CHAPTER IV

A NEW STORM GATHERS

As Sister Rosalie took up the service of those who were poor in the Mouffetard area, the Company of the Daughters of Charity and France itself were still rebuilding and redefining themselves after the turmoil of the Revolution of 1789. When the young Jeanne-Marie Rendu and her two companions arrived at the Motherhouse in May 1802, the seminary had been reopened. A decree of the Napoleonic government, dated 16 October 1802, seemed to assure the re-establishment of the Company. It stated the following rights and prohibitions:

Article 1 – The Sisters, called of Charity, are authorized, as in the past, to consecrate themselves to the service of the sick in hospices and parishes and to the instruction of poor girls.

Article 2 – They will be allowed to wear their usual habit.

Article 3 – They will be in a religious order under the jurisdiction of the bishops; they shall not correspond with any foreign superior.

Article 4 – In the service of the sick, they shall be subject to the administrations of the hospices and required to conform to the regulations of the hospice in which they serve.

Article 5 – They can accept pupils [candidates] only in their house in Paris.

Article 6 – To this end, the national house called ... is placed at their disposition.

Article 7 – They shall open their schools only with the authorization of and under the supervision of the local authorities.

Article 8 – The infirmed sisters or those no longer serving
because of age are supported at the expense of the hospice where they became ill or grew old.

Article 9 – The Ministers of the Interior and of Finance are charged with implementation.

Signed by Napoléon Bonaparte and by the Minister of Cult, Monsieur Portalis

Be that as it may, the aforementioned Statutes would not be officially approved until 1809 and not without considerable internal and external tribulation.

Sister Deleau was allowed to accept candidates and to train them for the service of the hospitals, but the sisters were not

110 Decree of the Napoleonic government which seemed to assure the re-establishment of the Company of the Daughters of Charity signed by Napoléon and Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis, Minister of Cult, 16 October 1802, AN: F.19.6344.
permitted to resume their traditional habit. When speaking of Sister Rosalie's arrival at the Maison Saint-Martin, Sister Saillard said, "She arrived there wearing a little muslin dress made from an old infirmary curtain." It seems to have taken the intervention of the Pope for this to change. Indeed, in December 1804, the Holy Father, Pius VII, who had come to Paris for the coronation of Napoléon as Emperor, visited the Motherhouse on rue du Vieux-Colombier. It has been noted that:

...he seemed surprised that the sisters had not resumed wearing the traditional habit of their order... He spoke of this to the Emperor, telling him that the good Daughters of Charity looked like widows. At his urging the Emperor authorized the sisters to resume wearing their traditional habit [the cornette]. This took place in the Spring of 1805 [25 March, feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, on which the Daughters of Charity annually renew their vows].

On that occasion,

...there was great celebration in the house on rue du Vieux-Colombier. Cardinal [Joseph] Fesch [the Emperor's uncle] came to say the community mass and the Emperor's mother, herself, assisted at it.

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111 Sacra Congregatio Pro causis, Rendu, Positio; Summario, 62.
112 Melun, Vie de la soeur Rosalie, 265-66.
113 Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission (1900), 586.
The sight of the sisters in their traditional habit would seem to indicate that unity of hearts and minds had been re-established. Such, alas, was far from the truth. The divisions were deep and no external sign could long hide them from view. Indeed, while the trauma of the Revolution was over, a new and perhaps more threatening storm was brewing. It is not our purpose here to recount in detail the history of that troubled era, however some understanding of it is essential as it is the period (1807-1815) during which the young Sister Rosalie was beginning her life as a Daughter of Charity. Her comportment, at this time, became her manner for dealing with divisions and internal difficulties throughout her life.

Sister Rosalie was twenty-one years of age in 1807. She had been in the Company for five years. Except for the few months spent in the seminary of the Motherhouse, her entire experience was at the Maison Saint-Martin with Sister Tardy. This was one of the “maisons de secours” (houses of charity), which had remained open throughout the Revolution. The situation was not easy but the sisters never lost their focus on the service of those who were poor – which even the most radical revolutionary had to recognize as essential. Sister Rosalie must have learned about this trying period from her companions.

Melun speaks of the difficulties of those years.\(^\text{14}\) However, Father Desmet goes into even greater detail than Melun concerning

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\(^{14}\) Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 28.
this era for the sisters of rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel. He tells us:

The Daughters of Charity who made up the little Community of the faubourg Saint-Marceau were a very fervent group. While living in this poor area they had multiplied their services. During the revolutionary period, they gave proof of great courage. They had lived through the most terrible days without abandoning the service of those who were poor. And then one day, they were denounced by the Committee of Public Safety and summoned to appear before the revolutionary tribunal. They did so fearlessly, happy to offer to Our Lord the sacrifice of their lives. It was not accepted. They were too needed in the world. The news of their arrest aroused the entire neighborhood. Crowds gathered. When the men of the neighborhood saw their Sisters being led away, they followed them to the tribunal. They told the judges that they were determined to defend the Sisters and take them back with them. In the face of this human shield, the Committee did not dare to detain them. [The Sisters] returned home accompanied by their liberators. It was a great triumph! ...The Sisters had been brought back to their life of prayer and charitable activity.115

Thus, in the midst of turmoil, their eyes had never wavered from the very raison-d'être of their vocation and they had remained faithful to the service of those in need. This is what Sister Deleau had asked of them in 1792 when she wrote:

Always be attentive to the needs of those who are poor. Console them in the deprivations they may experience. You can succor them only to the extent of the means furnished you but you can always comfort them, urge them to be patient, and inspire in them all the Christian virtues that can render their state

115 Desmet, Sœur Rosalie, 84-85.
sanctifying. If you have little, give this little with a generous heart which compensates for and which is like a supplement to what you cannot give them. Make your conduct ever more blameless before God and before others.\footnote{Ibid., 9 April 1792, AFCP.}

A little later on, she urged them:

In order to continue the service of those who are poor, accept everything that can honestly be required of you in the present circumstances provided there be nothing contrary to religion, the Church, and your conscience.\footnote{Ibid., 9 April 1792, AFCP.}

And so they did, wherever they could.

By 1807, the year during which Sister Rosalie pronounced her vows for the first time, the Company was growing again. Napoléon then decided that he wanted to re-establish active congregations of women and place them under the protection of his mother. To this end, by the Decree of 30 September 1807, he convoked a General Chapter of Charitable Institutions of Women. This document included a listing of the number of establishments and sisters for each congregation. The following statistics were provided for the Daughters of Charity:

PRINCIPAL ESTABLISHMENT: Paris
NUMBER OF HOUSES: BEFORE 1793: 461; IN 1807: 260
NUMBER OF SISTERS: BEFORE 1793: 3,300; IN 1807: 1,598\footnote{Number of houses before 1793 and in 1807, AN: F.19.6344.}

The convocation opened on 27 November 1807 at the Tuileries and was presided over by Napoléon’s mother, Madame Letizia, and by his uncle, Cardinal Fesch. The Superioresses of forty different institutes, along with their Assistants, participated. At that time, Sister Deschaux, who had replaced Sister Deleau at the head of the
Company, asked that the name “Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul” be reserved to the Company. Her request was granted.\textsuperscript{119}

Sister Deschaux also requested financial support from the Napoleonic government. This was granted by a Decree of 3 February 1808. The Company was to receive “an extraordinary sum of 182,500 francs to defray expenses for the first establishment [and] an annual sum of 130,000 francs.” Moreover, “all the houses that the associations of Sisters of Charity have requested for the service of their establishments are granted to them.”\textsuperscript{120}

Despite this reorganization and governmental support, the Company of the Daughters of Charity would not exist legally for another year. This legal status would be accorded by an Imperial

\textsuperscript{119} Sister Deschaux requests that the name “Daughters of Charity of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul” be reserved to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Request was granted. Chapter of “Sisters of Charity which opened on 27 November 1807,” AN: F.19.6343.

\textsuperscript{120} Sister Deschaux asks the Napoleonic government for financial assistance for the Company. All the houses that the Daughters asked for their service were granted, AN: F.19.6247; See also AN: F.19.6344.
Decree of 8 November 1809. It contains within it the core of the controversy, and we quote it in its entirety:

**IMPERIAL DECREES
Concerning the Sisters Hospitalers of the Charity
called of Saint Vincent de Paul

Palace of Fontainebleau, 8 November 1809

Napoléon, Emperor of the French, King of Italy, and Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine,

*After the report of our Minister of Cult and with the approval of our Council of State,*

We have decreed and we do decree what follows:

**Article I.** The letters patent of the month of November 1657, concerning the Sisters Hospitalers of the Charity, called of Saint Vincent de Paul, with the letters of establishment and the statutes annexed to them, are confirmed and approved, with the exception only of the dispositions relative to the Superior General of the Mission, which congregation was suppressed by our decree of 26 September last, and the responsibility of the said sisters to conform to the general rule of 18 February last concerning hospitals and notably to the articles concerning episcopal authority and the disposition of goods.

**Article II.** The letters patent, the letters of establishment, and the rule put forth in the preceding article shall remain attached to the present decree.

**Article III.** The Sisters of the Charity shall continue to wear their present habit and, in general, they shall conform, notably for the election of the Superioress General and the Officers, to the praiseworthy customs of their institute as expressed in the said statutes, drawn up by Saint Vincent de Paul.

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121 *Bulletin des Lois, 2e semestre, #252, article 4838.*
Article IV. Our Ministers of Cult and of the Interior are charged with the implementation of the present decree which, along with the attached documents, shall be inserted into the Bulletin of Laws.

Signed: Napoléon

By the Emperor
The Minister Secretary of State, signed: Hugues B. Maret

And there it is, the long sought legal recognition of the Company and the phrase that nearly led to its destruction. What the Revolution and the Reign of Terror could not do, this phrase could very well have done. Only the fall of the Napoleonic government in 1814 would begin the healing. What was it? Quite a simple statement on the surface, “with the exception only of dispositions relative to the Superior General of the Mission.” Before it was over, however, two Superioresses General would resign (Sister Antoinette Beaudoin, 1809; Sister Judith Mousteyro, 1810), one would assume office without a valid election (Sister Marie Durgueilh, 1810-1815), and the Vicar General, Dominique-François Hanon, C.M. (1807-1816), would go to prison. It was a high stakes struggle for the government, for the Church of France, and for the Congregation of the Mission. The Daughters

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
of Charity were viewed as essential to the re-establishment of health care and social services for the growing number of persons who were poor in post-revolutionary France. Each group had a vested interest in maintaining jurisdiction over them. Some of those interests were noble, some far less so.

Surely the Vincentian tradition played a vital role. As mentioned earlier, the jurisdiction of the Superior General had been viewed by Louise de Marillac as vital to the preservation of the spirit of the Company. Nevertheless, the original statutes, submitted to the Archbishop of Paris in 1645 did not contain such a stipulation; nor did the Act of Establishment of the Company by the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, on 20 November 1646. It is this text that those favoring episcopal authority would put forth during this post-revolutionary struggle for control over the Company. Louise de Marillac, in her lifetime, never experienced this kind of internal conflict, but she seems to have been convinced of its inevitability because, as she told Vincent de Paul on 5 July 1651:

The basis for this establishment, without which it would appear impossible for the said Company to subsist or for God to derive from it the glory that He seems to want it to render to Him, is that it must be erected either with the title of Company or of Confraternity and must be entirely under the jurisdiction of and dependent upon the venerable guidance of the Most Honored Superior General of the Venerable Priests of the Missions, with the consent of their Company, so that, in association with them, it might share in the good they accomplish so that the divine goodness, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, might grant our Company the grace to live in the same spirit with which His goodness animates their honorable Company.

Her determination bore fruit and the statutes, which were resubmitted in 1655, provided that the Superior General of the Congregation of

123 CED, 13:551-556.
124 Ibid., 557-565.
125 Sullivan, Spiritual Writings, 364.
the Mission would also be the Superior General of the Daughters of Charity. The Act of Approbation by Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, on 18 January 1655, states unequivocally:

Insofar as God has blessed the work that our said dear and beloved Vincent de Paul has done to bring about the success of this pious design [the founding of the Daughters of Charity] we have confided and committed to him once again and, by this present act, confide and commit to him the conduct and direction of the above mentioned society and confraternity [the Company of the Daughters of Charity] during his lifetime and, after him, to his successors, the Superiors General of the said Congregation of the Mission.¹²

The battle lines over jurisdiction were drawn, not only by those who wanted control over the Company, but within the Community itself. There were sharp divisions at the highest levels of the administration of the Motherhouse. Indeed, after the Revolution, the first Superioresses General seemed to favor placing the Company

¹² CED, 13:572.
under the direction of the Archbishop of Paris while, early on, a large number of sisters opposed this. When faced with a choice between the service of those who were poor and jurisdiction over the Company, however, most chose to remain with those who were poor, thereby accepting dependence on the Archbishop of Paris. Thus, on three separate occasions between 1800 and 1807 when the Napoleonic government requested copies of the statutes, the General Superiors submitted versions omitting mention of constitutional dependence of the Daughters of Charity on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. The October 1807 version, signed by Sister Deschaux, the officers, and secretaries, reads as follows:

The Sisters of Charity do not form a religious body, but a Company of Daughters occupied with the care of the sick and the instruction of the poor. They are submissive to an ecclesiastical Superior, chosen by them and approved by the Archbishop of Paris, a Superioress General, elected every three years and several Sisters elected to assist her.\(^\text{127}\)

This is the opposite of the authentic text which stated in Article 2 of the Statutes, signed by 78 sisters on 15 May 1809 and submitted by Sister Beaudoin on 23 June 1809:

It [the Company of Daughters of Charity] is not erected as a religious order, but only as a community of young women who obey, according to their Institute, our Lords, the bishops and the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, said of Saint-Lazare, and those among them who are elected Superioress of their Company, as well as the officers of the community or of particular establishments.\(^\text{128}\)

Hardly had Father Hanon been named Vicar General, when, in March 1809, he sent the Minister of Cult a corrected text of the statutes submitted by Sister Deschaux. In the margin, written in his own hand, Father Hanon states, "It is always the Superior General

\(^{127}\) The superiors of the Daughters of Charity submit statutes which place the Company under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris, AN: F.19.6240. See also AN: F.19.6344.

\(^{128}\) Dossier Filles de la Charité, ACMP.
of the Mission of Saint-Lazare that Saint Vincent designated to be, in perpetuity, Superior General of the Sisters of Charity and it is always he whom they choose.”

Napoléon moved to gain absolute control over all “sisters of charity” in his realm. Meanwhile, Father Hanon, the exiled Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission and Superior of the Daughters of Charity, strove to ensure that “things would be left as Saint Vincent had arranged them.” Such would not be the case. The Emperor was determined to see all governmentally approved congregations of women subject to the bishop of the places where they were located. Thus, on 18 February 1809, he issued a decree requiring all communities of sisters to submit their rule, incorporating this new regulation, for government approval. The deadline for compliance was 1 January 1810. The penalty for non-compliance was legal dissolution. Father Hanon’s worst fears seemed about to be realized. The Company of the Daughters of Charity was divided into two opposing camps, the “Vincentines,” who wished to retain the traditional governing structure with its dependence on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, and the “Jalabertines,” who wanted to be under the authority of the local bishops. This latter group was named for Jean-François Jalabert, one of the vicars general of the Archdiocese of Paris, who was at the forefront of those who wanted diocesan control of the Company.

The ensuing struggle was as complex as it was bitter and nearly resulted in the Daughters of Charity facing “their last moments in France.” Such, fortunately, was not the case. The matter was finally resolved and the jurisdiction of the Superior General once again recognized. But this was only in 1814, with the abdication of the Emperor and the later restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815. Father Hanon returned to Paris, where he sought to begin the healing process among the sisters.

Father Hanon realized only too well how difficult it would be for the two groups to live and work harmoniously. There were those who had been expelled by the government for their opposition to its policies as well as “those who have not laid aside [their] habit

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129 Father Hanon sends corrected statutes to the Minister of Cult, AN: F.19.6240.
131 Ibid.
or abandoned [their] ministry with the poor; those sisters who have preserved these without adopting novelties, and without taking part in the agitations around them. They have always observed their vows, and preserved the sentiments transmitted to them by your excellent mothers."' By welcoming back those who had been exiled because of their refusal to comply with government regulations as well as those who had continued to serve while remaining faithful to the tradition of the Company, Father Hanon hoped to restore peace and charity. He concluded his Circular by urging reconciliation. He wrote, "Let there be absolute silence and general forgetfulness of the past. Show the same justice, regard, affection, and kindness to all the sisters without exception, whatever may have been their previous sentiments, language and conduct."'

In order for harmony to be restored, there had to be union around the leadership of the Company. On 20 February 1815, Paul-Thérèse-David d’Astros, a vicar general of the Archdiocese of Paris, transmitted to the Company the decision of Pope Pius VII of 19 January 1815 concerning them and their government. Father d’Astros had been named Apostolic Visitor for the entire Company of the Daughters of Charity. He had also been charged by the Holy Father to convocate an assembly of the sisters for the election of the Superioress General. Sister Marie Durgueilh (1810-1815), who had assumed office after the resignation of Sister Judith Mousteyro (1809-1810), had never been elected and the legitimacy of her office had not been recognized. According to the Pope’s decision, Father d’Astros, assisted by Father Hanon, was to preside over the election as the Superior General had done since the time of Saint Vincent."

The election took place in Paris on 12 March 1815. Sister Elisabeth Baudet was elected (1815-1818), thus officially ending the schism. The willingness of a large portion of the Company to recognize the place of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission as Superior of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and the one to whom they make their vow of obedience, is apparent in a post-script to Father Hanon’s Circular. He wrote:

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133 Dominique-François Hanon, *Circulaire*, 1 January 1815, AFCP.
134 Ibid.
135 Paul-Thérèse-David d’Astros, *Circulaire*, 20 February 1815, "Dossier Hanon," AFCP.
136 Ibid.
Even before the arrival of the Papal Brief, more than 150 entire houses had asked us for the renewal of the holy vows in the manner prescribed in our Circular of 1 January 1815. In houses where the movement of hearts had been restricted, four, six, eight, and even as many as twelve sisters joined together to send us their request. This was in addition to the large number of individual letters that we have received on the same matter. After the decision of the Holy See, we can no longer doubt the spirit of unanimity. There is perhaps not one sister in a hundred who does not join with us and does not do her part for the general well-being.137

It should be pointed out again here that the vows of the Daughters of Charity are annual. In the Company at this time, the sisters made known their desire to renew them to the local superior, who transmitted the requests to the Superioress General. The latter, in turn, requested the renewal of vows for the entire Company from the Superior General. It was this tradition that had disappeared during the years of the schism and which would be central to the re-establishment of any true union.

137 Dominique-François Hanon, *Circulaire*, 24 February 1815, AFCP.
On 16 September 1815, Father Hanon again wrote to the sisters. He asked that all the dispersed sisters return; that there be a sincere and total reuniting of all hearts; and that the Rule, the former good order, and unity in government be re-established. He then went on to stress the importance of the role of local superiors in making any necessary changes or reforms in themselves, their sisters, and their houses so as to restore the "exact observance of the Rules and the Holy Vows." He assured them that if they could bring this about they would have "the merit and the consolation of freeing the admirable work of our Holy Founder [Saint Vincent] from the terrible rust that is tarnishing it and which is visibly eating away at it and [that they] will restore its original luster."

This would eventually come about, but Father Hanon would not live to see it. He died on 24 April 1816.

Several weeks after the election of the new Superior General, on 29 June 1815, the Daughters of Charity transferred their Motherhouse to a building, provided by the government, at 140, rue du Bac. It remains there to this day.

All this, however, did not bring about instant union. Indeed, Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M., who was Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity

138 Ibid., 16 September 1815, AFCP.
from 1843 to 1874, and was probably the most influential after Saint Vincent himself, stated that the sisters who had contributed to the congregation’s restoration met with opposition and were even blamed “by the sisters who then governed their Company... since the spirit of the Motherhouse was not what it would later become.”

Thus, the era during which Sister Rosalie began her life as a Daughter of Charity was a troubled one. Just as the child and adolescent had grown up in the shadow of the Revolution, so the young sister took her first steps in the service of those who were poor during the tumultuous years of its aftermath. What do we know of her comportment at that time?

It must be admitted from the outset that we do not have any solid evidence relative to her thoughts or actions with regard to the government of the Daughters of Charity during the period of 1807-1815. It is safe to assume that the house where she lived, Saint-Martin, followed the procedure that these same sisters had followed during the Revolution. That is to say, that they continued to live their lives quietly, in the spirit of their founders, and to serve those who were poor.

The testimony of Sister Rosalie herself on Father Emery is revealing on this point. After briefly summarizing the events of 1808, she goes on to say that many sisters had consulted Father Emery about how they should act and he had “urged them to remain at their posts.” Then she added, “All those who followed his advice never had any reason to regret having done so.”

Sister Rosalie also seems to have adhered to the letter of Father Hanon’s request for “silence” concerning this painful period in the history of the Company. Sister Costalin, Sister Rosalie’s companion of eleven years, describes the lifetime practice of a woman who would, on occasion, have her own serious difficulties with her superiors. She testified:

I never heard her criticize the actions of our Superiors. When, looking back on a very deplorable past, an older sister would allude to the troubles that had at one time ravaged the community, we could never detect blame in her for one side or the other. She would simply say,

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140 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 83.
"We often deceive ourselves. We reason about things of which we have no knowledge. We judge without having the grace to do so. We speak without recalling these words of Sacred Scripture, ‘place a lock upon your lips.’ Herein lies all the evil. The community is built in the image of the Church; there is one head. In following Him, we are sure not to go astray."\[141\]

Sister Costalin seems to be alluding to Sister Rosalie's personal difficulties with her superiors when she continues this part of her testimony by adding, "She had many trials to endure in her lifetime. Never did a word escape her lips to express the slightest pain. We always learned of her sufferings from a third party."\[142\]

So it was that the young sister, who was just beginning her service of those who were poor and her life as a Daughter of Charity, learned some valuable lessons from circumstances beyond her control. She would never forget them as she took her first steps along the path that would lead her to ever closer union with God and to the most abandoned of His creatures, the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. Let us now follow her on that journey.

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\[141\] Ibid., 35.
\[142\] Ibid.