

*On the Anniversary of the Death  
of  
Louise Humann*



*30 septembre 1766 - 19 septembre 1836*

**NOTRE DAME DE SION**



## Notes

1. Theodore Ratisbonne, Book 1. P.15, Sr.Carmelle. *“Some day there must be an analysis done of the part played by these (early) influences on the development of fr. Theodore”*.
2. Theodore Ratisbonne, Bk. 1. P.15 by Sr. Carmelle .
3. Text of the Pact of Turkenstein.
4. *This and subsequent quotations from Louise’s Writings, written in italics, are taken from the Tomes, ‘SIONA’. After Louise’s death, they would surely have been transcribed into the large volumes now held by the St. Louis Srs in Juilly. Further research as to who were the writers still needs to be done in this area.*
5. Fr.Eugene de Regny & Fr. G.Adolphe Carl, the archivists of Louise Humann’s Writings.

September 2012

*Dear Sisters and Members of the Sion Family,*

*The Congregational Leadership Team asked that we write to you for the anniversary of Louise Humann’s death, 19th September. How did this come about? We, Elizabeth Losinski and Patricia Watson, were impressed by the teachers in our Sion Colleges requesting to know more about Sion’s origins and the educational philosophy that has influenced the pedagogy of our Schools to this day. Urged on by Sr. Carmelle’s recommendation<sup>1</sup>, we applied for the ‘Louise Humann Bursary’ to launch into this vast field of study. The C.L.T. agreed and so we spent six weeks in April/May, firstly in Juilly, then profiting from Sr. Jean Marie’s (Callian) extensive and detailed knowledge of our roots in Strasbourg. She as well as Sr. Beatrix-Marie (Lorgues) graciously shared the fruits of their years of research on our origins. We sincerely thank them. We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to the St. Louis Sisters who shared their Archives, their home and their friendship with us in Juilly. Finally, with Sr. Anne Therese’s kind assistance, we followed through with further research in our Rome archives.*

Who was this lay woman, Anne Marie Madeleine, (called Louise) Humann who lived at a momentous period of French history: before, during and after the Revolution, 1789 – 1799, and who had an enormous influence on a group of young philosophy students, many of whom were later to make an important contribution to the life of the Church. Apart from



*Louise Humann*

seventeen years, 1802 – 1819, when she directed a School for young girls in Mainz, Germany, Louise’s entire life was spent in or near Strasbourg. We know that she had a profound effect on Theodore and was responsible for leading him to faith in God who is Love, personified in Jesus. Two large tomes, interestingly enough entitled, SIONA, each of over seven hundred handwritten pages in the Juilly Archives, bear witness to Louise as a prolific writer. Some of her writings are letters to Louis Bautain, to Theodore and to others; some form a spiritual journal of her own personal search for God, some are studies over a range of interesting subjects: philosophy, astronomy, cabbala, chemistry, mathematics, animal magnetism... Confronted with these latter topics, we were left with more questions than we



*Louis Bautain*

began with! Were such studies in vogue at that time? How exceptional was it that a woman would delve into these subjects? We need further and broader research to answer these and other questions we have. What we do know though is that Louise was deeply motivated by the conviction, echoed several times in her writings, “to know more

in order to love more”. Rather than concentrate on the biographical details of her life, which you are already familiar with, we prefer to reflect on Louise’s spirituality, certainly influenced by the

We would like to include in this reflection an interesting excerpt from Louise’s writings. It revealed to us the breadth of her understanding and openness; she was surely theologically ahead of her times, “Judaism is not a thing of the past. It exists in the law of the Church.... (Judaism and Christianity) are just like a tree. The Church cannot be separated from Judaism”.

Before closing this letter, we invite you to take time to reflect in prayer on the following questions. Where do you find echoes of Louise’s spirituality still alive and active in the Sion family today? What are some aspects of her spirituality that you feel inspired to invigorate in your own life?

Asking God’s blessings on each one and with our love,

*Elizabeth*

*Patricia*

Elizabeth Losinski, (Canada/U.S.A.) & Patricia Watson, (Aust.)

Truth must lead each one to goodness, knowledge and love”.

As we continued our study, we shared with the St. Louis Sisters how easy it would be to idealize Louise. Certainly, she was a holy woman, deeply united to God, yet she had her fragility too. She was prone to depression, especially if plans did not work out as she had envisaged. This happened when she discovered she had no vocation to religious life, and after six months, had to return home. What would she do with her life? On two later occasions, when Fr. Colmar was appointed Bishop of Mainz, and hence had to leave Strasbourg, then when she received news of his sudden death at age fifty-eight years, she was seized with panic, even becoming quite ill. She had lost her beloved spiritual director who had accompanied her in her search for God throughout her life.

What would she do? With time in prayer, her journal entries reveal greater serenity from learning to trust God in the unknown. In 1818, she wrote, “If my existence is prolonged here on earth, there is a reason. If I am no longer useful to others, it is surely because I have work to do on myself”.

In her direction of the young priests in Rue Toussaint, Strasbourg, Louise could be very practical and down to earth in her counsels. “Rise at 6 a.m. and be in bed no later than 10 p.m.!” “Dress quickly and don’t waste time admiring yourself”. “A quarter of an hour’s quiet reflection is worth more than a day spent in reading!” “One nasty word can destroy a heart”.



Louise Humann's home

Rhineland Mystics, and “marking with an indelible seal the very core of Theodore’s being”.<sup>2</sup>

One key event in Louise’s life that profoundly influenced her spirituality was the Pact of Turkenstein, pronounced on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, 23rd June, 1797.

The Pact, signed by Fr. Louis Colmar, Therese Brek and Louise, centred on Jesus’ words, “Sint Unum - That they may be one, as we are one” John 17:11. These words would become the group’s raison d’être, “uniting them in firm friendship with one another in the Heart of Jesus”, empowering them “to give themselves in service to others, especially to the sick and to the education of youth ....who only rarely receive a solid foundation in the knowledge of religion”<sup>3</sup>.



The quest for ‘unity’ was a lodestar in Louise’s life. The two Testaments of Scripture were, for her, unified by the continuing message of God’s love for humanity. God’s unity within the Trinity underpinned her spirituality. “It is essential that you are firmly bonded to the Trinity”, she once wrote to Theodore. The concept of unity, personified in family life, was basic to the Pact. The three members were to form a united family. Later, we see this emphasis on unity clearly demonstrated in the educational philosophy of the School in Mainz.

“A strong family spirit is to exist between teachers and students”.<sup>4</sup>

Education was to form 'the whole person' through a variety of subjects: moral, intellectual, spiritual and physical. The School was to show forth 'Sint Unum' in operation, welcoming students from diverse backgrounds, German and French, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant. Later, when Louise returned to Strasbourg and was assisting the small group of priests (which included Theodore), known as the Priests of St. Louis, she encouraged them to make a Family Pact together, "in the name of the Most Holy Trinity and in union with Jesus Christ, our Master and Model". Several times in her writings, no matter the topic, she echoed her conviction regarding the underlying unity of all creation, "All in God and God in all".

Strasbourg



In Louise's search for God, she believed that if she looked for truth, she would find God. She wrote in her Journal, "O Siona, my heavenly instructress, teach me where Truth dwells". She gives the reply, "Truth abides in the depths of your soul. Your interior eye will perceive its splendour, your ear will hear its divine voice.

The sanctuary of your soul is the tabernacle where God lives in you. True knowledge of God consists less in the inspiration of the mind than in the movement of the heart. It is more by the heart than by reason that a (person) discerns truth". In keeping with the spirituality of the Rhineland Mystics, Louise took a vow of simplicity soon after the Pact of Turkenstein. She promised openness to God, without affectation, to all God might ask of her, "As the Shema asks - to love with one's whole being, with an undivided heart". Other entries in SIONA read, "To find truth, all that is necessary is simplicity, the

setting aside of one's own opinions. The Spirit alone teaches this wisdom to the simple. Evangelical childhood is an essential condition to perceive truth: the Kingdom of God is within you"... "Be pliable as a reed in the Hand of God, simple, unaffected, with childlike confidence".

In light of Louise's repeated mention of the 'heart', it is not surprising that her spirituality was deeply marked by love: love of God, of Scripture which she saw as a means of coming to know God, and love of others. She wrote, "In sacred language, God is Being, Life, the Eternal One, a devouring fire, the essence of all that exists". The Bible was her prized possession, the first book she learned to read from at the age of three. Later, she learned Latin and Greek to assist her younger brother in his Seminary studies and to study herself the Gospels in their original language. When in Mainz, she engaged the chief rabbi's son to teach her Hebrew so she would better understand the Hebrew Testament.

"She perceived religion as an affair of the heart"<sup>5</sup>. When teaching the Ten Commandments to her first Communion class, Louise spoke of them as "the gift of a loving Father to his children to help them to be happy". Of the Eucharist, she wrote, "I have the duty of showing these children the beauty of their religion, to reveal to them the heart of their God. I want them to see in their God, an attention, a solicitude, a tender love, an immense generosity in giving us this gift". She also spoke of God's love as 'a motherly love for her children'. Once, when Louise was asked the secret of her success as an educator and how she won her pupils' hearts, she replied, "My talent is to love them". Later, after retiring from education, she reflected in her journal, "The human person is not made solely to understand and to admire. (S/he) is created, above all, to love.