified’ ... and we ought to adore His Will of Good Pleasure, whenever it is made known to us by events. All the while, it is proper for us to have good confidence, while we know that ‘those who fear Him need only to ask to be answered’*  
 [Ps 145:19] [92].

*In prayer I experienced a great desire to bring myself into uniformity to the Divine Will in all things. I made known to the Lord that my life would really be a burden without this uniformity, so I prayed to Him to give me a sublime readiness to will only what He wills with all my heart, with all my affection and with all of myself* [93].

c. As St. Ignatius teaches, Abandonment leads to indifference for all created reality. The reason for this indifference is to be sought in the need to place oneself in a state in which there would always be guaranteed the choice of the most suitable means in order to obtain the height of God’s glory:

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89. M. VILLER, *Abandon....* o.c., col. 3.

90. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 26, 1811, f. 54.

91. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., March 4, 1813, p. 71.

92. *ib.*, June 5, 1814, p. 113.

93. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., December 14, 1812, f. 99.

*It seemed that it was said to me by the Lord that He wished that we be like two close friends that would think of one another. He made it clear that He would think of everything for me and that I ought to occupy myself solely for Him for the sole motive of giving Him joy [94].*

*Toward God one ought to rivet his only attention, and having done His good pleasure, all else will proceed well [95].*

## 2. Foundations of Abandonment

This is an Abandonment that is based on Scripture, on the example of Christ and on the Providence of God.

“The writings and the word of Fr. Bertoni constitute a precious path of direction, interpretation in so far as his own heart and mind were saturated and impregnated by the biblical message. The encounter and confrontation with the Word of God not only formed and signed profoundly his interior life, but they also gave birth to a process of radiance which was reserved and projected into his style of preaching, into his forms of conversation and prayer, reflected in his personal notes, as well as in his epistolary correspondence” [96].

a. The “Private Memorial” of Fr. Gaspar is sprinkled with citations of the most varied biblical sources. They appear there as motivations which mark the rhythm and the file of his thoughts, and they serve as a direct mirror for those thoughts which inform and move his deepest life.

The sap of the Word of God circulates also throughout Leopoldina’s “Spiritual Diary” and it is always God Who is speaking and intervening in the challenges of her life.

In the Collection of his Letters many of his inspirations and the very unfolding of his thoughts are imbued and sustained by this almost continuous support that he found from very well appropriated biblical texts. These reflect the movement of his spirit, the reflections of light, the convictions which permeate his supernatural wisdom in his solution of various problems presented to him.

From the examination of the numerous Letters it can be verified that these ideals and scriptural texts serve the function of responding to questions and to particular states of mind. Numerous biblical texts also serve as an explicit invitation to his confidence and to Abandonment, as may be noted in his letter of November 16, 1812:

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94. ib., June 9, 1811, f. 70.

95. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., June 4, 1814, p. 250.

96. G. FURLANI, *La Parola di Dio regola del pensiero e dell'azione del Beato Bertoni*, in: *Saggi sullo spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, Verona 1983, p. 17.

*'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' [Jn 15:1-2]. When Peter heard this correction he was not far away, nor was he even on that path of moving away from Jesus, but he was still very close to Him and was in the very act of being approached by Him, drawn by His right hand. Oh! How sublime ought to be our hope in God always! It should not only be high, but it should be very high: 'He has placed my refuge on high!' [Ps 115:9]. This is the effect and the sign of recognizing this blessed confidence: 'in peace and in the self-same I will sleep and have my rest, for You, O Lord, have built me up in peace' [cf. Ps 14:9-10] [97].*

The presence of Christ and the commitment to imitate Him appears in a very marked manner in the thought and life of Fr. Bertoni. This is what he jotted in his "Private Memorial":

*There was a strong movement to follow Our Lord more closely, even at the cost of life [98].*

And on Saturday, March 2, 1818, he invited Leopoldina to sanctify her Lent by proposing to her a new particular examen, formulated thus:

*In every undertaking, fix your gaze on the Redeemer, Who in His assumed humanity has come to compose the number of the elect [99].*

In this case, too, Fr. Bertoni is only following the path which Leopoldina herself had always followed:

*I have always found in myself one devotion only, which is that of Jesus; and there my heart is so riveted that the devotion that I have for Mary Most Holy and for St. Joseph, are but relative to Jesus, our Lord [100].*

Christ is the Model to which Leopoldina wishes to conform her own life, as is evident from this note in her "Spiritual Diary":

*Love wants similarity. If, therefore, I love Jesus, I have to be like Him [101].*

It is important to observe how the Christocentric dimension in Fr. Bertoni and in Mother Naudet proceeds at equal pace with the ascent along the way of Holy Abandonment. There is not a passing over from one spirituality to another, but it is all contemporaneity, complementary.

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97. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., November 16, 1812, pp. 23-24.  
 98. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c. September 25, 1808, p. 52.  
 99. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 2, 1811, f. 51.  
 100. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., May 1828, p. 127.  
 101. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., p. 65.

If we look to the interior life of Christ, to His prayer, we see that in Him there is a perfect adherence to His mission of servant: “Behold, I come O Lord, to do Your will” [102]. Thus, the life of the Christian will be an adherence to his/her existence in grace and adherence to one’s own mission, as this is designated by the Will of God.

It is above all in conforming one’s own will to that of God that there is realized our identification with the Christ, obedient unto death, Who placed Himself totally abandoned into the hands of His Divine Father. Fr. Bertoni, both by his own natural disposition, as well as by the special grace of God, saw in the Mystery of Jesus Christ, above all His availability and abandonment to the Father: it is this aspect that he sought to translate into his own life and to propose this to his spiritual daughter.

**b.** All that the Providence of God disposes is always what is best, in so far as from all this He is able to draw salvation. There are causes and remedies to resolve the thousand difficulties in which Fr. Bertoni and Mother Naudet discovered themselves. However, these were all considered only as secondary realities with regard to the fulfillment of God’s universal Will of salvation, even in these situations.

*There will come the time in which there will be loosened the shackles of those delays, which prudence teaches us to observe. Divine Providence makes use of them to protect that which He has decided upon as soon as the clouds pass. Blessed are they who hope in his Divine Providence. They have nothing to fear if they place no obstacle or hindrance to His designs.*

*Divine Providence proceeds sweetly and strongly at the same time, disposing everything for the purpose intended: and all things, the prosperous as well as the adverse, and the good and evil wills of human beings, equally serve His Plan.*

*‘All that He wills, He does in heaven and on earth’ [Ps 34:6]. ‘There is no one who can resist Your will, O Lord’ [Esther 13:9]; ‘for those who love the Lord all things work unto good’ [Rm 8:28]. [103]*

And Leopoldina notes in her “Spiritual Diary” that this Providence intervenes really in her life:

*You think only of me, and I will think of you and for you. The Lord not only had me understand this, but I would even say further without hesitation what I see how it happens when I uselessly become concerned at times about other matters, that all I have to do is to love Him and to follow that which He wants of me, and all the rest to leave up to Him [104].*

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102. Ps 39:8

103. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., January 15, 1813, p. 53.

104. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., October 9, 1812, f. 93.

And Fr. Bertoni insists:

*The works of God have their proofs, as God shows His hand in guiding them and directing them to His end. In doing this, with the difficulties He permits, He seems to withdraw His hand from human beings, who are humbly to give way to His Providence, from which they come to see clearly that all depends on this for their conservation and success.*

*When it is night for us, it is day for Him Who knows what He is to do.*

*And we should raise our hands to heaven, when we do not know where to place them, and there is nothing better than to ask God's help. 'In the watches of the night raise your hands to the holy places' [Ps 133:2] 'and night shall be as the light of day' [Ps 138:12]. [105].*

### 3. Elements and Effects of Abandonment

To abandon oneself to God it is necessary to begin by abandoning oneself and this out of pure love.

a. Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar brought this to maturity in prayer and contemplation.

*In prayer, by becoming ever stronger and rendering ever more vibrant the sentiment of God, of total confidence in Him, abandonment, there was joined a great desire of total annihilation and self-emptying, so that God might be able to achieve everything, totally and alone within me. [106]. In the following days, these same sentiments of abandonment and total loss of myself in God continued [107].*

On September 30, 1812, Fr. Bertoni proposed for himself the particular examination:

*To do everything out of pure love [108].*

This became the habitual background of his own spiritual life as well as that of Leopoldina:

*Reverend Mother, make room only for love and offer yourself freely to that love. This means to be most ready to do what you know pleases God, and not out of fear, but principally out of love. Love is not afraid of anything. Hence, when you are in this magnanimous disposition of love, and seeking solely to please the Lord, and confiding in Him above all else, take your rest in Him and in His Goodness ... Be abandoned, of course, totally in God, not placing boundaries, nor limiting goals, nor times on our Lord [109].*

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105. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario ...*, o.c., May 22, 1829, p. 256.

106. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 12, 1812, f. 86.

107. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., October 25, 1808, p. 72.

108. *ib.*, September 30, 1812, p. 184.

109. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., March 6, 1813, p. 73.

b. In this passage of his letter, in addition to love, there is light shed also on the object of Abandonment:

*Be abandoned totally in God, do not place boundaries, nor limit the goals, nor the times...*

There is thus confirmed what the classical authors write about this theme: “The object of Abandonment has the same extension as Providence, from which nothing slips away” [110]. The secondary causes are nothing other than simply instruments in the hands of God. Fr. Bertoni noted:

*Do not go to any trouble. For the one who does not resist God, He is the only one to do all that He chooses in heaven and on earth [111].*

And again:

*... who knows whether Divine Providence, which disposes all while human beings may only propose, might have something succeed to a better result than what was expected? Whoever works in God is never confused, nor forced to turn away embarrassed. On the other hand, God Our Lord, makes succeed at times those matters by some other way than the one which we had set up, so that it might be known ‘that unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it [Ps 126:1] [112].*

c. In the meantime, should we cross our arms and just look at what Divine Providence disposes?

*May God pardon these days, but it is fitting that we should continue rowing in these stormy times [113].*

Abandonment should remain active because that which God has created without us, He does not will to sanctify without us. Both Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar had understood this perfectly, with their mystical realism: they were individuals with both feet on the ground, being attentive to the many and contrasting aspects of the reality in their lives, especially of the human heart. Through all these, they remained with their hearts fixed on God:

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110. M. VILLER, *Abandon....*, o.c., col. 11.

111. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., September 1825, p. 184.

112. *ib.*, March 21, 1829, p. 253.

113. *ib.*, September 1825, p. 184.

*At the end of prayer, while setting up the daily agenda, and having to take care of a matter, the Lord led me to understand that I had to do this day in and day out. He led me to trust in Him and without any further thought on how this would all turn out, or on how to work it through to its end [114].*

*Surely this undertaking requires much prayer, much diligence, supreme confidence in God, and much caution on the part of human beings, along with extreme humility, together with heroic virtues. If we do our part, God will always take hold of His part [115].*

Fr. Bertoni might be described as a “Mystic of Activity”, and Leopoldina Naudet a “Contemplative in Action”. This is the way every evangelical worker should be: He called those to Himself whom He wanted... He constituted the Twelve that were with Him and also to send them out to preach [116]. Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar, together along the way of Abandonment, practiced every other virtue without neglecting the human values and sensibilities proper to the prophet and the apostle. They summarized their chosen path as being synthesized in the gift of themselves to God: “To become all things to all, in order to gain all for Christ” [117].

However, it is the virtue of humility that remains the characteristic trait of both. Their contemporaries noted this in the both of them: “In humility, she was outstanding. She recognized the graces that the Lord had given her, However, her recognition of them rather than leading to vainglory in her, served no other purpose than to confound her and to humble her all the more. She regarded them as precious gifts, but posited within her, as in an unclean, unworthy vessel, which loses absolutely nothing of its vileness, even containing a precious liquid. So, she would compare herself to a simple channel through which the Lord made His graces pass on to others - and at times, to a machine, which would have no virtue of its own, but was able to produce great effects because of the virtues of the Artifice who drove it and moved it [118].

He imitated Jesus especially in His humility of heart, in which He was most profound. It seems to be that a humility that was so simple, and in one so dignified, could only come together in one like Fr. Gaspar [119].

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114. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 25, 1811, f. 54.

115. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., May 1825, p. 177.

116. Mk 3:13-14.

117. cf. 1 Co 9::22.

118. Metilda CANOSSA, *Epoche*, o.c., f. 12.

119. *Summarium Additionale super virtutibus ex officio dispositum et positioni super virtutibus adnexum*, 1958. Doc. XVII, p. 88; Doc. XXIII, p.215.

Such judgments become all the more real when they are confirmed in what these great persons were trying to accomplish in their interior lives:

*The consideration of my own nothingness has caused me ever greater gratitude toward Him. I was given a deeper penetration into my own nothingness, but always with joy and consolation, through finding everything in God [120].*

*What a great good it is to forget and to despoil all that is created to seek the Lord alone. How God is honored and loves His humiliated Son. Oh, what a debt is ours to do for Him, at least in part, what He first did for us [121].*

Without humility it is impossible to arrive at union with God, because:

*... it is in the depths of one's own nothingness that God is found [122]*

*Before the Lord raises a soul very high, writes Fr. Gaspar, it is only fitting that He lower it just as deep: God is no less wise than the bricklayers, who know well how to dig a deep foundation when they want the building to rise on high.*

*Let us pray to the Lord that three increase His light in us, that knowing better our own wretchedness, we come to its depths, even to its abyss: then it will be that an abyss will call out to another abyss, corresponding the depths to the height of the building [123].*

Humility and Abandonment complete one another. The reason why Fr. Bertoni wanted to sound out the abyss of his own poverty is so that he might experience the joy of knowing his extreme need of God.

In a sermon to the newly approved confessors, he stated:

*Give to God all that is His; all that remains for us is our nothing.*

**d.** The fruits of Abandonment are effectively Freedom, Peace and Joy

\* Abandonment renders the faithful free because it wills only what God wills, we come to accept that which He decides.

*My only thought should be to love Him and to follow whatever He wills for me, and to leave all the rest to Him [124].*

*I am seeing what the Lord is doing. Oh!, how good He is! The Lord will do that which is His and He will do it from that which He is [125].*

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120. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 14, 1812, f. 86.

121. G. Bertoni, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., December 25, 1808, p. 93.

122. *ib.*, August 24, 1808, p. 39.

123. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., June 7, 1814, p. 115.

124. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., October 10, 1812, f. 93.

125. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., January 15, 1813.



\* Abandonment is also the source of Peace.

*On finishing prayer, the Lord gave me a pledge of the help that I can derive from this Abandonment in order to be the more united to Him.*

*He allowed me to experience a morsel and to taste the good of losing myself in Him, to that extent of no longer finding myself in anything else [126].*

*Who would need to worry, since the Lord has taken such care of everything? [127].*

*Like a wise and docile lamb, let yourself be ruled, guided, nourished by Him [128].*

\* For anyone who would strive to practice Abandonment, all is easy, all becomes gentle, and all becomes a motive of serene joy.

*It suffices, 'whether we live, or die, we are the Lord's' [Rm 14:8]. Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God [Rm 8:38]. The disciples know just in Whom they have placed their trust: Let us love God, then, and render to Him that service that we can, just as He has done for each whom He has called, in accord with the Spirit and the grace that He has*

*bestowed on each. And our Lord will be content. It would really be shameful if we were not content! 'Serve the Lord in joy', says David, 'go into His presence in exultation. Know that the Lord is God: He made us, His we are' [Ps 92:29].*

*In trials, one abounds in consolation because of the copious fruit, at least with regard to our weakness which God draws and squeezes out of our anguish and tribulations [129]*

#### 4. Conclusion

The personal writings of Fr. Bertoni and Leopoldina Naudet, placed alongside the classical description of Abandonment as presented by its proponents, confirm how effectively and genuinely Holy Abandonment was indeed one of the basic supports of their spirituality, even if it seems that to them this was always a goal to be achieved.

A clear indication of this would be this citation of a letter between them, made up of expressions which would summarize St. Ignatius of Loyola, their shared patron:

*How few are they would understand what God would do with them were He not impeded by them in His designs [130].*

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126. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., March 24, 1811, f. 54.

127. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., January 1813, p. 46.

128. *ib.*, April 1828, p. 236.

129. *ib.* April 30, 1828, p. 236.

130. *ib.*, February 1813, p. 61.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**THE PRACTICE OF ABANDONMENT**  
**in**

**LEOPOLDINA NAUDET AND IN FR. GASPAR BERTONI**

**1. The Practice of Abandonment in Leopoldina**

Abandonment is the path of “those souls whose conduct God takes in hand” [131]. Mother Naudet and Fr. Bertoni pertain to this number.

In her “Spiritual Diary” Leopoldina noted that God had chosen her as His spouse from her infancy, preserving her in ten years of life in the royal court from attaching herself to anything other than to Him alone.

As her life unfolded, thanks to the direction of good confessors, but even more by the graces of exceptional gifts of prayer, she concentrated her every activity on God alone, loving and serving always in full confidence in Him.

*From you I wanted the most sublime perfection* [132].

This is what the Lord had communicated to her on June 18, 1800.

*I do not want anything other than what God wills -*

is what she would say to her spiritual daughters on the day of her death [133].

Between these two dates there unfolds the story of a life lived in the practice of Abandonment. The only matter that she kept in her heart was the carrying out of the Divine Will in the same perfection that will be realized in heaven.

*The Lord gave me a very strong and interior sentiment regarding these words of the ‘Our Father’: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*

*There was impressed in my spirit and knowledge that the spirit received from these and enkindled my will to desire in me the realization of this petition and to carry out the Lord’s will with all perfection in every matter, repeating in my spirit: as it is in heaven so it will be on earth* [134].

This desire of attaching herself to God alone was most profoundly rooted in Leopoldina. She truly willed only that which would be pleasing to Him. And after spending all of her energies for the good of the community she founded, she stated:

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131. M. VILLER, *Abandon*, o.c., col. 20.

132. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., June 18, 1800, f. 3.

133. S. GAGNERE, *Memorie sulle virtu praticate dalla Ven. Fondatrice*, fasc. ms., 1835, Doc. 42, f. 3.

134. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., August 1812, ff. 71-72.

*If God did not choose anything else, and were I to see it all reduced to*

*nothing, I would not change a single thing. This is provided that it were not our fault. I am content that there would thus be fulfilled God's Will, and that I had done all that was in my power to do, for the fulfillment of this will [135].*

In the years lived at the royal court she remained coherent in her quest for God alone:

*In the world my rebellious nature, at times, would have chosen to seek human satisfactions and to love creatures. But, it was sustained by the intimate sentiment that made me understand that I already belonged to God. Thus, I overcame every affection, every thought that was not for God alone [136].*

She renounced her own dream to become a Trappistine [137], because she was completely bereft of her personal choices, and sought only the good pleasure of her God, to carry out His will.

In the first years of her consecration she suffered under the harsh spiritual direction of Fr. Paccanari. Even her physical well-being experienced some tribulations during this time of her life. However, her decision was soon taken:

*I resolve to submit my own judgment and to rejoice in the humiliations that will come to me. However, in this way, I will not lose the freedom of the Spirit, knowing that it is the deceit of the evil one to allow myself to be overcome by mortifications [138].*

There would come even greater trials because of difficulties that Fr. Paccanari created for himself. He was subjected to a judgment by the Holy Office, which led to the dissolving of the "Company of the Fathers of the Faith". As a result of this, the community called the "Beloved of Jesus", for which Leopoldina was responsible, remained without a guide and assistance, and eventually disappeared.

Reflecting on these events, Leopoldina wrote:

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135. S. GAGNERE, *Memorie...*, o.c., f. 7.

136. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., October 10, 1801, f. 18.

137. When she was 24 years of age, Leopoldina desired to consecrate herself to the Lord in a very particular and austere manner, by embracing the Order of the Trappistines. However, God led her to understand that she had been chosen by Him for another work, and that she had to be forgetful of herself and her own inclinations, precisely to be a Foundress of a new Religious Order in the Church. . She came to see that this would bring glory to God and therefore, she was being called to renounce her own wishes, in order to place herself totally into the hands of God, to be employed by Him in accord with His Will. In her most humble manner, she submitted herself to the Divine Good Pleasure, thereby offering a total sacrifice of herself to the Lord. [Luisa NAUDET, *Alcune notizie dell'infanzia e della gioventu' della Fondatrice*, Roma, April 26, 1835].

138. Leopoldina NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., August 1800, f. 17.

*God saved me from the midst of the storm... with a flow of admirable graces; step by step He led me to the point of bestowing on me the most vivid confidence that He would be able to bring to term what which we desire, which is simply that of serving Him according to our vocation. [139].*

Regarding Leopoldina's whole life centered on her full confidence and abandonment in God, her secretary, Metilda di Canossa - and her companion, Sophia Gagnere offer abundant testimony.

Metilda assures us that "she had heard [Leopoldina] pronounce her living *fiat* every time some reverse or other, came to her. She would see the Foundress with a serene look on her face, just going ahead with her own duties even when the most painful difficulties and bitterness pierced her soul:

*It is enough for me now to offer prayer, she would say, in order to have time for that which my Lord will decide.*

Her total relaxation was right here [140].

There are trials of the most interior nature: aridity, the silence of God, uncertainties, doubts ... but the Lord does not like complaining, so"

*I helped myself with Faith, and I tried to be content to be able in sheer faith to protest to the Lord that I want Him alone [141].*

The testimony of her secretary continues: "It is indescribable what she had to endure and to suffer in so many matters for the establishment of her Congregation. However, she sustained it all with indomitable spirit. She would often quote that passage from Scripture: *the Just Person lives by faith...*"

*I do not need visions, nor miracles - for me, faith suffices [142].*

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139. L. Naudet, *Lettera autografa, a P. Rozaven*, March 7, 1815. Doc. 365. A.G.S.F. John Rozaven of Layssegues, was born in Quimper, Francis, on March 9, 1772. He escaped into exile at the time of the French Revolution. In 1797, he was accepted by Fr. Varin into the Society of the Sacred Heart, in Hagenbruun. After the union of this Society with the Company of the Faith, he was sent to England. Eventually, he separated himself from Fr. Paccanari's group and in 1804, he became a Jesuit in White Russia. Here he taught philosophy in the College of Petersburg, and had a significant role in the movement among the Moscovite nobility toward the Catholic Church. At the time of the expulsion of the Jesuits from Russia [in 1820], he was charged by the General of the Society of Jesus, to defend his confreres from those charges of which they were accused. In 1820, he took part in the 20th General Congregation of the Company of Jesus in his capacity of Vicar-Provincial of France. He was named Assistant General for France by Fr. Fortis, and held this office until his death, which took place in Rome on April 2, 1851 [He is buried at the Gesu' - Tr. note]. Fr. Rozaven was one of the more outstanding members of the Company of Jesus in the first decades of the 19th century. He was an illustrious writer and philosopher, despite his numerous other occupations. In all he did, he found the time to follow the doctrinal questions that concerned the Church. [cf. A. GUIDEE, *Vi du R.P. Joseph Varin*, o.c., pp. 225-235].

There is a collection of an abundant exchange of letters between Leopoldina Naudet and Fr. Rozaven.

140. Metilda CANOSSA, *Memorie sulle virtù praticate dalla Ven. Fondatrice delle Sorelle della S. Famiglia*, fasc. ms. 835, Doc. 40, f. 9.

141. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., April 1812, f. 88.

142. Metilda CANOSSA, *Memorie...*, o.c., f. 9.

She makes this following confession:

*Do not marvel at the miracles that are read as being worked by God through His saints, since it is even a greater wonder when they are not wrought when confidence and faith in the omnipotence of God is all that it should be [143].*

When everything seems contrary and human forces seem unleashed against the success of some endeavor, then there is needed a fully supernatural certainty. The Foundress expressed herself in these words:

*The Lord wishes to be served and glorified by us one day, and to find His delight through this Institute.  
Let us strive to live in a manner to give joy to the Lord and we are sure that He will shower us with His mercies.  
The just person lives by faith, and there would not be more faith than if everything ran without contradictions and, so to speak, with full sails [144].*

The greatest trial for Leopoldina was reserved for her on that May 1, 1819, when Fr. Gaspar decided to end his spiritual direction of her, even though he would continue his interest in her religious community. She suffered from this decision even sensibly, she prayed, sought the mediation of intermediaries. However, all this only served to lead her to a greater depth of understanding and persuasion of her own need. In one of her few writings during the year of 1820, she noted:

*Remember, my soul, how great is your wretchedness, that when the Lord put you to the trial, how weak you were, exhausted, upset by a thousand thoughts and much anguish. You easily tired of suffering and found yourself in a turbulent sea. Your anguished spirit and in the midst of a flood of temptations, seemed to you to be going under it all.  
The faculties occupied by this were what saddened you.  
Memory crucified you with recollections of the past. The intellect represented to you all that could add even greater weight to the tribulations.  
The will led you to desert the end of it all, and to make you even more tired of suffering and from the endlessness of it all.  
This is what you are then, and even more than what you have actually noted. So, when once again the Lord will give you the grace of peace and quiet of soul, remember that it is all His gift. What you are is wretchedness and you are the lowliest creature that there is in the world [145].*

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143. ib., f. 9.

144. S. GAGNERE, *Memorie...*, o.c, f.1.

145. L. NAUDET, *Giornale Spirituale*, o.c., 1820, f. 116.

For fifteen months she went on without any spiritual direction and her suffering did not lessen. The continuing acts of confidence left her in desolation. However, in this night of the spirit, there was enkindled in her the most luminous light of her life and she formally consecrates her life to Divine Providence with an heroic Act of Holy Abandonment, On a piece of paper which bears the initials of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Ignatius, she wrote:

***Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Ignatius. Act of Abandonment***

*O my Lord... from this moment, and for always, I abandon all my interests into Your hands. I entrust myself entirely to Your infinite goodness, being sure, to the extent that I am able, that You care for me and of all that You have entrusted to me. So, from now on, I wish to live without anguish and fears, to do whatever I can for You, to serve You, and to make You loved and served by others, to the extent of my ability.*

*I wish to work for Your glory and Your service and You think of me... To You, I abandon everything. You are able, You know how, and You will - all this suffices for me to be sure of what You will do. Give me Your holy love, zeal for Your glory; increase always in me trust and confidence in You.*

*I ask all this through the merits of Your Most Holy Mother, Mary, to whom you can refuse nothing of what she asks of You. I ask it through the merits of St. Joseph, Your foster-father, and of my advocate, St. Ignatius [146].*

The Act of Abandonment is the document which expresses the entire spirit of Leopoldina and which distinguishes the most personal characteristic of her spirituality.

## **2. The Practice of Abandonment in Fr. Gaspar**

Mother Naudet and Fr. Bertoni can surely be compared to children in the arms of God, waiting to be placed on earth [147].

To his first companion, Fr. Marani, Fr. Gaspar confided that he had heard the call to holiness when he was still a child. A composition dating from his school years offers some witness to this:

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146. ib., July 1820, f. 108.

147. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., June 1, 1814, p. 249.

*All of a sudden, my heart heard, during the green years, the gentle voice of a chaste spouse.*

*I heard, and I burned with it; I almost saw Him, in those times, and too late did I turn to Him, and the barest of outlines and my weak eye-sight,,*

*You were lost... [148].*

Fr Giacobbe, his first biographer, states that he found Fr. Bertoni, already matured spiritually to the death of his own will, even as a boy, in that from the first to the very last choice of his life he always awaited an indication from the Lord.

The spiritual portrait is drawn in this uninterrupted fidelity from his infancy to his death, to the indication to his heavenly Father.

Once more, Fr. Marani is the witness of his *allowing God to do all; to go behind Him, and never ahead of Him.* This was a constant practice of Fr. Bertoni, and his Holy Abandonment was a customary attitude always, but especially in the frequent and painful events of his life, as for example:

- the death of his little sister, during his own childhood years;
- the separation of his parents...

In the more critical moments of life, Fr. Bertoni remained in the serenity of Abandonment, knowing that

*it is the joy of spirit that characterizes those who are in the Reign [149].*

Once an accusation leveled against him was sent to his Bishop [Mutti]. He hardly interested himself in the outcome of the calumny "since his unwavering principle was that of leaving everything up to God and of handing over everything to His divine Good Pleasure, no matter how adverse and contrary they might prove to be. This left him so tranquil and sure that the Lord would have taken up his cause. So, it did not disturb him, and he was convinced that God Himself would take up his defense and his protection" [150].

His Abandonment remained unchanged even in those very long years spent on the cross of his most painful illnesses.

Here, then, is the confirmation of a soul abandoned to God is particularly adroit in drawing profit from all the lessons that God imparts in every event depending on His Providence.

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148. G. BERTONI, *Composizioni giovanili*, in: N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Beato Gaspare Bertoni*. Roma 1975, p. 18

149. cf. Rm 14:17.

150. G. GIACOBBE, *Vita del Servo di Dio Don Gaspare Bertoni*, Verona 1858, in: *Summ. Add. Doc. XXVI*, p. 534.

A willing student, Fr. Bertoni frequented with availability this *School of God*, and asked to follow it to draw the utmost profit from it.

*Pray, Reverend Mother, by your charity, that I might draw fruit from this school to which the Lord has chosen to send me, that I might be disposed to serve Him in it [151].*

He faithfully served “his Lord” throughout his illnesses enduring them in that perspective of faith, in their significance for salvation. It is the certainty of the hidden hand of a loving Providence which sheds light on all events, which provides the motive of salvation, and which leads even to the point of enjoying the Cross:

*I thank you, and in what better manner could you wish for your true friends other than crosses?*

*Surely, for me, you could not wish any greater pleasure. It is not that I have the strength of virtue to carry them, but the Lord gives me the grace to appreciate them [152].*

On September 25, 1808, Fr. Bertoni received a special invitation to follow Christ:

*It is my resolute decision to follow You more closely, in so far as this will be possible for me, and to imitate You in supporting every injury and every shame and every poverty, both material as well as spiritual [153].*

His continual desire is that of participating always more profoundly in the drama of Christ abandoned in the various stages of His life, but especially on the Cross, following the Will of the Father. Fr. Gaspar did not go looking for suffering, but he experienced excruciating illness almost to the point of desperation for the pain he endured, which he might have done, if it had not been the grace of God to sustain him:

*Jesus and Mary! O God, I cannot take any more! [154].*

He openly confessed his own weaknesses and his own limitations:

*Whether it is because of the weakness of my mind, worn out by the infection, and by the pain of the incision that they made on me this morning - or whether it is the very nature of the very complicated difficulty I am dealing with, which I think is more the case - nonetheless, from last evening I have not been able to find any solutions for this matter, other than those which would have very unpleasant consequences. [155].*

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151. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario ...*, June 1, 1814, p. 109.

152. *ib.*, January 29, 1840, p. 318.

153. G. BERTONI, *Memoriale Privato*, o.c., September 25, 1808, p. 52.

154. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario ...*, May 29, 1825, cf. p. 180.

155. *ib.*, 1825, p. 181



Despite it all, however, Fr. Bertoni remained solidly radicated in patience and in the spirit of Holy Abandonment.

This is the way he also approached His Work: “Fr. Gaspar had a vision, in which God had him understand that he had destined him to found a Congregation [156]. However, his sole concern was how to do this in a way that this Work would result uniquely as the work of the Lord.

He waited years before taking the first steps and continued to wait for that right moment of being able to realize it. To all who would encourage him to start the procedure in order to receive approbation, he would humbly and almost ironically respond that he “was not the kind to found religious communities.”

The more the years passed without possibilities of clarification, the more there increased in Fr. Gaspar the confident Abandonment accompanied by the indomitable tenacity to realize the signified Will of God.

*So it is that the matters have become quite involved , but patience and courage are needed... who endures all this, wins. It is necessary to throw ourselves into the sea, a friendly whale will then place us on the shore [157].*

Regarding the institute envisioned for the Stimmate, when the common opinion was that it would never get off the ground, Fr. Bertoni remained serene even to the point of seeming that “he had never seen with greater clarity that was his hour.” He encouraged his companions who ran the risk of discouragement, in these and like terms:

*Let us have courage, let us trust in God, let us leave it up to Him as He can do all [158].*

Fr. Bertoni was never spared the most terrible trials of all, those regarding the state of his own soul and his own eternal destiny. Abandonment in God was for him, his extreme trial, the confirmation that God had taken very seriously the prayer of His “beloved”.

*Receive, o Lord, through the hands of St. Ignatius, all my freedom ... grant me love of You, with Your grace and I am satisfied and look for nothing else [159].*

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156. G. M. MARANI, *Cenni intorno alla Congregazione dei Preti delle Stimmate*, Verona 1835, p. 18.

157. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, September 4, 1816, p. 134.

158. G. GIACOBBE, *Vita...*, o.c., p. 473.

159. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario...*, o.c., November 26, 1812, p. 29.

### 3. Conclusion

As experienced by Leopoldina and Fr. Gaspar, this was a lived abandonment, not some theoretical exercise. It was an abandonment that was born of contemplation, of the experience of the infinite love of God. It resulted from that thrust of transcending creatures in order to place oneself at the total disposition of God's Will, for His glory and the salvation of their fellow human beings, on every occasion and always.

There is a letter from Fr. Bertoni to Mother Naudet which might be entitled *The Hymn of Abandonment*. This is one more confirmation that these two lives were constantly maintained on the length of the wave of "being in God":

*... it is evident that the Lord wishes that we be mindful of Him, and that in Him should be our minds and hearts perfectly firm and recollected. If, because of this, we forget other matters, He either will know how to remind us of them, or with His Providence He will conduct the business even better than we could, with all the remembering and thinking that we will have done. In brief, it is not we who are always diligent, 'when we find God our delight.'*

*Blessed is the one who becomes lost in this abyss! Blessed is the one who remains courageous and ship-wrecked in this ocean! An infant is never more secure than when draped in his mother's embrace and sleeps, abandoning every thought and care of self. The child does not see, nor listen, nor speak. But, the Mother sees for the little one, listens and speaks. Whenever she wants, she would know how to awaken her infant, since she is so close.*

*Be mindful, Reverend Mother, of those two expressions of our Lord: 'Without Me you can do nothing' [Jn 15:5]; and this other one: 'I can do all things in Him Who comforts me' [Ph 4:8]. Be calm and await the abundance of the Spirit and of His Delectation, according to Christ's commandment. Then, invested with strength from on high, you will find what seems impossible, actually easy to accomplish.*

*Never be content to follow after the sweet odor of Our Lord; but seek Him with strength and with confidence: 'draw me after You!' [Sgs 1:3]. Then, taken by His hand, it will not suffice to walk, or even to run, but rather we should leap with giant steps forward. You will see your spirit closely bound to that God and become one reality with Him [160].*

## CONCLUSION

After having accompanied Mother Leopoldina Naudet and Fr. Gaspar Bertoni for a brief stretch along their path, a sense of gratitude comes spontaneously to my heart for their commitment of fidelity to the plan of God set out for them.

This was a most particular plan that both individuals knew how to develop in their every expression: both in its broad strokes, as well as in its most delicate nuances.

God Himself, Who has conceived the idea of a life abandoned to Him, kept its thread through the many vicissitudes of the unfolding of their lives that everything that happened concurred harmoniously according to the designated goal: their “total transformation into Him.”

Having come so close to the lives lived in the light of the principle that all is possible for anyone who “is drawn, and who allows oneself to be drawn by God”, these conclusions come to mind. On the part of God, He is the Arbiter of life and of its various designs, and all is wisdom, goodness, grace, love. On the part of human beings, their challenge is to believe, to hope, to trust, to allow Him to act, and to allow His plan to unfold.

*May the Lord grant to us the grace to fulfill, His Will not partially, but totally, as in this is our sanctification, what is most useful for our brothers and sisters and His glory. [161].*

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161. G. STOFELLA, *Epistolario ...*, o.c., December 21, 1814, pp. 122-123.