

## MARY EUPHRASIA, HER RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAITY

Mary Euphrasia's relationships with the laity were numerous and diverse. To measure the importance of these relationships, we need to measure the cultural changes which separate us from our Foundress. Here are just some of the important aspects:

- Like all religious in 19th century Mary Euphrasia lived a cloistered life. To cross the threshold of the green door at 3, rue Brault, she had to have the Bishop's permission. She could not visit anyone; consult an expert, without the express permission of the local bishop.
- In the Church, a well-ordered "society", if religious carried little weight compared with the clergy, compared with the laity, they were way out in front. To work with the laity as partners, in an open and trusting partnership was not at all frequent at this time.
- In the bourgeoisie society of 19th century, social convention was very strong. The young nobleman marrying the poor young factory worker... is the subject of a novel. In reality, for "good families", a mismatch was seen as a drama. In the same vein, the fact of a young girl getting pregnant before marriage was regarded as a disgrace for the whole family.

We have to keep these realities in our minds so as to be able to measure the "novelty" of certain of Mary Euphrasia's attitudes towards certain lay people. In the name of Jesus the Good Shepherd, she brought down well established social barriers.

1. Let us be aware of one fact:

**Mary Euphrasia was in personal contact with many lay people** : workmen at the Mother House, neighbours, instigators of charitable works in France and indeed aboard.

### Let us leaf through the Archives :

In 1855 during the work on the tunnel linking the Mother House to St. Nicholas' Abbey, Mary Euphrasia was walking through the streets to look at the new work. To the great surprise of the sister who was with her, the people living nearby came up to her, gave her news of one or another, thanked her for her help, asked her for this and that. . .

*I never imagined that she would know all these people, asking about their children and their difficulties<sup>1</sup> she said.*

On 6th January 1840, Mary Euphrasia wrote to Mary of St. Clement Pattin as follows:  
*Such a start to the year, 100 letters, 50 visits to the parlour, 10 departures and how many crosses<sup>2</sup>*

*Our Mother is never out of the parlour. . .*

Her secretaries complain. Echoing this we read in the Process:

*No-one will ever know how many marriages she reconciled, how many parents she saved from disgrace in her meetings in the parlour!<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Witness N° 1 - Ordinary Process, M. of Ste Thérèse (Adeline-Sophie) Letoçart, p. 192

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Mary Euphrasia to M. of St. Clement Pattin, 6th January 1840

<sup>3</sup> Witness N° 4 - Ordinary Process, Mary of St. Jean Chrysostome Royer, p

All that represents a lot of relationships !

\* Let us take another example from Adeline-Sophie, (Marie de Ste Thérèse) Letocart, one of the foundresses of Santiago in Chile.

*One of our sisters told me that the Servant of God, often had the opportunity, when going to Nazareth, to pass by the house where her parents who were of poor and humble condition lived and that she would have the carriage stopped so as she could talk to them.<sup>4</sup>*

This same Sister testified that before leaving for Chile, she was permitted to spend a whole day, on her own with her mother. This permission seems quite normal to us today, but at that time, Sisters never returned home and never travelled alone. This permission constituted a "transgression" of the Rule, testifying to understanding, to humanity.

Another example: In 1846, Mary Euphrasia invited the Lady Benefactors of the Good Shepherd in Poitiers to the Mother House : clothing ceremony in the morning, lunch, visit of the house in the afternoon, an "Open Day"<sup>5</sup> and also a desire for communication and relationship.

Let us look at yet another example of a different sort altogether. Eugène Boré (1809 1878) professor at the College of France, orientalist of great renown, came to meet the Community and talk about his perception of the Moslem world. It was on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1843. He was passing through Angers and Mary Euphrasia invited him<sup>6</sup>... for 10 years this man from Anjou had been travelling through several Asian countries. He had been led, by different circumstances to open two schools in Persia. He drew from his experiences a lesson that he communicated to Mary Euphrasia Pelletier.

*At that moment it was practically impossible to convert the Moslems ; I had to find other means of apostolate than simple preaching : the best was the school, open to all children without distinction of race or religion, on the one hand this allowed for the dissipation of the errors Islam has about Christians and on the other, it raised the standing of local Christians which was at rock bottom.*

*Parallel to this, charitable institutions such as hospitals and orphanages, gained the sympathy of the population<sup>7</sup>.*

A bachelor of 34 in the cloister ! It is true that later he entered the Lazarist Fathers and even became their Superior General! The Mother House Archives possess 3 letters from Eugène Boré to Mary Euphrasia, which shows us that the relationship continued.

We would need to talk about all the visitors mentioned in the texts of the time in order to show the multiplicity and variety of relationships Mary Euphrasia had, from Pauline Jaricot<sup>8</sup> working for the Propagation of the Faith, or Mme de Galembert<sup>9</sup> who had been accompanied spiritually since 1825 in Tours or again, Mme Jacobsen<sup>10</sup>, the wife of the Mayor of Noirmoutier in 1852... to the butcher in the rue St Jacques who testified:

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<sup>4</sup> Witness N° 2- Ordinary Process, Mary of Ste Thérèse (Adeline-Sophie) Letocart, p. 191

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Mary Euphrasia Pelletier of 29th March 1846

<sup>6</sup> Mother House Archives, Annals 3, p.51

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Daniel Rops - The era of the Revolutions

<sup>8</sup> Mother House Archives, Annals 2, p.8

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Portais, Biography, Vol. 1, chap. 7- p. 129 in 1898 edition

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Mme Jacobsen, 16th August 1852

*I loved her like a mother. When she died, I was more upset than when I lost my parents*<sup>11</sup>.

Multiplicity of relationship... but what relationships ? What sort of relationships?

**Let us analyse five situations more closely.**

### **Laurence GUITAUD**

A Savoyard (at this time Savoy belonged to the Kingdom of Piedmont), of humble origins : sixth child of a modest delicatessen owner in Chambéry . For health reasons (she was coughing blood - which means she had tuberculosis), she had to leave the Carmel she had entered at 18. Returned to her family she was considered "delicate", she decided to commit herself to good works. First of all she worked at home and used the proceeds of her work to help the 45 women prisoners in Chambéry and their children. In fact she became the auxiliary chaplain to the prison chaplain, Fr. Maurice Revoire. This led her to ask herself what happened to the young women when they got out of prison. She thought of taking them into her own home but the clergy were against it. Through a combination of circumstances Laurence Guitaud came into contact with the Good Shepherd in Grenoble in 1838 at the same time as Mary Euphrasia was travelling to Rome.

First meeting of the two women in Le Puy in April 1838

*Unfortunately we do not have any details, say the Good Shepherd Archives of Chambéry, on the mutual impression Laurence and the Blessed Mother made on each other, these two souls, both ardent and passionate for good ; but we can conjecture that a profound sympathy must have been born out of this meeting, for, if they were never to be sisters by habit and external way of living, there were indeed by sentiment and zeal for souls.*<sup>12</sup>

Mary Euphrasia Pelletier gave Laurence the Constitutions. At the end of May, Laurence rented a house and welcomed the first young girl, Maria, "in the spirit of the Good Shepherd Constitutions". Mary Euphrasia visited her on her return from Rome and Laurence Guitaud succeeded in getting permission from Mr. Martinet for the opening of a house of the Good Shepherd in Chambéry. On 12 January 1839, the first four Sisters arrived in Chambéry with the Bishop's approval, but on condition that they were self-sufficient. So, Laurence Guitaud, not forgetting her prison work, made herself the fund raiser and publicity agent for the Good Shepherd. She went as far as Aix-les-Bains, Fribourg, Berne, Turin, Lyon, Ars, Paris... She collected large sums of money... at the cost of fatigue, rebuffs - one day she was spat at in the street. She worked in the aristocratic and political worlds and was instrumental in preparing several foundations, notably Turin and Paris.

Mary Euphrasia saw her a second time in 1843 and if, at the present time, we have not found the correspondence between them we know that it existed (by allusions in other correspondence). The Mother House possesses several souvenirs of Mlle Guitaud a portrait, several travel permits signed by King Charles-Albert, a picture of the Blessed Virgin painted by Laurence herself and offered to Mary Euphrasia...

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<sup>11</sup> Witness N° 20- Ordinary Process, Jean-Baptiste Schafihäuser, p. 1017/1018

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Secret - The Good Shepherd in Chambéry. Chambéry, 1940, p. 46

What can we conclude from all this for our subject today: Mary Euphrasia recognized in Laurence Guitaud a collaborator, not only a fund raiser. She shared the same faith, the same desire to help these "poor Women", to go out to meet them, to get the well off interested in their fate. If, from the first meeting, Mary Euphrasia confided the Constitutions to her, she did not put any pressure on her to enter the Good Shepherd. She recognized a partner, one who had a different vocation to hers.

### **The Countess of GRANVILLE**

Issue of the very old nobility, Caroline de Beaufort, was born in Anvers on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1793. Because of the events of the Revolution, her family, like many others, like Mme d'Andigné, like the Count de Neuville, emigrated. Caroline's early infancy was spent abroad. She continued her education in Amiens under the personal direction of Madame Barat, the future St. Madeleine Sophie Barat. Caroline would keep up a correspondence with her old teacher, even after her marriage to the Count de la Granville on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1818. After her marriage she went to live in the Beauchamps Castle, in a little village of 770 inhabitants about 15 kms from Lille in the north of France. Life there was quite austere for a young woman, especially as the marriage was childless. Encouraged by Sophie Barat who spoke to her about "spiritual motherhood", the Countess de la Granville became the great benefactress of the Works of Lille and the surrounding district.

She made contact with Mary Euphrasia Pelletier on the advice of Sophie Barat and she "tasted" the work of the Good Shepherd : *This venerable Mother understood my soul!*

She founded the Good Shepherd House in Loos near Lille in the north of France. She would come and eat in the dining room with the young girls several times a year, invite the "little ones" to tea in her castle. She herself had taken a private vow of poverty "she sold her jewels and the unnecessary furniture in her bedroom". This great lady, writer, benefactress of the whole region would build a church, give large suffice of money to the Jesuits, to the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, to the Sisters of the Sacred Beart, to the Marist Brothers, but with the Good Shepherd, she shared a little of the life. Mary Euphrasia wrote to Mary of St. Dosithée Joseph about her thus :

*She is so beloved of God that her works will always be blessed.*<sup>13</sup>

### **Madame Geneviève du Vau Countess d'Andigné**

Much better known in the Congregation, the "privileged laywoman" lived in the Convent from 21<sup>st</sup> November 1833 to her death on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1846. She knew Mary Euphrasia well before 1833. In fact she had been a childhood friend of Mother Marie-Hippolyte de Boëtmilliau who became Superior at Our Lady of Charity in Tours on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1819 (Mary Euphrasia would succeed her as Superior in 1825). On her return from exile in 1801, Mme d'Andigné strongly supported and encouraged the religious in the reviving of the monasteries and the return to community life after the Revolution.

Mme d'Andigné was a friend and benefactress to Mary Euphrasia whom she called "Mother of Hope" one day. She was committed to the process undertaken in view of the Generalate: the first request sent by Mgr. Montault to Rome names "Mme the Countess d'Andigné, sister-in-law to the late Mgr. d'Andigné, Bishop of Nantes, a very respectable and pious lady", as guarantor for the Community<sup>14</sup> She was in contact with Fr. Vaurès, a Friars Minor Conventual's, in Rome. She interceded with the Jesuit Fathers whom she knew well so as to promote the apostolic work. She even made the journey to Paris to meet them.

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<sup>13</sup> Letter to Sr. M. of St. Dosithée, undated, probably, 1845

<sup>14</sup> Mother House Archives, Annals 1 (4) p. 80

At 77 years of age, she accompanied Mary Euphrasia to Rome in April 1838 in her carriage. . For the most part she shared the life of the community. She made meditation, said the Office: her prie-dieu was in the Sisters' Choir behind the stalls.

The benefactress not only financed the works of the Congregation but she was a friend and collaborator with our Foundress, putting her relations, her name and her advice at the service of the Good Shepherd.

### **Monsieur Augustin Le Roy de la Potherie de Neuville**

Like Mme d'Andigné, it is out of the question to share here all that concerns M. de Neuville, a bachelor, devout believer, descendant of a family belonging to the very ancient nobility. He would put his whole fortune at the service of the Good Shepherd, to the point of cruelly deceiving his nephew and heir, M. de Genouilhac<sup>15</sup>

He too was committed to the business affairs of the Congregation. During a court case in 1842, M. de Neuville represented the Community and defended its interests. He followed the life of the House in detail : offering the meal when a Bishop came to visit, warm blankets during a cold snap, a bottle of white wine for the chanters during the liturgical feasts or when the Offices were very long. He set up the community library . . . Sometimes his advice was contrary to Mother Pelletier's plans. For example, he strongly discouraged the foundation in Algeria ... which took place all the same!

In the Mother House Archives there are 700 letters from M. de Neuville to Mary Euphrasia Pelletier. . . and one single letter of all the ones the foundress sent to him. According to M. de Neuville's replies, it is possible to deduce that there was a certain spiritual direction of M. Neuville by Mary Euphrasia.

### **Marie-Alexandrine Bertin**

She came forward spontaneously to witness in favour of Mary Euphrasia during the beatification process: she was 87 years old at the time. She was the daughter of the Post Master (today we could call him the Carrier) "who assured the correspondence between the principle towns around Angers". Her husband took over the business when her father retired. Let us listen to her talking about Mary Euphrasia during her testimony<sup>16</sup>:

*I knew her personally. In 1829 she came to Angers in one of our carriages... We stayed in contact throughout her lifetime and I often had to do business with her about the movement of Sisters... She asked us to take good care of her Sisters when they were travelling. I always brought them into a private room and I heard them talking... My husband couldn't keep quiet about all he say and heard of the sisters... They cheerfulness over the inconveniences of the journeys amazed him . . .*

*We never had any business difficulties with her... When she invited us to look at the map of her foundations, I didn't think it was presumption on her part, but rather desire for the glory of Gad and maybe the thought that she might interest us in her work and then we might be able to help her in some way.*

*She was always very gracious to me; several times she did me the honour of embracing me. Several times I was invited to the religious feasts at the Good Shepherd... I had great confidence in her.*

*I often saw her in the parlour where we would talk. The time that this worthy religious gave me seemed so precious that I had a scruple about taking up so much of it through my visits...*

I don't think there is anything to add to this.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mary Euphrasia's Letters, Vol. V, p. 423, note 6

<sup>16</sup> Witness N° 14- Ordinary Process, M. Alexandrine Bertin, p. 966-968

Men and women, from humble and well-off milieus, friendly relationships or gratefully courteous... *she was in contact with many nations and with all the social classes*<sup>17</sup> .

## 2. An analysis of some elements

- The title "Mary Euphrasia Pelletier and the laity" immediately makes us think of the "financial help" given by lay benefactors to the work of the Good Shepherd. Certainly this financial assistance was indispensable. At that time none of the structures for social help that we have today existed and this whole sector was financed by private means.

The only exception to this was from 1852- 1885 when the Good Shepherd received for the underage detainees the board and lodging previously paid to the prisons where they had been before coming to the Good Shepherd : 50 - 80 centimes per day, the normal salary for a day' s work being about 4 or 5 francs. (Added to this there were a certain number of expenses pertaining to this administration, for the transfer of the detainees for example)

Sometimes, as a special case, such and such a house would receive payment from a town council or department, but these gifts were neither regular nor very large, hence the place of lay benefactors having the will and means to complete the help given by responsible ecclesiastics. Each "Community Letter" contained the names of these benefactors and their gifts of interventions (organization of a lottery, finding work...). Sometimes the se benefactresses (for most of the time it was the women) were grouped together in a Good Shepherd Association. The meetings were held at the Good Shepherd and these women followed the progress of the work. Mary Euphrasia wrote thus to M. of St. Stanislas Bédouet on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1834:

*The two letters you wrote from Grenoble have been passed on to a great number of ladies who, touched by your zeal in Poitiers, cried out with tears of tenderness: "We want to do as much. " So, tell our dear benefactresses: "They have saved the two houses " .*

In 1845, Mary Euphrasia organized a veritable media operation for the foundation of Cairo: 10. 000 leaflets were printed and sent out; a secretariat of four sisters was set up. The Mother House committed itself to giving information about the foundation every year, and this was done. This time the leaflets were sent to people known to the Congregation, in certain embassies and consulates, the most active of the benefactors being charged with the diffusion of the information.

As soon as there is question of money and ambiguity can arise : what dependence can exist between the financial backers and the religious community, today we would speak of social actors.

With the lay benefactors, notably M. de Neuville, the accent was put on the common mission, on the Kingdom of God! Thus, some months before M. de Neuville's death, Mary Euphrasia sent him feast day greetings and wrote:

*"How can I thank you for all the good you have brought to this mission ? Oh, if you could see all the religious vocations who, thanks to you, have been possible, all the conversions which have happened in this house ...»*

Mary Euphrasia linked the financial help M. de Neuville brought to the realisation of vocations, conversions, so, to spiritual realities. The stakes were less the success of a social or humanitarian project, but directly the evangelisation of the world.

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<sup>17</sup> Witness N°4 - Ordinary Process, M. of St. Jean Chrysostome Royer, p. 650

- **Another aspect of the relationship between the community and the laity is that of collaboration, mutual help.**

In 1848 the economic crisis which had Europe in its grip took on a tragic dimension for the Irish people. Millions of exiles left their country and the poor flooded into the Good Shepherd as to all the charitable institutions. The Community itself was without any resources. The Superior, Sr. Mary of St. Louis Gonzaga de Baligand, brought a Belgian worker to Limerick. Her brief was to pass on her knowledge to the young Irish women, thus giving them work and procuring resources for the house. The community in Mons found the lay lace-maker... thanks to lay friends of the house.

In Avignon in 1841, the niece of one of the benefactors, Mlle Aymard, would be "Mistress of Boarder" to fill in for a sick sister<sup>18</sup>

M. de Neuville would take the first steps in English towards the foundation of London. He put the Good Shepherd in touch with others.

Here we have an important aspect of the role of the laity in the life of the Good Shepherd: not only financial aid, administrative or apostolic steps to be taken ... but also concrete service. The lay friends could go where the sisters could not go. They brought caution to the Work and moral support to Mary Euphrasia through the people they knew and their experience.

- Another dimension of this collaboration touches on **understanding and friendship**. For Mary Euphrasia, M. de Neuville was the liaison with whom to discuss a foundation, an opportunity for construction, a renovation we'd say today. M. de Neuville's letters, for the most part preserved, are a mine of information on this subject. Thus, we see him meeting postulants and sharing with Mary Euphrasia his impression of such and such a young woman. His opinion is not determining - it is one of the proofs - and is formulated with prudence. You might find this practice surprising, but M. de Neuville was really a partner, participating in the life of the house.

How could Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, cloistered, middle class, without any personal fortune, without contacts through her family, without any other experience than the boarding school in Tours and the Convent, how could she have extended the Congregation throughout the world without the participation of lay people? Even if this participation does not explain all our history, it is impossible to neglect this aspect.

Mary Euphrasia trusted certain lay people; she worked with them "so that God might reign in all hearts", each in his own state of life.

- Regarding M. de Neuville, we have to speak of **spiritual friendship**. The best proof of this would be Mary Euphrasia's reaction to the Count de Neuville's death: Mary Euphrasia was sorrowful but she resolved to *honour his memory by perfecting more and more his work and extending it throughout the universe*. This is the same text as the circular letter of 4<sup>th</sup> December 1843 from the Mother House announcing M. de Neuville's death.

In the same vein, Mary Euphrasia wrote to M. of St. John of the Cross David on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1843:

*...alas my dear daughter, the sad death of our incomparable Father has plunged me into an immense torrent of tears, accompanied by a profound peace, an intimate*

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<sup>18</sup> Letter to M. of St. Felicity Ruffieux, 19th May 1841

*conviction as if this holy Father is delighting in God, he watches over us and works great things !*

The proof the quality of this friendship is on the one hand the profound peace that Mary Euphrasia said she felt, and on the other, the desire to be even more "apostolic".

Around the "Holy Work" Mary Euphrasia gathered and collaborated with people of diverse social origins and situations: single people, couples, simple, well-known. Such as Laurence Guitaud, daughter of a pork butcher who got Mme la Vicountess de Lamartine so interested in women in difficulties that she founded the house in Paris. Mary Euphrasia "challenged" society regarding prisoners of 8 and 10 years old, slaves sold in the markets. Mme de la Granville sat in the dinning-room in Loos beside young delinquent adolescents. M. de Neuville would die, in poverty, like Pauline Jaricot, the daughter of a business man in Lyon.

- **Rarely expressed, it is true, but real nonetheless, Mary Euphrasia's faithfilled vision of the vocation of the laity in the conformism of her time astonishes us.**

Let us read together some extracts from a letter Mary Euphrasia wrote to M. of St. Claire Godelier, the Superior in Namur on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1840:

*First of all, let us bless God for all the signal benefits he accords Namur... Mme Kinet is a rich treasure for us, she is the best of mothers, and she will be so for the beautiful foundation of Brussels. Yes, assuredly, this worthy mother must be involved in this great work. We have asked her to make the journey and see everything for herself, to address herself in everything to Mgr. the Archbishop of Malines... God, my dear daughters, will enlighten each of you.*

A little remark: *She (Mme Kinet) is a rich treasure for us... this worthy mother must be involved in this great work...* Faced with the apostolic service asked for from Brussels, the Sister and the lay woman will each play their part, but the Holy Spirit will enlighten both of them. Before the Holy Spirit there is no one more privileged than another for the mission. He gives abundantly to all. There is no superiority of vocation, simply diversity of services.

### **In Conclusion**

We would like to know more about Mary Euphrasia and the laity... The documents preserved here in Angers are like the tip of the iceberg. We are prisoners of a time which preserved the traces of relationships which could be qualified as "honourable" and more! Little is known of what we would call the "ordinary folk". No doubt, letters lie sleeping in private archives and all that is "known only to God".

What marvels of undoubted devotion and what spiritual journeys of such and such a person: I would like to evoke the example of Mlle Ranay, a wealthy benefactress of the convent in Louisville. She was 24 years old. Called to the religious life, she entered with the Sisters Magdalens in Louisville then asked for a transfer to the Sisters Magdalens in Angers 'to live a life known only to God". She was Magdalen of St. Augustine of the Cross. She died on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1866 in Angers at the age of 39 years!

Let us finish with these words from Mary Euphrasia :

*To God, to Jesus, to Mary be the glory, the honour, the love !*  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 1833, to M. of St. Stanislas Bédouet

*God does marvels for our works...*  
27<sup>th</sup> April 1835, to M. of St. Stanislas Bédouet

*My dearest daughter, I can't tell you what is happening in the Work! There is something divine, something extraordinary that I can 't explain.*

14th June 1839, to M. of St. Stanislas Bédouet

*The Work is great but the designs of God are greater still !*

25<sup>th</sup> July 1840, to M. of St. Felicity Ruffieux

Sr. Odile Laugier