

Leopoldina Naudet

Biography

The origins

Leopoldina Naudet was born in Florence on May 31, 1773 of Joseph and Susanna Arnth of German-Slovakian origin. Already motherless in just three years, she was sent, together with her sister Luisa, first to the Augustinian of San Frediano in Florence (1778-1783), then with the Ladies of Our Lady to Soissons in France (1783-1789) to receive proper training. At 14, also her father died and the two sisters returned to Florence, where the Grand Duke Leopold entrusted to them the education of his children. In 1790 they moved, however, to Vienna, in the wake of Maria Luisa, wife of Leopold, who became Emperor in the meantime and, at his death (1792), left for Bohemia as Archduchess Marianna's ladies in waiting, sister of the new Emperor Francis II and abbess of a monastery in Prague.

Leopoldina was involved in the major events across Europe: the revolutionary uprising and the thorny question of the suppression of the Society of Jesus (1773) had a considerable influence on her life. Leopoldina, an educated and attentive woman to the transformations taking place, met on her way with people which were building a spiritual and intellectual journey of particular relevance. She got in touch with the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, supported by the former Jesuit Father Joseph Varin, in addition to the rehabilitation of the Jesuits, he saw fit to create a feminine Institute of Ignatian spirit for the education of girls. It was determinant her personal contact with her spiritual director Father Nicholas Diessbach, also a former Jesuit she had known before in Vienna and Prague. That involved her in the book apostolate for the dissemination of good Catholic press: the book, in fact, it will always be perceived by Leopoldina as a source of culture and, above all, an orientation towards the spiritual and moral education of the Christian.

Equally important is the relationship with the restless confessor Niccolò Paccanari (1773-1820), founder of the Society of the Fathers of the Faith, who will have an undoubted attraction on her. Paccanari, wanting to create a feminine Institute of Ignatian spirit, found a fertile ground to realize his project in the archduchess Marianna and the two Naudet sisters. The work shows a first implementation in 1799 in

the experience of the Beloved of Jesus: the three women agree with him to observe a first rule of the new society, where women are not obliged to cloistered and pronounce simple and temporary vows.

In Amiens in France, through the apostolate of the Fathers of the Faith, the Beloved give birth in 1800 to a new community, the Bien-Aimees, under the direction of Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865), but serious accusations against Paccanari, reported at the Holy Office, pushed, on the one hand, the Barat to become independent with the foundation of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, an institute engaged in the education of mothers, and, on the other hand, the Naudet to seek, first in Padua , then in Venice and finally in Verona a better concretization of her dream.

The birth of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

At the invitation of Canon Luigi Pacetti (1761-1819), a distinguished preacher and missionary, in 1807 Leopoldina moves to Verona with her companions and in May 8, 1808 enters in the former monastery of Saints Joseph and Fidenzio to collaborate with Magdalene of Canossa who was at that time engaged in the work of education for poor girls. At first the two groups shared a common way of life under the guidance of the Naudet and in this period (from 1808 to 1816) Leopoldina found in Gaspar Bertoni (1777-1853), founder of the Stigmatines, a precious spiritual director, who would help her to define well her own religious vocation. At the end of 1811 Leopoldina started a long spiritual journey and in 1813 she began working with the wise suggestions of Bertoni, on the Constitutions for a new community that according to Leopoldina would find its own model in the Holy Family.

After living together for eight years, the two women decided to separate their own ways. On November 9, 1816 Leopoldina transferred at the convent called Terese to create the new Institute of Ignatian inspiration, responsible for the training of teachers and the education of high middle class girls (Sisters of the Holy Family). The community of Canossa, more modelled on Vincentian spirituality, was directed towards the poorer classes with the offer of basic education (Daughters of Charity).

On May 1819 Fr. Gaspar decided to suspend the spiritual direction and Leopoldina had to experience her total trust in God (act of abandonment) and to take on the full responsibility for her choices. This path of autonomy was made possible by the confidence that

Bertoni had been able to communicate to her. He believed in her abilities and in the goodness of her vocational proposal.

Evangelizing women and, above all, giving them in a profound educational process appear to Leopoldina, in the post-revolutionary society, an imperious cultural and social need. The school, therefore, becomes for her not only training centre, but also a place of hospitality and spirituality where women can meet, discuss, reflect and grow both humanly and spiritually. Her school offered two possibilities: tuition free school for poor girls and instead paid for boarders. For both groups she worked out a plan of extensive and well-structured studies including the history, geography, arithmetic, grammar, German and French language, drawing, painting, home economics, and the Christian doctrine of the Old and New Testament' stories.

Her great passion *for the good reading* has been put at the foundation of the extensive training program and herself, with exchanges of news and reflections, played a role in stimulating and cultural mediation, through wide circulation of texts to spread to create a new laboratory of Christian life in which education was a cultural commitment. She made, as well, a personal contribution to the birth of a new religious model, which combines the contemplative life with the apostolic dimension of consecrated life. Catechesis and spiritual retreats for women complete the educational framework: a real turning point in the 800 for the status of women in the Church.

The expansion of the Institute's activities directed to the education of young ladies pushed Leopoldina to move to the larger monastery of Saint Dominic February 17, 1827. A few years later, on May 5, 1833, the imperial approval of the community was granted, and, at the end on December 20 the recognition of Gregory XVI. Within a few months, August 17, 1834, Leopoldina died. She was declared Venerable on June 22, 2007, and the process for his beatification is still going on.

After the laws of suppression of 1866, the Sisters bought a few buildings at San Giovanni in Valle and prepared the novitiate house. The pontifical approval of the Constitutions is dated on September 8, 1948.

The reference points of the Spirituality and Mission

Spirituality

The spirituality of the Sisters is rooted on the Holy Family. The family welcomes, feeds, hugs, looks, shapes, indicates, makes free. It is the place of reconciled relationships able to integrate the differences, which can accept the limits of human frailty. It is the place that holds the hope of the possible living together in a reciprocal to know each other and to love each other.

This spirituality is based on some pillars:

- *Trust in God*: the Sister of the Holy Family need to be rooted in God's love and entrusts herself to Him (*act of abandonment*). The love of God comes first, founds and shapes the life of prayer and charity (Const. Or. 1). Being *with God alone* means:

a. to put ourselves in obedient listening to His Word (study and meditation of the Bible);

b. to feed us in the conviviality of the table of the Eucharist (liturgical life);

c. to turn to God with gratitude and love (prayer and asceticism)

- *Joyful humility*: Humility is not passive and submissive acceptance, but, like the one experienced by Mary, is a response to God's subversive project: "Here I am." Humility is looking into one's own humanity without fear because each one is loved and forgiven in his/her weaknesses; it is to acknowledge one's own limitations and frailty and rely, in joy, in God's grace that welcome all. Humility opens the door to a poor, sober, essential life style because God is "everything."

- *Contemplation in action*: the Sister is both contemplative and active. In intimate dialogue with God through prayer and interior recollection is, at the same time, in listening to others and their needs. To be rooted in Christ entails a proactive and compassionate love for others. Each daily action, the humblest, is an act of love dedicated to God (all for the glory of God).

- *Merciful hospitality*: the community of the Sisters of the Holy Family is called to become a way of life, for individual and the community, as a place of reconciliation and love, as a concrete possibility of acceptance of diversity and recognition of identity. In the community there is space to welcome, to set in motion dynamics of mutual

service to promote the lives of others: the gift of self is fruitfulness of God's grace.

This spirituality, which welcomes the One who came and every day is coming to bring the fullness of our lives, resulting in the apostolate through specific choices of the field that embody the foundational spirit in the different historical and environmental circumstances. The fidelity to the inspiration of Leopoldina Naudet, too, needs to take a *journey of reformulation* to adapt the proposal to the needs of changing times.

Mission

CULTURAL PROJECT: TO FORM

The cultural innovation that brings Leopoldina Naudet comes from the awareness of how the ignorance can become, even for women, decay germ and how the study is urgent tool for human and spiritual growth. For this reason cultural elevation through the study and knowledge shows its importance. To train and to educate are essential commitments for its growth (encouraging the study and updating of the Sisters, always attentive to the solicitation and debates of the time) and of the others, especially in the poorest and downcast social contexts. To understand, in fact, the value of culture means working for the renewal of the Christian community and the construction of true human dignity, especially of the poorer classes.

PASTORAL PROJECT: TO NOURISH

The family is the place that feeds its members. Similarly, the Sisters of the Holy Family, in everything they do, take charge of nourishing the faith of the people they meet. They are at the service of the needs of the local churches, open to the demands of evangelization. They devote themselves to animate the lectio divina, guiding spiritual exercises, organizing catechesis, to follow the youth groups, to visit and to form families, to coordinate the charitable action and the works of human promotion.

Effectiveness in pastoral work passes through the active role that the religious assumes if she realizes to be a visible sign of the dignity of her being joyful woman in faith, trained for her duties, welcoming

of other peoples fragility, a witness of the hope of living together in mutual respect: a Sister of the Holy Family.

ACT OF ABANDONMENT of Leopoldina Naudet

O my Lord, from this moment and forever I abandon all my interests in Your hands, trusting fully in Your infinite goodness, assured that You will take care of me and the things that You have entrusted to me, more than I myself could have.

And so from now on, in front of You I want to live without anguish and fear, I'll do what I can to serve You, and invite others to do the same.

I want to procure Your glory and Your service, and I ask You also to remember me.

To You I abandon everything. You can, You know, You will: these things are enough for me to be certain that You will do it.

Grant me Your love and zeal for Your glory; increase in me always and more my trust and confidence in You.

I ask them through the merits of the Virgin Mary, Your Mother, to whom You will never refuse anything that she asks from You.

I ask them through the merits of St. Joseph Your father and my advocate Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

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