

***Jeanne-Antide's journey back to France, from 1821 to 1823
and her stay in Paris.***

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Introduction

After eleven years spent in Naples, far from Besançon, during which she had done so much work, had overcome so many troubles and had obtained the Pontifical Approval of her Rule and her Institute, Jeanne-Antide thought it was time to go back to the cradle of her Congregation...

Delayed by political events and illness¹, the time so longed for had finally come!

Boarding the carriage and saying goodbye to her «*dear Sisters Sophie, G n reuse, Ang lique... and all ...*»² Jeanne-Antide certainly did not imagine that this journey would take her to Paris rather than to Besançon...

This would be her third stay at the Capital, the first time she had gone there for her Novitiate during the Revolution, the second time for the Chapter of 1807, with Napoleon, and this time she was coming to defend the cause of her Institute.

¹ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Sr Catherine Barrois in Besançon, Rome, 8th August 1821.

² Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Sr Genevi ve Boucon in Naples, Capua, 20th July 1821. Autograph letter.

Year 1821: the return

The letter of 20th July 1821 addressed from **Capua** to Sr Geneviève Boucon tells us that Jeanne-Antide had been able to start her journey. She left with her niece Sr Rosalie, Sr Marie, and Madam Nielli.

Itinerary

The letters wrote by Jeanne-Antide along her journey show us her itinerary.

On 8th August, she wrote from **Rome** to the Sister replacing her in Besançon Sr Catherine Barrois, to announce her arrival.

Then, the small group stopped in **Modena** and **Turin** before reaching Thonon to visit the community.

➤ *We shall now have a look at the historical context.*

The first Sisters had arrived in Thonon in May 1810.

Thonon was then part of France, as Savoy had been annexed by Napoleon.

However, after the Emperor's fall, the King of Piedmont-Sardinia got his ancient province back.

Thus, the French Sisters living in Thonon found themselves in a different kingdom.

The Foundress wished to open a novitiate in this province of Savoy. As it is said in a letter to the Administrators of the hospital dated 7th June 1820, in which she asked to receive a novice who had been waiting.³ It was with the King of Turin, King of Piedmont-Sardinia, Charles Felix, she had to deal now.

In 1821, the kingdom included Piedmont, Sardinia, Savoy, the county of Nice, and it had expanded to Gênes. Its Capital City was Turin.

In **Modena** Jeanne-Antide met the King, as he was staying there. He would not go back to Turin, the Capital of the State, until 15th October 1821.

She asked to be received as she had a letter to deliver. The King and the Queen received her the same evening. On that occasion she submitted the supplication she had prepared to request the establishment of a novitiate.⁴

Writing to Sr Geneviève, she told how *«the King and the Queen of Turin were so good to receive us»*.⁵

She also announced she would leave the following day, 1st September, for **Turin**.

Father Neyre had also been advised to recommend the Sisters to the Archbishop's benevolence when passing in **Chambery**.⁶

They reached **Thonon** on 12th September: *«With the grace of God, we had a good journey.»*⁷

³ Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to the administrators of the hospital in Thonon, Rome, 7th June 1820. Autograph signature.

⁴ The novitiate will open in Saint-Paul en Chablais in 1821 with the arrival of Sr Victoire Bartholemot whom Jeanne-Antide had sent when she stopped in Bourg.

⁵ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Jeanne-Antide from Modena, to Sr Genevieve Boucon in Naples, 31st August 1821. Autograph letter.

⁶ Id. Letter of Fr Neyre to Jeanne-Antide, Thonon, 2nd February 1821

⁷ Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Sr Geneviève Boucon, Thonon, 16th September 1821. Autograph letter.

News received in Thonon

The joy of seeing again Sr Basile Prince and the Sisters of the community was saddened ... as, in Besançon, after Jeanne-Antide's departure in 1810, the situation had completely changed!

Following the death of Mgr Lecoq in 1815, the Vicars General governed the diocese. They were all refractory priests, and Gallicans⁸, like the future Archbishop.

Jeanne-Antide in the Rule of 1802 had conferred the title of Superior General to a former constitutional priest, Mgr Lecoq! Moreover, she had the Rule of her Institute approved by the Pope!

Two unforgivable choices for the clergy in Besançon!

The new Archbishop, Mgr Cortois de Pressigny, was a prelate belonging to the nobility, one of the most influential members of the French clergy after the Restoration. The King had entrusted to him the task of negotiating with the Holy See a new Concordat. Louis XVIII had granted him the title of Count and Peer⁹ of France and because of this title he would often go to Paris to sit at the House of Peers.

He was appointed Archbishop of Besançon on 4th July 1817, got possession of his See on 31st October 1819, and entered Besançon in 1821. At the time of his appointment he was 72 years old. His ministry would not be long as he died in Paris on 2nd May 1823.

In February 1820, the Archbishop wrote to Mgr de Chaffoy, his representative as Superior General of the Congregation: «*My opinion is to hold the elections for the Sisters of Charity and have them renew the vows as soon as possible.*»¹⁰

All the Sisters servant had to attend a retreat starting on 11th April in Besançon and concluded with the renewal of vows.

At the end of the retreat he appointed Sr Catherine Barrois as Superior of the Congregation although temporarily.¹¹

Thus, the authority over the Sisters in Besançon was taken away from the Superior General in Naples.

⁸ Gallicanism is a French religious and political doctrine which wanted to keep the autonomy of the local Catholic Church by limiting the authority of the Pope. According to it the Pope had only spiritual power and did not accept his interference in temporal matters. Even the Pope's spiritual primacy was limited by the Church's General Councils, by Bishops in their dioceses and Sovereigns in their States. This implied that the French sovereign had a strict control on the Bishops' appointments and decisions. It is an old doctrine which goes back to the XIV century and opposed the ultramontanism. In France the Pope kept the spiritual primacy, yet in the dioceses, for what concerned the internal affairs, it was the Bishop who had the authority.

⁹ In the Middle Ages and with the Ancient Regime, the Peers were ecclesiastics and nobles from the high class to whom the King had granted honorific or jurisdictional privileges. From 1814 to 1848, they were members of the House of Peers also called High Chamber.

¹⁰ Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon

¹¹ Id. «*Register of deliberations of the Council of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Besançon, under the Rule of Saint Vincent de Paul, from 1816 to 1826*» Page 29

Sr Catherine presided for the first time as the Superior, together with Mgr de Chaffoy, the Council on 19th April.

Sr Marie-Anne Bon wrote to Mother Thouret: «*We can do nothing but submit to Mgr de Chaffoy's orders ...*»¹²

Therefore, when Jeanne-Antide wrote to Sr Catherine Barrois to announce her return, the latter according to the instructions received, brought the letter straight to Mgr de Chaffoy: «*He told us to go to the Archbishop's house... When we arrived at the Archbishopric, Monseigneur read your letter; he merely told us:*

«*You shall answer Madam Thouret that I wrote to her two years ago what you are going to repeat on my behalf: that I shall never receive her in any establishment in my diocese; that I consider her as a lay woman, and if, against my will, she would dare to turn up at one of the houses of your Congregation, I shall call against her even the civil authority if necessary. And you, my Sisters, you should not have other thoughts than mine.*»¹³

Sr Catherine passed on the response to Mother Thouret...

The decision reiterated by the Archbishop was followed on 31st August 1821, by an order forbidding «*the Superiors of the houses of the Sisters of Charity of our diocese, to receive ... Sr Jeanne-Antide Thouret previous Superior of the Sisters of Charity of Besançon.*»¹⁴

The Foundress was thus officially excluded from her Institute ...

While Sr Catherine had to inform the Sisters about the definitive interdiction.

Great dismay was felt in many of the communities, sometimes even indignation as it happened among the Sisters at Bellevaux, and Sr Elisabeth Bouvard expressed it clearly! Also because the Superior hastened to inform the communities the same evening she received the Bishop's order! «*That is, Mother dear, the sudden order they hastened to give us: as it had been sent around six pm to Sr Catherine, and by seven pm, she had already sent out a copy to us ...*»¹⁵

It was a letter full of anguish and panic the one Sr Elisabeth wrote to Jeanne-Antide at the hospital in Thonon and was given to her by the Sister Servant, Sr Basile. Then, Mother Thouret discovered the interdiction which concerned her.

The archives in La Roche-sur-Foron keep a precious souvenir: the furniture of the hospital of Thonon against which the Foundress leaned while reading the sorrowful letter.

Four days after her arrival in Thonon, Jeanne-Antide wrote to Sr Geneviève : «*Entrust yourself into his paternal hands, and you shall find joy. That is what the Good Lord grants me the grace to feel at the moment; and he knows how much I need it ...*»¹⁶

She also knew that she would always be the Mother in the heart of many Sisters, those of Thonon who remained always faithful to her, those at Bellevaux in Besançon : «*... our very dear Mother, do not fear; you shall be received at Bellevaux.*».

¹² Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter from Sr Marie-Anne Bon to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 6th January 1820.

¹³ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Sr Catherine Barrois to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 24th August 1821. Autograph draft at the Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon.

¹⁴ Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon.

¹⁵ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Sr Elisabeth Bouvard to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 7th September 1821.

¹⁶ Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Sr Geneviève Boucon, Thonon, 16th September 1821. Autograph letter.

After being told of her return, the Sisters were happy to see her soon and wrote to her: «*your establishment at Bellevaux is totally yours*»¹⁷.

Mother Thouret was still in Thonon when she received a letter from Mgr de Pressigny repeating the interdiction pronounced two years earlier «*to take away all uncertainties about my dispositions...* » and adding : « *I told Mgr the Nuncio I had reason to believe the testimonies of the most trustworthy priests, that you have neither the virtues nor the necessary qualities to be a Superior; you did not even have those to be a good religious...* »¹⁸

The sword went deep in ...

The Journey continued – Bourg

¹⁷ Id. Letter of Sr Elisabeth Bouvard and her Sisters to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 9th August 1821.

¹⁸ Id. Letter of Mgr de Pressigny to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 5th September 1821.

Strong in her faith and trust, Mother Thouret continued her journey back. She always carried on herself the prayer she had composed before leaving for France: «*O my God, Alone Great, Alone Holy and Alone Omnipotent ... show-forth your goodness and your former mercies. Stand between me and my enemies...*»¹⁹

From Thonon, she wrote to Sr Geneviève: «*Being innocent, the Good Lord grants me the grace to feel a deep calm*»²⁰.

If the houses in Besançon did not receive her, those in other dioceses welcomed her.

From Thonon, she went to France destination **Bourg-en-Bresse**. There she stayed for few weeks.²¹ She was received with open arms by Sr Pauline Bardot, the Sr Servant, and by Sr Elisabeth Bouvard !

Many Sisters wanted to follow the Mother, but she refused: «*I could well accept them, but I do not want the establishments and the poor be deprived of the good done by our Sisters there.*»²²

Many followed her anyway,²³ among them Sr Elisabeth Bouvard who had just come to Bourg, as in a short letter dated 8th September 1821 addressed to the Sisters in various dioceses, the new Superior of Besançon had stated: «*... stand by Monseigneur or by our Mother. If we stand by Monseigneur, we have to be in his diocese; if we stand by our Mother we shall be where she will think suitable, in Italy or in France.*»²⁴

¹⁹ Autograph text at the Archives at the General House in Rome.

²⁰ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Sr Geneviève, Thonon, 16th September 1821. Autograph letter.

²¹ A letter of Jeanne-Antide to Mgr de Pressigny was dated 18th September 1821 and written in Thonon, while on 18th October she wrote from Bourg to a priest to announce the arrival of three Sisters. The identity of this parish priest is still unknown.

The autograph letter to Mgr de Pressigny is kept at the Archives at the General House in Rome.

Many houses outside the diocese of Besançon would remain under the authority of the Superiors in Besançon, as it happened for the workhouse in Bourg.

It was not an easy situation for the civil authority as well. In fact at the workhouse in Bourg, the administrators contacted directly the Superior in Besançon to express their astonishment as «*three Sister were replaced without the administration being informed. We came to know that it was caused by a certain Dame Thouret and Sr Pauline*», and to make it possible for the workhouse in Bourg to stay under the Besançon's authority, the Sisters had to sign a statement of submission to the Archbishop and to the Superior in Besançon, only after that they were considered as members of the Congregation in Besançon, and were allowed to remain at the Hospice. (Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon. Correspondence between the Committee of the Workhouses in Bourg and Sr Catherine Barrois Superior in Besançon. Letters of 24th and 28th December 1821, and of 5th, 11th, 17th, 24th, 26th and 29th January 1822, and of 20th February 1822.)

²² Archives at the General House in Rome. Note of Sr Fébronie 1882

²³ The Srs Elisabeth et Agnès Bouvard, Philippine Mille, Anne Chouffe, Félicité Bontron.

Sr Marthe (Pauline) Bardot left Bourg (certainly a painful departure as she had spent there 16 years) within the first two weeks of February 1822 to join Sr Elisabeth Bouvard in Villecerf. (cf. Mother Antoine de Padoue in «The first companions of Jeanne-Antide» page 115)

²⁴ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Sr Catherine Barrois to the Sisters of other dioceses, Besançon, 8th September 1821

Sr Victoire Bartholemot had come to that establishment the previous year, in autumn 1820²⁵ and Mother Thouret sent her to Savoy for the new foundation of Saint-Paul, where she would arrive on 29th October 1821.

Going to Paris

From Bourg, Jeanne-Antide continued towards **Paris**, accompanied by Sr Rosalie and this time also by Sr Elisabeth. They reached Paris on 2nd November.

Why Paris ?

The explanation can be found in one of Fr. Neyre's letters, dated 6th November: *«I totally agree, Madam, with your resolution of going immediately to Paris... You should not let those opposing you have the time to form new oppositions. »*

Besides the law made compulsory to get all publications authorized by the government, therefore, the Papal Brief dated 14th December 1819 needed the authorization before publishing. Jeanne-Antide had to have it translated in order to submit it to the Minister of the Interior.

And finally: *«I have come to Paris to try to do something, so that I may be able to say that I did everything that depended on me »*, she said to Fr Neyre in her letter of December 1821.

Lodgings

They stayed at a Benedictines community, 5 rue du Regard.²⁶

The door and the façade no longer are as Jeanne-Antide saw them, however, the rear façade at n. 68 on boulevard Raspail, is still the same one.

The city

Paris had changed after Jeanne-Antide's stay in 1807. Mother Thouret met ladies belonging to the bourgeoisie or to the lower class, like the lady selling flowers.

In the evening she would see the streets enlightened by new gas lanterns.²⁷

²⁵ Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon. *«Registre des délibérations du Conseil de la Congrégation des Sœurs de la Charité de Besançon, sous la Règle de Saint Vincent de Paul, de 1816 à 1826 »* Deliberation dated 20th August 1820. Page 31

²⁶ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Mr de Montaiglon to Jeanne-Antide, Paris, 11th March 1822. Mr. de Montaiglon stated it also in his letter to Mr. de Raimond, on 21st March 1822. Slander had reached Mgr de Pressigny, saying that the Foundress had been staying opposite the Daughters of Charity to challenge their community. *«In 1821, those ladies lived in rue du Regard, next to the Luxembourg.»* The Mother House of the Daughters of Charity had been in rue du Bac from 1815.

Rue du Regard got this name at the end of the XVII century because of a fountain located there.

Boulevard Raspail got its name on 9th July 1887 to honour François Vincent Raspail (1794-1878), chemist, medical doctor and politic.

²⁷ Installation of gas light in 1816. 5000 lanterns enlightened 1600 streets in Paris.

Perhaps, she had the occasion of crossing Place Vendôme and seeing the new column erected at Napoleon's order to commemorate the victory in Austerlitz. Bronze plaques told the successes of the Napoleonic Army.²⁸
She would use new coins portraying the King Louis XVIII.

***She had other concerns ...
Whom did she meet?***

As soon as she arrived she went to the Nunciature. With the Nuncio's help, she could get in touch with people who put her in contact with the Minister of Interior, and with the Archbishop of Besançon.

It was in Paris that Jeanne-Antide met for the first and only time Mgr de Pressigny.

The people she met

- **The Nuncio Mgr Macchi**, introduced in January by Sr Paola, whom I thank for doing it.
- **Mr de Montaignon**

He was from Besançon, but had left the city many years earlier. He was «Advisor at the State's Council», as it is written in his letters. The State's Council had been created by Napoleon Bonaparte, and its main role was to advise the government, especially about the issuing of new laws. As advisor he was supposed to present a matter and draw up the findings of a parliamentary committee ...²⁹

Fr Thouret wrote to his Sister: «*I am glad to know you found someone to help you register the Brief, as it is a matter to be concluded ...*»³⁰

²⁸ Column erected at Napoleon's order «for the glory of the Great Army» from 1806 to 1810 to commemorate the victory in Austerlitz.

The column was 44 metres high; it was inspired by the Trajan's column in Rome. 1200 cannons taken from Russians and Austrians were melted to make a decoration of 280 metres, and 425 bronze plaques were coiled in a spiral, telling the military successes of the Great Army.

Initially called Austerlitz column, on top it had a statue of Napoleon ^{1st} represented like a Roman Emperor.

The statue was replaced by a flag with fleur-de-lis during the Restauration.

The square made by Louis XIV, was initially called Place Louis le Grand, then Place Vendôme from the XVIII century, after the Vendôme family. Following Napoleon's fall the column was called Vendôme column.

²⁹ The Advisor to the State's Council was supposed to illustrate a matter or the conclusions drawn by a parliamentary committee, to evaluate a project of research, or a doctorate dissertation, etc.

'Advisor' was the initial title given to the members of the State Council: Advisor of Justice, at the Court of Accounts, at the Court of Cassation ...

The State's Council was a public institution created in 1799 by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Among the institutions of the Fifth Republic its main role was to advise the government about the issuing of new laws.

It was possible to become a member of the State's Council after concluding the ENA (National School of Administration) or during one's professional life.

³⁰ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Fr Thouret to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 8th January 1822

Mr. de Montaiglon took interest in Mother Thouret's matter, and was ready to help her do the procedure required by the Ministry. He was ready to take charge of the Brief's translation if Mother Thouret would not been able to provide it.

He did all he could, he organized meetings and chaperoned Mother Thouret here and there.

When she wrote her « Justificatory Memoir » she attached to it a letter which she submitted first to Mr. Jordan and Mr. Montaiglon. The latter, following Mr. Jordan's advice added his own letter to that of Jeanne-Antide.

He also tried to show the Archbishop that he had been falsely informed about the three Sisters' lodgings, as slander had reached Mgr de Pressigny, saying that the Foundress had gone to stay opposite the Daughters of Charity to challenge their community. The Mother House of the Daughters of Charity had been in rue du Bac from 1815.³¹

He talked to Mgr de Pressigny in favour of Mother Thouret in many letters.

The Archbishop kept refusing his words: *«I took advice from the Council I established for the government of the diocese and ... I would be imprudent if I changed conduct ... »*

And finally: *«I regret you took the pain to write to me again about a matter about which I shall always answer as I already did ... I had reason to fear that her return to the houses of the Daughters of Charity of Besançon would be cause of troubles and divisions. »*

- **Mr Jordan**

It was Mr. de Montaiglon who mentioned his title and role in a letter to Mr. de Raimond father: he was « Master of Requests at the State's Council », that is a Member of the State's Council which had to prepare a report about the matters submitted to it, and at the same time he was « Director of Cult at the Ministry of Interior ». He added that he had been secretary at the Embassy in Rome under Mgr de Pressigny, to whom he remained close.

That explains why the Archbishop went to Mr. Jordan's house, and it was there that Jeanne-Antide met him.

- **Mr de Châtillon**

He dealt with ecclesiastic affaires at the Ministry of Interior.

Mr. de Montaiglon signalled to Jeanne-Antide that the Papal Brief had to be submitted to him after being translated.

- **Mr de Gérando**

Sr Christine introduced us to him in her conference in April 2019.

I recall only that he attended the Chapter in 1807 in Paris, and Jeanne-Antide addressed to him her requests about the houses she wished to get in Besançon.

She met him in Rome in 1810, and he was interested in the Naples' foundation.

On 17th January 1822, he wrote to Mr Macarel, a lawyer: *«Here come the good Sisters of Charity of Besançon with a Brief to be registered by the State's Council ... I entrust them to you and ask your wise advice for them. »*³²

³¹ Cf. Note n 26

³² Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Mr. de Gérando to the lawyer Macarel, Paris, 17th January 1822

- A person Jeanne-Antide did not meet in Paris, but who played an important part was **Mr. de Raimond**.

He lived in Besançon.

He was Inspector at the Post Office, and a Member of the Academy of Besançon, where he became the Vice-President and later was the Treasurer.

He was also administrator at the «Workhouse of Besançon », that is Bellevaux.

He followed initially the revolutionary ideas, then, he supported Napoleon and then, the King during the Restoration. He asked the Légion d'Honneur from King Louis XVIII.

Mr. de Montaiglon wrote to Mr. de Raimond on 21st March 1822: *«I come to inform you about the position of Madam Sr Thouret, Superior and Foundress of the Charity House in Besançon, and of her two companions. The fatal interdiction issued by Mgr our Archbishop aims at preventing them from returning to the heart of their Institute ...»*.

He clearly explained the reason: she had the Institute approved by the Pope. He also asked his «dear compatriot» to talk to the Archbishop to explain the situation to him.³³

However, as Mr. de Raimond greatly esteemed the Archbishop, and they often met and were quite friendly, he did not believe what his correspondent told him about Mgr de Pressigny ...

Therefore, he did not want to get involved: *«... a lay person as I am ... By what right should I judge a prelate who enjoy universal consideration ... ? »*

«If Mgr Archbishop would talk to me about it, I would, as member of the council of the Bellevaux workhouse, speak well about them, because I can only say good things, but beyond this ... what could I say ... »³⁴

- **Meeting with Mgr de Pressigny**

Finally, Jeanne-Antide met Mgr de Pressigny in December 1821, at the Ministry of Interior.

Jeanne-Antide wrote something about this meeting in one of her letters to Fr. Neyre: *«Meeting him I threw myself at his feet asking for his blessing. He gave me a hard answer: «No, I won't. »Then, he reproached me about many false things. I told him: «Monseigneur, allow me to explain so that you may know the truth. You have been deceived». He answered: «No, I do not want to hear you. Be quiet! » and he went on with other mortifying words».*

She continued: *«Two gentlemen (Mr Jordan and Mr de Montaiglon) who were there apologised to me and told me they were truly scandalized by this way of acting, and they would have never believed Mgr Archbishop would behave in such a way, had they not been there.»*

«His answer was very rude...He is a determined man, who does not want to listen ... I came to Paris to try to do something. I met the Nuncio many times; lately he received orders from Rome, confirming again the new Brief of the Holy Father ... He was sorry to see Bishops so little submitted to the Holy See»³⁵

³³ Id. Letter of Mr. de Montaiglon to Mr. de Raimond father, in Besançon. Paris, 21st March 1822.

Mr. de Montaiglon gave his letter to Mother Thouret *«I gave it to these ladies to bring it to you. »* Jeanne-Antide knew this long letter and she copied it, and considered it of great importance. (Comment of Mother Antoine de Padoue, L.D. page 373 French version).

³⁴ Id. Letter of Mr. de Raimond father to Mr. de Montaiglon, Besançon, 1st April 1822.

³⁵ Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Fr Neyre, Paris, December 1821.

Jeanne-Antide told also Cardinal Pacca about the meeting with Mgr. de Pressigny, letter 15th May 1823

In his turn Mr. de Montaiglon told his impressions to Mr. de Raimond: «*His apostolic zeal was closer to anger than to a pastor's attitude ...*»³⁶

In order to have the Papal Brief registered on 14th December 1819 by the government,

- « *Won't the Archbishop oppose it again?* » wrote Jeanne-Antide to Fr Neyre.
- « *The matter is not without difficulty...* » declared Mr. de Gérando to the lawyer Macarel.
- « *We have to use precaution and prudence, because of Mgr de Pressigny, who is in Paris... If it was not for him, there would not be any difficulty from the government.* » wrote Jeanne-Antide to Canon Gallinari.

³⁶ Id. Letter of Mr. de Montaiglon to Mr. de Raimond father, Paris, 21st March 1822.

Year 1822: Mother Thouret in Paris

In order to refute the accusations against her, the Foundress answered with the « **Justificatory Memoir**» on 2nd March 1822.

Elections in Besançon

In September, the ecclesiastic authority of Besançon proceeded to the **election of the Superior General**.

The Vicar General sent a circular letter to the Sisters dated 1st September «*The elections shall be held this year, on next 26th September, the day after the closing of the first of two retreats*».

« *Acts of the first elections* » 26th September 1822

«*Today twenty-sixth September, one thousand eight hundred twenty two, took place the election ... of Sr Catherine Barrois as Superior General of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Besançon, with the absolute majority of the votes... »*³⁷

The separation, already caused in 1820, at the end of the retreat held in April, with the appointment of a temporary Superior, became official on 26th September 1822.

News about the Institute

Besides the procedures to get the Brief registered, Mother Thouret went on directing her Institute, she kept in touch with priests, administrators, she did not forget her Sisters in Naples, in Sancey or in Savoy.

To Sr Geneviève in **Naples**, who asked advice about specific situations, well-known to Jeanne-Antide, she responded with a long letter, she sent also letters for the Great Vicar, for the Bishop of the place chosen for the new establishment, following well all the events of the house.³⁸

The Sisters in **Sancey** kept her informed about the progress of their small school, and of her niece Françoise, always studious and obedient, but also, Halas, about the sad situation in Besançon... The mail was very slow! On 10th January they received the letter dated 4th December, and on 17th January the one written on the 8th !³⁹

In **Saint-Paul** and **Thonon**, the houses kept going; waiting for postulants they opened a new establishment and gave all the news to Jeanne-Antide.⁴⁰

The news from **Bourg** were not as nice, as she received a letter from Sr Pauline telling about the submission of the Sisters to the Archbishop and the Superiors in Besançon, while she and other Sisters would leave.⁴¹

³⁷ Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon

³⁸ Archives at the General House in Rome. Cf. letters dated 7th March, 22nd April, 12th June, 21st July, 3rd November 1822, 21st January 1823

³⁹ Id. Cf. letters dated 17th January, 19th February, 8th May, 30th November 1822, 10th May 1823.

⁴⁰ Id. Cf. letters dated 24th April, 11th September, 21th October 1822

⁴¹ Id. Letter dated 18th January 1822

Her Friends and advisors, Fr Neyre, Mgr Narni, waited for the news and were totally devoted to her cause.

Her brother still supported her, wrote often to her keeping her updated with the latest news, and passed on to her the Sisters' letters. Jeanne-Antide also kept him informed about her decisions, she sent him letters for Mgr de Pressigny, and also to Mr. de Raimond...⁴²

The establishment in Crèches

In **Crèches**, within the diocese of Autun, the house had been closed by the Superiors in Besançon.⁴³ Yet, the Mayor wished to have a community of Sisters in his village, thus he asked Mother Thouret to send some Sisters!

She sent Sr Agnès Bouvard and Sr Philippine Mille to «*educate young people and care for the sick of the mentioned village.*»

As the Bishop of Autun was in Paris, Jeanne-Antide gave him the letter with the obedience destined to the Sisters.

The «Hospice of charity» was then under Jeanne-Antide's responsibility.⁴⁴

Another request came through Mr. de Raimond, a noble family in Clermont en Auvergne wished to have an establishment similar to that of Bellevaux in Besançon. A large sum had already been put aside, and there could also be a novitiate there.⁴⁵

Jeanne-Antide hastened to respond to the letter affirmatively.

Yet, «*the family asking for the establishment is very well acquainted with Mgr de Pressigny. If he comes to know the project he will certainly write to him ...*» her brother, who was a priest, told Jeanne-Antide.⁴⁶

As expected the project never materialized.

Villecerf

Yet in the midst of expectations and uncertainties, in spite of her concern for the Sisters and the establishments, and the suffering caused by the Institute taken away from her, the year 1822 brought an unexpected opening.

⁴² Id. Cf. letters dated 28th November 1821, 8th January, 1st February, 12th March, 9th and 24th April, 4th, 9th and 29th May 1822, 27th October 1822

⁴³ Closure certainly due to this consideration: *Mgr de Chaffoy said that it was not suitable to make establishments which could not be visited every year due to their distance»* wrote Sr Marie-Anne Bon in her notes, and the department of Saône-et-Loire belonged to such category.

⁴⁴ In the minute of the Council of the Congregation of Besançon on 30th April 1822 we read: «*Respond to the parish priest in CREICHE: the Sisters he mentioned do not belong to that Congregation, as they separated long ago.*»

⁴⁵ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Mr. de Raimond to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 27th February 1822.

⁴⁶ Id. Letter of Fr Thouret to Jeanne-Antide, Besançon, 12th March 1822

The Lord of **Villecerf**,⁴⁷ in the diocese of Meaux, was looking for religious to replace the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul who had left on 1st May 1820, and used to run a school and take care of the poor sick in their homes. He had asked the Benedictines Sisters in Paris, who suggested to ask Mother Thouret.

Accompanied by Sr Elisabeth Bouvard, the Sisters reached Villecerf on 2nd May 1822, and lodged in a large rural house.

They re-established the Charity Office, and a small pharmacy to provide the poor and sick of five or six villages.⁴⁸

Other Sisters joined Sr Elisabeth later on, among them also her sister Françoise, in religion Sr Agnès and Sr Félicité Bontron.⁴⁹

The new community in Villecerf was for Jeanne-Antide like the promise for a future «province of France », and its proximity to Paris could be an asset. She had great hopes for this house.

She had prolonged her stay there⁵⁰ to ensure that the Sisters could remain there. In the beginning of the year 1823, she sent a copy of the Rule approved by the Pope to the parish priest of the neighbouring village of Villemaréchal, who was also the Sisters' confessor.

Sr Elisabeth died at Villecerf on 16th March 1863 aged 91, and was buried there.

⁴⁷ Hunting deer had been a common sport. Villecerf was part of the Gâtinais, included in the French kingdom in 1061, when Philippe I was King.

⁴⁸ «Historical notes. Archives at the General House in Rome, dossier Savoy »

⁴⁹ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of the Sisters in Villecerf, 21st October 1822

⁵⁰ Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to the parish priest of Villemaréchal, Paris, at the end of February or the beginning of February 1823. The parish priest responded on 8th February expressing his satisfaction following the reception of the Institute's Rule.

Year 1823: Return to Naples

After spending a second winter in Paris without any result; «*The situation is always the same*»⁵¹ wrote Jeanne-Antide to Sr Geneviève on 21st January 1823. Therefore, she thought of returning to Naples, and as the French government did not wish to oppose the Archbishop of Besançon, remaining in Paris was useless. The Nuncio persuaded her to give up for the moment and go back: «*...he advised me to wait for the time of the Providence.*»⁵²

Did Jeanne-Antide come to Besançon ?⁵³

No document says anything about this. Tradition alone was collected at the end of the XIX century, and the Notes edited for the process of beatification in Naples in 1900 and the process in Besançon in 1918, contained testimonies about Mother Thouret's coming to Besançon in April 1823.

It was a painful journey during which Mother Thouret came to the door of the house on the Grande rue, but she was not received: «*I heard talking about the return of Mother Thouret in Besançon in 1823; and of her suffering seeing the doors of the houses she had founded shut... She contented herself with crying and remaining outside of the houses whose walls she kissed, obliged to request hospitality to an outsider.*»

The «*outsider*» was Mademoiselle Ligier, who came from Sancey, and lived then in Battant.⁵⁴ Sr Fébronie Thouret, niece of Jeanne-Antide, tells us: «*In Besançon Sr Jeanne-Antide, with Sr Rosalie, had to hide in the house of a lady known to them, and had to wear a secular habit.*»⁵⁵

According to another testimony, Jeanne-Antide lodged at the prince of Arenberg's, rue des Martelots : «*when the good Mother returned to Besançon thinking of going back to her community, she was accommodated by my family for eight days. Every day she went to knock at the door of her dear community but they always refused to let her in. She came back and from her room she sadly looked at the chapel's windows ...*»⁵⁶

Some elderly Sisters told that as Mother Thouret could not go into the establishments, the Sisters of Bellevaux organized an encounter «*on a boat on the Doubs...*»

Sr Marguerite Paillot, one of the first postulants received by Jeanne-Antide, and former Novice Mistress, died on 24th April 1823. According to tradition Mother Thouret attended the funeral without being noticed.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Sr Geneviève Boucon, Paris, 21st January 1823

⁵² Id. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Cardinal Pacca, without place, most likely Thonon, 15th May 1823

⁵³ About this, cf. Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon: Process of beatification in Naples 1900, Process in Besançon 1918, Note from the Tradition, and references mentioned.

⁵⁴ «*She had to stay at the house of a person from Sancey who lived in Besançon, called Mademoiselle Ligier*» Calhiat in «*La Mère Thouret, Fondatrice des Sœurs de la Charité sous la protection de Saint Vincent de Paul – Histoire de sa vie et de ses œuvres*», 1892.

⁵⁵ Archives at the General House in Rome. A.G. 1882 «*Union Besançon*» : «*Copy of Fébronie Thouret's manuscript, date supposed 1882, about Besançon*»

⁵⁶ Letter of Sr Marie-Léopold to Mother Marie-Anna, Groffe 6th May 1918

⁵⁷ Mother Antoine de Padoue Duffet in «*The first companions of Jeanne-Antide*» page 92

Always according to tradition she asked to tell some Sisters, who «*could not resist the wish of seeing her*» and wanted to visit her at Mademoiselle Ligier's house, «*not to expose themselves to the excommunication threatened by Mgr de Pressigny.* »

« ... many Sisters tried to see their Mother who did not accept to receive them. »

Jeanne-Antide wrote to Cardinal Pacca in May 1823 that she had abstained «*from going to the houses outside the diocese of Besançon* » ... How did she come to Besançon then? «*defying the Archbishop's authority in Besançon itself? How could she put the Sisters in such a difficult situation, exposing them to the risk of disobeying the ecclesiastic authority?* »⁵⁸

According to Mother Antoine de Padoue «*Many things are still unknown about the journey back to Besançon, and we are not even sure that it really took place.*».

Did Jeanne-Antide go to Sancey ?

The Sisters in Sancey wrote on 10th May to Fr Thouret: «*it was a great consolation for us the letter we received from our dear Sr Rosalie. The hope she gave us to see her again together with our good Mother, brought us back to life.* »⁵⁹

However, they had not yet seen her when they wrote to her on 11th June 1823: «*How painful it is and how much it costs to us knowing that you are so close ... neither be able to see you nor to relieve you ...* »⁶⁰

At that time Jeanne-Antide was certainly already in Thonon or in Saint Paul...

It is, therefore, sure that she never went to Sancey.

In the same letter dated 11th June it is also said that Françoise-Joséphine, the daughter of her brother Claude-Antoine, was attending the Sisters' school in Sancey. «*... she is always kind and very talented...* »

The girl had expressed the wish of being a religious and wanted to follow her aunt. In a Memoir after having become Sr Fébronie she wrote: «*If my father would agree she would have taken me with her in Italy. Mother Thouret preceded us and went to the hospital in Thonon, asking Sr Rosalie to wait for me, and I left straight from the boarding school ... We left for Thonon, and joined my aunt, we found her sitting in the garden of Thonon's hospital; after spending 15 days in Thonon, we went up to Saint-Paul, and later from there to Italy* »⁶¹

Where did Sr Rosalie waited for her? In Besançon as suggested by Mgr Trochu, with her father taking his daughter there?⁶²

The niece informs us about the itinerary followed by the Foundress.

⁵⁸ Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon - Conference of Mother Antoine de Padoue : «The Papal Approval», 1989

⁵⁹ Archives at the General House in Rome. Letter of Sr Brigitte Jannot to Fr Sébastien-Joseph Thouret, Sancey, 10th May 1823

⁶⁰ Id. Letter of the Sisters in Sancey to Jeanne-Antide, Sancey, 11th June 1823

⁶¹ Memoir concerning the separation of the Sisters of Besançon, presumably issued in 1882. Cf. Mother Antoine de Padoue Duffet in «*The first companions of Jeanne-Antide* » page 399

⁶² Mgr Trochu in «*Saint Jeanne-Antide Thouret* » Brown edition 1974, page 451

Stop in Thonon and Saint Paul

Jeanne-Antide remained few days in Thonon, then, she went to **Saint-Paul** where she would remain from May to September 1823.

The Sisters in Thonon, who no longer were under the jurisdiction of Besançon, received, on 4th September 1822, from the King of Turin and the Archbishop of Chambéry, the letter « patente » authorising them to live within the Duchy.

Fr Neyre, however, had already decided the temporary opening of a novitiate, before getting the official authorization, as it was urgent to have a novitiate in Savoy, to respond to the requests of other parishes wishing to have the Sisters.

In October 1821, Sr Victoire Bartholomot and Sr Agnès Bouvard arrived in Thonon from Bourg, and from there they went on to Saint-Paul, to establish a small community in charge of running a free school, serving the poor and caring for the sick.

Quickly they soon gathered many children coming from the neighbouring villages, they were so many that Sr Victoire had to open a boarding. She shared with Jeanne-Antide the progress made by the school: « *We have 20 boarders and 4 more are coming in a few days ...* »

Many asked to become novices, thus, Sr Victoire was entrusted the formation of novices.

The parish priest, Fr Gaud, did not mind to spend money for the house: « *... he had dormitories built for the girls and one bedroom for the Sisters.* »

Therefore, Mother Thouret was able to rest in Saint Paul, comforted by the success of the house.

Death of Mgr de Pressigny

There, the Foundress received the news of **Mgr de Pressigny's death**, which had taken place on 2nd May. She then explained the situation of her Institute to Cardinal Pacca, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and asked: « *Has the time of the Providence come? As God has just called him to Himself ...* »⁶³

Conclusion

Then, « *...I am totally submitted to what God wants for my Institute, I put it under the powerful protection of the Holy See, and I await peacefully what its high Wisdom and deep enlightenment will deign to order...* »⁶⁴

She returned to Thonon to travel by Mr Cristin coach, recommended by trustworthy people. She was accompanied by Sr Rosalie, and her other niece the future Sr Fébronie, and by « *three postulants* »⁶⁵ certainly from Thonon, as Fr Neyre asked in his letter, written at the end of the year, to greet his « *former parishioners* ». ⁶⁶

⁶³ Archives at the General House in Rome. Minute. Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Cardinal Pacca, 15th May 1823

⁶⁴ Id.

⁶⁵ Archives at the General House in Rome. « *The last three years of Sr Jeanne-Antide Thouret's life* », manuscript written by Sr Fébronie Thouret, niece of Sainte Jeanne-Antide, in Carouge (Switzerland) in 1884

⁶⁶ «The Province of Savoy» First volume 1810-1860, page 22

Coming back from Naples, Mr Cristin stopped at the hospital of Thonon: *«he brought us a letter, he told us many nice things, he expressed the great joy he had in having the honour to take you ... »*⁶⁷

Again in Turin, then in **Rome**... She arrived there during the conclave. Pope Pious VII had died on 20th August 1823. The Cardinals had gathered on 2nd September to elect his successor, which shall be Leo XII.

Sr Fébronie wrote: *«During the journey, she was deeply sorry to hear of the loss of the glorious Pope Pious VII, from whom she had received so great spiritual favours ... We remained several days in Rome to visit the tomb, St Peter's church, St Mary Major, St John in Lateran, etc. etc. »*⁶⁸ After their return to **Naples** at the end of September, life at Regina Coeli went on with the concerns about sisters, houses, activities, visits, correspondence, the hospital's management, the service to the poor ...⁶⁹ Weakened and affected by diabetes *«the blade worn out the sheath. »*

However, as Mother Antoine de Padoue said: *«She never spoke of her suffering, yet three years later she died because of her wound. »*⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ Mgr Trochu, in « *Saint Jeanne-Antide Thouret* » Brown edition 1974, page 456

⁷⁰ Archives at the Provincial House in Besançon - Mother Antoine de Padoue: conference about «The Papal approval », 1989