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A Challenge to Napoleon: The Defiance of the Daughters of Charity

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that mysticism is deeply tied to its root tradition, world view, and language, but we cannot deny the fact that its result shares characteristics as seen in three mystics from three very different traditions.

Finally, notice that all three mystics employed central symbols from the natural world. Vincent de Paul used a mare which pulls a cart following the will of her master; Cheng Yi chose the mountain, nurturing all forms of life according to a proper time; and Yin Zhiping envisioned a bright moon which shines upon the world, though occasionally darkened by fleeting clouds. They probably chose natural examples due to their innate lack of artificiality or falsity. Cheng Yi warned as superficial the notion of practice with effort, believing that as we artificially arouse our will it becomes selfishness. Yin Zhiping asserted that preserving a constant mind and accumulating worldly merits derives from the person, but the manifestation of the Dao, and the sages leading you, belong to Heaven. Paradoxically, it is in this entrusting passivity that the most energetic passion for apostolic outreach is born and preserved.


50 The Records of the Northern Journey, 736, second section. 先保此平常, 其積行累功, 皆由乎己, 是在我者也。道之顯驗, 聖賢把偓, 是在天者也。當盡其在我者, 而任其在天者, 功行旣至, 道乃自得。

A Challenge to Napoleon: The Defiance of the Daughters of Charity
By
Elisabeth Charpy, D.C.
Translated by
Clara Orban, Ph.D.
&
Edward R. Udovic, C.M.

“In the presence of God and of the Heavenly Host, for a year I renew my baptismal promises and make a vow to God of poverty, chastity and obedience, in accordance with our rule and our statutes. I also vow to work towards corporeal and spiritual service to the sick poor, our true masters, in the Company of the Daughters of Charity. I ask this by the merits of Jesus Christ crucified and through the intercession of the very holy Virgin.”

In France, the coup d’état of 18 Brumaire (9 November 1799) brought Napoleon Bonaparte to power. The Consulate gave a new breath of life to the country after the terrible years of the Revolution. Bonaparte began the national reconstruction by reestablishing civil peace. Most of the émigrés were authorized to return. The population rallied behind the new master of France.

Restoration of the Daughters of Charity — 22 December 1800
The re-establishment of the Daughters was spurred, in part, by hospital directors, who were worried about the decline of care in their establishments, and who wanted the former sisters to resume their services. In 1800 Sister Thérèse Deschaux, superior of the Hospital at Auch, was sent to Paris, to meet with the Minister of Cults, Jean-Antoine Chaptal.1

1 Born 1756 in Saint-Pierre-de-Nogaret, Lozère, Chaptal studied chemistry at the University of Montpellier, where he earned his doctorate in 1777 and later became a professor. A factory he established was the first to commercially produce sulfuric acid in France, and his scientific accomplishments led to recognition and awards from the French government. Chaptal was arrested and briefly imprisoned during the French Revolution for publishing a controversial paper. Following his release he managed the saltpetre works at Grenelle. He was appointed councilor of state by the First Consul after the 18 Brumaire coup of 9 November 1799, and eventually Minister of the Interior. As such, he instituted many reforms in the fields of medicine, industry, and public works — including a reorganization of the hospitals and the introduction of the metric system. Chaptal fell in and out of favor with Napoleon, who awarded him the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor less than a year after forcing him from office in 1804. He concluded his career as director-general of commerce and manufacturing and Minister of State, before the Bourbon Restoration forced him to permanently retire. He died in Paris in 1832.
He acknowledged the deplorable state of the hospitals: “I am tired of the innumerable complaints that arrive daily and the unsatisfactory state of hospices.”

Having learned that the superioress general of the Daughters of Charity had returned to Paris, he expressed his desire to re-establish their Company, dismantled in 1792 along with other secular religious congregations.

On 22 December 1800, having become Minister of the Interior, Chaptal published a decree which brought the Company of the Daughters of Charity back to life:

Art. 1. Citizen Deleau, formerly the superior of the Daughters of Charity, is authorized to prepare students to serve in hospices.
Art. 2. The orphanage located on the Rue du Vieux Colombier, is put at their disposal.
Art. 7. The necessary funds to support the needs of the institution will be taken from the general funds budgeted for hospices. This will not exceed the sum of twelve thousand francs.²

On 25 January 1801, Mother Antoinette Deleau moved into the Rue du Vieux Colombier with some of the sisters who had returned to Paris. Soon, postulants arrived from all regions of France. Sixty-five were welcomed during the year. A new decree, dated 19 April, permitted the Daughters of Charity to resume their ministries in the various arrondissements of Paris under the supervision of local committees established by the government:

Art. 5. Subject to inspection by the committees, the Daughters of Charity are especially charged with the assistance and comfort of the sick poor of each arrondissement, and the assistance of children of a young age and with the distribution of linen, beds, clothes, furniture and other things which, by usage and propriety only they can direct.
Art. 6. There are in each municipal arrondissement soup kitchens for the poor and warehouses for medicines. Their direction is conferred to the Daughters of Charity.³

In her circular letter of 1 January 1802, Mother Antoinette Deleau expressed her joy at the Company’s restoration:

Here we are, restored by the French Government to that identity which we never stopped being according to our joyous vocation: the humble servants of the poor… I know of the virtuous actions that distinguished many of you during all the trials of the Revolution….⁴ Let us make a generous resolution to renew ourselves in the love and the exercise of all our duties. The renovation of our vows which usually takes place on 25 March⁵ should take place immediately upon reception of the present letter.⁶

³ Ibid.
⁴ During the Revolution, sisters were imprisoned, where some died, and some were even executed in Arras, Angers, and Cambrai. For instance, at Arras (Robespierre’s birthplace, and therefore a town fiercely loyal to the Revolution’s ideals), the superioress, Marie-Madeleine Fontaine, along with three sisters, Marie-Françoise Lanel, Thérèse-Madeleine Fantou, and Jeanne Gérard, were jailed 14 February 1794 for refusing to take the government’s newly prescribed oaths. Eventually they were charged with possession of counter-revolutionary printed matter (evidence exists that it was planted) and imprisoned. It was soon determined that their good charitable works would make it difficult, even in Arras, to have them executed. Subsequently they were moved to Cambrai where, on 26 June 1794, they were guillotined. It is said that as their sentence was issued, and at their execution, the normally boisterous crowd remained silent.
⁵ The vows of the Daughters of Charity are renewed annually on the Feast of the Annunciation, 25 March, with the permission of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission.
⁶ Archives, Daughters of Charity, Maison-Mère, 140, rue du Bac, Paris, France. Hereinafter cited as D.C. Archives.
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2 Chevalier A., Les Soeurs de la Charité et le conseil municipal de Paris (1881).

3 Ibid.

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The Company of the Daughters of Charity, like the rest of the Church in France, began to reorganize itself. Many houses (hospitals, houses of Charity) were established. Postulants continued to arrive in great numbers: eighty-three in 1802, seventy-six in 1803. The sisters resumed the annual renewal of their vows.

On 8 April 1802, the Chamber of Deputies ratified the concordat with the Holy See, signed the preceding 15 July. In addition, it recognized the seventy-seven Gallican “organic articles” which Bonaparte had unilaterally added to the agreement. For example, pontifical decrees could not be published without governmental approval. Nonetheless, the French welcomed with relief the renewal of religious life. With the news that pastors would be required to swear an oath of fidelity the sisters became worried. Would the imposition of this oath lead again to the strife caused by the oath during the Revolution? On 4 June 1802, Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis, the Minister of Cults, responded to the prefect of the Seine’s questions in this regard:

The Daughters of Charity wonder whether they will be required to take the same oaths required of those who are employed as pastors or others involved in ministry to souls. All these ecclesiastics are required to do when they swear the oath required by the Concordat is to promise to live in communion with the bishops nominated by the first Consul and confirmed by the Pope.

It is foreseen and it is the intention of the government that the Daughters of Charity recognize as their superior the diocesan bishop. It is enough to accept their declaration of intent to obey their bishop without burdening them with other obligations which are foreign to their sex and to the nature of their work.

On 22 August sixty sisters gathered in an Assembly presided over by their director, Laurent Philippe. The term of the superior general, Mother Deleau, despite her age (seventy-five years old, fifty-five of vocation), was extended and Sister Thérèse Deschaux (fifty-nine years old, thirty-nine of vocation), superior of the Hospital at Auch, was named assistant.

A new decree, signed on 16 October 1802 by Napoleon clarified the rules concerning the Company of the Daughters of Charity:

Art. 1. As in the past, the sisters, called of Charity, are authorized to consecrate themselves to the service of the sick in hospices and parishes and to the instruction of poor girls.
Art. 2. They can wear their traditional costume.
Art. 3. They are in a religious order under the jurisdiction of the bishops; they will not correspond with any foreign superior.
Art. 5. They may only receive new recruits in their Paris house.

At the time it does not seem that the article placing the Company of the Daughters of Charity under the jurisdiction of the local bishop posed any problem. In 1802, the Congregation of the Mission had not yet been legally reestablished in France.

During the seventeenth century, Louise de Marillac, co-founder of the Daughters of Charity with Vincent de Paul, had insisted that the community should depend on the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission rather than the bishops. At the time there was still some opposition among the bishops to having consecrated women not under the rule of cloister. For Louise and Vincent, enclosing the Daughters of Charity in their houses would lead to the end of their direct service to the poor, thereby countering the very goal of their Company. Assuring the juridical link between the Congregation

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7 The Concordat of 1801 was an agreement between Napoleon Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII that solidified the Roman Catholic Church as the majority church of France and brought back most of its civil statutes. However, while the Concordat restored some ties to the papacy, it largely favored the state. Napoleon believed he could win favor with French Catholics while also controlling Rome’s political reach.

8 Passed on 12 July 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was a law which effectively made the Roman Catholic Church subordinate to the French government. In the year leading to its passing, the State had already eradicated tithing, nationalized Church property utilized to create revenue, forbade the taking of monastic vows, and dissolved all ecclesiastical orders and congregations beyond those involved in nursing or the education of children. The new law further reduced Rome’s authority in: significantly reducing the number of bishops; mandating that bishops and priests be elected locally only by those who had sworn an oath to the government (and that those who voted did not need to be Catholic); reducing the Pope’s role in appointing clergy to only being allowed the right of being informed of election results; and demanding that new bishops swear an oath of loyalty to the State before taking office. Furthermore, on 27 November 1790, the National Assembly directed the clergy to sign an oath of loyalty to the Constitution. Many refused the oath, which led to great internal discord. Religious freedoms were restored in 1795, but it was not until the Concordat of 1801 that the civilly constituted Gallican Church resolved this conflict with Rome.

9 Chevalier A., Les Sœurs de la Charité.

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In her circular letter of 1 January 1803, Mother Deleau announced the provisions of the decree signed by the first Consul on 16 October: She said “We are certain of the provisions of this decree but we have not yet received a copy of it.”

Many requests for sisters came to Mother Deleau from all over the country. Despite their growing numbers, Mother Deleau could not fulfill all the requests. For example, she responded to the municipality of Châtillon-sur-Seine: “We receive many requests of this type which, due to lack of personnel, we cannot satisfy… We would need 3,000 sisters to fill the demand, and there is only at best half that number.”

On 30 January 1804, Sister Deschaux, announced the death of Mother Antoinette Deleau the night of the 29th, around midnight. The sisters, for their part, appreciated the courage and wisdom Mother Deleau had exercised in leading the Daughters of Charity during the years of the Revolution. They acknowledged her role as the restorer of the Company.

On the Monday after Pentecost, 21 May 1804, according to the Company’s custom the sisters gathered in Paris for the election of their next superior general. They chose Sister Thérèse Deschaux (sixty-one years old, forty-one of vocation). The superior of the Petites-Maisons de Paris, Sister Marie Quitterie Duprat (fifty-eight years old, forty-one of vocation), was elected to replace her in the office of assistant.

Several days later on 27 May, an imperial decree reestablished the Congregation of the Mission under the name Society of Priests Charged with Preparing and Furnishing Missionaries to Serve French Missions in the Levant and China. The director of this society would be named by the Emperor.

Beginning in 1804, Napoleon published a number of decrees concerning religious congregations. The decree of 22 June 1804, for example, obliged any association or religious congregation which wished to operate in France to obtain legal authorization from the Emperor. This same decree directed all congregations who had already been legally recognized (this included the Company of the Daughters of Charity) “to present within six months a copy of their statutes and rules so that these could be reviewed and approved by the Conseil d’État which had responsibility over all religious matters.”

In response to this Napoleonic decree the Pope was asked to confirm the juridical ties between the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. A pontifical brief was issued on 30 October 1804 which stated: “To the office of the superior general of the Mission is joined the care and the government of the community of women or Daughters of Charity.” The six month period for compliance foreseen by the decree of 24 June was extended several times.

On 23 March 1805, Napoleon named his mother, Laetitia Bonaparte, the protector of all the so-called Sisters of Charity established throughout the Empire. Madame Mère, as the Emperor’s mother was called, convoked a general chapter of all twenty-five of the congregations which the government considered to be the “Sisters of Charity.”

Origin of the Conflict — 1807
Mother Thérèse Deschaux, her assistant Sœur Marguerite Ithier, and their secretaries spent some time reflecting on the text of the statutes which they were required to submit to the government.

The vicar general of the Lazarists, Claude-Joseph Placiard, had died on 16 September 1807. Taking advantage of this vacancy, on 28 October, Mother Deschaux sent the required copy of the statutes to the Minister of Cults. The first article of the submitted rule stated:

The Sisters of Charity, do not form a religious order but a congregation of women devoted to the care of the sick and the instruction of the poor. They are responsible to an ecclesiastical superior whom they choose with the approval of the Archbishop of Paris, and by a superior general and council of several sisters, who are elected every three years.

11 D.C. Archives.
12 D.C. Archives.
14 AN: F/19/6310.
15 C.M. Archives.
16 AN: F/19/6247.
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Napoleon’s control of the Congregations — 1804-1805

The Concordat had given Napoleon all but complete control over the episcopacy. He also wanted to establish his authority over religious communities. From his perspective their existence was justified by their social utility. After his coronation by Pope Pius VII, as Emperor of the French, he set out to re-establish a close alliance between Church and State.

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The minister, surprised by the claims of Monsieur Hanon and the sisters, ordered research done on the history of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. The act of approval of 1655, signed by Cardinal de Retz, archbishop of Paris, was studied at length:

[...] the Confraternity or Society will be and will remain in perpetuity under our authority and dependence and those of our successors, the Archbishops of Paris, in the exact observance of the Statutes and Regulations specified hereinafter, which we have once again approved, and do approve, by these present letters.

And since God has blessed the efforts our dearly beloved Vincent de Paul has made for the success of this pious intention, we have entrusted and confided to him and by these present letters do entrust and confide to him for life the leadership and direction of the Society and Confraternity and, after him, to his successors as Superiors General of the Congregation of the Mission.

This text can be compared to the first article as it appeared in 1718 in the text published by Jean Bonnet, the then superior general of the Congregation of the Mission:

The Company of the Daughters of Charity is instituted for the honor and service of our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of the poor, particularly the sick, by assisting them in body and spirit in the manner prescribed by their rules. They are not a religious order but a community of women who work for Christian perfection and obey, according to their institution, our lords the bishops and the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, as superior of the Company, and to the one elected their superior, as also to the officers of the community and the individual establishments.

The reference to having an ecclesiastical superior was not omitted, but the sisters hoped to obtain the power to choose the priest themselves! Perhaps they wanted this power so that they could choose a Priest of the Mission?

On 14 October 1807, Pius VII named Dominique Hanon (aged 50, 35 years of vocation) as vicar general of the Congregation of the Mission to replace Monsieur Placiard. He accorded him the ordinary and extraordinary powers of the superior general that had been mentioned in the brief of 30 October 1804. Napoleon accepted this nomination on the 8th of January.

When Hanon read the statutes the sisters had presented to the government, his reaction was swift. He insisted that the juridical ties between the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity had been in existence from the very beginning of the community’s history. Having been confirmed in his position by the Pope, he resubmitted the statutes with a note indicating: “In fulfillment of the designation made by Saint Vincent himself, it is the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission who is, in perpetuity, the superior general of the Daughters of Charity, and it is he who has always been chosen.”

Hanon argued that any change in the government of the Company would “destroy from its foundation the constitutions, rules, vows, and distinctive spirit of their vocation which has been responsible for making them capable of rendering such important services to our homeland and indeed to all of humanity.” He predicted that any change would lead to the departure of numerous sisters.

The minister, surprised by the claims of Monsieur Hanon and the sisters, ordered research done on the history of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. The act of approval of 1655, signed by Cardinal de Retz, archbishop of Paris, was studied at length:

[...] the Confraternity or Society will be and will remain in perpetuity under our authority and dependence and those of our successors, the Archbishops of Paris, in the exact observance of the Statutes and Regulations specified hereinafter, which we have once again approved, and do approve, by these present letters.

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The text which was submitted to the Minister of Cults demonstrated that the approval of 1655 placed the Daughters of Charity under the

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18 See note 15.
19 AN: F/19/6344 and F/19/6240.
21 Statutes of the Daughters of Charity, 1718, D.C. Archives.
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The conflict also illustrated the rising importance of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. In 1807, only six years after their restoration, they staffed 266 establishments in France and thirty-six in Poland. Their number was 1580, of which 112 sisters served in the Maison-Mère in Paris.\(^22\)

Monsieur Hanon knew of the study ordered by the Minister and tried to persuade the government of the rightness of his position. On 31 August 1808, in a long letter to Cardinal Fesch (the Emperor’s uncle who served as Archbishop of Lyon and Grand Aumônier of the Empire) he explained that new regulations would represent unprecedented changes in the constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, and would expose this community (comprised of respectable and extremely useful women) to very dangerous problems that would undoubtedly lead to their destruction. He tried to explain that the Daughters of Charity had never had the status of nuns in a religious order, that rather they were a body of secular women who did not enjoy any of the privileges of nuns including exemption from episcopal authority. With regard to their interior life and spirit of their vocation, Vincent de Paul had provided that this would be maintained through their ties with the Congregation of the Mission. He pointed out that you could not remove this bond without destroying their Constitutions, their customary rules of conduct, their vows, and the unique spirit proper to their vocation of serving the poor.\(^23\)

On 29 January 1809 Hanon wrote to the Minister of Cults and requested that his authority over the Daughters of Charity be confirmed by the government. He noted that this confirmation was necessary since the Daughters of Charity were preparing for their annual renewal of vows on the upcoming 25th of March. This renewal would include a renewal of their vow of obedience to the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. He requested a speedy response to his letter noting that he needed time to also write to the sisters in Spain, Poland, Russia, and Austria.

The next day, in an interview with Cardinal Fesch, Hanon again defended the traditional ties between the Lazarists and the Daughters of Charity.\(^24\) In response to Monsieur Hanon’s letter the Minister of Cults asked him to provide a copy of the brief that he held from the Holy See in regards to the Daughters of Charity, and a copy of the letter usually sent to the sisters for the renewal of vows. Monsieur Hanon sent a copy of the document from the Holy See on the 31st, but he noted that the letter for the renewal of vows had not yet been written, and would not be until after the response of the minister. He noted, however, that in general this letter usually “encouraged the piety of the sisters in living up to their vows.”\(^25\)

**Hardening of the Conflict — 1809**

On 18 February 1809, a new decree signed by Napoleon gave new directives to the congregations:

2. The statutes of each congregation will be approved by us and inserted into the Bulletin of the Laws.
3. All congregations, of which the statutes will not have been approved and published before 1 January 1810, will be dissolved.
6. Each hospital house, even the principal location if there is one, is under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop who will rule it, and will exclusively visit it. All superiors, other than the bishop in person, must be delegated by him and govern under his authority.
8. Vows must be professed in the presence of the bishop and the civil officer who will witness the act.\(^26\)

The vicars general of Paris, who were charged with administering the archdiocese after the death of Cardinal Jean-Baptiste de Belloy in January 1809, also contributed their thoughts on the impact of this decree upon the Daughters of Charity:

The government of the Gallican Church does not today have a subaltern ecclesiastical function independent of the authority of the bishops, nor one that is not submitted to the surveillance of our lords the bishops…. How unreasonable would it be to want a congregation erected by the archbishop of Paris with the charge of remaining in perpetuity under the

\(^22\) AN: F/19/6247.
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22 AN: F/19/6247.
23 AN: F/19/6344.
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25 Ibid.
26 AN: F/19/6310.
Jean-François Jalabert, one of the vicars general who sent the text, asked that it be immediately considered and accepted by the members of the sisters’ council, and that it be returned by the following Wednesday. Sister Beaudoin, the interim superior, was opposed to this new version of the statutes and refused to sign. Monsieur Jalabert, who wanted to avoid a confrontation with the sisters, proposed that the Minister of Cults wait to take action until after the election, which was scheduled to take place the Monday of Pentecost, 22 May, in hopes that a more moderate sister would be elected. However, he did note that “we must convince stubborn heads.”

Monsieur Bigot de Préameneu was impatient with the slow pace of negotiations. He demanded that Cardinal Fesch intervene immediately with the sisters: After the decree of 18 February I have several times reiterated the importance with proceeding toward implementing the reorganization of the Daughters of Charity so that they should be the first one recognized by the government. Three months have now passed. I have received letters from everywhere complaining that this delay keeps all of the Empire in suspense. I ask your Eminence to intercede and to terminate this affair without delay…. In the present circumstances, it would not be appropriate if the superioress general were nominated before the institution decree, which might come at any moment.

Monsieur Hanon responded to the deadline imposed upon the sisters, and on 15 May he called a general assembly of the sisters living in the houses of Paris. At this meeting he proposed that they sign, anew, the old statutes. In the margins he wrote these remarks: “I the undersigned, attest that the statutes printed here are the only ones that have ever governed the Company and that they are word-for-word in accordance with the original held in the custody of Sister Beaudoin, interim superioress general of the Daughters of Charity, signed Hanon, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.” On the evening of 15 May, Mother Beaudoin, accompanied by the sisters of the council, submitted the non-conforming statutes to the Minister of Cults. The minister refused to accept them.
dependence and the jurisdiction of his successors, of which
the superiors’ only title is the commission and confidence
they received to conduct and direct it, to be exempt, even in
Paris, of the archbishop’s jurisdiction?27

The sudden death of Mother Thérèse Deschaux on 17 April shocked
the sisters. On the afternoon of that day, Monsieur Hanon, fearing without
doubt the intervention of the vicars general, called together the council of the
Company to take emergency measures. In virtue of article 9 of the statutes,
which prescribed that the sisters name a replacement for the deceased
superior general while waiting for the election that would take place on
the Monday following the feast of Pentecost, the members of the council
named as their superior general Sister Marie Antoinette Beaudoin (fifty-
two years old, thirty-seven of vocation), at that time the sister servant at the
Invalides in Paris. This election was ratified by the sister servants of Paris.28

After the promulgation of the 18 February 1809 decree, Cardinal
Fesch asked the vicars general of Paris to modify the statutes of the Daughters
of Charity in conformity with the Emperor’s directives. The new statutes
arrived at the Maison-Mère on Saturday, 6 May:

Art. 2. The Company of the Daughters of Charity is not
erected as a religious order but only as a congregation of
women who obey, according to their Institute, Monsignor the
archbishop of Paris as the superior general of the Company,
or his delegate, and the one who is elected superior as well
as the officers of the community.

Art. 14. The superior will have the direction of all the
Company as the delegate of Monsignor the archbishop. She
will be like the soul of the whole body.

Art. 16. The sisters, spread out in the departments, will
obey our lords the bishops with respect to the interior
discipline of establishments and the surveillance of spiritual
administration.29

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the sisters’ council, and that it be returned by the following Wednesday.30
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Mother Beaudoin, accompanied by the sisters of the council, submitted the
non-conforming statutes to the Minister of Cults. The minister refused to
accept them.33

27 Des Soeurs de la Charité en 1809 et 1810, AN: F/19/6344, text prepared by the archbishopric
of Paris.
28 D.C. Archives, book of elections; and AN: F/19/6344.
29 AN: F/19/6240.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 AN: F/19/6344, text prepared by the archbishopric.
33 Ibid.
Within the Maison-Mère, opinion was divided. Some sisters wanted to preserve the company at all costs and avoid a new suppression. They obtained signatures of a number of sisters to the amended statutes. Several days later this text was submitted to the Archdiocese of Paris.

On 24 May, Monsieur Jalabert informed the Minister of Cults that he had received the amended statutes of the Daughters of Charity “signed by some of those who inhabit the mother house.” He noted, however, that the superioress “who, by virtue of her office has some influence in this affair is not among the signatories.” Although a number of other sisters in Paris had not signed, he was satisfied. Jalabert thought things would fall back into place. He read *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras* by Nicolas Gobillon, and undertook a study of the statutes promulgated by Monsieur Bonnet in the 18th century.

For his part the Minister of Cults was unhappy at the state of affairs. On 16 May he summoned Monsieur Hanon. The Minister’s position was that on the basis of their 1655 approval, “At its origins, the congregation of the sisters had been put in perpetuity under the jurisdiction and dependence of the archbishop of Paris, and if the superiors of the Mission directed it, it was only because this role was conferred upon them, that is to say it was delegated to them by the archbishop.”

Monsieur Hanon responded forcefully, sensing the consequences of any modification in the sisters’ vow of obedience. “If the Daughters of Charity do not vow obedience to the superior of the Mission they will cease to be Daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul.” He predicted that sisters would leave rather than submit to Episcopal authority which represented a violation of the moral relationship that existed between them and their superior (the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission). The Minister proposed a compromise, saying that Hanon could preserve his authority over the sisters by accepting it as a delegated role. Caught between the choice of agreeing to the decree or of being forcibly separated from the Daughters, Hanon asked for some time to consider the proposal.

Monsieur Hanon’s reactions were contradictory. He first said that he would resign as superior general but then he backtracked and accepted the delegation proposed by the Minister of Cults. In a letter of 19 May he informed Cardinal Fesch: “Monsignor, I told his Excellency the Minister of Cults that I would accept the delegation of Monsignor the archbishop of Paris for the conduct of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul as proposed by Your Eminence. I take this opportunity to transmit this decision to your Eminence as well, along with the assurance of my zeal and promptness in fulfilling these duties.”

But on 29 May, he repudiated delegation and again claimed total independence in governing the Company: “You cannot claim any rights with regard to the interior regime or the domestic and temporal government of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. That is the principal charge of the office of superior.”

The year 1809 also saw worsening relations between Napoleon and the Pope. Napoleon demanded that Pius VII honor the terms of the continental blockade he had instituted against his foreign enemies. When the Pope refused French troops invaded the Papal States on 2 October 1808, and quickly occupied Rome.

On 17 May 1809, the Papal States (located in central Italy) were incorporated into the French Empire. The Pope, on 10 June, excommunicated Napoleon. The reaction came swiftly. The Emperor arrested the Pope on 6 July and imprisoned him in Savonne, a port near Genoa in Italy. This action galvanized Catholic opinion against the Emperor.

As the wider conflict with the Holy See began, the struggle between Monsieur Hanon and the Minister of Cults also worsened. Laurent Philippe left Paris and traveled to the south of France. From there, on 8 July 1809, he sent a letter to a number of houses:

At the mother house in Paris there is a grave disagreement among the sisters: some have preserved the respect and inviolable attachment to Saint Vincent and his statutes, and to his successor who is Monsieur Hanon. Others desire and ask for another superior, which would bring the ruin of the whole Company. That is why I now advise you to write to Sister Beaudoin, the interim superioress general, so she may tell her council of your attachment to the statutes of Saint Vincent and how much you are horrified by the proposed changes.

In many houses this letter only served to create confusion. The sisters of Bazas said they would do whatever they needed to so that they could continue to take care of the sick. Those in Ussel wrote with embarrassment,

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34 AN: F/19/6344.
35 AN: F/19/6344, text prepared by the archbishopric.
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Climax of the Conflict — 1809-1810

On the advice of the Minister of Cults, the vicars general of Paris decided to suspend the profession of vows of the Daughters of Charity, as the question of who had the authority to approve their vows was not resolved. The order was dated 17 May 1809.

Obedience vowed by the Daughters of Charity to the superior of the Mission is subordinate to that which is due to the archbishop of Paris, who according to canon law is their primary superior as confirmed by the original decree erecting said congregation.

Art. 1. From this day, no more Daughters of Charity will be allowed to make vows until the legal approval of their Congregation.

Art. 2. The vows made previously, even those to obey the superior of the Mission, are under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Paris and during the vacancy of this see are under our jurisdiction.

Resignation of the Superioress General, Mother Beaudoin — 10 July 1809

When this order was received on 10 July 1809, Mother Beaudoin decided to disobey its provisions. She authorized the young sisters in retreat at the Maison-Mère to pronounce their vows. She informed the vicars general of Paris of her actions, who in turn informed the Minister of Cults. Bigot de Préameneu was furious. He immediately suspended Mother Beaudoin from her functions as superioress general and ordered her to return to her former assignment at the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris. He named her assistant, Sister Marguerite Ithier, to replace her in governing the Company.

Monsieur Hanon’s reaction came swiftly. The same day, he wrote to the Minister of Cults. He said that the Minister’s letter relieving Sister Beaudoin had been received, and had plunged the community into consternation. He expressed his surprise of the choice of Sister Ithier as superioress, since the rules did not call for the assistant to become superioress general, but rather called for a new election. Hanon admitted that the Company of Daughters of Charity was heading towards dissolution: houses were no longer sending postulants; and parents were urging their daughters to return home. Of the 102 sisters who had entered the community in 1809, thirty had already returned to their families.

Mother Beaudoin obeyed the Minister’s directive. She left the Maison-Mère and returned to Les Invalides. She informed Bigot de Préameneu:

Sir, I am in receipt of the letter that Your Excellence did me the honor of writing. I have returned to the Hôtel des Militaires Invalides, as you ordered. At the direction of my superiors I recognize your authority, and I have been prompt in my obedience. However, sir, I do not believe that I have done anything to deserve this unjust treatment even though I can now fulfill my long held desire to return to Les Invalides.

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 AN: F/19/6240.
42 AN: F/19/6319.
43 Ibid.
44 AN: F/19/6344.
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**Climax of the Conflict — 1809-1810**

On the advice of the Minister of Cults, the vicars general of Paris decided to suspend the profession of vows of the Daughters of Charity, as the question of who had the authority to approve their vows was not resolved. The order was dated 17 May 1809:

Obedience vowed by the Daughters of Charity to the superior of the Mission is subordinate to that which is due to the archbishop of Paris, who according to canon law is their primary superior as confirmed by the original decree erecting said congregation.

Art. 1. From this day, no more Daughters of Charity will be allowed to make vows until the legal approval of their Congregation.

Art. 2. The vows made previously, even those to obey the superior of the Mission, are under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Paris and during the vacancy of this see are under our jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{41}

**Resignation of the Superioress General, Mother Beaudoin — 10 July 1809**

When this order was received on 10 July 1809, Mother Beaudoin decided to disobey its provisions. She authorized the young sisters in retreat at the Maison-Mère to pronounce their vows. She informed the vicars general of Paris of her actions, who in turn informed the Minister of Cults. Bigot de Préameneu was furious. He immediately suspended Mother Beaudoin from her functions as superioress general and ordered her to return to her former assignment at the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris. He named her assistant, Sister Marguerite Ithier, to replace her in governing the Company.\textsuperscript{42}

Monsieur Hanon’s reaction came swiftly. The same day, he wrote to the Minister of Cults. He said that the Minister’s letter relieving Sister Beaudoin had been received, and had plunged the community into consternation. He expressed his surprise of the choice of Sister Ithier as superioress, since the rules did not call for the assistant to become superioress general, but rather called for a new election. Hanon admitted that the Company of Daughters of Charity was heading towards dissolution: houses were no longer sending postulants; and parents were urging their daughters to return home.\textsuperscript{43} Of the 102 sisters who had entered the community in 1809, thirty had already returned to their families.

Mother Beaudoin obeyed the Minister’s directive. She left the Maison-Mère and returned to Les Invalides. She informed Bigot de Préameneu:

Sir, I am in receipt of the letter that Your Excellence did me the honor of writing. I have returned to the Hôtel des Militaires Invalides, as you ordered. At the direction of my superiors I recognize your authority, and I have been prompt in my obedience. However, sir, I do not believe that I have done anything to deserve this unjust treatment even though I can now fulfill my long held desire to return to Les Invalides.\textsuperscript{44}

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\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} AN: F/19/6240.

\textsuperscript{42} AN: F/19/6319.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} AN: F/19/6344.
Publication of the New Statutes — 8 November 1809

The process for the revision and approval of the statutes went on. On 1 November 1809, Monsieur Jalabert submitted these proposed modifications to Cardinal Fesch:

1. Add some of Monsieur Bonnet’s statutes.
2. Add the following:
   - The Daughters of Charity are in conformance with the Imperial Decree of 18 February 1809.
   - The Congregation of the Daughters of Charity will be, and will remain in perpetuity, under the jurisdiction and dependence of the archbishop of Paris, conservator of the statutes. The archbishop will designate two priests to fill the function of superior and director respectively.
   - The sisters elsewhere in the departments are under the authority of the local Bishop.
   - The formula of vows contains this modification: I vow to obey our rules and our statutes for a year....

These modifications were accepted by the government on 8 November 1809. By imperial decree Napoleon approved the statutes thus modified for the Daughters of Charity.

Art. 1. The patent letters of November 1657, concerning the sisters of the hospitals of Charity, known as Saint Vincent de Paul, along with the letter of erection of the statutes and annexes, are confirmed and approved. The only exception are the dispositions relative to the superior general of the Missions (since the congregation was suppressed by our decree of 26 September) and the charge of said sisters to conform to the general rule of 18 February concerning hospitals, and above all the articles concerning Episcopal authority and the disposition of goods.

Art. 2. The patent letters, the letter of erection and rule announced in the preceding article will remain in force and annexed to the present decree.

Art. 3. The Daughters of Charity will continue to wear their usual habit and, in general, will conform above all

Worried about this turn of events and fearing the departure of sisters from the hospitals, the vicars general, with the agreement of the Minister of Cults, rescinded the interdiction of the profession of vows for new sisters. And, to prepare for the election of the superioress general, the Minister asked for the minutes of past elections in order to verify the manner in which elections in the Company of the Daughters of Charity had been made.

Suppression of the Congregation of the Mission — 16 September 1809

Having been briefed on the situation, Napoleon would not stand for Monsieur Hanon’s opposition. On 16 September he signed a decree suppressing the Congregation of the Mission. The information was sent to Sister Ithier, the interim superioress general: since the Congregation of the Mission no longer legally existed, Monsieur Hanon could no longer claim to be superior of the Daughters of Charity.

On 10 October, Jacques-Pierre Claude and Jacques-Pierre-Martin Braud were named respectively by the archbishop of Paris as superior and director of the Daughters of Charity. Monsieur Jalabert informed Sister Ithier: “The former attachment of these gentlemen to your congregation, their virtues, their experience, and the service they have given, provide the vicars general the confidence that this choice will be agreeable to you.”

At the Maison-Mère these nominations were not well received. The director of the seminary, Sister Pélagie Nicot, had the sisters of the seminary read Saint Vincent’s conference on fidelity to the rules, especially this significant passage: “Never consent to any change whatsoever; avoid that like poison and say that this title of Confraternity or Society has been given to you so that you’ll be steadfast in retaining the original spirit God gave your Congregation from its birth. Sisters, from the bottom of my heart I entreat you to do this.”

When, on 16 October, Monsieur Claude presented himself to the Daughters of Charity, he was not welcomed. As he entered the seminary all the sisters arose and cried: “Help! Wolf!” Revolt split the Company.

Imprisonment of the Vicar General — 29 October 1809

Persuaded that Monsieur Hanon would continue his opposition, Napoleon ordered his arrest. On 29 October 1809, he was imprisoned.

Monsieur Jalabert believed things would eventually calm down. Monsieur Hanon was freed in November.

45 Ibid.
46 69. Fidelity to the Rules, 8 August 1655, CCD, 10:84.
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45 Ibid.
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to the election of the superioress general and the officers, according to the laudable customs of their institution as they are expressed in said statutes written by Saint Vincent de Paul.

This decree became official when it was published in the Bulletin des Lois #252 (second trimester, 1809), article 4838. The text was sent to the Maison-Mère by Monsieur Achard, in the name of the vicars general of the archdiocese, with a very long explanation. Napoleon’s actions were portrayed as being in accordance with Saint Vincent’s thought:

My dear sisters, we have as much satisfaction in seeing your statutes approved by his Imperial Majesty as you must have had in receiving them. You possess in your oratory the precious relics of Saint Vincent de Paul. Your institution is his good work. Your statutes are his masterpiece. His spirit, his body, his heart, all is among you and in your hands.

The statutes that we gave you are not his work by a second hand, but his work. You will find his thoughts, his sentiments, and his inimitable style of tender and incomparable pity.

Who would have thought, my very dear sisters, that the rule of 1718 would have made you forget the primitive statutes? The Minister of his Majesty discovered these with the perseverance that characterizes men of clairvoyance determined to find the truth in original documents. His Excellence found them in the archives of the former parlement of Paris, where Saint Vincent deposited them when he registered the patent letter. The Minister gave the originals to the Emperor who could clearly see the signatures of St. Vincent de Paul, the Cardinal de Retz and the patent letter. This was the original monument that the Emperor wanted to restore. Great men love to confirm the acts of other great men. The Emperor would not have found it worthy, worthy of Saint Vincent de Paul, worthy of your institution, to give you other statutes than the ones that Saint Vincent de Paul himself gave you.48

The letter ended with an announcement of the date for the election of the superioress general, set for 10 December.

**Election of Mother Mousteyro — 10 December 1809**

This election was presided over by Monsieur Jalabert and Pierre Vignier, vicars general of Paris. One hundred forty-eight sisters were present and chose as superioress general Sister Judith Mousteyro, “even though she was somewhat opposed to the settlement albeit in a moderate way.”49 Mother Mousteyro was seventy-four years old (fifty-two years of vocation), and was the superior at the Clermont hospital. Sister Elisabeth Baudet (fifty-six years old, thirty-seven of vocation), superior at Ile de Ré, was named treasurer.

On 1 January 1810, Mother Mousteyro, in the customary new year’s circular letter, sent the all the sisters copies of the new statutes and recommended the renewal of their vows. But on 4 January, conscious of the difficulties the vow of obedience to the bishop would cause to the life and work of the Company, she proposed an abbreviated formula to the vicars general based only upon obeying the rules.50 The vicars general, after consulting Cardinal Fesch, refused the proposed formula and demanded that the vows include the statement of obedience to the rules and statutes — that is, obedience to the archbishop of Paris.51

In response Mother Judith Mousteyro wrote, 1 February, to the secretary of the archbishop:

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48 Ibid.
49 D.C. Archives, book of elections.
50 AN: F/19/6344.
51 Ibid.
to the election of the superioress general and the officers, according to the laudable customs of their institution as they are expressed in said statutes written by Saint Vincent de Paul.

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49 D.C. Archives, book of elections.

50 AN: F/19/6344.

51 Ibid.
It is impossible for me to express the surprise and sorrow caused to me by the text for formula of vows that you sent yesterday…. I flattered myself that I would be able reunite all our divided spirits. Which lead me to ask them to profess vows according to the formula I proposed. I hoped that this would be agreeable to you, since all we want is peace…. My conscience would reproach me for the rest of my life if I accepted such a formula.

If we are forced to receive them it would be more proper for us not to renew our vows. This is what I would encourage the sisters to do, but in the end they will do what their consciences dictate.

In my case, I have the advantage of having professed valid vows for forty years of my life. I cannot take back what I have already given to God.\footnote{AN: F/19/6344, text prepared by the archbishopric.}

Without waiting for a response, Mother Mousteyro sent a circular letter to the sisters wherein she restated her opposition to all the changes in the Company’s government. She was very conscious of the consequences this would have for her:

At this time of year, I find myself in the position of not being able to send the traditional letter concerning the renovation of your vows. In light of the fact that the archbishop requires that we adopt a formula that directs our vow of obedience to him, I do not think that I have the power to consent for you, my dear sisters, and to make you agree to such a new concept, which would divide us from our sisters in Poland and other places. What is more, I would be remiss in the confidence that you have in me. And even if I am to suffer the same fate as Monsieur our Most Honored Father (Dominque Hanon), I would not agree to anything that would represent such an essential change to the work of Saint Vincent. On this point, I do not rely upon my own judgment, but believe that only the supreme authority (of the papacy) could change the words of our vow formula.

My dear sisters, let us renew our zeal and our charity towards our dear masters, the poor. The happy chains that attach us to their service are in no other hands than those of Jesus Christ.\footnote{D.C. Archives, and AN: F/19/6344.}

When he heard of Mother Mousteyro’s decision Monsieur Jalabert went to the Maison-Mère of the Daughters of Charity to communicate the archbishop’s disapproval and to try to make them submit.\footnote{AN: F/19/6344, text prepared by the archbishopric.} Faced with the difficulties of his task, he proposed that the Minister of Cults exile from Paris all the sisters who were strongest in their support of the supérieur general, in particular: the two directors of the seminary, Sister Pélagie Nicot (fifty-three years old, thirty-five of vocation) and Sister Gilette Ricourt (forty-nine years old, twenty-six of vocation); the superior of the parish of Saint Roch, Sister Françoise Tireau (sixty-four years old, forty-three of vocation); and the former supérieur general, Sister Antoinette Beaudoin (fifty-three years old, thirty-eight of vocation).

On 19 March, Bigot de Préameneu sent for Mother Mousteyro. She visited the Minister of Cults accompanied by some sisters. It appeared at first that she was convinced by the Minister’s arguments and that she was ready to accept the new vows of obedience. But, when she returned to the Maison-Mère, she reconsidered and wrote to the Minister that she would not accept the new formula of vows as she had led him to believe she would, and that she was prepared to tender her resignation. She admitted that she had originally agreed, but explained that she had felt pressured, and had been unable to express herself honestly.\footnote{AN: F/19/6344.}

In a circular of 3 April 1810, Mother Mousteyro informed the Daughters of Charity that she had presented her resignation as supérieur general: \footnote{AN: F/19/6344.}

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In a circular of 3 April 1810, Mother Mousteyro informed the Daughters of Charity that she had presented her resignation as superioress general:

After long reflection in the presence of God, I have concluded that I must resign. When I accepted the role of superioress, I had some hopes that, with the grace of God, I could accomplish some good, in particular to bring about a union of all spirits as I had in other houses in which Providence had placed me. Now, after all the sacrifices I have made to bring peace, I no longer have anymore hope.

\textsuperscript{53} D.C. Archives, and AN: F/19/6344.
\textsuperscript{54} AN: F/19/6344, text prepared by the archbishopric.
\textsuperscript{55} AN: F/19/6344.
The archbishop of Paris immediately sent a circular to the Daughters of Charity affirming that calm had been reestablished, and asking them to follow divine inspiration and the wisdom of Saint Vincent in being faithful to their vocations. 58

The next day, 4 April, Monsieur Jalabert informed the Minister of Cults of these developments. He told of Sister Mousteyro’s resignation, and recounted that the directors of the seminary had been ordered to return to their families. He did not believe that Sister Mousteyro would encourage any further opposition amongst the sisters; he could not say the same however for Sister Nicot, who: “departed for Lyon where there are pockets of resistance,” or of Sister Ricourt, who: “had departed to Mans where the sisters are very defiant.” The local Bishop had been warned. 59

On 15 May, Mother Durgueilh sent a circular letter to the Daughters of Charity informing them of her nomination as head of the Company. She said she had accepted the charge only to help preserve the community and avoid a new dissolution that would deprive the poor of the help of numerous sisters.

Because I had been nominated at the last election, after the resignation of Sister Mousteyro the Lord called me to replace her, following the means approved by Saint Vincent I left the house to which I had been assigned to follow the demands of Providence. As hard as these sacrifices have been, I will do whatever I need to do to preserve our dear community. These are the only reasons that helped me, despite my repugnance, to decide to accept such a task, especially given the present circumstances. I have been greatly pained by the disunion that exists amongst us. While acknowledging the good intentions of many sisters, what they desire seems impossible. It is no less true, dear sisters, that we must not and cannot refuse to obey legitimate spiritual and temporal authority, as they do not ask us to do anything which is contrary to our holy religion. No community can survive in a State without the agreement and authority of both powers. 60

The position taken by Sister Durgueilh was met by a range of reactions. If a good number of the sisters accepted the situation, some did so seemingly without understanding what was at stake. Others reacted negatively to her

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56 D.C. Archives.
57 D.C. Archives, Book of Elections.
58 AN: F/19/6344.
59 Ibid.
60 D.C. Archives.
I know that I have failed, and after all of the setbacks I have suffered, I am determined to resign. The final straw came when I was pressured to change the formula of our sainted vows; a change which would have cost me my conscience. The present situation makes it impossible for me to fulfill my functions as duty demands. I must ask God to give you light in the choice of a new superioress, because from this moment I no longer hold that position; I now see myself as the least member of the community.56

Election of Mother Durgueilh — 3 April 1810

The same day, two priests, Messieurs Viguier and Braud, came to the Maison-Mère of the Daughters of Charity and accepted the resignation of Sister Judith Mousteyro. In her place they appointed Sister Marie Dominique Durgueilh, superior of the Hospital of Saint Eloi de Montpellier. According to the custom of the Daughters of Charity, two sisters’ names were proposed for election as superioress general. In the last election Sister Judith Mousteyro and Sister Durgueilh were chosen as the two candidates. The three sister councilors, Sister Marguerite Ithier, Sister Elisabeth Baudet, and Sister Marguerite Grange, along with the two priests of Paris, signed the register of election.57

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56 D.C. Archives.
57 D.C. Archives, Book of Elections.
58 AN: F/19/6344.
59 Ibid.
60 D.C. Archives.
nomination. They refused to recognize the new superior general, and did not accept the dismissal of the sisters who directed the seminary.

Approximately one third of the houses in France opposed the settlement. Almost 100 sisters decided to leave the Company. Among them, fifty had been in the community less than ten years. Many, particularly older sisters, had already rejoined their families once before during the dark years of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{61}

Monsieur Hanon, who encouraged this resistance, was again arrested and imprisoned at the Fenestrelle Fortress in Piedmont. He remained there until Napoleon’s defeat in April 1814.

On 1 March 1811, Mother Durgueilh sent the sisters the new vow formula:

\begin{quote}
In the presence of God and of the Heavenly Host, I renew for one year my baptismal promises and make a vow to God of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in accordance with our rules and our statutes.\textsuperscript{62} I also vow to dedicate myself in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, to the corporal and spiritual service of the sick poor, who are our true masters. I ask this by the merits of Jesus Christ crucified and through the intercession of the very holy Virgin.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

She urged the sisters to renew their vows as was customary on 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation: “I have put off writing to you about the renewal of our holy vows until I could send you the permission that you will find in this circular and the vow formula […] I am persuaded, dear sisters, that it will be a great consolation to you to see the time of penitence that our Good Lord gave us last year come to an end. Its purpose, without a doubt, was so that we could appreciate his graces and accept his exhortation to a renewal of our fervor and fidelity.”\textsuperscript{64} Following this letter, the opposition hardened again. These sisters refused the new formula of vows which placed them under the jurisdiction of the bishops.

\textsuperscript{61} Cf. AN: F/19/6344 — as of 18 December 1811.

\textsuperscript{62} From the origins of the Company the formula read “I, the undersigned, in the presence of God, renew the promises of my baptism, and I vow poverty, chastity and obedience to the Venerable Superior General of the Priests of the Mission in the Company of the Daughters of Charity in order to give myself, for the whole of this year, to the corporal and spiritual service of the sick poor…” A.44B Formula of the Vows, \textit{Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac}, ed. & trans. by Louise Sullivan, D.C. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), p. 782.

\textsuperscript{63} AN: F/19/6344.

\textsuperscript{64} D.C. Archives.

\section*{Expulsion of Dissenting Sisters}

Napoleon was surprised by the sisters’ resistance. He reacted angrily and instructed Bigot de Prémameneu to obtain the submission of all sisters: they were to indicate by oath or in writing their recognition of Mother Durgueilh, the superior named by the archbishop of Paris, upon the advice of the Minister of Cults.

\section*{The Bishops are Ordered to Take Action — March 1811}

At the end of March 1811, the Minister of Cults sent a circular letter to the bishops: “His Majesty has learned that many sisters will not recognize the superior general… The sisters who have refused to recognize their superior are not really Sisters of Charity… Not only must they submit, but if they cannot be persuaded to fulfill their duties they must be punished and publicly removed from the congregation.”\textsuperscript{65} In the following weeks numerous accounts of these efforts were submitted. Procedures to ensure the sisters’ obedience had been put in place, either by the bishop himself, or by a priest delegated for the purpose.

The bishops’ reactions were varied: some were submissive to the Emperor’s orders while others defended the sisters. Cardinal Jean-Sifrein Maury of Paris was able to persuade Sister Bonamy, superior of the parish of Saint Paul, and Sister Beaucourt of the Invalides, but not Sister Tireau of the Parish of Saint Roch.\textsuperscript{66}

However, rebel sisters were not always welcomed in houses: “If the superior of Saint Paul, who has returned to the Maison-Mère, is not treated well her stubborn temperament will lead her to change her opinion which she had given out of the submission and respect due to your Eminence.”\textsuperscript{67} The bishop of Cahors announced the submission of the superiors of Cahors and of Montauban, but he noted that the superior of Agen was still insubordinate, “She travels around and stirs up trouble.”\textsuperscript{68} The bishops of Meaux, Coutances, Metz, and Evreux were able to obtain the submission of the sisters working in their hospitals and dioceses.\textsuperscript{69} The bishop of Sees reported that it had taken him two hours to persuade the superior of Bellème. The bishop of Nancy related the distress of Sister Martel, superior of Verdun: “Will I violate my conscience if I recognize the new superior general?”\textsuperscript{70} The bishop of Versailles asked that the superior
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The Bishops are Ordered to Take Action — March 1811

At the end of March 1811, the Minister of Cults sent a circular letter to the bishops: “His Majesty has learned that many sisters will not recognize the superioress general... The sisters who have refused to recognize their superior are not really Sisters of Charity... Not only must they submit, but if they cannot be persuaded to fulfill their duties they must be punished and publicly removed from the congregation.”

In the following weeks numerous accounts of these efforts were submitted. Procedures to ensure the sisters’ obedience had been put in place, either by the bishop himself, or by a priest delegated for the purpose.

The bishops’ reactions were varied: some were submissive to the Emperor’s orders while others defended the sisters. Cardinal Jean-Sifrein Maury of Paris was able to persuade Sister Bonamy, superior of the parish of Saint Paul, and Sister Beaucourt of the Invalides, but not Sister Tireau of the Parish of Saint Roch.

However, rebel sisters were not always welcomed in houses: “If the superior of Saint Paul, who has returned to the Maison-Mère, is not treated well her stubborn temperament will lead her to change her opinion which she had given out of the submission and respect due to your Eminence.”

The bishops of Meaux, Coutances, Metz, and Evreux were able to obtain the submission of the sisters working in their hospitals and dioceses.

The bishop of Sees reported that it had taken him two hours to persuade the superior of Bellème. The bishop of Nancy related the distress of Sister Martel, superior of Verdun: “Will I violate my conscience if I recognize the new superioress general?” The bishop of Versailles asked that the superior

She urged the sisters to renew their vows as was customary on 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation: “I have put off writing to you about the renewal of our holy vows until I could send you the permission that you will find in this circular and the vow formula [...] I am persuaded, dear sisters, that it will be a great consolation to you to see the time of penitence that our Good Lord gave us last year come to an end. Its purpose, without a doubt, was so that we could appreciate his graces and accept his exhortation to a renewal of our fervor and fidelity.” Following this letter, the opposition hardened again. These sisters refused the new formula of vows which placed them under the jurisdiction of the bishops.

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61 Cf. AN: F/19/6344 — as of 18 December 1811.
62 From the origins of the Company the formula read “I, the undersigned, in the presence of God, renew the promises of my baptism, and I vow poverty, chastity and obedience to the Venerable Superior General of the Priests of the Mission in the Company of the Daughters of Charity in order to give myself, for the whole of this year, to the corporal and spiritual service of the sick poor... A.44B Formula of the Vows, Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, ed. & trans. by Louise Sullivan, D.C. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), p. 782.
63 AN: F/19/6344.
64 D.C. Archives.
65 AN: F/19/6319.
66 AN: F/19/6344.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
of the parish of Saint Louis be given special consideration in light of her zeal for service of the poor.\textsuperscript{71} The bishop of Amiens insisted that the sisters be treated with kindness, acknowledging that “they exercise their functions with so much zeal and charity.”\textsuperscript{72} The bishop of Rochelle noted that the civil and military hospitals needed replacements for more than 50 sisters. “No sister is disposed to make their submission. It is against their conscience. Nothing will convince these hot-heads, particularly since they are women who are convinced that their faith is being compromised.”\textsuperscript{73} In Dijon and Lyon, the sisters also resisted efforts to have them submit.

Letters arrived at the Maison-Mère detailing the turmoil of conscience sisters were experiencing:

I will not hide from you that I have had great trouble accepting the changes made to our statutes. I have finally accepted them, but not out of fear of the threats that have been made; the idea that these threats in-and-of-themselves would be capable of making me submit would be horrible to contemplate. It was the love of my vocation, and the fear of losing that, which were the only motives that persuaded me to submit to this new order of things of which I had such repugnance.\textsuperscript{74}

The love and respect that we had for our holy statutes led us to greatly desire that they should not be changed. However, in light of the governmental order which offers us the choice to either quit our vocation or accept the proposed changes, we declare that we adhere, being convinced that our adherence does not damage our conscience.\textsuperscript{75}

After the intervention of the bishops 393 sisters out of 560 submitted, and twenty-six houses out of ninety-three declared their submission by recognizing Sister Durgueilh as superior general and accepting the new vow formula.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Letter of Sister Dréan, hospice de Dax, 25 May 1811, AN: F/19/6319.
\textsuperscript{75} Letter of the Community of the Hospital of Dax, 22 May 1811, AN: F/19/6319.

\section*{The Departmental Prefects are Ordered to Act — July 1811}

Faced with the resistance of a number of sisters despite the intervention of the bishops the Minister of Cults Bigot de Préameneu, addressed the departmental prefects. In July of 1811 he sent a report on the dissident sisters within their various departments. He reminded the prefects that: “If the sisters refuse to recognize the superior general, they must quit the habit and retire to their birthplace.” Further, the minister demanded ongoing police surveillance: “The sisters sent away to their birthplaces are to be watched by the authorities so that they do not have any correspondence with the sisters of the congregation of Saint Vincent de Paul, of which they are no longer a part, and to ensure they do not exercise any function relative to their former positions as hospital workers.”\textsuperscript{76}

The prefects responded quickly, reporting the departures of the intransigent sisters. A report from November 1811, submitted by Mother Durgueilh at the request of the Minister of Cults, reported that eighty-seven sisters had chosen to leave rather than submit.\textsuperscript{77} Some departmental prefects, such as those in La Rochelle, Rochefort, and Le Mans, dismissed local hospital sisters and requested replacements.\textsuperscript{78}

\section*{The Bishops are Ordered to Act — January 1812}

Faced with the continuing resistance of several houses, the Minister of Cults sent a new instruction to twelve bishops who would not, or could not convince the sisters, asking them to fulfill their orders. In some cases the bishops were able to obtain submissions, but more often than not the sisters remained firm in their opposition.

The bishop of Carcassonne informed the Minister that he had summoned the superior of Pennautier; Sister Marie Madeleine Chanu. The sister, old, infirm, and senile, arrived on a donkey. Despite her senility she told the bishop that she would not go against her conscience, even if they made her suffer. Her elderly companion responded the same way.\textsuperscript{79}

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The bishop of Béziers refused to implement the order of expulsion as the sisters in question were highly esteemed in the locality because of their good conduct and zeal in service to the sick. He explained that their expulsion would leave a bad impression.\textsuperscript{80} The bishop of Toulouse reported on the eight houses in his diocese which contained seventy sisters. He

\textsuperscript{76} AN: F/19/6319.
\textsuperscript{77} AN: F/19/6344.
\textsuperscript{78} AN: F/19/6319.
\textsuperscript{79} Letter of 24 January 1812, AN: F/19/6319.
\textsuperscript{80} Letter of 23 January 1812, AN: F/19/6334.
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advised the Minister of Cults against any hasty actions, which could produce negative results.  

The resistance of the women surprised Napoleon, as an army general and Emperor he was accustomed to being obeyed. He hardened his tone in a new letter to his Minister on 3 March 1812:

"It is time to put an end to this scandal caused by the Daughters of Charity who are in revolt against their superior. My intention is to suppress all those houses which, despite the warnings you have given them, have not yet submitted. You will repopulate the insubordinate houses, not by sisters of the same order, but with those of another order of charity. The Daughters of Charity of Paris will thus lose their influence. That will be good. You will substitute sisters of an order which is more obedient and does not complain."

New Actions by the Prefects — March 1812

On the same day as Napoleon’s order, the Minister of Cults sent new instructions to eleven prefects. He recommended they unite speed with prudence in fulfilling their orders so there would be no interruption in the service of the sick in their hospitals. He asked them to call once more on the superior of each house and demand she cooperate in obtaining the submission of her sisters. But he recognized it would be difficult to replace the insubordinate sisters. The next day he sent a letter to eleven other hospital congregations, asking for sisters to replace some 250 Daughters of Charity who had not submitted. Only five of the congregations responded, placing thirty sisters at the disposal of the minister.

The prefects understood how difficult it would be to execute these orders. Those from the departments of the Basses-Pyrenees, Lot, Garonne, and Gers, asked permission to suspend the implementation of the orders given the difficulties their hospitals were facing in tending to the numerous sick and wounded Spanish prisoners. On 3 April, Bigot de Préameneu lost his patience and sent a new order to the prefects: “The insubordinate sisters represent an organized opposition which is very dangerous. The Emperor sees their resistance as a deplorable opposition to his government.” An express order was given to expel the dissident sisters within twenty-four hours.

During the month of April 1812, 145 sisters received the order to leave their ministries, take off their habit as a Daughter of Charity, and return home to their families. They were each sent an internal passport. In several cases sick or elderly sisters could not travel and so some stayed and were cared for, while others were welcomed by friends. Some sisters had no family to return to. Where were they to go? Some asked to be allowed to rent a room nearby. Most often, they were allowed to do so.

Before their departures, many sisters again reaffirmed their determination to resist. The eight sisters of the hospital of Pau sent a letter to the bishop: “We do not want in any way to contribute to the destruction of the works of Saint Vincent, who often counseled us to resist any new innovations in our rules. If, faithful to these sentiments, we are found worthy of continuing in the service of the poor, we will be happy to do so. If the contrary is true, we will submit to the order of the government and leave.” At Trévoux, the five sisters signed a declaration affirming, “We leave the service of the sick with chagrin and sadness.”

The expelled sisters who returned to their families were placed under close police surveillance. The prefects had to certify that the former sisters no longer worked in hospitals, and that they were doing nothing to foment problems with the sisters who had submitted. The prefect of the department Loir et Cher noted that Sister Besnard, the former superior of the hospice of Mans, arrived in Saint Aignan, her birthplace, on 29 August, and that she was leading a tranquil life, did not wear the habit of the Congregation, and only dressed in black. The prefect of Allier noted that Sister de Boutin of the hospice of Saint Pol had not returned to Sauvagny, her place of birth. He believed she had retired in Enrichemont (Cher) at the home of her brother who was the town’s priest.

Some sisters would not accept their forced inactivity. Sister Louise Buyot, expelled from Toulouse, went to work at the hospital of Muret under the pseudonym Dame Laventurier, the name of one of her father’s lands. She was hired. Informed of this, the Minister of Cults demanded an explanation from the prefect of Toulouse: “This situation violates the orders of his Imperial Majesty. The Daughters of Charity who have not submitted must immediately relinquish the habit and be sent to their birthplaces.”

On 18 August, the prefect of Toulouse confirmed the facts of the case, and he confirmed that the sister would be sent away. In September, the prefect of Beaune was questioned by the Minister because the city’s Welfare Bureau

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81 Letter of 28 February 1812, AN: F/19/6319.
82 AN: F/19/6319.
83 Ibid.
84 AN: F/19/6344.
85 AN: F/19/6319.
86 Letter of 11 April 1812, AN: F/19/6319.
87 Letter of 19 April 1812, AN: F/19/6319.
88 Letters of 30 September 1811, AN: F/19/6319.
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Since the beginning of the conflict almost 270 sisters had left or were expelled from the community. Among them, almost one third were sisters who had entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity after its restoration in 1801. This fact certainly illustrates the influence of the directors of the seminary, who after 1810 had publicly opposed all modification of the community’s statutes.

Often local superiors encouraged the resistance in their communities. In Mans, Sister Besnard\footnote{Sister Madeleine Besnard was named superior general in May 1818.} led nineteen sisters in their opposition. In Béziers, Sister Amblard\footnote{Sister Catherine Amblard was named superior general in 1820, after the death of Sister Besnard.} led fifteen sisters who were expelled. In Lyon, twenty-two sisters were sent away to their families; in Toulouse, seventeen; in Dijon, fourteen; in Agen, eleven; in Auch, twelve; etc....

Government of Mother Durgueilh — 1812-1814

Mother Marie Dominique Durgueilh, elected superior general after the dismissal of Mother Mousteyro, was considered to be a usurper by the recalcitrant sisters. She was legitimately reelected by the sisters assembled according to the customs of the Daughters of Charity, on 18 May 1812.

On 22 February 1813, Pope Pius VII, imprisoned at the palace of Fontainebleau, signed a rescript confirming the powers of the superior general of the Daughters of Charity:

Our Holy Father Pope Pius VII, considering the present state of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, and wanting good order and uniformity to be observed between the sisters as to the simple vows that they have to make each year, gives them all, under the present circumstances, the authority of professing, in accordance with their own consciences, the simple vows according to the commandment of the superior general whom they must, according to the provision of their constitutions, recognize as the head of all the congregation.\footnote{D.C. Archives.}

On 7 March, Mother Durgueilh, after speaking privately with the Pope the night before, had the joy of attending the papal mass. She relayed the warm words of Pius VII to the sisters: “[...] I was presented to His Holiness, he received me with the greatest kindness. I asked for his blessing for myself and for all the community, which he kindly accorded because of our merit. I would not have thought to share his words if I did not want them to demonstrate the great affection that His Holiness has for the Daughters of Charity. This has given me hope that all those who have left will return.” Mother Durgueilh was happy with the Pope’s encouragement, interpreting it as his approval of her leadership of the Company.

The conflict the Daughters endured during these three years did not diminish the number of young women entering the community. In 1810, 110 were received in the seminary,\footnote{Name given to the Novitiate in the Daughters of Charity.} in 1812, 146; and in 1813, 127. The Maison-Mère, located on the Rue du Vieux Colombier, was too small to house all the novices. Mother Durgueilh asked the government for a bigger house.
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On 25 March 1813, an imperial decree conveyed the Hôtel de Châtillon, at 132 rue du Bac, which belonged to the hospices of Paris, to the Daughters of Charity.

Art. 1. The Hôtel de Châtillon, situated on the rue du Bac and belonging to the hospices of our good city of Paris, will be acquired by the city.
Art. 2. The price of this house, valued at 26,000 francs, will be paid to the hospices by means of the surrender of a rent of 13,000 francs to be taken from profits at the wine market.
Art. 3. Our good city of Paris will convey the house to the Daughters of Charity to function as the principal house of their order.

A decree of the prefect of the Seine, dated 17 May, confirmed the sale of the Hôtel de Châtillon by the administration of the hospices of the city of Paris. “The Daughters of Charity will use freely, from this day, the Hôtel de Châtillon, to establish the principal residence of their order. This use will conform to the provisions of the Napoleonic Code relative to the rights of use.” Needed repairs were to be made by the city of Paris. The Ministry of the Interior granted a sum of 150,217 francs for the needed work.

After visiting the future location of the Maison-Mère, and in light of the growing number of vocations, Mother Durgueilh asked for the construction of a tribune for the chapel. The cost for this extra construction was covered by the sale of forty-six mirrors from the former Hôtel de Châtillon. A public sale was held on 13 February 1815, earning the sum of 7,683 francs.

A Confusing Situation — 1814-1815

April 1814 brought profound political changes. During the War of the Sixth Coalition the allies invaded France in December 1813 and arrived in Paris, 31 March 1814. Napoleon abdicated on 11 April and left for the island of Elba. On 3 May, Louis XVIII, the oldest brother of the late King Louis XVI, entered Paris and restored the Bourbon Monarchy.

Napoleon’s political prisoners were immediately freed. Pius VII left Fontainebleau and returned to Rome, where he was greeted with a triumphal welcome on 24 May. Dominique Hanon, who had been imprisoned since 15 February 1811, was freed on 13 April from the Fenestrelle prison. He obtained a passport for Lyon and arrived in Paris on 1 June 1814. He learned of everything that had taken place during his imprisonment. On 23 June he told the sisters:

…that he would immediately undertake the reestablishment of the community as prescribed by Saint Vincent. He asked them to forget about, and maintain absolute silence on, the events that had taken place over the last three years. He confirmed the decisions of Mother Durgueilh with regards to the foundation of new establishments; the nominations of sister servants; and placements of sisters. He retained Sister Chouilli as secretary general of the Company, and reappointed Sister Ricourt (a dissident sister who had left), as seminary directress replacing the current director, Sister Vincent. In addition, Mother Mousteyro, who resigned because she refused to accept the government’s demands was to return as superioress general. Mother Durgueilh was to become her assistant. Finally he declared the election of 30 May as null and void, and directed that no other actions be taken until his arrival in Paris.

When confronted by the Hanon’s reproaches and directives, Mother Durgueilh justified her conduct:

You are not unaware, my dear sisters, of the personal sacrifices I made when I left the house that was so dear to me. I made this decision upon the advice of enlightened persons — both the bishops and others — who urged me to make the sacrifices necessary to support the community which I was fortunate enough to return to peace and union. My authority was confirmed by the Holy Father in his rescript of 22 February 1813 […] Our Most Honored Father has directed that I cede my office to Sister Mousteyro, aged seventy-nine years. He has notified her to this effect. Needed repairs were to be made by the city of Paris. The Ministry of the Interior granted a sum of 150,217 francs for the needed work.

A decree of the prefect of the Seine, dated 17 May, confirmed the sale of the Hôtel de Châtillon by the administration of the hospices of the city of Paris. “The Daughters of Charity will use freely, from this day, the Hôtel de Châtillon, to establish the principal residence of their order. This use will conform to the provisions of the Napoleonic Code relative to the rights of use.”

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A Confusing Situation — 1814-1815

April 1814 brought profound political changes. During the War of the Sixth Coalition the allies invaded France in December 1813 and arrived in Paris, 31 March 1814. Napoleon abdicated on 11 April and left for the island of Elba. On 3 May, Louis XVIII, the oldest brother of the late King Louis XVI, entered Paris and restored the Bourbon Monarchy.

Napoleon’s political prisoners were immediately freed. Pius VII left Fontainebleau and returned to Rome, where he was greeted with a triumphal welcome on 24 May. Dominique Hanon, who had been imprisoned since 15 February 1811, was freed on 13 April from the Fenestrelle prison. He obtained a passport for Lyon and arrived in Paris on 1 June 1814. He learned of everything that had taken place during his imprisonment. On 23 June he told the sisters:

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96 The number later changed to 140 rue du Bac.
97 AN: F/13/884.
98 AN: F/13/740.
99 Ibid.
100 D.C. Archives.
On 25 March 1813, an imperial decree conveyed the Hôtel de Châtillon, at 132 rue du Bac, which belonged to the hospices of Paris, to the Daughters of Charity.

Art. 1. The Hôtel de Châtillon, situated on the rue du Bac and belonging to the hospices of our good city of Paris, will be acquired by the city.

Art. 2. The price of this house, valued at 26,000 francs, will be paid to the hospices by means of the surrender of a rent of 13,000 francs to be taken from profits at the wine market.

Art. 3. Our good city of Paris will convey the house to the Daughters of Charity to function as the principal house of their order.97

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Mother Durgueilh replied, trying again to justify her actions:

I have been made aware of Monsieur Hanon’s circular. My conscience is not troubled because, by the grace of God, I have always, in regards to our affairs, acted only after asking for advice and after much prayer. But I am distressed by the thought that our sisters will accept this circular because this will involve us in a new set of troubles that will be even worse than the previous ones. The congregation will suffer in any case, and we will scandalize the world instead of edifying it. That is why I immediately write to ask you not to be troubled by this letter, and to exhort the sisters you know to not be worried.

Papal Intervention — 1815

The situation facing the Community of the Daughters of Charity was fraught with difficulties. Monsieur Hanon’s circular letters, which he had hoped would spur healing instead only made the wounds worse. Those of Mother Durgueilh, designed to justify the status quo, did nothing to calm the situation. Many letters were sent to Pope Pius VII asking him to intervene.

After studying the issues, the Pope tried to calm the conflict by naming Paul Thérèse David d’Astros, vicar capitular of Paris, as apostolic visitor for the Company of the Daughters of Charity, with all the rights traditionally accorded to the superior general. The pontifical decree was dated 17 January 1815.

On 20 February, Monsieur d’Astros sent a letter informing the sisters of his nomination. His first duty as apostolic visitor was to preside over the election of a new superioress general according to the statutes of the Daughters of Charity. Dominique Hanon would be allowed to be present. He was also to oversee the return of the dispersed sisters. The pontifical decree insisted on the restoration of unity among the sisters: “That their hearts should bind them in peace and charity, and that all things be reestablished in the old and good order and union; so that, reunited calmly and under the yoke of obedience, the Daughters of Charity may be strengthened in constancy and courage for the greater glory of God, the joy of the Church, and the advantage of Christians.”

Two days later Monsieur Hanon also sent the text of the pontifical decree, and added his commentary. He noted that more than 150 houses (out of 274) recognized his authority.
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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
In March of 1815, Monsieur d’Astros convoked an extraordinary assembly of the Daughters of Charity for the new election of the superioress general. He demanded that all sisters participate in this assembly. On 12 March, the fifth Sunday of Lent, the assembly, brought together according to the rescript of Pius VII, elected as their superioress general Sister Elisabeth Baudet. Mother Elisabeth Baudet was not one of the dissenting sisters. She had served as the treasurer of the Company from 1809 to 1812 under Mother Durgueilh.

The evening of that same day, Monsieur d’Astros informed the sisters of the results of the general assembly and of the election of Sister Elisabeth Baudet. He noted that the election had taken place in the presence of Monsieur Hanon, who performed the functions assigned to him in the statutes. The apostolic visitor called for all of the dissident sisters to return to the community. These individuals were to write to the superioress, who would “take care of the manner, the place, the time for the sisters’ return, and their new assignments as she deemed fit.”

The following Tuesday, Mother Elisabeth Baudet announced her election as superioress general: “Be sure, my dear sisters, of my willingness to continue to achieve peace and union among us. I hope that you will make this task easier for me by renewing your fervor in the practice of perfect charity, in your regularity, and your zeal in serving the poor.”

However, the calm which was gradually returning to the Company of the Daughters of Charity took a sudden and unexpected turn. On 20 March, Napoleon Bonaparte, who had escaped the island of Elba where he was prisoner, entered Paris, and was welcomed by the populace. Louis XVIII escaped to Gand, in Belgium. As Monsieur Hanon would say a few months later, “This return puts us in great peril, and causes us consternation and alarm.”

Napoleon’s presence was short lived: 100 days. The defeat at Waterloo, 18 June, brought his downfall. Followed to Paris by the victorious armies, Napoleon signed his second abdication 22 June 1815. He was then deported to the island of Saint Helena. Napoleon died on Saint Helena, 5 May 1821.

The presence of allied soldiers around Paris frightened the sisters in charge of educating young girls at the house of Saint Cyr. It was decided to send the girls to Paris for safety, and to house them at the Rue du Vieux Colombier. On 29 June 1815, the Daughters of Charity vacated their house on the Rue du Vieux Colombier and moved to their new Maison-Mère, at the Hôtel de Châtillon, on the Rue du Bac, where construction was almost complete. The move was quickly accomplished. The remains of their founder, Louise de Marillac, arrived first, then the seminary directresses and the 100 seminary sisters after, and finally the sick and infirm sisters. On 6 August, Monsieur Hanon blessed the chapel of the new Maison-Mère, a chapel requested from the government by Mother Durgueilh.

Return of the Expelled Sisters

The reentry of the dissident sisters of the Company posed some problems. Should the sisters return to the houses they had left in 1811 and 1812, or should they come first to the Maison-Mère in Paris? Would they be welcomed by a community divided by their departures and the 100 seminary sisters after, and finally the sick and infirm sisters. On 1 January 1815, Monsieur Hanon wrote in his circular letter to “our sisters, who have been the victims of impious challenges to the authority and the institutions of the Church.” He affirmed that they would be called back to “their offices, to the places and houses of the Company, as soon as it
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will be possible.” While waiting, he asked them to remain in their current locations. He affirmed that sisters could return to their original houses if the sisters living there welcomed them. However, he also affirmed: “But those returning to their old houses must see this as only a temporary situation. They will be responsible to the local superior who will inform us of their return. The fact that they resisted Napoleon, and defended the link between Company of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission, will not give them any special rights or power.”

In the decree of 19 February 1815, naming the apostolic visitor, Pope Pius VII expressed his wish that “all the dispersed sisters be called back to the family; that hearts be reunited by the ties of peace and charity and that all things be reestablished in good order and unity.”

Napoleon’s 100-days-return created another interruption. On 16 October 1815, Monsieur Hanon gave new directives to facilitate the return of sisters to the Company: “We desire that everyone, without exception, reenter houses of the Company by All Saints Day. Here are the steps to be taken to execute this measure which we announce after having relayed them to the dear sister superior general and her council.”

All our dear dispersed sisters who, at the reception of the present circular, have not yet been assigned to a particular house will be able to re-enter without delay at any house where the sister servant will receive them until a definitive assignment can be made, if their infirmities or their age are not an obstacle. If they have received no invitation to a particular house, they may seek to enter at any convenient house, and the sister servants are authorized to receive them and offer them all possible assistance. If any outcast sister is not invited, contacted, nor accepted by a house, as described above, she may contact us in Paris where we will find a place as soon as possible.

Old or infirm sisters were authorized to join their former houses if the sister servant would accept them.

Monsieur Hanon ended his circular by insisting on the necessity of everyone coming to a great union of heart and minds:

But what would be the use, dear sisters, of submitting to the authority of your legitimate superiors if you still remain divided among yourselves? What would be the use dear sisters, if your faith does not fill your hearts now with the charity and humility that will enable you to forget mutual wounds, soothe and silence your feelings, and allow the attentiveness and kindness of the truly religious friendships which characterized your pious ancestors and made them only one family, one heart, and one mind in the Lord? Pardon! ... Forget! ... Remove from your hearts everything that disposes you to bitterness.

A reading of the registers of the Company of the Daughters of Charity reveals that the return of these sisters took place over several years, and that in the end only a small number of sisters never returned. A dozen aged sisters died at home with their families between 1812 and 1816. About twenty, generally young women who entered after 1810, did not come back to the Company and decided to leave definitively. However, the great majority of sisters came back to the Company and again took up their community life and service of the poor. While some returned in 1814 and 1815, some waited until 1816, and a small number did not return until 1817 and 1818. The registers do not indicate the reasons for these delays. For some sisters, only the fact of their return is mentioned and there is no date specified.

When Monsieur Hanon died on 24 April 1816, the divisions within the community were still very much alive. This entire period has been described as a “schism.” But who were the schismatics? The sisters who left, or those who remained? Who was right? Who was wrong? Those who defended the dependence of the Daughters of Charity, on the jurisdiction of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, or those who wanted to maintain the life of the Company when it was threatened with destruction? The tensions and outlooks which arose through the differing approaches to these questions took a long time to dissipate. The Daughters of Charity had to learn to accept one another though their opinions in the past might have differed, and be reconciled with one another. The new vicar general, Marie-Charles-Emmanuel Verbert, reiterated the “call to flee from discord, to return to a tender Christian friendship.”

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Conclusion

“Since its origin, the Company has willed to be subject to the authority of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, the successor of Saint Vincent de Paul. He has over the Company the double power, dominative\textsuperscript{111} and jurisdictional,\textsuperscript{112} recognized by the Church and by the Constitutions.

The Daughters of Charity acknowledge and accept him as God’s representative, the one who helps them to maintain their characteristic spirit and to carry out their mission in the Church. They vow to obey him, and he may command them in the name of this vow. Everything in the Company that pertains to vows is within his competence.\textsuperscript{113}

Since its origin, the Company of the Daughters of Charity shows the growing interest of the State in the direction of religious congregations.”\textsuperscript{110} Desiring to have personnel to staff the empire’s hospitals and hospices, Napoleon restored the Company of the Daughters of Charity. His only concern was the social utility and effectiveness of this congregation. Desiring to solidify his power, he wanted to place all women’s religious orders under the jurisdiction of those bishops whom he would choose.

The resistance of these women took him by surprise, particularly as a man who commanded the armies of the Empire with such success. Napoleon, in some regard, tolerated “this scandal.” Usually, those who resisted him — the Pope, bishops, military men — were immediately arrested and imprisoned. Napoleon was less severe in his punishment of the women: he was content to send them home! And so the sisters returned to their families resolved not to give in to this man who had so disrupted the identity of the community.

This crisis demonstrated the difficulty of interpreting official texts. The juridical authority of the Company of the Daughters of Charity was subject to different interpretations, some demanding a literal reading others taking into account traditional practices. It also illustrated that women were capable of obstinately defending their point of view, despite the threat of governmental reprisal. It revealed that the vow of obedience taken by the sisters did not suppress their ability to judge matters in accord with their consciences. Certainly, among themselves the Daughters of Charity interpreted events differently. They expressed their points of view and took opposing sides. Their decisions created tensions, and even conflict within the community. As in any society, time was needed to heal, and erase, the memories of past suffering.

The statutes of the Daughters of Charity, signed by Napoleon on 7 November 1809, remain without modification the official text with respect to the administrative relationship between the French State and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

On many occasions since this time, the Church has reaffirmed the ties existing between the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and confirmed the jurisdiction of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. The constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, as revised and approved by the Church in 1983, declare:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} According to Jacques-Olivier Boudon, president of the Napoleon Institute (http://www.institut-napoleon.org/).
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Power of the superior to direct and give orders for the common good, according to universal and specific norms of the law.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Public and ecclesiastical power to govern one’s subjects internally and externally, according to universal and specific norms of the law.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity (1983): C. 3.27, page 69.
\end{itemize}
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Conclusion

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