**GENESIS of A RULE**

Sr Nicole Marie Roland

We have today four versions of Rules and Constitutions composed during Jeanne Antide’s life:
The two manuscripts
- The Rule of 1802 is in the Archives of the Provincial House of Besançon,
- A second version of this text sent to the Ministry of Interior and of cults in 1804 is in the National Archives and it shows some changes in comparison with the one of 1802.

Two versions were printed
- the one of 1807 approved by Mgr Lecoz,
- the two language version: French – Italian Rule of 1820 approved by Pious VII

At a first look these four documents show the successive modifications Jeanne Antide made to the Rule, modifications more or less important according to the stages, the events or the situations:

We shall compare rapidly the evolution of the title

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Let us now have a look at the outline of the four versions

**RULE OF 1802**
**RULE OF 1804**
**RULE OF 1807**
**RULE OF 1820**

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Through these documents of the origins we can see in the background the history of the first years of the Institute and we can guess what Jeanne Antide had at heart, her priorities, her choices but also her long and difficult struggles.

In fact, each manuscript caused a conflict which Jeanne Antide had to face. That is why she said: the Rule «cost me too much work and hardship to let it be lost ... »2. Let us see quickly when and in what circumstances these documents were written, and what modifications were made in the process.

**The Rule of 1802**

We know well the circumstances reported by Sr Rosalie:

«The Concordat ...»

«Do all you can to write a Rule before the Bishop arrives. ... she then left for the little town of Dole. »2

Jeanne Antide in those first years of the Institute wrote and gave order to all that «seemed necessary» to her first community.

In this first text, Jeanne Antide expressed her intuition about the charism as well as the experience she had acquired along the years as a woman, a Christian and a religious:

Her experience among the Daughters of Charity: « ... We willingly say that most of the regulations we adopted in these constitution are taken from the behaviour we saw observed in many houses of the daughters of charity, where we made our novitiate during eight consecutive years».

The experience of service lived in Sancy or on the roads during the exile and what she saw practiced around her in the first Congregations reconstituted after the revolution (among others the Hospitaller Sisters, which had come back to the Hospital St. Jacques in Besançon on 21st December 1801). She accepted also the advice of Abbot Filsjean and other people.

In fact, the manuscript kept in our archives had been well written by Abbot Filsjean, yet Jeanne Antide after reading it with attention made her own corrections.

And Filsjean added: «We made three manuscript editions, of the Constitutions at long intervals before having it printed» 3

**Some characteristics of this document:**

The first version was made up of 5 parts preceded by a preliminary chapter.

In this first manuscript, we discovered:

- **An explicit reference to the Vincentian charism**

In fact in this Rule we find a new expression of the Vincentian charism: in the years spent among the Daughters of Charity JA had known mainly Institutions, especially hospitals, no doubt she knew also the parish schools the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul had established and developed. However, after the Revolution the context had changed, the poor were also in the houses and along the streets of cities and villages, therefore, it felt natural for Jeanne Antide to reach out to people in their houses resuming a flexible and adaptable service outside the Institutions. It was, however, an organized service, which kept increasing in many neighbourhoods and villages: with slender establishments in rented rooms where the Sisters held classes, prepared and distributed soup and medications to the poor ...

The Vincentian charism was re-read and actualised with the feminine touch of a woman with a good heart: fragments of St Vincent de Paul’s sentences had impressed her and she repeated them according to her own genius, for instance we can have a look at two passages that can be found in the Rule of 1802 as well as in that of the Daughters of Charity. In both we find:

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1. LD, Manuscript of Sr Rosalie p 104
2. R. Thouret, Manuscript in LD p 85
3. Id
Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity

« They shall consider themselves as if they were not in religion, as such state does not suit the services of their vocation, nonetheless, as they are more exposed to the outside world than religious women, they ordinarily shall have as monastery the homes of the sick; their cell shall be a rented room; their chapel shall be the church of the parish; their cloister the streets of the city or the wards of the hospitals; obedience shall be their enclosure, their grate the fear of God, and holy modesty their veil ». Ch I ; II

The same conception of « active religious life »

Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity

« Finally considering how much their services are great in the eyes of faith, they shall not forget the dangers to which such service expose them (...) What perfection is required from a soul who ordinarily shall have nothing for enclosure but obedience, as a cell a common accommodation, the streets of the city or the hospitals, as grate the fear of God, as veil holy modesty, nonetheless they are obliged to live in the world as if they did not belong to it, and to practice detachment with extreme care and purity of heart and body, the edification of the public and all virtues of religious status. » p 27

The same attitude of service :

Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity:

« Being their main work that of serving the sick poor, they will do it with all the possible care and affection, considering that they are not serving them but Jesus-Christ: with this in mind they will take food and medications to them, treating them with compassion, kindness, cordiality, respect and devotion, ... ». Ch. VII §1

(in yellow what is specific of each text)

R 1802 « § I. Spirit with which the Sisters shall serve the poor

They will serve the poor

1° with humility and respect, considering in their person the person of Jesus-Christ who willingly became poor, even though He was the Sovereign Lord of all things, and who receives as done to himself all the good done on His name to the least. In order to manifest such respect the Sisters will curtsey before the poor when approaching them and when leaving them.

2° with cordiality, showing them a modest cheerfulness.

3° with compassion, receiving with goodness their complaints, sharing in their miseries, and trying to relieve and to console them.

4° with charity and patience, putting up with their most disgusting infirmities, dirt, taunts, insults and reproaches they may receive from them.

5° Finally the Sisters will serve the poor with a wise dedication, accomplishing their duties towards them with all the affection, accuracy and all the zeal of which they shall be capable; generously preferring this service to particular devotions, even to the exercises of piety prescribed by the Rule, when these will inevitably occur at the same time of the service of the poor. » p 25

A new style of religious life: when the Institute began, the religious Congregations were still forbidden in France, nonetheless Jeanne Antide gave to this group of women gathered around her all the characteristics of a religious community, and from the beginning she outlined a specific style of religious life. « From the beginning I wrote for them a little Rule for every day, every week, every month and every year », she wrote in her Memorandum of pure Truths. 4 In the third part of this rule we find: Practices and duties common to all the Sisters: First Chapter; Rules for every day, every week, every month and every year.

The importance of the service of the poor: the service had priority ...

It was a multiple service which took into account all the needs of the person: care and food, education and spirituality, we would say today ...

A service always urgent ... « At the first cry of the sick poor the Sister servant shall fly to their rescue ».

The writing of the first version of the Rule caused the first crisis in the life of the Institute: To whom should the responsibility as Superior General be given?

4 JA THOURET Memorandum of pure truths LD p 9
Abbot Filsjean kept a record of this lively discussion with the Foundress.

« … it was decreed in the Concordat that all religious houses would all be immediately dependent on the Ordinary. I, therefore, thought it my duty to give, in our Constitutions, the place of Superior General to the Archbishop legitimately occupying the see of Besançon. Mme Thouret was violently opposed to my measure. She wanted Mr. Bacoffe as Superior; … She thought that another name but his, inscribed for the highest office in her Community would be a frightful ingratitude; it would seem like giving him his marching orders, and in any case it would lead to a series of harms and disadvantages which should at all costs be avoided. It would take too long, … to recount the different arguments I had to enter into in order to get my way. Let it suffice to say that the Superior did not yield until I had shown her it was impossible to make any other choice.»

and Filsjean continued:

«However, the fear of Mme Thouret materialized. … »

The conflict with Mr Bacoffe lasted almost two years and had serious consequences: Mr Bacoffe tried in various ways to dismiss the Foundress from the office of Superior General. He refused to continue giving the subsidies needed for the service of the poor. Jeanne Antide could do nothing but turn to the Prefect and the Archbishop to justify her rights, to be confirmed in her mission and to obtain the necessary subsidies.

The first edition of the Rule provided a structure to that «association of pious women» transforming it in a religious Institute and organizing its mission. This obliged Jeanne Antide to pass from being «against the revolution», and a refractory, to being part of the «public domain» of the new society which was organizing itself after the revolution. No doubt, this was one of the factors which brought about the fast development of the Institute in its first years.

**The Rule of 1804**

After 10 years of revolutionary unrest and changes of political regimes the Empire completely reorganized the administrative structures of the State. With the Concordat the Church was associated to this reorganization, and in all departments, Prefect and Bishop worked together peacefully.

Jeanne Antide chose to be of service to that society as it was, and as an active member of the Church which was part of the Concordat, she worked with the Prefect, the Mayor and the Archbishop so that the poor could be served.

Nonetheless, the Congregations were still forbidden, as it is said in one circular of the Ministry of Interior and cults, Portalis (the author of the Civil Code), dated 4 Pluviose year 11 (24 January year 1803):

> Our French laws have dissolved any secular and religious corporation, and the universal right of a nation prevents any such establishment from existing in a State without the knowledge and formal admission of the public authorities …

> Therefore, I recall your attention, Citizen Bishop, on all different gatherings of ecclesiastics or people of any sex having any religious aim, and I ask you to let me know if such gatherings exist in your Diocese …

The interdiction was addressed especially to the male Congregations which Napoleon was suspicious of and the monastic Orders, yet the State needed the Congregations at the service of the poor and the sick. In fact, the circular went on saying:

> … The authority is interested in protecting all that is good but in order to do so, it should be known to it …. moreover

> … a religious Establishment, of any kind, should not be a mystery for the State. It may not exist without a formal authorization without a previous verification of any authority.»

A second decree dated 3 Messidor Year XII (22 June 1804) confirmed the suppression of the Congregations and established that «no aggregation or association of men and women may be established in future with the pretext of religion unless it got formal authorization by an imperial decree about its statutes and regulations»

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5 Abbé Filsjean’s Memorandum LD p 133
6 Note (I) Memorandum of Pure Truths LD p 13
7 National Archives. F 19/6343, (Circular to the Archbishops and Bishops dated 4 Pluviose year 11 (24 January year 1803)
8 Imperial Decree dated 3 Messidor year 12 (22 June 1804) art 4
Political and administrative circumstances led Jeanne Antide to re-read and to address her Rule to the governmental authorities with the help of the Prefect and of the Bishop: In the National Archives two documents, sent one after the other one, are kept, yet with two different denominations …

Besançon: Sisters of Charity: 14 Brumaire year XII (6 November 1803)
Besançon: Sisters of St Vincent de Paul of Besançon: 24 Fructidor year XII (11 September 1804)\(^9\)

This manuscript was a bit different from the manuscript of 1802, although both were handwritten by Fr Filsjean, Jeanne Antide had taken into account the corrections and mistakes of the first manuscript, and had made essentially some modifications in style: simpler sentences, more precise vocabulary, some paragraphs were summarized. All these are indications of a careful reading of the initial text, although the layout and the content stayed the same, except for those variants.

The second version presented to the administrative and ecclesiastical authorities would also be the object of criticism and debates for many years, as shown by the correspondence between the Prefect Debry, Mgr Lecoz, the Minister of cults, Mr Portalis, and sometimes the Minister of the Interior, Mr Chaptal; without mentioning the letters of the Congregations involved: the Hospitaliers (Mother Boyer), the Daughters of Charity of Paris, (Sr Thérèse Deschaux: Superior General from 1804 to 1809) and our Congregation represented by its Foundress, Jeanne Antide. More than fifty letters were written between 1804 and 1806 concerning the Rule, and are kept in the Archives.

The debate went on «orchestrated by her enemies», would say Jeanne Antide, and it was the source of deep concern and many struggles she would face.

- She was slandered, her reputation was destroyed before the authorities: Jeanne Antide had to justify herself before the Prefect\(^10\), with the support of Mgr Lecoz\(^11\):

  I know positively that in Besançon there are people who wish to ruin this precious establishment, they mostly resent Sr Thouret; and I know for sure that they reached the point of coming to you in order to speak against her, reporting things that are no less ridiculous than slanderous. Among other things, they said that she governed in a despotic way the young Sisters and she threatened to put them in prison, etc…

  Such statements can only be made by those who, for a long time, have been trying to sow division between these virtuous girls and, thus, bring about the dissolution of their small association, which according to me would be an irreparable misfortune for the most miserable.

- Another complaint was raised by «the surgeons and apothecaries of the rural areas», who, deprived from an important source of income, accused Jeanne Antide and her companions, of illegally practicing medicine. In this case too, Mgr Lecoz strongly rejected such accuse in a letter addressed to the Prefect.\(^12\)

«Some surgeons in the rural areas took this opportunity to worry them; they claim that under the law of 19 Ventose, year XI, these good girls could not, without a diploma, even bleed an unfortunate person.
Are the daughters of St Vincent breaking the law … because they bleed the sick, provide simple and free remedies to unfortunate people who due to their condition could not go to the health officers, especially in rural areas, who ask for very high prices for their visits and remedies? May the spirit of the law, and especially the spirit of our government aim at depriving of all relief for ordinary sicknesses a crowd of citizens to whom the charity of our good Sisters offers freely some precious remedy? »

Besides, he observed that the Sisters did not lack competence as: «our best doctors are ready, out of charity, to teach them the art of applying to the sick poor simple and free remedies, provided by the Charity office which are an admirable resource in both the countryside and the cities».

These local controversies will go away as the months went by …

- But there were more important ones which would not be without consequences: to understand well what happened between 1804-1807, it is important to remember the difficult local, administrative and ecclesiastical context in Besançon at that time.

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\(^9\) AN. F 19/6310 folder 1
\(^10\) Letter of Jeanne Antide to Mr Debry dated 11 Fructidor Year XII (28 August 1804) LD p 108
\(^11\) Letter of Mgr Lecoz to the Prefect Debry, dated 2 Fructidor, year 12 (20 August 1804) A.D.D.
\(^12\) Letter of Mgr Lecoz dated 22 July 1804 AA (LD I p 48 French version).
The new administrative and ecclesiastical structures resulted from the Revolution were not always accepted by the people, who had refused the Revolution and had remained attached to the Ancient Regime. Mgr Lecoz being a constitutional Bishop was ill-accepted within his Diocese and part of the priests and old Vicars General opposed him and denounced his actions.

The book of the Hospitaller Sisters described the situation well:

«... Abbot de Chaffoy, while seemingly absorbed by the direction of Communities, passed to the Nunciature letters and notes referring the Archbishop’s constitutional relapses. It was an elusive conspiracy, whose ramifications extended to the entire ecclesiastic province; it hindered the new Eastern Metropolitan in the performance of his duties in such a way as to make them unbearable.» He wrote to Portalis in these words: «Unfortunately, in this city there is a society of opponents called «Council Committee» and whose decisions given in the shadows are usually very divergent from mine.»

At the beginnings of her Institute, Jeanne Antide was supported and encouraged by those who were against the revolution, Mgr de Chaffoy, Bacoiffe, the Dames of Charity... The conflict with Bacoiffe, as we saw, obliged her to turn to the Archbishop, the Prefect and the Charity office of the City. Then, her first supporters became her greatest enemies.

Jeanne Antide found herself involved in a greater conflict between those faithful to the Ancient Regime and those adhering to the new order of the Church and society.

In order to respond to the demands of the Imperial Decree dated 3 Messidor Year XII, (22 June 1804), Jeanne Antide submitted her Constitutions to Mgr Lecoz who addressed them to the Prefect Debry.

The first reproach to this Rule was highlighted in the Prefect Debry’s response: if we adopt this project of statute, the hospital Sisters currently present in the hospitals won’t have other choice than leaving if they do not want to be part of the new Institute; I thought there would never be too much prudence in a case of such importance... Therefore, he decided to address the question to the Minister of Cults.

While communicating those Statutes to Mr Portalis, Minister of Cults, he added the following comment: «I believe I should call your particular attention to the general consequences for the establishment involved, ...The first claim of the association would be to appropriate the service of hospices of all kind of humanity and it was drawn in a way that if it were to get the government’s sanction, the Sisters ... would in effect have the exclusive privilege of serving them; what would then become those also assigned to the same functions, to whom the administrative commissions have entrusted the hospitals service.»

Many letters were exchanged among the Prefect of Besançon, Jean De Bry, who got all these rumours and remained doubtful; Mgr Le Coz who, from the start assured an unconditional support to Jeanne-Antide and to her Institute; and the Minister of Cults, Mr Portalis, who received the complaints of various people and tried to clarify the situation of the Congregations while applying the government’s politics: verifying the usefulness of the Institutes, uniting them in one, centralising and finally authorising.

To those letters, Mr Portalis answered quickly, yet he raised another question:

Mr Portalis to Mr Debry, Paris on 16 Germinal Year XII (6 April 1804)

First observations on the Regulation of the Daughters of St. Vincent

I have not examined the articles of these Statutes because the previous establishment of the Sisters of Charity whose destination is the same, still exists, and the Government announced with various protecting measures its intention of maintaining this Establishment whose services are well appreciated by all the hospices’ administrations, it would be useless and perhaps even dangerous to give permission to other Establishments, whose rivalry would decrease the reciprocal advantages. »

It is now clear to the Prefect of Besançon that the new Congregation is in competition with the Hospitaller Sisters, and in Paris, the Minister rejected a new Congregation similar to that of the Daughters of Charity,

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13 THE HOSPITALLERS OF BESANÇON. HISTORY and MEMORIES. 1951 p 130
14 PINGAUD De Bry.
15 ROUSSEL Correspondence Lecoz, tome I.
16 Letter of Prefect Debry to Mgr Lecoz : 19 Ventose Year (10 March 1804) ADD LD1 p 37 (French version)
17 Letter of Prefect Debry to Mr Portalis : 21 Ventose Year 12 (12 March 1804) ADD LD 1 p 38 (French version)
18 LD 1 p 40 (French version) Mr. Portalis to Mr Debry: «First observations on the Rule of the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul » Paris, 16 Germinal Year XII of the Republic (6 April 1804)
daughters of St Vincent de Paul … Only Mgr Le Coz defended and supported with perseverance the Congregation of Jeanne Antide as we can see in his several letters.

However, in order to conform to the requests of the Government, the Prefect, before the end of the year 1804, sent again the Rule and this time he abstained from any comment\(^\text{19}\) : as he was aware of the risk of seeing the new Institute dissolved:

\[ I \text{ shall abstain from any reflection about an object whose exam is reserved to the State Council, yet I have to attest to Your Grace, from the report given to me about the behaviour and the works of these women, that so far I have only been given testimonies favourable to them and that this institution could only become more and more advantageous to the countryside for which it is mainly intended. } \]

At the National Archives we found this second mailing recorded on 24 Fructidor Year 12 (11 September 1804)\(^\text{20}\), and it is this second manuscript that we found there.

Meanwhile a second enquiry was despatched by the Ministry: were the associations or Congregations which adhered to the Concordat in communion with the Bishop? Few days later passing on the Statutes of the Hospitaller Sisters, Mr. Debry established his report about the two Communities and this was his conclusion:

\[ « \text{ Both, HOSPITALLERS and SISTERS OF CHARITY, gave evidence that they adhered to the Concordat and that they were in communion with the Archbishop … in general I have only favourable testimonies about the service they provide in the different Houses in which they serve. » } \]

Nonetheless Jeanne Antide was not at peace as she had not received any answer from the government, and the survival of her Institute was in question. Therefore, she addressed once again the Prefect in January 1805.\(^\text{21}\)

In the same month, Mgr Lecoz received from Mr Portalis the rejection indicating the two main obstacles for the approval of this new Institute\(^\text{22}\) and he sent a copy to the Prefect Debry.

\[ \text{The Minister of Cults, Great Officer of the Legion of honour} \]

\[ \text{To Mgr the Archbishop of Besançon,} \]

\[ \text{Monseigneur Archbishop,} \]

\[ \text{These statutes were sent to me for the first time in the month of Ventose Year XII by Mr. the Prefect of Doubs, with some wise observations which, together with other reasons which I am going to explain, do not allow me to propose the approbation of this new association.} \]

\[ \text{There is already another one in your Diocese which has been in existence for more than one century and whose Sisters are also recommendable for their services, and necessary to the hospices for the knowledge they have acquired; however, the first art. of the Statutes submitted for the new association attributes to it the exclusive privilege of serving hospitals and establishments of charity of your Diocese; approving these Statute would be like pronouncing the suppression of the ancient association whose subjects have been tested, in order to favour the unknown subjects of the new one, this would be unjust and dangerous.} \]

\[ \text{If the first establishment is not enough extended for the needs of the hospices of your Diocese, multiply its houses and the Sisters you support should join the ancient Institute. I do not see the advantage of establishing a rivalry between the new and the ancient Institution, and even less to suppress the latter to replace it with a new Establishment.} \]

\[ \text{This new association takes the title of Sisters of St Vincent de Paul, title already existing which is the name of the Sisters of charity, founded by St Vincent de Paul himself. This association whose Mother House is in Paris … gives the most important services to people of the last class, it would be incoherent to establish under the same title an institution separated and independent from the Mother House; … I shall repeat what I have already said above, that the new association of Besançon should join the ancient Institution of the Sisters of St Vincent de Paul and then establish one or more houses in your diocese; this would be more regular and wise.} \]

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\(^{19}\) From Mr Debry to the Ministry of Cults without date (September 1804) A.B.

\(^{20}\) Receiving the Statutes: Sisters of St Vincent de Paul. AN F 19/6310

\(^{21}\) Letter of Jeanne-Antide to Mr Debry dated 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Pluviose, Year XIII - (21 January 1805). A.D.D.

\(^{22}\) Letter of Mr Portalis to Mgr Lecoz. 5 Pluviose year 13 (25 January 1805) A.A. Registration n. 4021, 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Division
These are not the only reasons which oppose the statutes of the association you are proposing and that I am submitting to the verification of the State Council, ... art.5 of the Imperial decree applies only to institutions already in existence, those whose usefulness was demonstrated by a long experience ...

Those are the one to be supported, re-established, before thinking of new Institutions.

I am honoured to send you my regards .... Signed: Portalis

Informed about this answer which sounded like a condemnation with no appeal, Jeanne Antide worried and addressed a long plea to the Prefect, responding point by point to all the observations made:

Mr Prefect,

I come to your feet to beg to have regard to my most truthful representations.

I saw with pain that Mr. Portalis, Minister of Cults, ill interpreted the Statutes we submitted to the verification of the State Council, in whose first part is explained to the Sisters of our Association the way of serving the hospitals and the charitable establishments entrusted to them ...

However, we never demanded that this would be to the detriment either of the Hospitaller Sisters of your department and elsewhere, or to the Sisters of Charity of Paris, as well as of others existing before the Revolution. We would never dare to attribute to ourselves the exclusive privilege of serving all the hospitals and other charitable establishments in your department or elsewhere, ...

She went through the chronology of events and the development of the services provided in Besançon and within the diocese ... : soup, schools and she added: We also take the liberty of stating that the Sisters of our Association are not at all ready to join the Sisters of Charity of Paris. They told me they would prefer to die (...)

Sr Jeanne-Antide Thouret, First Sister of our Association who formed the others with the help of God.

This long letter of Jeanne Antide got support by the letters of Mgr Lecoq to Mr. Portalis. Like the one dated 18 February 1805 To take out of my diocese these respectable daughters of St Vincent or to hinder somehow their role and charity, would afflict all hearts that love of virtue, religion and order; it would deprive us of one of the most powerful means of repairing the painful damages caused by the Revolution .... Then he closed expressing his irritation: That these good daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul bear a different name; that they be associated or not to the Sisters of Charity of Paris, does not matter; what I wish, what religion and our Country wish with me is that they continue in my diocese the great good they have started doing; and unfortunately it is this good that would be stopped.

Meanwhile, at the government’s level continued the careful study of the Statutes: the various Rules submitted were compared and that of Jeanne Antide was considered:

Report about the Statutes and rules of the religious Associations existing in the Empire written by the ministry of Cults

"I have chosen as the basis of my work the Statutes of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul". The Constitutions of almost fifty Congregations were studied: this report edited by the Minister of Cults and addressed to Napoleon presented in detail their Institutions and the general spirit animating them. See documents AN F 19 / 6310 3.4.5.6.

This document presented the existing Congregations according to the services provided: service of the poor, teaching, hospitals, homes for the «repented» and according to their government organization ...

Three big Congregations got all the favours: «that of the Sisters of Charity, that of the Sisters of Nevers and that of the Sisters of wisdom. These 3 associations of which the Sisters of Charity are the most extended are not limited to one department, one diocese, one municipality. It is in their spirit to expand everywhere. Therefore, they are the ones which deserve the benevolence of your Majesty. ... the other institutions of the same kind are purely local, they do not exist for a general regime .... By protecting these 3 main institutions, a general and effective good for all France will be promoted ... As for the other Institutions it would be too expensive to protect them ... » Such was the conclusion of the report.

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23 Letter of Jeanne Antide to Mr. Debray dated 25 (or 26) Pluviose, year XIII, 14 (or 15) February 1805. A.D.D.
24 Letter of Mgr. Lecoq to Mr. Portalis dated 18 February 1805 A.A.
25 AN F 19 / 6310 2nd copy: Report about the Statutes and rules of religious Associations of Women existing within the Empire written by the minister of Cults (without date) p 49
This struggle did not distracted Jeanne Antide from her first mission: relieving the poor. The number of the establishments in the diocese increased: in the Doubs, in Russey, Beaume les Dames, at the Visitation hospital; and outside the diocese at Bourg in Ain.

The controversy about the name and the title of Superior General of the Daughters of charity was relaunched in 1806. Denounced to the General Superior of Paris, the latter complained with the Minister of cults who turned to the Prefect of Doubs. 26

The Prefect asked the Mayor of Besançon 27 and to his deputy to make enquiries ... once again Jeanne Antide firmly defended herself 28. At the Archives of Besançon there is the draft of an answer to Mr. Seguin. 29 We have not asked to get the name of the Daughters of Charity, although we do all the same works, even less we wanted to be their Superior. We would limit ourselves to take the name of Daughters of Saint Vincent, or Sisters of Saint Vincent, because we follow his rule, and have chosen him as our protector and model. We have chosen Mgr. the Archbishop of Besançon as our Superior General, and all the Sisters of our Society recognize as their Superior the Sister who started this establishment, ...

In his turn, Mgr. Lecoz addressing Mr. Portalis 30 was full of praise in describing the works of the Institute at Besançon and in all the diocese and concluded: So there you have it, Sir, are these the women who were pointed out to his Excellence the Minister as ambitious, greedy for titles, for chimerial domination? How can wickedness resort to such mean and ridiculous means? ... I have too great respect for your Excellence, the Minister, and I esteem you too much Sir to believe that you would lend a hand to such revolting ways.

Also, Mr Debry following the report received 31 wrote a long letter to Mr. Portalis 32: Answering this letter I am honoured to inform Your Excellence that exist at the heart of Besançon, and not far from it, a community of women following, under the direction of Mgr. Archbishop of Besançon, the rule of St Vincent de Paul, but it is not to my knowledge that the Superior of this community has the title of Superior General. The copy, here attached, of her answer to the Mayor, which I had asked to get a positive explanation from her about this point, may give you the needed clarifications.

And prudently he added:

It is not up to me, Sir, to judge how much the existence of a local association of such nature may fit in the general vision of the government ..., however as administrator I cannot help giving the best testimony on this matter both for the good spirit which up to date animates the women who belong to it, and for the essential service they provide daily at the hospital.

I can say that it is thank to their well-directed and enlightened zeal that order, wise economy and a convenient organization were re-established in an establishment of this city known as Bellevaux. The Sisters of the same establishment are devoted also to the instruction of young women in the rural areas ... and I do not know of any complaint caused by anyone of them.

Such are, Monseigneur, the services currently provided by the Sisters of St Vincent established in Besançon. I thought it necessary to give you some detail so that you may correct your opinion about them and take into consideration the real services they provide our Country with, when considering the decisions which could be made about them.

Following this letter Mr. Portalis writing to the Superior General of the Daughters of Charity in November 1806 33 in a letter kept in the National Archives could say:

Madame,

We spoke to you about the Superior of a Community of charitable women in Besançon who had taken the title of Superior General of the Daughters of Charity of the Institute of Saint Vincent de Paul. I made some enquiries about this matter. It came out that it does exist in Besançon itself an association of women who, in fact, follow the Rule of Saint Vincent de Paul, yet their Superior never had the intention to use a title which does not belong to her. "Nothing more wrong" wrote that Superior herself in the report made to His

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26 Letter to the Minister of cults form the Prefect of Doubs 12 July 1806. A.D.D. registration n° 4721.
27 Debry to Mr. Daclin, 22 July 1806. A.D.D
28 Letter of Jeanne Antide to Mr. Portalis July 1806.LD p 228. MSR LD p 115.
29 Letter of Jeanne Antide to Mr Seguin, deputy of the Mayor of Besançon
30 Letter of Mgr Lecoz to Portalis dated 27 July 1806. A.A.
31 Mr Daclin to Mr Debry, 30 July 1806. A.D.D. letter n. 1036
32 Mr Debry to Portalis, 6 August 1806 A.D.D n. 721, Secretariat office
33 Portalis to the Sup of the Daughters of charity AN F19*/136 ; register Ministry of Cults p 6
Excellence the Minister of Cult. ... etc. (and he quoted Jeanne Antide’s letter) ... "I thought it was my duty, Madame, to communicate these details from which it appears that you were ill-informed when you were told that the Superior we are talking about used the title of Superior General of the Daughters of Charity...

It will be at the Chapter held in November 1807 in Paris that this controversy would be definitively closed by asking Jeanne Antide to receive a name different from that of the Daughters of Charity in order to avoid any confusion. 34

Voir texte du titre corrigé

The letters and the many messages of Mgr Lecoz, and above all the testimony of charity and the multiple services within the city of Besançon, in the Doubs and in the close departments seemed to have won the support of the Prefect who then resolutely committed himself as well as Mgr Le Coz to defend the cause of Jeanne-Antide before the Government 35 and to obtain the tolerance, if not the approbation of the Government for such a «useful work» ... The immediate threats seemed to disappear but the storm of slander had almost made fail the just born Institute.

The Rule of 1807

Meanwhile, a circular from the Ministry precised that the statutes of the Congregations should be approved by the Ordinary of the place before being submitted to the government.

In 1807, Jeanne Antide seemed to take up again her work at the Rule as Sr Rosalie tells us: 36 «She examined with great attention her Rule, which she had submitted to the Archbishop after the events of Mr. Bacoffe. Knowing that the Archbishop had neither approved nor disapproved it, as she had not yet asked for his approbation, she was inspired by God to ask for it in view of the greatest solidity of her Institute.» Whilst continuing the re-reading of the first manuscripts of the Rule with Fr. Filjean, whom she had called to take up again such task 37, according to Sr. Rosalie, Jeanne Antide wrote also a second document: «She gave him an Instruction on the four vows, which she had composed to guide the Sisters, asking them to copy it. Then, she submitted it to the Archbishop asking for his approbation: which he did, in writing, on 2nd April 1807. »

The re-reading of the Rule was done with great care, and although the spirit was the same and the content expressed the same charism and the same mission of service of the poor, the outline of the document was different, the style was more refined, the articles were reorganised and summarized, or on the contrary they were more precise and developed.

This new version of the Rule was the fruit of a methodical work as Sr Rosalie told us:

« ... she then asked the priest ... to recopy the three parts of the Rule separately ... in order to add whatever the Holy Spirit had dictated during her experience in the eight years that the Institute had existed, with regard to the Sisters who already composed it and those who would compose it in the future, and with regard to the government. She wrote all that she wanted to be added while the priest copied it; so that the additions could be put there, where they should be placed.

When the first part was finished, she asked the priest to take it to the Archbishop to be examined. That was done and the Archbishop gave his approbation in writing.

The same was done for each one of the three parts.

When all was copied, with a table of contents, she sent it to the Archbishop, who examined it and gave it his approbation.

One correction is still relevant: JA faced the interreligious

34 MSR LD p 121-122
35 Letter of Mr. De Bry to Mr. Portalis dated 6 August 1806 LD I p 99 (French version)
36 MSR LD p 115
37 MSR LD p 116
Presentation of the Rule of 1807

The content is now gathered in three big parts and a supplement:

The preliminary chapter became a much more developed preliminary discourse. The text was addressed directly to the Institute’s Sisters: «receive this book, M. T. C. S. I not as a profane or purely humane production; but as a gift which Heaven sent to you in its mercy. Read it, meditate it, and do all that is prescribed in it.»

The first paragraphs presented the purposes of the Institute «relief the poor in their spiritual and temporal needs» and the aim of the Rule: to offer to the Institute «constitutions, as a solid base, which would provide it with organization and to have as guide wise rules capable to direct it towards its purpose.

Then, a long explanation followed about the benefit of observing the Rules and the demands deriving from the observance of the Rule, and from the service.

The Rule was reorganized in three parts

1st part: about the life of the Sisters within the Institute:

2nd part: the mission, the service of the poor and the various ways in which the poor were assisted

The 3rd part about the government of the Institute

Some remarks about the new text:

With the rules of 1802 and 1804 Jeanne-Antide presented at first the services that «society of pious women» could offer to the poor and, therefore, to the State, she tried to get the recognition of the Congregation for the services it could provide the Society with.

Some years later, this aspect was known and acknowledged by the public administrations at least at local level. The State needed feminine religious Congregations to take care of the many wounded admitted at the Empire’s hospitals, to take care of the poor in order to keep the indispensable peace and order, to teach young girls hitherto left behind especially in the rural areas. No doubt, while presenting the service in the second part she also kept in mind the reproach of being a rival of the Hospitalisers Sisters.

Jeanne Antide presented the Rule according to the criteria given by the State, which had required that religious Congregations should have their own organisation, a particular life-style and a mission at the service of the poor. The organization of the community according to a religious life-style could now be presented from the outset:

Chapter 1: General Rules for every day, every week, every month and every year …

Second part: the mission: duties of the Sisters towards the poor

Various were the services included: hospitals, charity hospices, schools, orphanages, service among prisoners, travellers and pilgrims poor. As in the previous versions also this time this part ended with: «the spirit with which the Sisters shall serve the poor». The content of each chapter was completely reorganized; the texts were shorter, swifter, went straight to the essential.

There were also smaller yet significant changes, for instance in the introduction to the service of the poor:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1802-1804</th>
<th>1807</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They will rescue prisoners and hapless travellers: everywhere, they will</td>
<td>They will rescue prisoners and <em>miserable</em> travellers. <em>Everywhere</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relieve poverty, as much as it depends on their power and their abilities.</td>
<td>they will <em>fly before indigence</em>, as much as they can and according</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to the beneficent view of the Founders and of the particular</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>administrations.</td>
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The importance of the service of the poor for JA is evident here: it was the purpose of the Institute and it was urgent to do something in the suffering society of those days. It was no longer only a question of relieving poverty but it was necessary to fly before indigence poverty.

At the end of the introduction she added: «*However, the services the Sisters will provide to the poor, shall not stop at the temporal needs, or at the care for physical health; the soul’s salvation!* This will be especially dear to them, this will keep alive the fervour of their zeal, they shall apply to this with prudence, yet constantly and untiringly.»

Thus, she highlighted the importance of the spiritual care, today we would say of the evangelization as participation in the mission of Christ redeemer and as a consequence she would invite the Sister to suggest the sacrament of confession to the sick.

The Rule of 1807 insisted particularly on the rigour, accuracy, organization and order demanded by the service. Besides, to avoid any conflict with doctors she wrote:

§.I.3. *They will carry out exactly the doctors and surgeons’ prescriptions about remedies, soup, the choice and quality of food, and about the whole behaviour of the sick, ...*

JA insisted too with great detail on keeping the accounts. (6 § instead of just 3 in the manuscripts)

Behind these sentences there is the experience she acquired first at Bellevaux, then at the Visitation, where she worked with lay administrators, from whom she received indications for the service, the needed money and to whom she gave account in a precise way ...

In fact the community did not just care for the patients in the hospital, it was also in charge of the organization, the direction and the management ... Entrusting such roles to women was something new in those days ... The Institution was then well structured:

there was an administration board (under the direction of the Mayor or the Prefect) which gave the directions, established the rules (see the various regulations made by the Prefect for Bellevaux and then for the Visitation...) which were needed for the organization of the care and the institutions entrusted to religious women ...

**The third part was consecrated to the government of the Institute:**

Adapting to the government’s wish and encouragement, Jeanne Antide pictured a centralized establishment in which all communities and works depended from a Superior General (female) elected by her Sisters under the Direction of the Superior General (male) that was the Bishop of the diocese where the main House of the Institute had been established.

1. *All the establishments of the Daughters of S. Vincent de Paul form a unique and the same community, whose government is totally in the hands of the General Superiors (both male and female).*

In the third part she presented: offices ... elections ... admission of new members, the transfer of Sisters, the creation of new establishments...

**Particular aspects of the Rule of 1807**

The hostels were placed in a final supplement: with a preliminary observation.

*The daughters of St. Vincent de Paul will constantly remember that the real aim of our Institution is to devote ourselves entirely to the poor; and that we, as a consequence, should serve rich people, whoever they may be, only when the poor do not suffer because of it.*

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38 Rule of 1807 p167
The text was now ready to be submitted to the Archbishop of Besançon in order to get the approbation of the statutes of the Congregation.

In fact the letter asking for the approbation was already in the first page of the manuscript of 1802 and was reproduced in the edition printed in 1807 with a few variations:\footnote{Some variations in comparison with the manuscript of 1802: Jeanne Antide’s spelling, (Antyde in 1802) the date was written in full letters, the word society was replaced by the word Congregation.}

We have neither the manuscripts of the various parts of the new version addressed to the Archbishop, nor the manuscript letter which went with it. Yet we know that the approbation was given on 26th September 1807 and the text was included as the conclusion of the printed Rule.\footnote{INSTITUTE or RULES and GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul. Imp CHALANDRE 1807 p 183}

The two writings, the letter with the request and the text of the approbation were added as annexes in the Rule of 1807 with the title «supplication and approbation ». Jeanne Antide hastened to have printed the Rule approved by the Archbishop. The accounts book of the community kept trace of this edition. In 1807 the Sisters reached the number of 100 members, she had 200 copies printed.

However a new event marked the Institute’s life.\footnote{MSR LD p 117, MSR, LD p 117}

Few weeks later, for the astonishment of the Prefect,\footnote{Circular to the Sisters in France, 1819, LD 331} Mr Portalis addressed directly to Jeanne Antide, on 10th October 1807, the imperial decree and the invitation to attend the «General Chapter of the Etsablishments at the service of the poor».\footnote{Letter of Mr Portalis to Jeanne Antide with the decree of 30 September 1807. From 10 October 1807. AB.. LD I p 125-126 (French version)}

Jeanne Antide prepared actively and rapidly her stay in Paris: «She had a number of copies of her Rule brought back from the printing press in the night of All Saints Eve». «She did not rest a minute! In the morning, she attended the holy Mass, and left on horse-cart at eleven in the morning, on the first of November, accompanied by a Sister, to go to Paris. »\footnote{Letter of Mr Portalis to Jeanne Antide with the decree of 30 September 1807. From 10 October 1807. AB.. LD I p 125-126 (French version)}

The Chapter would be for Jeanne Antide and her Congregation a foundational event in which she would make herself known … after that meeting, to the three big Congregations chosen by Mr Portalis, a fourth one was then added: that of Jeanne Antide.

Then, the approbation of the Institute and of the Constitutions was no longer a problem but they had to wait for three more years … The decree of approbation of the Congregation and of the Constitutions by the French State would be given on 28th August 1810.

However, the Rule would be the object of a new conflict in Naples in 1811 and Jeanne Antide would need to defend herself to have it fully applied. (Cf. Conference of Sr Paola Arosio: S. 9 February 2020)

**The Rule of 1820**

After 18 years in Naples, Jeanne Antide was aware of the changes worked within the Church by her Congregation, which had crossed the borders not just of the Diocese where she was born but also of countries… (Cf. conference of Sr Paola Arosio 9 March 2019)

The Pope represented, then, an affirmed spiritual authority, and for Jeanne Antide (who were born an ultramontanist), the approbation of the Constitutions and the Institute was a grace and a guarantee for the future: "the Pope Pious VII approved our Institute, our Rules and Constitutions .... I invite you to thank the Good Lord to have, by this approbation, consolidated our Institute for ever »\footnote{Circular to the Sisters in France, 1819, LD 331}, her Congregation had become «a big tree which had extended its branches»\footnote{Letter to the Holy Father in September 1819, LD p 330}. It was time to ensure its future, giving it cohesion, solidity and unity.

I do not go back to the procedure in view of the pontifical approbation well illustrated by Sr Paola … I shall just name the changes made in the Rule at the Church’s request.
It was in the 3rd part of the Rule of 1807 that the modifications asked for by the Holy See were made: the name of the Congregation, and also the authority and the vows: the formula of the vows had these modifications

1807: I ...at the presence of God and of all the Heavenly Court, renew the promises of my baptism, and make a vow to God of poverty, chastity, obedience before our R. F. Superior General, and to you our reverend Mother, Superior General, and to your legitimate successors, according to our rules, for one year; and for the same time to spend myself at the corporal and spiritual service of the poor, in the company of the daughters of St. Vincent de Paul: this I ask from God by the merits of J. C. crucified, and through the intercession of the most holy Virgin.

A le 18

1820: ....... "In the presence of God and of all the Heavenly Court, I renew the promises of my baptism, and make a vow to God of poverty, chastity, obedience to Monseigneur our Bishop and to you, our reverend Mother Superior General, and to your legitimate Successors, according to our rules, only for the time of my permanence in the Congregation; and for the same time to spend myself at the corporal and spiritual service of the poor, in the company of the Daughters of Charity under the protection of St. Vincent de Paul; this I ask from God by the merits of J. C. crucified, and through the intercession of the most holy Virgin.

A le 18

Quelques changements sont opérés pour s’adapter au nouveau contexte international: il sera nécessaire par exemple de tenir compte de la langue locale dans l’enseignement par exemple

1807 « the first elements of the French grammar » in the Rule 1820 became: « the first element of grammar in the language used in the State where they exist, »

In the same way: 1807 « If French grammar is taught the pupils will study one lesson per day with their parents. » 1820 « If the grammar is taught in the language of the state where the children live and will live, they will learn on lesson per day at their parents’ home. »

The pontifical approbation to the Institute and to the Constitutions was granted on 23rd July 1819. She announced it to the Sisters of France in a letter of 2nd October 1819 (Cf. conference of Sr Paola of 9 March 2019: as Jeanne Antide announced it to the Sisters of France in a letter of 2 October 1819:

« On the last twenty third July (Pious VII) approved our Institute, our Rules and Constitutions, with the modifications he believed he had to make. He gave to our Community the name of Daughters of Charity under the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul; he changed the vows and made many changes in the third part of the Rule.

The new version of the Rule would be the source of a new conflict and a deep wound within the Institute

... as mentioned by Sr Christiane Marie in her Conference of 9th November 2019

This quick look at the four first versions of our Rule enables us to feel the constant concern which marked the whole life of St Jeanne Antide who wanted to:

Do anything so that the poor may be served and well served
Offer to her first Sisters a life that lead to holiness through a religious and fraternal life of service.
Ensure the solidity of her Institute and provide it from its origins with the means to spread in the world.

46 Rule 1807 p 81 and 1820 p 206: second part; chapter III Regulations for the Charity Schools. §1. General dispositions
47 Rule 1807 p 85 and 1820 p 214: second part; chapter III Regulations for the Charity Schools. §IV ways of teaching in class three n. 2
In conclusion, we can read together the prayer that Jeanne Antide inserted in conclusion of the Rule\textsuperscript{48}:

\begin{center}
\textbf{P R A Y E R}
\end{center}

"O my God, we have no doubts after the special countersigns of protection which you have not stopped granting us; it is you who formed our Congregation, and have made it grow in such a short time and you have supported it almost with your hand among infinite perils because it would have infallibly perished without your help. Continue your work, continue to protect us, fill us always more and more with the spirit of our holy state, with the zeal and the fidelity to observe our statutes; may this spirit, this zeal grow in our Congregation and until the time that the Daughters of your great servant St Vincent de Paul, remain on earth, may they all be imitators and like faithful copies of the virtue of this illustrious Founder. We conjure you through the merits of Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. Amen."

\textsuperscript{48} Rule 1807 p181; Rule 1820 p 404