

## A tribute to the Sisters who have preceded us

Sr Christine Walczak

### INTRODUCTION:

Yes, in fact we would like to pay a tribute to the sisters who have preceded us in the historical research. I am not sure whether they would accept it ... But on our behalf we consider it a duty, a sign of gratitude and an occasion to express our thanks.

The current research on the history of the foundation and the life of their foundress are rooted in a work that started towards the year 1950 by some of our sisters in the Archives : Sisters archivists or sisters who were passionate about our foundress and the history of our Institute.

These sisters have accomplished a considerable research work concerning documents in different archives, an immense work of classification and organisation of the Archives. Some of them have even written articles or books on Jeanne-Antide or on our history.

Through this "memorial" we don't pretend to narrate their life but we just wish to acknowledge their work performed always humbly, methodically, persistently and often discreetly, in the shadow. This serious work entails research of papers and documents, interpretation and handwritten recopying in the first place followed by typing the same documents. The computer didn't exist yet! ...

Today, this work costs a goldmine for those who want to deepen the foundation of a particular community by Jeanne Antide, a particular event during the time of the foundation, or for those who wish to carry out a research of documents in other archives. We find this goldmine especially in the 4 volumes of Letters and Documents. These are 4 typed collections containing all the documents which came into light on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1982. A close collaboration between the sisters archivists of that time enabled the classification and the tying of these volumes which bring together both the writings of Jeanne Antide, most of which are found in « Letters and Documents », and the various letters of the civil or ecclesiastic authorities and of the sisters. They are classified chronologically in relation to the writings of Jeanne Antide.

These sisters have collaborated together since 1960. Here is a short presentation of these sisters :

▪ **Mother Antoine de Padoue Duffet:** ( 1911- 2008)

A sister of the Province of Besançon and professor of Greek, Latin and French, Sr Antoine de Padoue has been Superior General of Besançon (before the unity), then general council and later Mother General (1969-1980). Mother Antoine grouped together the writings of Jeanne Antide and became the book "Letters and Documents" (1981). She then continued the historical research until the last days of her life and she published several documents or books:

- Letters and Documents: 2 editions: 1965 and 1982
- 1971: The apostolic spirit of Jeanne Antide
- 1987: The history of the unity between the sisters of Charity of Besançon and the sisters of Charity of Rome, Ed PIEMME
- 1988: The subject index of Letters and Documents (Typed document)
- 1994: The first companions of Jeanne Antide, I.M.E. Baume les Dames
- 2006: History of the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret, 1826-1915

An unfinished piece of work: the translation from Latin to French of some documents about the canonization of St. Jeanne Antide.

During the funeral service of Mother Antoine de Padoue, on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008 in Besançon, Mother Maria Luisa Colombo, Superior general at the time, wrote in her message : *"You are and will remain ... the one who made the most of the sources of our charism, the one who has given to our Congregation the treasure of our foundress' texts, the one who highlighted with intelligence and skill, the history lived by the companions of Jeanne Antide, down the centuries ... this history which as you used to say, is "the history of God's mercy".*

▪ **Sister Maria Chiara Rogatti:** (1925 – 2008)

A Sister of the Province of Vercelli, professor of literature and arts, (has been a General councillor and later Provincial superior). She collaborated strongly with mother Antoine de Padoue in the research. Each year they met regularly to work together.

She wrote numerous articles or conferences, including the Rule of life according to Jeanne Antide's thought. She collaborated with mother Antoine de Padoue and Sr. Marie Hélène Magnien for the editing of Mother Antoine's last book which appeared in 2006. She published:

- 2003: Presenza di Luce – Suor Nemesia Valle (Presence of Light – Sr. Nemesia Valle) - Ed. A.R.S.G.L.
- Sr. Maria Chiara wrote the article on St. Jeanne Antide in the Dictionary of the Institutes of Perfection by Professor Rocca., Vol IV, Ed Paoline, 1977

In 2002, she organised the Archive of Northern Italy, in Vercelli where the documents of the Archives of Borgaro and Brescia had just been deposited.

During the funeral service, Sr. Battistina Ferraris recalled : *"... How can we fail to recall with gratitude all the effort accomplished in collaboration with Mother Antoine de Padoue and other sisters, to translate the writings of Sainte Jeanne Antide..."*

Mother Marie Antoine Henriot will also witness that: *"... we sing the magnificat for her life at the service of the big family of J.A. ... for having disclosed the Foundress' writings : a precious endeavour especially for the young sisters of the other continents..."*

▪ **Sister Marie Hélène Magnien:** (1923- 2010)

A Sister of the Province of Savoy, teacher, member of the national council of pedagogy of catholic teaching for some years ; she then joins the secretariat of the General house in Rome where she will also work in the Archives. Back to France, she becomes Archivist in the Convent of la Roche sur Foron. She wrote the history of the Province of Savoy in 3 volumes (2006).

In the introduction of the first volume she wrote: *"After 1825, it was indeed a real spring for the young province, a time of growth and development. The « cutting » planted in the land of Savoy, developed its branches in Chablais, across the Duchy, in Switzerland and even in Algeria for some years... "*

▪ **Sr. Germaine Berthollet:** (1909-2000)

A Sister of the Province of Savoy and nurse, was called to Rome in 1957 for the secretariat of the General house, (where she remains for 19 years). She came in contact with the documents that date back to the foundation of the Institute. Together with other sisters she made an inventory and created an Archive classification. When she returned to France in 1976, she found in Besançon some sisters with a passion in this matter and thus they continued together to organise and to classify the documents according to a certain method. Hence the "classified" Archives of Besançon and later of La Roche emerged.

**« The sisters fascinated by this matter » who « have worked discreetly, in the shadow » :**

▪ **Sr. Marie Therese Grunenwald:** (1914-1994)

A Sister of Besançon and teacher, who was also a Novice Mistress, provincial councillor and later Researcher and Archivist in the Provincial house from 1973 till 1994, where Sr. Germaine got acquainted with her in her early years.

▪ **Sr. Etienne Ledeur:** (1914-2004)

A Sister and nurse of the Province of Besançon who created together with Sr. Marie Therese the Documentation centre of Notre Dame, and later she reached the Archives with Sr. Marie Therese.

She visited attentively the municipal and departmental Archives of Besançon to finish the research. She accomplished an immense work on the family tree of St. Jeanne Antide.

Who knows how many notes they jotted down and how many documents they wrote and typed? ... How many working hours accomplished by our sisters? ... to manage to form in 1982 the 4 volumes which we have already mentioned above?

The first volume begins with the following text :

*"In this volume containing all the documents known in 1982, one can find all sorts of things, as in the Bible (comparatively!) which is described as: 'that odd history': with a few or no dates, omissions, whole periods of time spent in silence and on the other hand with insignificant details for us : an inventory of stolen things, a house's plan, an unpaid invoice, etc ... somehow like our family drawers where we keep photos, letters, newspapers' cuttings, menus, bills and medical prescriptions. Life is there<sup>1</sup>."*

▪ **Sister Raffaella Perugini: (1915 – 2012)**

A Sister of the Province of Rome, a teacher of art and history. She was also the Provincial superior of Rome. Deeply fascinated by Jeanne Antide, she wrote numerous articles in the Magazine *Nostra Stella* (1955-1968), on topics linked to Jeanne Antide and the history of our presence in Rome.

She wrote:

- 1989: Cenni storici sulla Provincia religiosa di Roma delle Suore della Carità di S. Giovanna Antida Thouret (Historical insights on the religious Roman Province of the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide Thouret) - ROME
- 1994: 150 anni da raccontare – Le Suore della Carità di S.G.A. nell'ospedale di S. Spirito di Roma (150 years to relate – The Sisters of Charity of S.J.A. in the hospital of Santo Spirito of Rome) - ROME
- 1998: La logica della Carità – Suor Agostina Pietrantoni (The logic of Charity – Sr. Agostina Pietrantoni) – ROME

▪ **Sister Sofia Castello: (1902-1990)**

A Sister of the Province of Naples who had been the provincial secretary for a long time while working also in the Archives. She wrote the first history of the Province of Naples ( a typed Document). This document is useful today because it offers a basic chronology to deepen the history of the foundations of the Province of Naples.

Every sister who today continues or carries out regularly research work, has been with or encountered one of these sisters ; she has detected their passion for Jeanne Anatidé and for the Institute, has received a lot from their experience, from their knowledge and their memory. It's entirely a work of transmitting our history which continues still today with other sisters who are equally fascinated.

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<sup>1</sup> Step by step with the Bible – St. Andrew's Abbey, Bruges, 1958, brochure n.1 p. 13