

SAN ZENO - VERONA

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**THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION
and
THE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT
of
FATHER GASPAR BERTONI
IN THE LIFE OF
LEOPOLDINA NAUDET**

An Exercise for the Baccalaureate in Theology

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ABBREVIATIONS

G *IL Giornale Spirituale di Leopoldina Naudet dal 1800 al 1831* [Leopoldina Naudet's Spiritual Diary from 1800 to 1831]. This typewritten copy is in conformity with the hand-written original, listed as "Document 103", among her writings. This can be found in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Verona.

E Fr. Joseph Stofella edited the *Epistolario del. Ven. Servo di Dio, Don Gaspare Bertoni* [The Letters of the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni]. Verona: Scuola Tipografica Missioni Padri Stigmatini 1954.

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INTRODUCTION

First of all, it is necessary to clarify a basic principle: the proper sphere of spiritual direction is primarily personal dialogue. The exchange of letters can only serve in a secondary manner.

Between Fr. Bertoni and Mother Naudet both of these forms were employed and, of course, the record of their dialogue has not come down to us. However, we can make good use of a certain number of the personal letters written by Fr. Bertoni to her. About a quarter of them are specifically letters of spiritual direction. In addition, we also have her Spiritual Diary, through which we see how Mother Leopoldina lived, matured and responded to the assistance offered her by Fr. Bertoni.

In this thesis, I have chosen this manner of proceeding: in the First Chapter, I offer a brief biography of each of them, with some reference to their spirituality. I give special emphasis to Mother Leopoldina, about whom it is still somewhat difficult to find material already published. Then, I analyze the vision, the dreams, and the requirements they both expressed regarding spiritual direction. All of this will help to comprehend the context in which to place the Second Chapter. Here, first of all, I describe the more significant indications of this spiritual direction that we have. Then, I try to deduce from these the precise method employed by Fr. Bertoni, and the content of this which we can call central [1].

Furthermore, I try to point out that there are various terms used to indicate the relationship between Fr. Bertoni and Mother Leopoldina, such as 'direction', 'guide', 'help, discernment', and the like, which do not help in grasping a theory of discernment. In the letters that we have between them, in fact, the emphasis seems to be more on discernment regarding the apostolate. There are two aspects to be kept in mind here: on the one hand, that discernment which God works in Mother Leopoldina's life - and on the other, that which the individual carries out to enter into a life of faith.

By Christian discernment, I mean that concrete searching for the will of God, for the purpose not only of discovering it, but also to carry it out. As a consequence, discernment requires a journey to be undertaken. This is seen not only step by step as it unfolds, but also as a process in which the will, characterized as being of God, verifies also what one has thought.

Finally, this work has no pretension of saying anything new, but only hopes to order the material for our use.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Leopoldina Naudet

She was born in Florence on May 31, 1773, into a noble French family. Shortly after her birth, her mother died, and she was brought up in monasteries until she was about sixteen. At that time, her father also died - her god-father at her Baptism, the future Emperor Leopold, brought her to the Court of Vienna.

In Vienna, she came to know the Arch-duchess, Maria Anna Fernanda, who later would be named the Abbess of a Chapter of Canonesses of St. George, in Prague. Leopoldina, together with her sister and the Abbess, began to plan a religious congregation that would be founded for the education of young women. This would come to be and had the name *Dilette di Gesù* - ["Beloved of Jesus"], thanks to the help of a certain priest, Fr. Nicolò Paccanari. In that institute, Leopoldina always held important posts - but, after a few years, for reasons that were not clear to Fr. Paccanari, these *Dilette di Gesù* were dissolved.

However, Leopoldina and a few other former members of the Institute, remained faithful to the original plan, and found a possibility of acting upon it when she met Fr. Pacetti. He directed them to Verona, to Magdalene di Canossa. On May 8th 1808, Leopoldina and her companions entered the Canossian Retreat, not far from San Zeno, in the building of the former monastery of St. Joseph and Fidentius. However, it soon became evident that the two groups had very distinct purposes. They eventually agreed on an amicable separation, despite a real effort to unite, which did not succeed.

It was from her earliest days here that Leopoldina met Fr. Bertoni, the confessor assigned to the Canossian Retreat. He assisted Mother Leopoldina for a certain time as confessor and spiritual director. Without interruption, he guided her in what pertained to her plan for the new institute, which had its formal foundation on November 9, 1816. On that date, a group with Mother

Leopoldina transferred, separating themselves from that time onward, from the institute of Magdalene di Canossa. The little community entered the old Monastery that once housed Carmelites, and was dedicated to St. Teresa. It was situated near Piazza Cittadella in Verona, within the parish of the Most Holy Trinity.

On December 23, 1833, Pope Gregory XVI approved the Rules of Mother Leopoldina's Institute - however, she died the following year, at the age of sixty-one, on August 17, 1834. Fr. Bertoni thought of her death as 'very frightful blow for the world' [2]. This expressed something of the esteem that he held for this woman.

Gaspar Bertoni

He was born in Verona on October 9, 1777, of a family in comfortable means and one that was solid in its Christian faith. At the age of 18, he made his choice for the priesthood, and frequented the courses of theology as an extern student at the seminary. He chose as his Spiritual Director, Fr. Nicholas Galvani, and was ordained a priest on September 20, 1800.

Living in a time of moral and religious decline, Fr. Gaspar would be primarily dedicated to the ministry of preaching and the pastoral care of the young (instituting for them the Marian Oratories) who were the most vulnerable to the deviant life-styles present before their eyes. He worked among the ill and the wounded, which the wars that were raging at the time produced in large measure.

From 1800 until 1810, he was an assistant in his home parish of St. Paul's in the Campo Marzo section of Verona. From 1810 until 1816, he served at St. Firmus' Major in Verona, and in 1808, he was assigned as Confessor to the Retreat at St. Joseph's Convent. This care he had to give up when he was assigned the responsibility of spiritual director of the seminary.

In these years, a group of priests and seminarians referred to Fr. Bertoni, both for the Marian Oratories, as well as for those meetings that would be called 'formational'. So, in the year 1816, a religious congregation sprang from this, in the spirit of St. Ignatius of Loyola, called the "Stigmatines". Fr. Gaspar and his companions began accepting enrollments and opened a school for the poor children of the city.

The remainder of Fr. Bertoni's life is marked by two major realities: on the one hand, the commitment he gave to the development of his Congregation - and then, the physical suffering that began to plague him in 1812, when he was 35 years of age, which continued to besiege him until his death, which took place on June 12, 1853.

The Relationship between the two

As we have already noted above, Mother Leopoldina Naudet and Fr. Bertoni met at the Canossian Retreat in 1808. Certainly from that first encounter on, she went to Fr. Gaspar as her Confessor. This was the heart of their relationship at that time, and nothing further, as will be studied a bit later.

From January 9, 1811, Fr. Bertoni became her spiritual director in a more formal sense. This we can date thanks to what Mother Leopoldina wrote in her "Spiritual Diary", on that day:

"... I made known to Him the desires that I had of obeying. It seemed to me up to that time that the Lord wanted me to direct this to Him alone. But now it seemed to me that He willed some outside help for me... and so, in a time of prayer, saying to the Lord that I am at peace with Him, my response seemed to be that it would be better for me since He wanted this ..." [3].

This corresponds to a note in Fr. Bertoni's "Diary", that records on January 12th of that year: "... that I would need to study to take on the direction of ...N.N..." [4].

Even though both of them did not mention the names of the other in their personal writing, this appears most evident from the exchange of letters that we have of this time that bear witness to this. Unfortunately, these letters go in one direction only [since the letters written by Mother Leopoldina were not saved, except for two of them], beginning from that November of 1812 [5].

This relationship of spiritual direction, together with the assistance that Fr. Bertoni gave her for all that pertained to her Institute, continued up until the year 1819. At that time, Fr. Gaspar discontinued as her spiritual director. However, he would go on giving her advice regarding her religious

community, correcting a draft of her constitutions, both regarding their content as well as their form. We know this from a letter Fr. Fusari wrote to Leopoldina, dated May 24, 1819. Among other bits of information, he states in this letter that he had met with Fr. Bertoni, who told him that for reasons of his own health, he would find it very difficult to continue coming [6] to San Zeno. Furthermore, we also have a confirmation of this in a letter of December 1819, written by Mother Leopoldina to Fr. Gaspar, which makes very clear the confusion and night of the spirit she was enduring because she could no longer benefit from his direction.. She expresses herself with great frankness:

“... if you would only once again offer me your counsel, this last tribulation would not be so difficult to take. When I would receive counsel from you, you know all too well that a word from you would quiet these trials. Countless signs have come as well as trials, that God would want me to do this: but now I no longer understand anything. This is how it seems to me, while you see it differently ...” [7]

We also have a further letter from Fr. Bertoni, that does not bear any date, but presumably was written sometime between the years 1822 and 1824. In this, he expresses himself very clearly:

“... it seems to me that I see darkness on all sides, except from one alone, where I see clearly: that I cannot assume, nor continue that care, or any direction, other than that little that I have on my hands now...” [8].

A number of other times, Mother Leopoldina would ask Fr. Bertoni to be directed by him. Each time that she did, she would always receive the same answer, a refusal. He also added a principle regarding the direction she might seek from other spiritual fathers:

“... I cannot offer you my services, nor may any of my companions assist you, neither now, nor ever” [9], and “... when He says : this is enough to one, he can no longer state that he would like to continue on...” [10].

Therefore, we can receive some idea of Fr. Bertoni's spiritual direction of Mother Leopoldina Naudet by analyzing the texts we have from January 9, 1811 until May of 1819 - except from one very important exception of January 1828 [11]. These sources are Mother Leopoldina's "Spiritual Diary" up until November of 1812, and the continued in the letters that followed.

CHAPTER TWO
THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE
of
MOTHER LEOPOLDINA NAUDET AND Fr. GASPAR BERTONI

Mother Leopoldina's Spirituality

From Mother Leopoldina's "Spiritual Diary", beginning in the year 1801, she appears totally committed to the Christian life. She comes across as a person who truly desired to unite her entire life around God Alone. There dominates in her a desire of perfection and of holiness, as she puts it:

"... I think often that God wishes that I become a saint, and of this I have infinite proofs, that whenever (as occurred also this year) I relax in this effort a little bit, I have always experienced a stimulus toward perfection..." [12].

She indicates the extent of the goodness and the mercy of God, as well as her own ingratitude and wretchedness:

"... a goodness that often has often amazed and overwhelmed me in thinking of my own lack of gratitude... it did not even seem possible to me that one as wretched as I am, full of weaknesses, could ever be the recipient of so many graces..." [13]]

This opened up for her the way in her for an ever increased purity of intention:

"... I truly want conformity to God's will, and that it be such that I would desire nothing above than this most holy will. Nor would I want any spiritual desires other than being submitted to this, being content to offer myself to the Lord, striving always to purify my spiritual desires, seeking in everything the purity of intention..." [14].

"... I strive for purity of intention and to have this in all that I do and say, thinking that the good I desire comes from my own efforts, cannot succeed unless it is accompanied by this intention of being submitted to His will..." [15].

Mother Leopoldina sought this purity of intention, not from some personal psychological factor. Rather, this was for her what the life of faith was asking of her, to follow this path: "...this life of faith sometimes brings me doubt regarding the motives of my actions..." [16]. Through the ordinary means of prayer [very often, Mother Leopoldina notes the hours, which were often during the night, that she dedicated to prayer] and from her commitment to perfection even in the insignificant matters: "... I tried to bring even the greatest perfection to the least important matters, that exactness offered to God, will have me also understand my own imperfections..." [17].

From January 9, 1811, Mother Leopoldina more often has recourse to her diary. We can review some key passages from it on her journey. There was being refined in her that relationship with God and her prayer, through which she deepened the purity of her intention. Her prayer, in fact, seems to become more and more of that passive type:

"... During the night I was at prayer, and the Lord kept me there two and a half hours ... those two and a half hours passed so quickly ... it seemed to me that I was engulfed and totally lost in the Lord, not doing anything other than being receptive and loving.... [18].

These effects at times even had physical manifestations: "... this evening I offered continuous acts of love toward the Lord, and I also experienced even sensible effects, as ardor, and accelerated palpitations of the heart..." [19].

She also notes a loss of the use of her faculties: "... I knew then that He wanted me to go on, and He held me in prayer, in that total silence of the potencies, and repose in him. This seems more passive than active, and so the desire at times to do something from my own part, is what disturbs me..."[20].

All of these signs, that passivity and silence of the potencies in particular, make up part of those indications that St. John of the Cross reads as the passing over to contemplation.

It is her prayer that became for Mother Leopoldina the path way for that purity of heart, that path which, as we will see, is the one pointed out to her precisely by Fr. Bertoni:

“... in prayer I came to realize that I am proceeding too slowly in spiritual matters. I discovered that this spirit of mine is not yet sufficiently purified, and it is all cluttered up with little things that can impede the Lord’s lights from penetrating them with that clarity. I came to understand just what I should make known to His minister. And he told me that it is in prayer that I ought to consume all this as in a crucible...” [21].

Summarizing, then, we can say that Mother Leopoldina was on a path which is no longer of her own initiative, or one that with her entire being that she sought to tend toward the Lord, to increase in virtue. Rather, God Himself had taken over and He drew her on, built her up, and changed her. Hers was the great merit of allowing the Lord to work His plan through her:

“... the Lord called on me this morning to prolong my prayer, and experiencing this stimulus, I surrendered. In that time that I reached that customary point, I came to grasp how important it is to correspond to that internal invitation which the Lord bestows on the soul, since precisely in this period, I experienced that the Lord was purifying my motives in my actions, and refining my intention, directing them all solely to Him and to His Glory...” [22].

It is also interesting to note how Mother Leopoldina discovers that this purity of intention is a goal that she does not have as her own ultimate purpose, at the center of her being, or having her own personal perfection as the scope of her own efforts, or for her own self realization - it is all for God’s glory:

“... all of this desires now have for their purpose, solely the Divine Glory. I am no longer looking at myself, or at my own interests, nor even at my own spiritual advantage. I seek only His glory in all these areas...” [23].

At this point, Mother Leopoldina is a person who is completely out of her own self-seeking, one who really no longer concentrates on her own self-interests. Her center of gravitation is clearly an Other, God, a Center that she wishes to protect, around which, she places a kind of protecting hedge, a fence

(which Fr. Bertoni, as we will see, will indicate to her as her constant attention to the Presence of God):

“... the Lord led me to understand that to guard that center where He dwells with my soul, it is necessary to put up a fence...” [24].

To carry out God’s Will, prayer, silence, waiting, purity of intention: these are the ‘constants’ that seem to develop in Mother Leopoldina’s spiritual journey. However, a notable change occurs in her Spiritual Diary with the year 1811. From that time on there appears as the very backbone of her spirituality the practice of abandonment. Trusting in God and charity now seem to be the preferred means of holiness, and no longer the direct struggle against her defects. Mother Leopoldina speaks less about her own perfection (which always gave the impression of stages, and struggle) because she speaks more about the gratuitous gate [25] to be perfect, that is, abandonment and confidence in God:

“... in all these days there continued in me the same sentiments of my own nothingness, of my own inability, always accompanied by confidence in God Who can do everything ... I realized more profoundly this defect of not trusting in God in the sight of my own nothingness, and I saw that whatever my own failings and defects are, everything in me is to be accomplished by means of charity, and that every time I distance myself from this, choosing rather to take up the correction of my own faults, rather than achieving this goal, I actually get further away from it. There can be nothing else within me than that means which consumes in me all rust, and every defect...” [26].

Repeatedly, Mother Leopoldina follows the path of abandonment: “...I began my prayer with greater abandonment in God ...” [27] - “...the Lord employs all His omnipotence and His goodness in behalf of anyone who abandons herself totally in Him...” [28]. By now, this has become for her the road to the heights of contemplation, of the mystical life, that is, of transforming union:

“... the Lord said to me then in those internal locutions that it is not enough for me to abandon myself in Him. By means of such stimuli, I replied in an abandonment that will draw me into the total transformation into Him, to the extent that it is no longer I who lives, but He lives in me...” [29]

Mother Leopoldina’s spirituality will find its fullest expression in that act of abandonment that she will compose in 1831 [30], after having passed through many trials not the least of these, and rather the determining factor, was the suffering of having to remain without a guide, or at least an adequate guide, after the refusal of Fr. Bertoni to continue in the spiritual direction of her, from 1819 onward.

The Spirituality of Fr. Bertoni

To wish to trace comprehensively a description of Fr. Bertoni’s spirituality would be impossible, both because of the interior richness of this man, but also because of the many, many publications in this regard. As a result, I limit myself to these few essential points with a view to this work undertaken here, leaving aside all profound treatment of the matter.

Fr. Bertoni was a priest who lived the centrality of Christ and that gospel radicality in imitating Him. He was able to realize this in accepting it all as a gift, through the listening to the Word of God and by a very deep sacramental life, especially Eucharistic.

He was also very sensitive toward the ecclesial communion which had deepened in him through obedience and his sense of fraternity.

Two aspects that seem fundamental in him are: love for the Cross, which led him to live his suffering as the School of God, and abandonment.

Mother Leopoldina’s Expectancies and Needs regarding Spiritual Direction

Mother Leopoldina chose as her spiritual director, Fr. Bertoni, after he had been her confessor for three years. She overcame some real setbacks in her quest to have a spiritual director.

In fact, she encountered certain problems in trying to enter into that relationship of fundamental growth that is known by the expression: "Spiritual Direction:"

1.] She had a real negative experience from those priests who did not truly urge her onward. They had not been demanding enough of her, by challenging her to real holiness. Rather, they were more of the mind to content her, while she yearned for a deeper path, and was not understood, that she be able to expose all her wretchedness and ingratitude [31].

2.] Her innate difficulty of speaking about herself, of what she experiencing within, also due to the deep impression she had of not being able to explain herself. Perhaps more than anything else, it was her fear that her speaking of such matters would spring on the one side, from her own self love - and on the other hand, this self exposure of her own interior life led to the disappearance, or the evaporation of "... those good lights and sentiments which came from the Lord..." [32].

Furthermore, for Mother Leopoldina it was basically indispensable that the genuine, exclusive director of her life should be God Himself, that one genuine "Director of souls."

Mother Naudet was able to overcome these difficulties when she was convinced that to have Fr. Gaspar as her spiritual guide truly was God's will, and that the Lord was calling her to this, while He Himself would still remain as the "Master of her spirit". It was to be in a better position before Him, and that she would continue to have Him as her Director, that God was asking her also to accept Fr. Bertoni's assistance [33].

Her demand that a spiritual father would direct her in the ways of God was then confirmed for her by experience. This was both because Fr. Gaspar profoundly respected her path [34], and also because she observed the sublime harmony between what Fr. Bertoni was telling her from the outside, and all that she experienced deep within herself as God's voice"

"...seeing that the Lord Himself always comes in support of what His minister is saying, and that he is following the Divine Will in my regard in all that he counsels me, I renewed my desire to obey ever more fully..." [35].

This correspondence and concord that she experienced within herself, assisted Mother Leopoldina always to have more confidence in Fr. Gaspar, and to manifest herself to him more and more, with ever fewer defences. She went ahead with that assurance of being within God's Will in sharing her interior life with her director [36].

Therefore, for Mother Leopoldina the relationship of direction was the path to follow to deepen God's plan in herself [37]. This appears evident from the fact that she never mentions Fr. Bertoni by name in her Diary. She always refers to him as the 'minister.'

Fr. Bertoni's Vision regarding Spiritual Direction

Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, in accord with his practical manner of approaching individuals in spiritual direction, had beyond any doubt, his own mentality, his own way of thinking about this service. One text that sheds much light on this fact is the one taken from his Spiritual Diary, under the date of January 12, 1812. He was considering precisely the commitment he had taken on in accepting Mother Leopoldina for spiritual direction. He wrote:

"... it is not that you would have to bring so much your own efforts for the direction of N.N. But, it will necessary to turn to the source of all light. Thus, this will accomplish much good for you. You must never precede, but follow the Lord Who will illumine the way, and will suggest to you, after you have placed your recourse, and from this you will have her proceed and correspond..." [38].

Therefore, it is evident that Fr. Bertoni wanted to discern God's ways, and to be not so much a director, as a brother who points out the way. Rather, he was a companion along the path, to the point of his conviction that the spiritual care of Mother Naudet would also make him grow. In his being a disciple of the one Master, Fr. Bertoni was convinced that God was at work in Mother Leopoldina, and was assisting him in helping her in the task of discernment.

Fr. Gaspar intended to leave up to each person that full freedom, as appears in his attitude regarding vocations: "... in the matter of vocations, rather than urge them on, it is better to leave their care to God..."[39]. This is evident particularly from a letter he wrote in response to a concrete problem.

Fr. Farinati (who became confessor at the Canossian Retreat after Fr. Bertoni became spiritual father at the Seminary) thought that whenever he would go there, all should come to him to make their confessions. In addition he had other scruples. Fr. Bertoni responded with clarity:

“... some may come and some may not, but all you need do is simply each time hear the confessions of those who do come and make your judgments in their situation...” [40].

Some other letters are also interesting in this regard, those written after 1819 (the year in which he gave up the direction of Mother Naudet). He places in evidence the instrumentality of a spiritual director and his own radical dependence on God: the spiritual director is a minister, from whom God does not deny the “lights” of His own wisdom [41]. This is a gift that must be sought, one that is necessary for any spiritual growth, that God makes function in one who seeks it at the cost of praying specifically for it. The spiritual director may not make decisions on his own, but needs to remain in obedience to God, accepting or not continuing with some, in an availability to the Lord’s Will, never binding oneself to anyone [42].

In some meditations delivered to the clergy, Fr. Gaspar stated that the priest needs much prayer in order to be able to understand the paths of God in other persons [43]. The priest is called not only to teach because he knows, but much more because he lives what he is teaching [44].

In order to grasp Fr. Bertoni’s ministry as a spiritual guide, one cannot neglect what he had interiorized from St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. John of the Cross. For St. Ignatius, the spiritual director is the Holy Spirit, and the human guide should never place himself between God and the person being directed, with his own counsels and proposals. Rather, the director is called to assist the person to mature in the attitudes of availability that open one up the more to hear the voice of God, through illuminations, the experience of desolations and consolations, and always, right reason [45]. For St. John of the Cross, the spiritual director ought not so much to teach, as to know how to admire what it is that God does in people. To be able to achieve this, knowledge and good sense are never enough. There is needed that personal experience [46] without which one will never succeed in guiding others. The spiritual director is only the instrument, who has to leave the way free for the person to follow those

roads that are not evident to his criteria of judgment and experience. The director has to limit himself to preparing the individual, because the direction of others' footsteps is the work of God alone. When the spiritual father realizes that the individual has entered into God's way which he personally does not know, he should counsel that person to seek out other direction. [Could this be perhaps a reason why at a certain point Fr. Bertoni gave up the spiritual direction of Mother Leopoldina?] [47].

CHAPTER THREE

THE STAGES OF A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Spiritual Direction

In this Chapter, first of all, it seems to me necessary to summarize briefly the more significant interventions regarding spiritual direction that can be found in those documents at our disposition, leaving aside the final period, from May 1819 onward. This would require a special consideration apart, because of the changed relationships that we have already seen between the two. For greater ease in following the thought, I will distinguish these into two periods:

1.] From January 9, 1812, in which we have only the “Spiritual Diary” of Mother Leopoldina;

2.] From January 9, 1812 until 1819, in which we have access also to Fr. Bertoni’s Letters.

First Period

Mother Leopoldina had come to understand that it was necessary for her to keep God at the center of her entire being, and it seemed to her that the best road to follow to accomplish this would be mortification. This, however, was in contrast with the state of her health. Fr. Bertoni pointed out to her that the protecting “fence” that guards “that center where He dwells in the center of my soul” [48] is just being in the presence of God, and the practice of the particular examen concerning this. When Mother Leopoldina realized that many imperfections were getting away from her, Fr. Bertoni suggested to her to make her examen each hour [49].

In July of 1811, she found once again that her spirit was “cluttered with many small things” which did not permit her to receive with clarity what it was that God was trying to share with her. She explained this to Fr. Gaspar, who pointed out to her that it is in prayer that the imperfections and obstacles that she noted would be consumed [50].

In August, she expressed a particular state of mind: in prayer, she experienced a weight that was due, in her view, to her defects, but Fr. Bertoni encouraged her to deliver herself of them [51].

In September, she experienced that God was being very generous with her in prayer, and had communicated to her that she should begin to form a religious institute, but a doubt arose in her: was all this springing more from tiredness and not from genuine resignation to the will of God? Still through prayer, she then understood that she should expose her doubt to the minister, and in meeting with him she was in a position to recognize that it really had been the Lord who was illuminating her [52]. In the presence of this intuition that this Institute should have as its base a very strong interior life, there sprang up in her a great consolation when she experienced approval in her ideal [53].

Fr. Gaspar then asked her to write always these intuitions that she was receiving as a gift in prayer, concerning the Institute and its formation [54].

In October, Mother Leopoldina submitted to her director her resolutions about fasting from breakfast, and received his permission to try this, as she was given the inspiration to give all the time to prayer that the Lord was drawing her [55]. Fr. Bertoni even prescribed for her to make the particular examen concerning her union with God in both prayer and her activities [56].

On September 3, 1812, she rejoiced in the Lord during her prayer, and feared that she might be getting attached to this in a negative manner. She explained her doubt to her director, and he responded to her that she might ponder her own defects at the time she was committed to prayer, and in this way she found herself alleviated of the problem [57].

Second Period

In September of 1812, Mother Leopoldina wrote to him about her lack of confidence, and asked him if she should confess this. Fr. Bertoni, referring to the Word of God, told her that she did not need the sacrament, but he did confirm that she was being called to strengthen and fortify her hope and confidence [58].

On the 15th of the same month, in prayer she felt that she ought to spiritualize [59] her every action. Fr. Bertoni responded to her that he could do nothing for her other than “repeat the words of her Master”, indicating to her to cultivate a child-like confidence as the best path to achieve this, together with her prayer [60]. It seemed, then, from the rest of his letter that she had begun to work with greater precision on the Institute she was founding, but accompanied by some doubts and fatigue. Fr. Bertoni invited her to think that only in Paradise will everything be clear but that for now, through lights and shadows, it is important to realize that one is always supported by the Father’s hand, and to continue on with her eye fixed on the goal.

Around the 5th of September, Fr. Bertoni responded to Mother Leopoldina, as she had the experience of God’s love for her as most active and challenging. He answered her by commenting on and strengthening his own views on what he heard from her with the Word of God. Then, most likely, making reference to some question or other that she had addressed to him regarding prayer, he told her that diligence in prayer helps prayer itself intensify and become the place of the gift of the Spirit [61].

In a successive letter, sometime after the 10th, Fr. Bertoni commented on a passage from her “Diary” [62], where she showed some concern of not being able to enjoy very much the assistance of her director for her spiritual life and her work, because of the many other duties that he had (this was the time he was given the ministry of spiritual father at the seminary). Fr. Gaspar invited her to the practice of abandonment, and he reminds her that providence passes and saves even along the pathway of suffering. Further, he pointed out, that suffering is a gift with which not all are on the level of being able to benefit by it, and that all would cooperate to render her intentions purer [63].

Between the 14th and the 21st, Fr. Bertoni wrote her a letter, full of spiritual direction, on the basis of a request of hers. She was asking what St. Bernard had said concerning the virtue of hope, and of a phrase which is found in a letter, written most likely by Mother Leopoldina, and which has not come down to us: “...the Lord does not wish that there should be anything, even the slightest obstacle in you that would oppose what He wills” [64]. After having cited a few texts from St. Bernard, Fr. Bertoni turned to St. John of the Cross, and spoke of his path of purification which the Lord is making her

undergo. This is always necessary where defects and negligences are eliminated more than through confession (which is necessary only for mortal sins, he stated quoting from the Council of Trent) - by charity. He pointed out to her that she had received this in abundance from God, even more than she was able to recognize and express (and here he makes a genuine pronouncement concerning God's love) [65].

In a letter written in some haste between 1812 and 1813, Fr. Bertoni invites Mother Leopoldina to remain in prayer before the Lord until He will have illumined her. He instructed her to have the heart of David, that is, of one who realizes his own wretchedness, and even knows that they are greater than he has been able to see them, and yet he is called to live as on the way of mercy [66].

In January of 1813, she noted in her Diary [67] that she was experiencing Passive Prayer, and did nothing other than allow herself to be attracted by God. Fr. Bertoni approved her way of acting, and in his response he commented on the Gospel (Lk 10:42). In the same letter, he commented on one of her phrases, that she wrote to the effect that she wanted to spiritualize everything and stand always before God, without being preoccupied with what was happening around her. He assured her that this is precisely what the Lord was seeking in her [68].

A letter of February 1813 is very interesting. In it, Fr. Bertoni, responding to Mother Leopoldina's request, traces out for her a rather minute examen of conscience, suited for a superior - foundress of a community. He noted that the way of heroic virtues for an Institute is a long one, and it is necessary that the prioress should sustain it with her prayer and holy desires. This should be a prayer which almost forces God's goodness, and the desire so pure that it seeks solely the will of God. It is worthy of note that there is also here the emphasis on the sponsality of the soul with God [69].

In a letter of a few days after this, the director approved the inspirations that she had following this, and invited her to give in to these to their very depths. She was advised to keep uppermost in her heart how she had understood in prayer to remain always very attentive "to have her soul always ready for the visits of her Divine Majesty." [70].

The first days of March, and again in responding to her requests, Fr. Bertoni counseled her concerning the method of benefiting well from the eight days of retreat she was making. He wrote two letters (because she had asked him to amplify the first one). He makes reference to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and invited her to allow herself to be guided by love and abandonment, as these would drive away all dread and fear. The fact is significant that Fr. Gaspar has before his eyes the degree of passive prayer to which Mother Leopoldina had by then arrived. This is why he binds her ultimately only to the action of God:

“...whenever the soul is not actually attracted by the Lord, she ought to be prepared according to what is prescribed in St. Ignatius’ genuine book and to observe diligently the schedule, the manner, the theme, the order and whatever else is expressed there. But, when the Lord is attracting one, it is not right to consider anything other than His pleasure...” [71].

Other letters of spiritual direction are along the lines of these that have preceded. One consideration apart should be given to a letter, without date, but which would be sometime in the year 1814. In this letter, Fr. Gaspar is consoling Mother Leopoldina, who had become more fearful of her own insufficiency of carrying ahead the project of the future Institute. For his message of encouragement, again he uses the Word of God: “...My grace is sufficient for thee...” (2 Co 12:9) [72].

The Method

Fr. Bertoni’s method that he employed in the spiritual direction of Mother Leopoldina followed an over-all plan. With the proper consideration and not always following the exact same order, this might always be found in his letters. To understand this better, it is good to present one of his letters in its entirety from the Collection of his Letters. It is the very first one, written in November of 1812:

Reverend Mother

a.]

There is no need to go to confession.

b.]

The branch is not off the vine, and remaining in the vine and also bearing fruit, the vineyard-keeper prunes it so that it can produce more: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper, ' etc. [Ego sum vitis vera, et Pater meus agricola est, etc.] Every branch that bears fruit, He will prune so that it will bear more fruit.'

When Peter heard that correction: O you of little faith, why did you doubt [Modicae fidei, quare dubitasti], he was not far away, nor was he on the way of distancing himself, but he was actually near Christ, and was in the act of drawing even closer to Him, having been drawn there by His right hand. He was at that point so much desired by the Spouse on the Sacred Canticles: 'Draw me [Trahe me].

c.]

Oh! how sublime ought to be our hope in God! It should not only be high, but should be very high: 'In the heights you have placed your refuge. Those who hope in the Lord sprout wings like the eagles, and they fly and will not faint, etc. [Altissimum posuisti refugium tuum. Qui sperant in Domino assument pennas ut aquilae, volabunt et non deficient', etc.]. This is the effect and the sign to recognize this confidence: 'In peace, in repose, I will sleep and take my rest, since You, o Lord, have placed me singularly in your hope.' [In pace, in idipsum, dormiam et requiescam, quoniam tu, Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me.'

d.] *The effect, then, of those internal admonitions is precisely that most precious one that you indicate, of strengthening this hope. This is beyond doubt, the good Spirit. 'Blessed is the man whom you instruct, Lord, and you teach him your law' [Beatus vir quem tu erudieris, Domine, et de lege tua docueris eum].*

e.] *May the Lord, Reverend Mother, reward you ... I have the honor, meantime, and with full esteem, to declare myself*

Your most devoted and obliged Servant,

G.B. Unworthy Priest

Surely the passages that are found in this letter are present in every letter, in a more or less accentuated manner:

a.] it opens with a response to Mother Leopoldina's question, or anyway, to some situation that she was living through and had manifested to him [the situation];

b.] he illumines her with the Word of God [announcement];

c.] he recognizes what God has been accomplishing in her, giving external expression to what she had been hearing from God, and for which she seeks confirmation in the minister [discernment];

d.] he directs Mother Leopoldina along the way that God Himself has indicated to her, assisting her to live it [orientation];

In addition, as in many other occasions, we find:

e.] he quotes the magisterium, bringing her own personal experience to the life of the Church [magisterial support].

a,] Situation:

The situation is certainly the object of a theological analysis and of every discernment. However, it is necessary to keep in mind one factor: if it is true that in a world in which the Holy Spirit is at work as its "leaven", then life is never neutral. It is likewise true that external, personal and community factors never have of themselves the value of sign. They acquire their religious sense and reveal the meaning of which they are the bearers, only when they have been assumed by human freedom and are put under the influence of faith.

Therefore, the point of departure is always Mother Leopoldina and whatever it was she was living through [73], or experiencing: in the example quoted above, she had a lack of confidence, as she noted in her Diary, under the date of November 1812, and had asked whether she should go to confession.

In Fr. Bertoni, there was never any pretense of leading people along paths that were not yet suited for them, no matter how just and important they might have seemed. Fr. Gaspar mentions, it is true, the teachings of St. John of

the Cross, of St. Ignatius, and of St. Bernard. But, he only does this when it corresponds to Mother Leopoldina's situation, and never explicitly, if he is not requested. Thus, he always knew how to respect the development of the person and her expectancies, with that profound intuition in that theology follows the life and then discerns it.

At times, the letters are responses to a request; other times they are a comment on what Mother Leopoldina was experiencing, as for example, the letter of January 1813: "... this is excellent, as it is the way that your reverence reached through prayer..." (this was in response to the passive prayer, then being lived by Mother Leopoldina) [74].

b.] Announcement

There is always present a series of citations from the Old and New Testaments. It seems to me that the very frequent use that Fr. Bertoni makes of the Word of God is that of giving meaning to what it was that Mother Leopoldina was experiencing, or rather to give support for and strength for the way to follow.

For Fr. Gaspar, Sacred Scripture seems to have been an inexhaustible source of his own life of faith, within and through which he reread Mother Naudet's experiences. This is how it appears in the letter quoted above, where he reads the fatigue being suffered by her meant to lead her to trust, as a pruning, taken from the image of the vine and branches of John 15.

We see this also in many other letters: "...I am the Lord your God, powerful and a jealous God..." (Ex 20:5) [*Ego Dominus Deus tuus, fortis et zelotes...*]. This is God's love, active and committed (Mother Leopoldina's words) taking over our hearts" [75]. In this letter, just cited, the Word is also a challenge for one to get underway: she asked practically how it is possible to be receptive to the Holy Spirit in prayer, and Fr. Bertoni writes to her that the Holy Spirit Himself responds for her: "...Let nothing prevent you from praying always..." [*Non impediatis orare semper*] [Si 18:22]. '...He told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart...' [*Oportet semper orare et non deficere...*]' (Lk 18:1). "... Pray constantly..." [*Sine intermissione orate...*] (1 Th 5:17) [76].

c.] Discernment:

To discern is a perspective received from faith, hope and love: since it is love that makes one know [77]. It has its foundation in a stable gift of grace which is specified and radicated in the virtue of prudence [78].

In his reflections on Mother Leopoldina's life, Fr. Gaspar exercised therefore, a ministry of discernment, helping her to comprehend what was truly from God. This was the source of his confirming her in what she was experiencing was truly a call to live and to strengthen hope.

In her challenge to work seriously for the foundation of her Institute, he helped her to understand that this was a fruit not so much of not being resigned to God's Will, but rather was a gift from him [79].

When he undertook to discuss with her the note was found in her Diary of wanting to spiritualize [80] her every action, Fr. Bertoni wrote: "... What could the servant do other than reply with the very words of his master..." [81].

Fr. Gaspar was also able to assist her in not taking as coming from God her own fears, as we notice in the letter just quoted above [as her fear of having to confess a certain lack of faith] - or, when her lack of clarity, probably on some practical matter concerning her Institute, seemed to her as being derived from her own sins, but he responded: "... If, while walking on the waters, one turns his eyes to look a bit at the waves, this is not really succeeding in the enterprise, but means one has given in a little to fear..." [82].

As a summary, as we have already noted, the relationship between what Mother Leopoldina experienced, and what her director said to her, was for her a clear sign of God's Will.

d.] Orientation:

Fr. Gaspar did not stop, however, in just interpreting Mother Leopoldina's experiences, by reading them from the perspective of the Word of God. Neither did he end with simply helping her to discern God's project in her. He urged her forward, encouraged her to continue along her path, and

indicated to her the concrete suggestions to follow. In the letter quoted above, Fr. Bertoni directs her toward the virtue of hope.

When Mother Leopoldina felt that she had much within her in need of purification, he pointed out to her the way of prayer [83]. He prescribed for her many times the particular examen on the matter of her union with God and of remaining in His presence [84] - or, also to note down the 'lights' that she received in prayer regarding her Institute [85]. Thus, he also invited her to let herself be attracted by God in prayer, leaving the initiative up to Him [86].

In one of his letters, Fr. Bertoni pointed out to her the way of purification [87], exhorting her to live charity [88], and just before one of her retreats, he recommended to her abandonment in God, and described for her the path of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises [89]. In almost all of his letters, we find repeated his counsels for her to have confidence in God.

It is very interesting, then, to see that when Mother Leopoldina sought advice on some matter in which it seemed to her to be very difficult to understand God's Will, Fr. Bertoni would suggest to her to continue to seek her response in God. He would really challenge her in her attitudes of faith:

"... it was said to me that in this there really is no defect to be noted, and that I should try to understand it all better before the Lord. This could change whatever defect I noted, since there really was not any in what I was saying. In recommending myself to the Lord, that I might grasp better what had been said to me, it seemed to me that the greater defect came that when I am truly busy with different concerns, when these are many in number, I was not proceeding with the necessary tranquility, being overwhelmed many times, and this is what brought me that weariness which I experienced..." [90].

e.] Support from the Magisterium:

We have already seen that Fr. Bertoni often made reference to St. Ignatius, or to St. John of the Cross, or even to St. Thomas. However, he also at times quoted the Magisterium of the Church and ecclesiastical practice. This he did with regard to the matter of confessing, when he made reference to the Council of Trent, which requires this, only for grave sins [91]. He also made

such reference in the matter of the impossibility of receiving communion without fasting, notwithstanding the situation of illness. In these issues, he simply took his advice from the existing ecclesial tradition [92].

In some cases, Fr. Gaspar even recalled explicitly his own personal experience - [I use the word 'explicitly', because in all his speaking about God and how He works and about our human receptivity, there is always the atmosphere of his own lived experience]. There is an instance of this when in response to Mother Leopoldina's inspirations that she received regarding the value of suffering, he responded mentioning to her what he had endured and come to understand during a period of illness that he had lived as a service for others and as a particular gift from God. [93]

To conclude, I believe that it can be said that Fr. Gaspar lived his service of spiritual fatherhood and brotherhood in authentic fidelity to God and his neighbor. He allowed the Word of God to speak, and followed seriously the Lord and all that He was accomplishing in people, respecting Mother Leopoldina's openness. His allowing space for God, then, appears also in his fidelity to the Church and to Tradition, precisely because there was nothing of 'his own' in what he would share. He saw his task as that of assisting Mother Naudet to live her experience of faith within the guidelines contained in Sacred Scripture, the Magisterium of the Church, and the tradition and lives of the saints. What is expressive of all this, it seems to me, is a passage from a letter, being a response to a practical problem she had presented (which was that of drawing up a plan of studies for those who would enter into the Institute). This is Fr. Bertoni's response:

"... Could it be that the Lord would illumine me, and why not even sooner you, Reverend Mother? Rather, He will illumine you and me even further: He will illumine me, in order to dispose you perhaps from very far away to receive His lights; and once these are received, in order to assure you of them, by comparing them to the wisdom of the Divine Scriptures, of the holy Catholic Church, of the holy saints and doctors who belong to it. He does all this, Reverend Mother, to complete in you and with you and for you what He has begun..." [94].

The Content

To speak of the content in Fr. Bertoni's spiritual direction of Mother Naudet is not easy. This is so because there is nothing here in the abstract but all we have is correspondence to concrete situations. Furthermore, the content would have already appeared in a global kind of way from what has been said thus far in this study, and to draw up a kind of synthesis of it all might seem to be a reduction of the teaching. The effort will now be to give the content some kind of order, to put it into a kind of system, seeking only to concentrate on the basic core of the spiritual direction, so to speak to concentrate on the foundations that support the orientations suggested by Fr. Gaspar.

It seems to me that the matter could be presented under these headings:

- confidence and abandonment in God;
- prayer;
- love;
- purity of heart, to accomplish everything for God's glory.

1.] Confidence

This is certainly the fundamental aspect of the dialogue between the two. Rather, it can be said that the intensity with which they both lived abandonment in God united them along the same pathway toward holiness. In many, many letters, Fr. Bertoni invites Mother Naudet to have confidence in God. He did this both in regard to her interior life, as well as in the exterior events she experienced, which were always to be read under the guidance of Providence. Abandonment is, then, that attitude which embraces one's entire existence, in the realization of the care that God takes of us all. When Fr. Gaspar came to know of the real possibility he was facing of becoming the Vice Rector of the Seminary, it was a post that he felt was contrary to his own vocation and irreconcilable with his having already been the Spiritual Father there. At this time he wrote to Mother Leopoldina some beautiful lines regarding abandonment: "...a child is never more secure as when asleep in her mother's arms, and abandons every thought and worry regarding herself..." [95]. This is a confidence that is lived, therefore, and one that demands that it

be lived also by Mother Leopoldina. He speaks of this when the day came and he had to limit the time that he could give her and her companions: "... all that God does is always for the better..." [96].

Confidence is also the path that makes possible the way to perfection. In a letter of December 1812, after having spoken of the gift of grace and of the theological virtues, he expressed himself this way:

"... really marvelous, then, are His piety and goodness - if He sees us, out of human weakness, wavering in such heights, and almost about to fall into a natural baseness, as a most loving Mother, he puts His hand out to support His children so that they will not hurt themselves..." [97].

2.] Prayer

Beyond any doubt, prayer is a central point in Fr. Bertoni's own spirituality, as it was also that of Mother Leopoldina. By the time she asked him to be her spiritual director, she had already entered into the grade of passive prayer. As a result of this, whenever Fr. Gaspar directed her it was that she allow herself to be drawn by God, and to leave the initiative up to Him, to learn how to pray by actually praying and to accept those inspirations that God would suggest. As regard the practical manner and the concrete 'techniques', even those praised by the tradition and proposed by the likes of St. Ignatius, all these are secondary if God makes His attraction felt:

"... As for your preparation for meditation: your internal sentiment and recollection are better than the intellect ... this is why I warned you, Reverend Mother, not to place your efforts before those of God, even if it is necessary to prepare the way, according to those most useful dictates of St. Ignatius..." [99]

3.] Love

Love is likewise one of those constants in Fr. Bertoni's letters, both as the committing of oneself to God, as well as one's response to God. Love of God for us is strong and asks for our response [100]; it is immense and beyond all measure [101]; it is sponsal [102]; capable of crushing under foot every fear [103]; and our love for Him ought to move us even to holiness [104]; it cancels venial sins, and springs from the recognition of how much Christ has lowered Himself for us [105].

This love, however, is not to be understood solely in the vertical direction, as it also is fraternal love, which inspires Mother Leopoldina to wish the spiritual well being of her companions [106], to interest herself in Fr. Gaspar's health [107] - and, in brief, to take the concrete care, in the life, of the education of the young, as both of these saints did.

4.] Purity of Heart

Corresponding to the desire of purity of heart that we have seen as so predominant in the life of Mother Naudet, Fr. Bertoni exhorted her even more to follow along the path of purification. It is in this that God wills not only to take sins away, but also whatever defects, imperfections and even those natural inclinations [108], in order to bring her to will His glory alone [109].

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

CRITERIA OF DISCERNMENT

Mother Leopoldina's faith was not static, but was mature, evolving, one that knew different moments of intensity in her responses - and this is simply because faith is always in a person of history.

It seems to me that there are some fundamental passages, which might serve as criteria of evaluation in an authentic spiritual journey, and that they would be these:

A. Lived Experience and Grace

The more Mother Leopoldina proceeded along her way in her Christian experience the more did she look on everything as a gift, as a grace. This is evident not only in her prayer of the passive degree, but also in her ever greater confidence in God's power. This does not deny her ethical commitment and personal responsibility. However, both Fr. Bertoni and Mother Naudet knew that the Lord preceded them and accompanied them.

B. The Taking up of the Cross

The entire journey of Mother Leopoldina (as well as Fr. Bertoni's) was accompanied by the experience of the cross. This appears rather as the most existential and historical reality in their lives. This was all part of a progressive dynamism of both death and resurrection. It is in fact in the logic of the cross that Leopoldina passed through a continual purification to arrive at the purity of her intentions. In this manner, she was engrafted into Christ's Paschal Mystery, the 'norm' of the life of every Christian,

C. The Sense of the Church

Their relationship with God was realized in a pathway guided by the Church whose concrete expressions and mediation are the ordained minister. Mother Leopoldina discovered slowly the place of ecclesial discernment in her journey, with the surprising result that the more she advanced in the spiritual life, the more did she experience the necessity of this service.

D. Certainty and Trust

Faith became ever more the sole foundation of Mother Naudet's life, which she expressed in abandonment (as was also true for Fr. Bertoni). This is the experience of one who does not know of any security outside of God.

It seems to me that Fr. Bertoni, for his part, employed a style of direction that might be articulated under these aspects:

1. The necessity of evaluating the facts with prudence and humility.
2. The continual reference to the Word of God.
3. The attention to the more significant elements, as prayer, realism, the spirit of sacrifice, the attitude of a faith view, detachment from consolations.
4. The increase in the theological virtues.
5. The capacity to make hope increase.
6. The growth of the spiritual director himself.

In Mother Leopoldina's life, Fr. Bertoni did not place himself so much as her 'director', but rather as her spiritual brother and father. At the same time, he was with her, the disciple of the same Master. He had served as St. John the Baptist, and indicated the way for her to follow. The paths that he pointed out were not his own, but those announced by the Church, of which he felt that he was her minister.

He had been able to meet the challenge of discernment because first he had lived this, and had waited from God that He would make known what previously was not clear.

To conclude, we can say that in Fr. Gaspar Bertoni there was the fundamental attitude to be a spiritual father. This means that he gave a profound attention to both God and his neighbor. In Mother Leopoldina Naudet there was that fundamental attitude of receiving the assistance of a spiritual father, which means the desire to grow in a constant relationship with God.

Thus, the dialogue that developed between these two for a number of years offered to both a possibility for continual growth.

APPENDIX

Why did Fr. Bertoni give up her Spiritual Direction?

As we already know, from May 1819, Fr. Bertoni gave up his relationship of the spiritual direction of Mother Leopoldina Naudet. Yet, he continued to give his assistance in her bringing forward the foundation and development of her Community. This decision of his was in sharp contrast with what Mother Leopoldina felt and experienced. For her, the extent of the assistance rendered her along the ways of God by Fr. Gaspar, was truly illumined. She had not been gifted with a like intervention on the part of the Lord on this occasion that was as clear as when she received from Him the inspiration to begin this kind of dialogue with Fr. Bertoni [110]. Furthermore, Mother Naudet, contrary to what she thought at the beginning of her spiritual journey along the ways of the mystical life, felt strongly the need of a spiritual director. She needed someone to whom she could confide what she was doing and living and from whom she could receive a certain judgment for her own conscience. She did not find others who, as Fr. Bertoni, would give her this security [111].

Why, then, would Fr. Gaspar make this decision? It is not easy to answer this, but at least two reasons might be culled from two letters of his [12], written to Mother Leopoldina:

1.] the state of his health, which did not permit him to assume commitments alongside that very important one of spiritual director in the Seminary;

2.] some interior intuition, with which God had led him to understand that by now, he had done his part.

To these two motives, very probably a third could be added - the Ignatian rule of not keeping the perpetual care of anyone and perhaps also that of St. John of the Cross, of not guiding anyone when one is not any surer of the ways of God for this person.

An important exception to his refusal of continuing her spiritual direction we have in a letter dated around 1828. Mother Naudet had asked him how she should conduct herself when in prayer, she experiences herself being

reduced even to the abandonment of her senses. Fr. Bertoni responded to her to allow the Lord to work within her, and that she should enjoy the gift He was giving to her, and to be always ready to leave behind this sweet solitude when the service of her neighbor - which is the service of God - should require this of her. To try to explain the reason behind this exception with some level of certitude, would be both presumptuous and difficult. One might at least hazard the guess that since Fr. Gaspar himself had some personal experience in this, he had understood how important it was in that moment, for that specific problem, to intervene, not leaving Mother Leopoldina abandoned to her own efforts.

FINAL END NOTES

1. For this last part, I found to be very help a study that is short, but very well done: Fr. Romolo Bertoni, *Il Bertoni guida di spirito*, in: AA. VV., *Saggi sullo Spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni*, pro-manoscritto, Curia Generalizia degli Stigmatini, Roma 1983.
2. Letter 189, in: *Epistolario* p. 290 ["E"]
3. Spiritual Diary of Mother Leopoldina Naudet, p. 44 ["G"]
4. *Lo spirito del Beato Gaspare Bertoni. Fondatore degli Stigmatini*. Stimmag, Verona 1977, p.240.
5. Letter n. 1, in: E, p.23.
6. E, p. 148.
7. E, p. 150.
8. Letter 76, E, p. 160.
9. Letter 95, E, p. 185.
10. Letter 145, E, p. 244.
11. Letter 126, E, p. 221.
12. G, p. 35.
13. G, p. 38.
14. G, p. 37.
15. G, p. 27.
16. G, p. 10.
17. G, p. 2.
18. G, p. 44.
19. G, p. 50.
20. G, p. 53.
21. G, p. 70.

22. G, p. 76.
23. ib.
24. G, p. 44.
25. By "free access", I mean the primacy of God's initiative, which precedes and accompanies that of the believer.
26. G, p. 74.
27. G, p. 53.
28. G, p. 54.
29. ib.
30. G, p. 108.
31. cf. G, p. 2.
32. G, p. 27.
33. cf. G, p.44.
34. The analysis of the method will amply confirm this.
35. G, p. 70.
36. cf. G, p. 73.
37. cf. G, p. 44.
38. *Lo Spirito ...*, o.c., p. 240.
39. *Lo Spirito...*, o.c., p. 211.
40. Letter 11, Ep. 47.
41. cf. Letter 95, E, p. 185.
42. cf. Letter 145, E, pp., 243, f..
43. *Lo Spirito ...*, o.c., p. 182.
44. *Lo Spirito ...*, o.c., p. 184.
45. cf. ANCILLI, E., (ed.), *Mistagogia e direzione spirituale*, ed., O.R., Roma 1985, pp. 94, ff.

46. By 'experience', I mean that knowledge of Christ in His mystery as a renewing power and value of the moral life - (St. Paul speaks of a religious, experienced "super-knowledge", *epignosis* cf. Ep 3:18). With this, there is affirmed that the simply discursive knowledge that would have as its object, abstract truth, is not sufficient. In fact, the truth of the Mystery of Christ is pregnant with being, which is only expressed in one's living and acting in time and space - it is a personified and incarnated truth. This is adequately comprehensible only by means of the *epignosis* which is a knowledge of a value determined by faith, hope and charity, under the action of the Holy Spirit. This puts in harmony all of the reality of the person of the Christian with truth-value-Word, which is Christ Himself (cf. C. Noyer, *Foi, charité, espérance et connaissance*, in: *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 1972, pp. 1051, f.).

47. cf. ANCILLI E., o.c., pp. 131, ff.

48. G, p. 44.

49. cf. G, pp. 49, ff.

50. cf. G, p. 70.

51. cf. G, p. 71.

52. cf. G, pp. 74-75.

53. cf. G, p. 75.

54. cf. G, p. 77.

55. cf. G, p. 78.

56. cf. G, p. 78.

57. cf. G, p. 92.

58. cf. Letter 1, E, p. 23.

59. The term *spiritualize* expresses the specific Christian vocation: each person is made to listen to God. Without pretending any theological and anthropological penetration of this faith event, nonetheless in Mother Leopoldina's experience, we recognize immediately her interior voice: in the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who brings to memory the Lord in history; then the Church keeps alive this memorial; and finally the believer seeks in his/her own person, or asks for counsel from a brother in the faith.

60. cf. Letter 4, E, p. 31.

61. cf. Letter 5, E, p. 33.
62. cf. G, p. 99.
63. cf. Letter nn. 6-7, E, pp. 36-37.
64. Letter 8, E, p. 39.
65. cf. Letter 8, E, pp. 39-40.
66. cf. Letter 11, E, pp.45-46.
67. cf. G, p. 100.
68. cf. Letter 12, E, pp. 48-49.
69. cf. Letter 21, E,ppp. 65-66.
70. Letter 22, E, p. 68.
71. Letter 28, E,p. 71.
72. Letter 48, E, p. 115.
73. With the terms *life - having lived* and analogous terms, I mean not only the facts in themselves, which are the objective aspect - but I also include the subjective manner with which these were received and felt by Mother Leopoldina, including in this the tension of leaving herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit.
74. Letter 12, E, p. 48.
75. Letter 5, E, p. 33.
76. ib.
77. cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II, q. 65, a. 1.
78. With this, there is no attempt to deny the indispensable place of the study of theology in the task of discernment, but the emphasis is to radicate it in the christian life where its foundation is always a gift. As is known, Fr. Gaspar was a studious man, much appreciated by his contemporaries.
79. cf. G, p. 74.
80. cf. note n. II bis.
81. Letter 4, E, p. 30.

82. Letter 4, E, p. 31.

83. cf. G, p. 70.

84. cf. G, p. 44 bis; G., p. 78.

85. cf. G, p.77.

86. cf. G, p. 78.

87. By *purification* there is meant permanent conversion. Anyone who is striving to read God's will in his/her life becomes progressively more attentive, and learns to read it, and interprets sincerely one's own story.

88. cf. Letter 8, E, p. 40.

89. cf. Letter 25, E, pp. 72,ff.

90. G, p. 92.

91. cf. Letter 8, E, p. 39.

92. cf. Letter 15, E,p. 55.

93. cf. Letter 7,E, pp. 37-38.

94. cf. Letter 28, E, pp. 80-81.

95. Letter 36 , E, p. 96.

96. Letter 7, E, p. 37.

97. Letter 6, E, p. 35.

98. To the objective reality of a God Who assumes ever more grand proportions, corresponds the subjective attitude of the believer in simply allowing God to be God.

99. Letter 25, E, p. 73.

100. cf. Letter 5, E, p. 33.

101. cf. Letter 8, , p. 40.

102. cf. Letter 21, E, pp. 66-67.

103. cf. Letter 25, E, p. 73.

104. cf. Letter 19, E, p. 62.

105. cf. Letter 48, E p.115.

106. cf.Letter 43, E, p. 106.

107. cf. Letter 10, E, p. 43.

108. cf. Letter 8, E, p. 39.

109. cf. Letter 7, E, p. 38.

110. cf. G, p. 71.

111. cf. Letter of February 20, 1824 - in: E, p. 68.

112. cf. Letter 76, E, p. 160; Letter 145, E, pp.243-244.

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