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No. 4

*The passages below are from the books of Father Theodore Ratisbonne.*

*No. of the book is first, then the page. These passages are taken from the English version.*



## **HOW DID THEODORE UNDERSTAND CHARITY AS LIVED IN COMMUNITY LIFE?**

Love is the substance of which religion is formed it is the summary of the law and the prophets (1. 21)

Sion is called to embody it a tangible way God's love (2. 67)

Charity is to treat all the ills of the soul. This is the goal of the servant of the Daughter of Sion. (2.298)

Charity must be the distinctive characteristic of our community. We must always prefer other's satisfaction to our own, love one another; never forget charity embraces all virtues: patience, gentleness, long-suffering etc. (2.299)

He experienced the Word of God in the Old and the New Testaments which reveals the same mystery: the mystery of a personal God who is love: "Love", he said, "is the fundamental mystery which is found in Scripture" (3. 245)

True charity gives all and exacts nothing for self; it loves without calculation, without looking for a return; it is generous, devoted, disinterested; it is happy when it is able to procure joy and consolation for others (4.149)

A Religious without charity is a lamp without oil. (4. 146)

I wish above all that you too become messengers of peace, charity and good news. (5. 78)

Charity is the indestructible cement which must unite the first stones of the building of Sion (5.85)

I reviewed all the books from 1 to 5 and I realized in all the letters of Fr.

Theodore to the sisters, he spoke always about charity in different ways. All his life was full of charity. I asked myself, why was this virtue so important for him? It is because he experienced God's love in his life and the Rhineland Spirituality. He also said: "we can grow in charity only if we have good relationship with Jesus Christ."

It is very evident, from the books of Father Theodore that he lived charity through his relationship with others and especially with the sisters; he was very respectful. He also was attentive to nature.

He was very strong in asking the sisters to live in charity because for him it was not just a word but an attitude that we need to live out in our daily life. For example: the way we talk, help, work with the others and so on.

For Father Theodore charity is a human aspect in community life that we must work on it. He repeated this several times to the sisters, especially to Sophie Stouhlen and Louise Weywada.

How can we live this value as sisters of Sion in today's world?

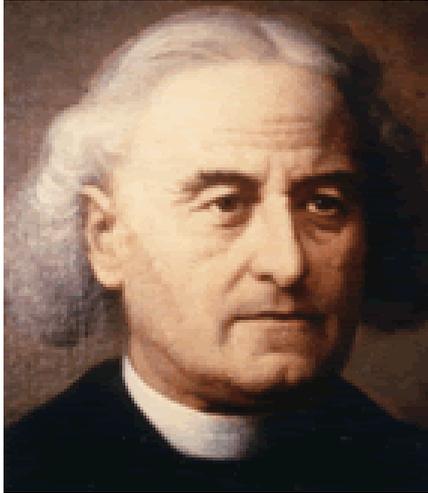
Father Theodore was a sensitive and charitable man in the society where he lived. He was a great guide for others, inviting them to live and show charity wherever they go. Our constitution no. 44, 47 and 50 remind us of this gift. We can embody charity in working for justice, peace, respect and love. As sisters of Sion, we inherited this Charism and Spirituality from our founder Theodore Ratisbonne.

WRITTEN BY ALEJANDRA

## What are the core aspects of Theodore spirituality and thus how he prayed ?

A Rhineland Mystic of his time

Our founder Theodore Ratisbonne was a man of his time, greatly influenced with



socio-political and religious contexts of France. Coming from a rich family with Jewish background and later converting to Christianity his spirituality and personality was fashioned in a unique way. As a man of his time, he was greatly influenced by Rhineland Spirituality which developed in the Middle Ages during post 11th century AD. The characteristic of Rhineland Spirituality was creation centred, centred on the heart of Jesus as the incarnation of God's love to humankind. It followed the gospel of John and it is an incarnational theology.

The Our Father which is repeated slowly, uniting with one's breath is often used in their prayer.

Theodore followed and lived the Rhineland Spirituality. It was evident in his writings, teachings and personal

letters to his friends as well as to the sisters.

Even though his spirituality was flavoured by Rhineland tradition he expressed it in a unique way. The core of his spirituality as a Rhineland mystic was rooted in Scripture. He saw the continuity of God's love in both testaments (the Hebrew and Christian). Theodore understood the imperative of the absoluteness of love in "**SHEMA**"(Book 2:274).

Theodore's whole being was enveloped in God's love for humanity. He abided in God's love and remained in Jesus' love until the end. He was centred on the person of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God's love to humanity: Emmanuel:

"GOD-IS-WITH-US" (Book 5:340;347). His prayer life was centred on creation, Scriptures, thanksgiving, arts, music, poetry, people and events (Book 4:49; 3:127; 2: 221, 278; 4:49, 253-273; 3:191; 5: 344-345; 4:51-53, 76-77; 5:339).

In addition Mt. Sion was important in Theodore's spirituality and Jewish identity. For him Mt. Sion symbolizes hope, security, trust and "the expression of the firmness of our faith in the fulfilment of the promise". Theodore's spirituality and personality was definitely established in Sion (Book 5:342-343).

Lastly, as a Rhineland mystic he hoped against all hope and believed in the Resurrection: "Theodore was a man of hope because he

trusted only in the Word of God and believed in the absoluteness of His promises. All Theodore's spirituality flowed from this contemplation of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God and Son of David, who came to fulfil the promises. Instinctively, he stressed His presence among us, Emmanuel, God with us, God in us, His way of life and prayer were essentially biblical; it was a constant seeking of God's will which he interpreted through signs, always in the framework of the absolute transcendence of the God of Abraham and Moses revealed in Jesus Christ" (book 2:69-70).

In conclusion, Theodore's spirituality and inspiration calls us to express our availability to listen and to witness by our life, to God's faithful love for all humanity but especially Jesus' own people. This call implies that our apostolic life is characterized by a three-fold commitment: to the Church, to the Jewish people and to a world of justice, peace and love (Cons. # 13).

WRITTEN BY ARLYNE

## How did his family and the world in which he lived influence Theodore ?

"Theodore Ratisbonne grew up surrounded by a loving and happy family." His Mother was a benefactor in the Jewish community of their city.

The love of his Mother influenced him so much that

this relationship inspired him to seek God's love which he found in the person of Louise Humann who became his spiritual guide. Louise Humann lived out of the Rhineland Spiritual tradition (people of deep faith who lived from the understanding of 'God is love') which she passed on to Theodore, "God in all and all in God."

His family and the world in which he lived influenced Theodore so much. His family lived the biblical values though they were not religious: "love and care for the insignificant and the poor, for justice and truth. His attitude was of a hopeful waiting, and above all, an unquenchable thirst for the Absolute." He cared about and respected the women who followed him; he helped them constantly to hear when God spoke to them according to their own spirituality.

Louise Humann was very instrumental



in Theodore becoming so knowledgeable about the whole Bible as one continuous story of god's love. It became his homeland. Theodore lived

the scriptures, uniting the Old Testament and New Testament by acting with justice and peace in responding to the needs of his time. Like the Prophets who challenged the people to have radical changes for justice; Theodore too is our model who challenge us to live the Biblical values in our world today.

"The Charism document reflects on the call of our Charism for today's world; a new and explicit call to name and stand beside both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples in their suffering; a renewed call from the Church through Cardinal Kasper to be women of dialogue; a new call to be stewards of creation." (25th General Chapter) Our Charism challenges each one of us to spread it all over the world. The seeds of Theodore Ratisbonne spirit continues to grow, working through our the mission "as we act together for a better world." (Const. Art.15.3)

WRITTEN BY JOEY

### **HOW DID THEODORE LIVE FREEDOM IN RELATION TO OBEDIENCE AND POVERTY?**

Do you want to become perfect Christian women? Theodore Ratisbonne always answered this question using Mary as the model. He understood the Latin root of the word: to obey meaning to listen with one's whole being. Mary listened attentively to God's voice. So Theodore had said:

'Obedience is the beginning, the middle and the end'. As a young student of 22 years of age he was searching for truth and met Louise Humann,

Her wisdom and passion for truth and integrity immediately impressed him. She was his model too. Later on Theodore taught other women how to listen to God.

Theodore was born 28 / 12 / 1802, the day for the Holy Innocents, this day was important to him after his baptism. But the most important day to him was his baptism on the eve of Easter 14 / 04 / 1827; it was the day that expressed his basic spirituality. Easter means to him: Resurrection-Hope. So Theodore's spirituality centred especially on the personality of Jesus Christ who is the soul of his life, the source and reason for his vocation.

Theodore grew up in a wealthy and loving family. His mother was a charitable woman with the poor people at that time, which is why she influenced a lot on him. Since he was young, he was very sensitive and yet unaware of God's will. Through the Scriptures he discovered God's will manifested in Jesus Christ; he started to know how to embody Christ in his daily life.

He had a strong aversion to money but at the same time he knew how to spend it properly so he used his money giving to the poor people; since he enjoyed music he took flute lessons and English.

Theodore knew how to relax and integrated his life with the whole environment, enjoying: nature, music, children, jokes and so on. His deep desire for unity with God and his passion for truth also led him to seek and love humility. This humility was united to poverty of spirit which consists, as he said in "the dispossession of self and of all spirit of ownership".

On the other hand, Theodore summarized obedience and poverty as living The **Shema**, [Deut 6,4] the covenant with God and the Jewish people; it is what Jesus and Mary lived as faithful Jewish persons which means: we hear and we will do. When Mary said, "Be it done to me according to your will" she was living **Shema**.

He lived with joy the words in the gospel of St Luke: "Strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." Lk. 12, 31

*Written by Maria Clara*

### **What were some of Life's challenges for Theodore? How did he live them?**

God conducted Theodore through a path full of surprises

As a young man Theodore asked if God really existed. God answered by putting in his path two persons: Miss Louise Humann and Mr. Louis Bautain. Both persons helped him begin to know God and Jesus Christ through the Bible and philosophy. Theodore gradually deepened his

understanding of the Bible as one continuous story of God's love.

His relationship with Louise Humann was a deeply spiritual one; she was a spiritual guide to him, a spiritual mother. Her guidance helped Theodore define his life to do God's work. Louise influenced Theodore in the discovery of a life of intimacy with God which is expressed through the phrase "God is Love". He decided to become Christian. That gave him many challenges. One challenge was about his baptism. Louise Humann prepared him for it.

However, a very important point was the fact that his family was Jewish which put him in a difficult situation. His mother had died seven years before and had been a great support and influence on Theodore. He loved her very much; she had taught him care of people and to respect them. Theodore knew his father would never accept that a member of the family would become Christian.

Theodore kept to his decision. Theodore received baptism by Louise Humann on April 14, 1827 with the Bishop's permission. It was done privately because his conversion was bound to create a stir. Eventually his family suspected Theodore was Christian so he explained to them frankly. It meant all family relationships with him were broken for a while.

Theodore suffered in seeking God. Louise Humann strengthened him to help him overcome his pain with much prayer to persevere in the path of God. He prayed every day for his family especially for his brother Alphonse. Twenty years later he became a priest, too. Theodore was consoled as gradually the loving family accepted him again and restored the family bond.

WRITTEN BY ROZENY

### **Who were persons that influenced Theodore and how did they affect him?**



Parents - Adelaide & Auguste Ratisbonne: Theodore's father influenced him to use money well; however, Theodore had aversion to money. His mother was a great benefactor of the Jewish community where they lived. Both his parents influenced him to value education especially for the Jewish children of their community. He came from a loving family and thus he learned what is meant to love and

respect one another. He also learned how to help poor families financially. As part of what he learned from his family was the respect for women.

Louise Humann: Theodore met this extraordinary educated and spiritual woman through his philosophy professor whom she knew, Louis Bautain. Theodore was searching for truth and a meaning to his life. Louise Humann influenced him by her wisdom and passion for truth and integrity. Louise also taught him to probe more deeply the mystery of the cross. She helped him to love the Scripture and to discern using Scripture. For example, he was thinking for marriage and he was confused; she said don't make any decision when you are upset. When you are at peace you will know what decision to make. He heeded her advice and he decided not to marry but rather to continue his medical studies. Louise taught him: to know more in order to love more. Love is for all times and all places. It is the most fundamental human law". Through her great influence on Theodore, Louise's spirit and heritage live today in the educational philosophy of the school and works of the Sion family. Booklet of her life and Memoirs

Louis Bautain: He was the one looking for the truth and then he taught Theodore philosophy which helped him to know the truth and raised him to the life of the spirit.

Theodore even dedicated his book in the life of St. Bernard to Fr. Bautain saying "You have been the instrument used by God to transmit life, light and happiness to me...Seventeen years ago today divine mercy, taking compassion on my profound wretchedness, directed me to your lessons. Book 1:14-15

Alphonse, Theodore's brother, was chosen by God to suggest to Father Theodore the opening of catechumenate. He encouraged Theodore to be a founder, a sign of the fidelity with the God who loves the Jewish people and works to fulfill the promises God made to them. Alphonse's spirituality and personality also influenced him a lot. Father Mary, in his humility, hid himself so that God's message would appear in its full light, and he's greatness lies in this hiddenness. He helped him to find concrete solutions in order to expand Sion especially in Jerusalem. Book 5: 267- 268

The Sacred Heart of Jesus: Theodore was taught by Louise Humann to identify with the heart of Jesus. It was based on the Rhineland spirituality which was focused on love, creation, Jesus, Eucharist, Mary. For Theodore the heart of Jesus helped him to remain in his love. His communion with Jesus enabled him to love the people of Israel and how much the heart of Jesus loved the children of Israel. It is from this communion and identification to the heart of

Jesus that his Charism as a founder originated. Book 5: 342-343.

Other influences on Theodore were the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Augustine; they helped him to grow in his faith journey. These authors supported his vision and encouraged him to continue following Jesus and serving the people.

Book 1:14-15

Written by Victoria.



These are our photos with Sr. Elizabeth at the time when we were studying about Sion's Spirituality and Charism.

