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Sister Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity On Fire with Love for the Poor

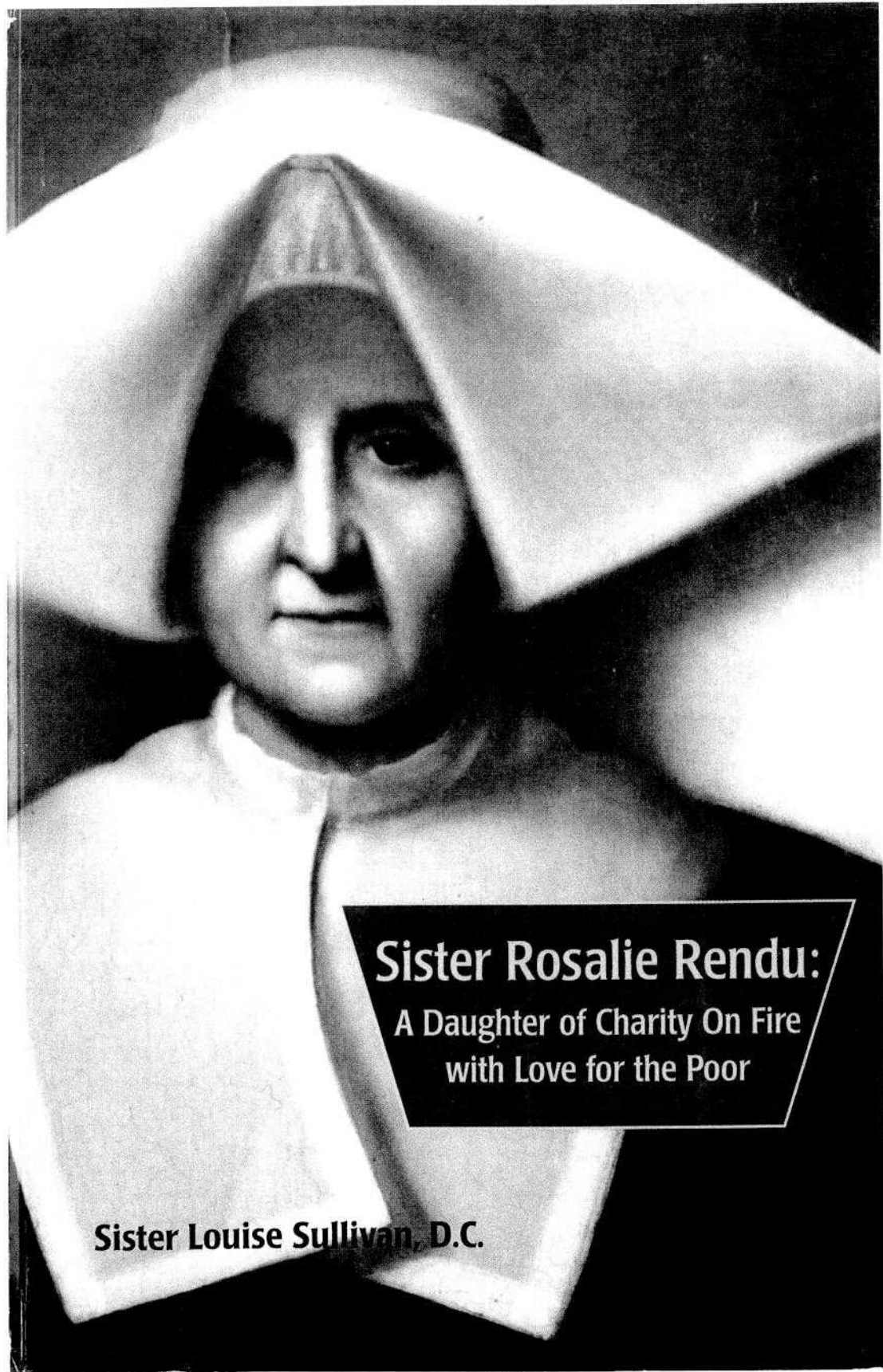
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Sister Rosalie Rendu:
A Daughter of Charity On Fire
with Love for the Poor

Sister Louise Sullivan, D.C.

**Sister Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity
On Fire with Love for the Poor**

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On Fire with Love for the Poor**

**By
Louise Sullivan, D.C.**

Vincentian Studies Institute

Chicago, Illinois

2006

Edited by:

Nathaniel Michaud, Editor-in-Chief
Francine Brown, D.C.
Raymonde Dubois

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In loving memory of
Sister Barbara McEnaney, D.C.
In gratitude for thirty years of friendship and support
And for teaching so many of us during her long battle with cancer
How to live and how to die.

PREFACE

I am delighted to present to you this new English-language biography of Rosalie Rendu. Coming just after her beatification, it will introduce many readers to this amazing Daughter of Charity whom all Paris mourned at the time of her death in 1856. They mourned her because they loved her. For over 50 years, she ministered to the poor in one of the most deprived neighborhoods of the city, while raising the consciousness of society to their needs.

She ran a school, a day-care center, a nursery school, an orphanage, a home for the elderly, a center for the distribution of food, a pharmacy, and a clothes dispensary. She organized the Children of Mary and the Ladies of Charity. She helped Frederick Ozanam in the founding of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. She cared for the sick and the dying during three cholera epidemics. She ministered to the wounded during two revolutions. No Daughter of Charity was better known in her lifetime than she.

Rosalie was very concrete and effective in the service of the poor. To use a modern term, she was an extraordinary “networker.” Rich and poor, clergy and lay, men and women, the young and the elderly knocked on her door. She enlisted the poor themselves to serve the poor. She asked the askers to do something for others.

Rosalie’s prodigious works were the fruit of her enormous faith. She believed that Christ lives in the person of the poor. She trusted that God’s love conquers all. Her faith radiated out in her tenderness, in her fearlessness, in her small, practical efforts at helping individuals, in her larger, creative, structured forms of serving the whole neighborhood. Her faith was transparent to others. They saw it. They admired it. They were drawn to it.

I congratulate Sr. Louise Sullivan, D.C., on the preparation of this book. It is the latest of a number of rich contributions that she has made to the study of our Vincentian heritage. I am certain that it will serve not only to inform readers already interested in Rosalie Rendu, but will also attract newcomers to the story of this wonderful woman.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General
Congregation of the Mission and
Company of the Daughters of Charity
24 April 2004

FOREWORD

“By serving those who are poor, you are serving Jesus Christ.... A Sister will go ten times a day to see those who are sick, and ten times a day she will find God there.... You will go into poor dwellings but you will find God there.”¹

The publication of Sister Louise Sullivan’s book on Sister Rosalie Rendu recalls for me the great family feast we celebrated at her Beatification in Rome in November 2003. Members of the Vincentian Family came from the four corners of the world to gather together in Saint Peter’s Square for this occasion: Daughters of Charity; Vincentian Priests and Brothers; the International Association of Charities; the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; as well as the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups; not to mention members of Sister Rosalie’s family; and of course, the Church from the dioceses of Paris and Belley. Our large family had already had the occasion to be honored in Rome in 1947 at the canonization of Saint Catherine Labouré, a contemporary of Sister Rosalie, to whom the Virgin Mary communicated the extraordinary message of the Miraculous Medal. Then there was the canonization of our American saint, Elizabeth Ann Seton. In 1984, there was the beatification of our Sisters of Angers who were among the many Christians martyred during the French Revolution. More recently three priests of the Congregation of the Mission, Fathers François-Régis Clet, Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, and Marcantonio Durando were canonized or beatified with other missionaries and several lay people.

It therefore seems opportune now that this study on Sister Rosalie’s influence on society, prepared carefully and prayerfully by Sister Louise Sullivan, should be made available to the public. It is a call to rediscover the secret of Sister Rosalie, and to find the essential attributes characterizing this simple country girl who became a symbol of Our Lord’s loving mercy toward those who are poor, so that we can all live in this way during these early days of the 21st century.

¹ Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, 14 vols. (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre J. Gabalda, 1920-1925), 9:252.

I would particularly like to emphasize three of these attributes:

Her rootedness in God, which led her to draw from prayer and contemplation of Jesus as Servant, the strength and courage required to serve those most in need. This close union with Our Lord colored all her social activity. She served Christ by assisting those who were poor in the Mouffetard district.

Her influence on society, her concern to bring together the rich and the poor, her success in guiding and inspiring lay people, the ease of her relationship with the powerful of her time, her closeness to those who were most deprived.

Her joy in living in community, her kindness to the older Sisters with whom she lived, her concern for the formation of young Sisters confided to her care, her faith in the witness given by the Sisters' life of sharing.

This book on the life of Sister Rosalie invites the Company to share with the world the special gifts it has received from God which have enabled it to serve those who are poor. I thank Sister Louise Sullivan for bringing this fine work to its conclusion with perseverance and enthusiasm.

May Sister Rosalie, who served both those who were Rich and those who were Poor, be a guide and inspiration for all.

Sister Evelyne Franc, D.C.
Superioress General

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Sincere gratitude to all those who, by their collaboration, have made the publication of this biography possible during this year marking the 150th Anniversary of the death of Sister Rosalie Rendu:

To Sister Juana Elizondo, D.C., Superioress General (1991-2003); Sister Evelyne Franc, D.C., Superioress General (2003-present); Sister Margaret Barrett, D.C., General Councilor (1997-present); and Robert P. Maloney, C.M., Superior General (1992-2004), for their continued support;

To Sister Louise Gallahue, D.C., Vistatrix, Province of New York, when work on this project began, and Sister Mary Francis Martin, D.C., present Visitatrix, who enabled me to bring this book to completion by their sisterly encouragement and support;

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To the International and U.S. Society of Saint Vincent de Paul for their assistance and encouragement;

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To the Vincentian Studies Institute for supporting this endeavor by a Research Grant and for including the biography among their publications;

To Nathaniel Michaud, Executive Director and Publications Editor for the Vincentian Studies Institute for his able editorial assistance, and Brian Cicirello, Office Coordinator, for his help with illustrations;

To the Daughters of Charity with whom I shared my community life throughout this undertaking, especially the: Sisters of St. Joseph Residence, Holbrook, MA; Sisters of Charity Hospital, Buffalo, NY; DePaul Provincial House, Albany, N.Y.; Sisters' Houses of Montréal, Québec; St. Joseph Residence, Chicago, IL; and House of Providence, Farmington Hills, MI, for creating a climate of fraternal charity and support favorable to the completion of this task;

To the ill and retired sisters of Saint Louise House, Albany, NY, who sustained me by their prayers and affection;

To all those friends and collaborators who have contributed the inestimable gift of their prayers and support.

INTRODUCTION

Sister Rosalie Rendu, a seventy-year-old Daughter of Charity who had spent nearly her entire religious life within the narrow confines of perhaps the poorest area of Paris, was buried with all the trappings of a state funeral from the church of Saint-Médard on 9 February 1856. The government laid aside its prohibition against the public display of religious symbols as those who were rich as well as those who were poor, those who were powerful as well as those who were voiceless, joined the silent procession behind the crucifix leading her remains to Montparnasse Cemetery. Religious and government officials, who frequently had little in common, forgot their differences for a few hours to pay tribute to this humble woman. The mighty and the downtrodden wept together. The following day Parisian newspapers of widely diverse and opposing political and religious persuasions described the singular event and paid tribute to the woman who had occasioned it.¹

During this year, 2006, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of her death. A steady flow of visitors continues to come to her grave. Many leave flowers or small marble plaques expressing gratitude and testifying to the truth of the inscription on the tomb, "To our good mother Rosalie, her grateful friends, the poor and the rich." An avenue in the area of the French capital where she labored bears her name. The occasional newspaper article still recalls her accomplishments. A recent book on the XIIIth arrondissement, which in Sister Rosalie's day was part of the administrative district where she devoted her life to the service of those in need, is dedicated quite simply "To Sister Rosalie."²

On 21 August 1997, Pope John Paul II beatified Frédéric Ozanam, the principal founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,

¹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum Officium Historicum. Parisien. [Beatificationis et] Canonizationes Servae Dei, Rosaliae Rendu (in saec.: Ionnae Mariae), Societatis Puellarum a Caritatae (1786-1856), Positio Super Virtutibus et Fama Sanctitatis (Rome, 1993). [Within this document there are three separate paginations: *Positio Biographie Documentée*, 1-318; *Exposé des Vertus*, 1-61; *Sommaire du Procès Ordinaire de Paris* (1953), contains the testimony of witnesses, *Examen des Ecrits*, 1-93.] *Positio*, 256-271. Note: Throughout this text we will try to use more personal expressions for "the poor" such as "those who are poor" or "persons who are poor" where syntax permits, or, unless the origin of the expression, such as Sister Rosalie's "beloved poor," dictates otherwise. There can be no doubt that Sister Rosalie saw all those who came into her life as persons.

² Jean-Jacques Lévêque, *Vie et histoire du XIII^e arrondissement* (Paris: Hervas, 1990), iii.

at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. In his homily, the Holy Father evoked Sister Rosalie's name. He stated, "The bonds among the members of the Vincentian Family have been strong since the origin of the Society because it was a Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu, who guided the young Frédéric Ozanam and his companions toward persons who were poor in the Mouffetard section of Paris."³

But who exactly is this woman who was herself beatified on 9 November 2003? What does her life have to say to men and women of our era who, regardless of their socio-economic status, seek to reach out to those in need?

Sister Rosalie's first biographer, Viscount Armand de Melun, declares, undoubtedly with exaggeration born of admiration, that his friend and collaborator of nearly 20 years was "at the origin of all of the major social welfare undertakings" of the first half of XIXth century France.⁴ Indeed, the mere cataloguing of her accomplishments in modern social works reveals a woman of extraordinary creativity and energy. Through her tireless service to those whom society in general had seemingly abandoned and her ability to involve youth and elders, wealthy benefactors as well as those in need in this work, she proved herself a worthy daughter of the founders of the Daughters of Charity, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. However, as with Vincent and Louise, there is the danger of losing the person behind the actions, of being so dazzled by the magnitude of their achievements that the spiritual and human motor that drove them disappears.

Such has often been the case with Sister Rosalie. The numerous texts that have appeared since her death portray her heroic deeds on the barricades during the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 or at the bedside of the sick during the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1849, and 1854. They also recount in detail the numerous works that she founded for those who were poor. But Sister Rosalie, the woman, is far more and far less than the sum of her actions. If she has something to say to the men and women of today, it is precisely because of the person she became by the grace of God and by her response to that grace.

³ *Discours du Pape et chronique romaine*, "Béatification de Frédéric Ozanam," Notre-Dame-de-Paris, 22 août 1997 (Paris, 1997).

⁴ Armand de Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie, Fille de la Charité*, 13^e édition (Paris, 1929), 118.

Sister Rosalie's service of persons who were poor is certainly of major importance and is the reason she continues to be remembered. Nevertheless, the woman behind the works is the person we must come to know if her life is to have any lasting meaning for us and for our epoch.

Such is the purpose of this new biography. While acknowledging the debt owed to previous works, particularly that of Armand de Melun, which is the essential basis of all subsequent texts, because of its historical accuracy and eyewitness accounts, the present work will attempt to draw a spiritual and human portrait of this extraordinary woman. To that end, considerable emphasis will be placed on Sister Rosalie's correspondence. Previous biographies have made little or no use of her letters. These writings, however, provide valuable insight into the character and personality of this humble woman who spent almost her entire life as a Daughter of Charity in the Mouffetard district in Paris' Latin Quarter. The response to her Beatification, both in Rome and in Paris, demonstrates that her example and message continue to reverberate in the minds and hearts of those who are seeking to relieve the plight of those who are poor and abandoned at the dawn of the XXIst century.

With that in mind, we now turn to the places, people, and events that formed Sister Rosalie and to her own words as found in her correspondence or cited by those who knew her well. Using all available documentation, it is our hope that we can weave a tapestry that will reveal the true portrait of Sister Rosalie Rendu, the woman, the Daughter of Charity, and the servant of all who needed her assistance, be they persons who were rich or persons who were poor.

CHAPTER I

A CHILD OF THE REVOLUTION

In France, Bellegarde is the final stop of the high-speed train running from Paris to Geneva. It is a small city nestled in the Jura Mountains near the banks of the Rhône. It has become a busy crossroads for skiers en route to Evian, for tourists, business travelers, and even commuters to Geneva, which is just 25 minutes away.

If, however, instead of moving on, one takes the narrow road up the mountain, one passes through the tiny villages of Ballon, Lancrans, Confort, Chézery, and finally Lélex, which is almost at the same altitude as Gex, the most important town in the region and in the department of l'Ain. There are cars now, some new houses and, in Confort, a residence for the elderly, the *Maison Sœur Rosalie*, but in reality the area has changed little in size or appearance since the late XVIIIth century when Jeanne-Marie Rendu, known in religion as Sister Rosalie, was born there.

For many years, despite numerous treaties, the region had remained part of the Kingdom of Savoy. It would only be in 1760, during the reign of Louis XV, that it would definitively become a part of France. Known diversely as *Confort*, *Comfort*, and *Réconfort*, the village of Sister Rosalie's birth takes its name from the chapel of *Notre-Dame-de-Consolation* or *Réconfort* which the Cistercian monks had built there in the XIIth century and which had become a site of Marian pilgrimages. The chapel no longer stands but the name endures.

The Rendu family had been in the area that covered the former parish of Lancrans since the end of the XVth century. According to Sister Marie-Madeleine Manceau, a Daughter of Charity, who was the local superior of the *Maison Sœur Rosalie* in 1927 and who knew the family history well, "in the XVIIIth century there were twenty-four Rendu households, consisting of more than 130 persons: one sixth of the total population."⁵ Armand de Melun described the family as belonging to "this ancient bourgeoisie which by long years of useful work had attained a standard of living that was equidistant between

⁵ Letter of Sister Manceau, 24 August 1927, Archives des Filles de la Charité, Paris. Hereinafter cited as AFCP; Henri Desmet, C.M., *Sœur Rosalie, une Fille de la Charité, Cinquante ans d'apostolat au quartier Mouffetard* (Paris, 1950), 16.

luxury and want. Their social position, which was more honorable than glittering, attracted respect rather than envy."⁶

The prominence of the Rendu family beyond the confines of the Jura was further attested to by the Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement in Paris, Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, when, on 22 December 1856, he dedicated a bust of Sister Rosalie which was placed in the assembly room of the town hall. In his discourse he stated, "For many years, [the Rendu family] has given lawyers to Parlement and notaries to the provinces. The University and the magistrature are indebted to [the family] for high officials. Today [Rendu] descendants, by their meritorious service of Church and State, in administration and at the bar, still reflect its honorable origins."⁷

The initial diocesan investigation into Sister Rosalie's life opened in Paris in 1953. Its purpose was to look into the possible introduction of her cause for beatification by the Catholic Church. In her earlier written testimony, Sister Louise-Clémence-Claire Saillard, a Daughter of Charity who, in 1852, was in the initial stage of her formation in the house where Sister Rosalie was the local superior, recalled, "I know that she belonged to an honorable, very Christian family that was persecuted during the Revolution because of its attachment to the Church. Her parents had the privilege of hiding several priests during the Reign of Terror and of risking their lives to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass."⁸

But what do we know specifically about Sister Rosalie's immediate family and of her life in Confort which she left definitively before her sixteenth birthday? To what extent did the land and the people of this tiny village form her and prepare her for the life she was to live in an environment that was the antithesis of the one in which she had spent her childhood and adolescence?

If the Rendu family had its illustrious members, Sister Rosalie's parents were among the more modest ones. The birth certificates of her younger sisters, Jeanne-Antoinette and Jeanne-Françoise state explicitly that her father, Jean-Antoine, was a "tiller of the soil."⁹ Vincent de Paul had used a similar appellation to describe

⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 1.

⁷ Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, *Inauguration du buste de Sœur Rosalie* (Paris, 1856), 22.

⁸ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 61.

⁹ Departmental Archives, l'Ain.

his own father.¹⁰ While clearly not rich, Jean-Antoine possessed land and after his marriage to Marie-Anne Laracine on 7 February 1785, in the church of Lancrans,¹¹ the young couple moved into one of the few houses in Confort. From later accounts, it appears that there were at least two servants in the household and that the family had the means to provide some assistance to persons who were poor living in the area.¹²



Parish church in present day Lancrans.
Courtesy of the author

There were four children, all girls, born of this marriage. According to the baptismal records of the parish of Lancrans they were: Jeanne-Marie, the future Sister Rosalie, on 9 September 1786; Marie-Claudine, on 8 September 1788; Jeanne-Antoinette, on 4 May 1793; and Jeanne-Françoise, on 19 March 1796.¹³

¹⁰ Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, 14 vols. (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre J. Gabalda, 1920-1925), 9:81. Hereinafter cited as *CED*. All citations will be from this edition.

¹¹ Archives, Parish of Lancrans.

¹² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 4.

¹³ Archives, Parish of Lancrans.

Aside from the fact that he was a farmer who was able to provide adequately for his family, little is known of Jean-Antoine Rendu who died at the age of 33, on 12 May 1796 when his oldest child, Jeanne-Marie, was not yet 10 years old. The untimely death of her father was followed on 19 July of the same year by the death of her 4-month-old sister, Jeanne-Françoise.¹⁴ Thus, full responsibility for the household and for the education of her three daughters fell squarely on the shoulders of the young widow. Those familiar with Sister Rosalie's childhood are in agreement in stating that her mother was admirably suited to the task.¹⁵

Let us now turn our attention to those formative years and try to discern how they marked Jeanne-Marie, whom her family called "Marie." It is surely here, in the rugged terrain of the Jura Mountains, that the character of the future apostle of the Mouffetard section of Paris was formed. Born in Confort, Jeanne-Marie Rendu was baptized the same day in the parish church of Lancrans, there being no parish church in Confort at the time. The Baptismal record lists her godparents as Nicole Rendu and Jean-Joseph Rendu, her grandfather.¹⁶ Sister Rosalie would later state that he was her godfather by proxy, replacing his close friend, the superior general of the Sulpicians, Jacques-André Emery, S.S.¹⁷ Indeed, Father Emery would play a decisive role not only in the future consecrated life of his godchild but also of the Daughters of Charity during the dramatic and often traumatic years following the Revolution of 1789.

Jeanne Marie Rendu fille d'Antoine Rendu et de
 Marie Marie affaictée mariée, nacquie et fut Baptisée
 le mes Septembre Mil sept cent quatre vingt
 six par le sieur Jean Joseph Rendu sur a figure
 Mairaine Nicole Rendu intercesse enquisse.
 Jean Joseph Rendu.

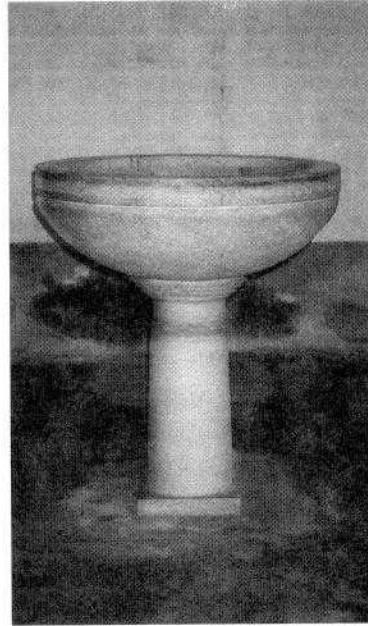
Baptismal record of Jeanne-Marie Rendu.
 Archives, Parish of Lancrans

¹⁴ Departmental Archives, l'Ain.

¹⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 85; Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 5.

¹⁶ Archives, Parish of Lancrans.

¹⁷ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 82.



Parish baptismal font in Lancrans.
Courtesy of the author

But no one could have foreseen all of that in 1786. While the storm clouds of the Revolution were gathering quickly over the capital and most of the rest of France, the region of Gex remained relatively undisturbed. The Catholic faith continued to be solid in an area distinguished by the earlier presence of Saint François de Sales. Viscount de Melun described their faith as “straightforward” and “simple,”¹⁸ attributes that would characterize the future Sister Rosalie in all aspects of her life.

Thus, Jeanne-Marie spent her early years in a profoundly Christian atmosphere. However, this did not mean that she was an excessively pious child. According to Sister Marie-Louise Wicquart, a Daughter of Charity, who was the local superior in Confort in 1949, oral tradition in the village, passed on to her by one of Sister Rosalie’s distant relatives, had it that the little girl was “lively, even mischievous, but that she was very devout and had a very kind heart and already, as a child, was moved to assist those who were poor.”¹⁹ Armand de

¹⁸ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 2.

¹⁹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 13.

Melun expands upon the portrait, describing his friend as a little girl who was “pretty... energetic... impulsive... and strong-willed.” He characterizes Sister Rosalie’s countenance as “lively... delicate... and mischievous.”²⁰

In this text Melun does not use any direct quotes, but when he goes on to explain how these characteristics manifested themselves he seems to be relating details that came from Sister Rosalie’s own reminiscences on her childhood as he inserts a “she said” without indicating who “she” is.²¹ He tells us that she “tried to get into all the mischief she could so that there would not be any left for her when she reached the age of reason.”²² He added that she “teased her sisters, liked to throw their dolls into the neighboring garden, was more interested in butterflies than in books, and that in games she was neither the last nor the least aggressive.”²³ Elsewhere, Melun describes the young Jeanne-Marie as having been “born with a lively and impetuous temperament.”²⁴

Sister Marie-Emile de Costalin, a Daughter of Charity, who was both a companion of eleven years at the house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois and a close friend of Sister Rosalie, supports Melun’s account and adds reflections of her own.²⁵ She found those leadership qualities in the young girl that would later characterize the woman. In her testimony she tells us:

From the age of 7 or 8 she was already very mature and pious and had a good deal of influence over her playmates. She loved to play school and took her role of teacher very seriously. She had her pupils recite their catechism and their prayers. She also liked to play house and to be the mother of a very good little girl whom she would reward by taking her to the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary. If the chapel was closed when they got back from the fields, they would kneel near the wall.

²⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 43.

Her little playmates feared nothing more than displeasing her and hid their naughtiness from her lest, "Jeanne-Marie... not want to play with them any more."²⁶

The years would temper Jeanne-Marie's impetuosity but that childhood exuberance which would later win her so many collaborators for the service of those who were poor was never dampened either by personal suffering or by external catastrophes. Sister Costalin, who knew her only as an adult, would attest to this. She stated that Sister Rosalie "was never impetuous although she was naturally exuberant."²⁷

It appears, however, that in the midst of those normal childhood games and nonsense, there grew in the heart of the child that deep love for those in need that would later draw her into the family of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac and lead her to dedicate her life to the relief of human misery. Those who know anything of these early years are in agreement on that point. Once again it is Sister Costalin who tells us:

...in the humble and hospitable house of Confort those in need and travelers always found assistance. It was the rule of the house. This, however, was not enough for the heart of the little girl who always sought, as a grace, to give [those in need] what had been set aside for her. Sometimes she followed them secretly to give them the little treats that her delicate constitution required. Her little purse was never filled. When her grandfather gave her some small coins, she would watch the road leading into the village so as to share her treasure with the first needy person who came along.²⁸

Melun relates a similar tale, adding that the mischievous little girl's comportment was different with those in need. With them "she was always gentle and obliging."²⁹ And if there were no poor to assist, Jeanne-Marie shared herself and her meager possessions with those

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 3.

who worked for the family, compassionating with them and doing a portion of their household tasks.³⁰

Indeed, this “extreme sensitivity” to the needs of those living in poverty, and in all other things for that matter, is considered by those who study her life as “unquestionably Sister Rosalie’s dominant character trait.”³¹ It manifested itself early and would remain all her life, sometimes causing her difficulty and suffering as when she was a novice.³² This same trait, however, would also lead her to become “a resting place where the whole weary world could lay its burdens.”³³

But times were changing and simple acts of charity would soon involve danger and require personal courage. By 1793, the Revolution had moved well beyond the capital and the tiny village of Confort found itself on the route leading to safety in Switzerland for those, many of them priests, seeking to escape the Reign of Terror. It is important to understand that the danger was very real. The law punished by death anyone who supported the clergy in the exercise of their ministry or hid them from the authorities. The Catholic religion had been suppressed and anyone who aided its ministers was considered an enemy of the State and punished accordingly.

This, however, did not deter the Rendus from opening their home to several priests and to Monseigneur Joseph-Marie Paget, Bishop of Geneva-Annecy. There is an anecdote connected with the latter, which Melun claims Sister Rosalie herself related to him when speaking of the “sad incidents of her childhood,”³⁴ and which is repeated by Sister Wicquart.³⁵ Recounted in a variety of ways, it essentially seems to be that one day, when Jeanne-Marie was seven years old, a new gardener, called Pierre, appeared in the household. The little girl noticed that he was treated with a certain reverence. Her curiosity was aroused. She began spying on him and soon discovered him saying mass at night in a cellar. Raised to believe that any form of dissimulation was wrong, she confronted her mother saying, “Be careful, I will say that Pierre is not Pierre.”³⁶ Madame Rendu, who had felt that her oldest daughter was too young to share the burden

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 189.

³² See Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 27.

³³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 82.

³⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 7.

³⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 14.

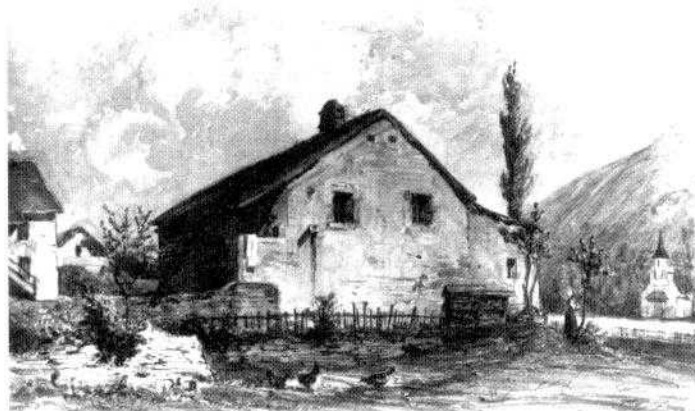
³⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 6.

of such dangerous secrets, had little choice but to tell her that their gardener was the Bishop of Geneva-Annecy, and that any indiscretion concerning his identity was deadly not only for Bishop Paget but for the family and for all the villagers.

Further credence is given to the tale by Canon Jean Mercier in his *Souvenirs historiques d'Annecy jusqu'à la Restauration* published in 1878, where he speaks of the bishop's flight into exile between September 1792 and April 1793 when he arrived at the house of the Congregation of the Mission in Turin, Italy. He states that:

During this six-month period, there is certainly the possibility of a stay by the poor exiled bishop in Confort which was very close to Geneva. The Gex region was part of the Diocese of Geneva-Annecy.... It would be very surprising if, during the first five years of his episcopacy, which began in May 1787, the bishop had not, on some occasion, discovered the hospitable home of the honorable Monsieur and Madame Rendu.³⁷

The Canon goes on to say that it was customary for mothers to present their children to the bishop for his blessing when he was passing through the village, so it is likely that the little Jeanne-Marie was among them.



Rendu home and birthplace of Jeanne-Marie (Sister Rosalie) in Confort.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

³⁷ Jean Mercier, *Souvenirs historiques d'Annecy jusqu'à la Restauration* (Annecy, 1878), 293-94.

Mercier concludes his account of Bishop Paget's possible stay in the Rendu home by stating, "Be that as it may, it appears from all that, that Monseigneur the Bishop of Annecy's stay in Confort was not very long."³⁸ It need not have been to have left an indelible mark on the future Sister Rosalie. During the Revolution of 1830, the recollection of her mother's fearless hospitality may very well have been the impetus that led her to warn Monseigneur Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen, Archbishop of Paris, of the danger he was in and to invite him to seek refuge in the house of the Daughters of Charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.³⁹

The Reign of Terror touched Jeanne-Marie's life in a still more personal way. Her biographers are in agreement that she received her first holy communion in a cellar, perhaps where the *Maison Sœur Rosalie* of Confort now stands or in a nearby house. The pastor of Lancrans at the time was Monsieur Colliex. He had been condemned to death, like so many other priests, for his refusal to take the Civil Oath of the Clergy which recognized only the Republican government's authority in Church matters. He, too, had to go into hiding. However, according to a history of the period in the Gex region, he refused to abandon his parishioners. In August of 1794, he stayed in Lancrans with Sister Rosalie's uncle, so as to be able to continue his ministry in the parish.⁴⁰ It could well have been at that time, although no date is certain, that he prepared the young Jeanne-Marie for the sacrament that she was about to receive and gave her holy communion for the first time.

While few biographers or witnesses during the Cause of Beatification speak explicitly of Sister Rosalie's faith, it is evident that her love for those who were poor was rooted in faith and in the conviction that it was God whom she found in them. That faith was born in the rugged terrain of the Jura Mountains in a home where God was the center and where one had to be willing to risk all, even one's life, to remain faithful. That lesson came from the faith environment in which Sister Rosalie grew up, particularly from the influence and example of her mother, Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu.

Sister Rosalie's biographers, as well as those who testified during the Cause of Beatification concerning her childhood, are

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 165.

⁴⁰ Edmond Chamouton, *Histoire de la persécution révolutionnaire dans le département du Jura* (Lons-le-Saunier, 1893), 250-52.

unanimous in acknowledging the primary role that Madame Rendu played in her daughter's human and spiritual formation. It is interesting to note that when speaking of the risks that Sister Rosalie's family took during the Revolution, by offering their home as a refuge for clergy fleeing into exile, Armand de Melun states, "Despite the law which punished by death those who would facilitate the practice of the condemned religion or who would hide priests who had refused the Civil Oath of the Clergy, she [Madame Rendu] opened her home to God and His ministers."⁴¹ Others use similar expressions. Yet, in 1793, Sister Rosalie's father, Jean-Antoine Rendu, was still living. He did not die until 1796. He certainly must have been aware and have approved of what was going on, although the driving force seems to have been his wife.

What do we know of Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu, who saw her daughter only once after she left Confort for the last time three months prior to her sixteenth birthday? The most complete description comes from the testimony of Mélanie Rendu, Sister Rosalie's cousin and close friend, who tells us:

Her worthy and venerated mother, widowed young, showed exemplary piety. She possessed and practiced all the virtues of the saints. In her parish, she was a model for widows and Christian mothers. Here she maintained the faith during the terrible period of the Terror of 1793. She instructed the uninitiated in the catechism and gave hospitality to priests who were emigrating.... By nature and the example of her ancestors she became the benefactress of all in need. She even brought Christian comfort to the bedside of the dying. In a word, her life was a tapestry of good works.⁴²

According to Mélanie, Madame Rendu was "the primary educator of her three daughters."⁴³ Much of that education came from the strength of her example. And it bore fruit in the heart of the young Jeanne-Marie, whom her cousin characterized as "gifted with great intelligence." She then added that, even at an early age, her cousin's

⁴¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 5.

⁴² Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 85.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

"piety, modesty, and natural gentleness were her crowning glory and all her virtues made her stand out in her parish which she left at the age of fourteen."⁴⁴

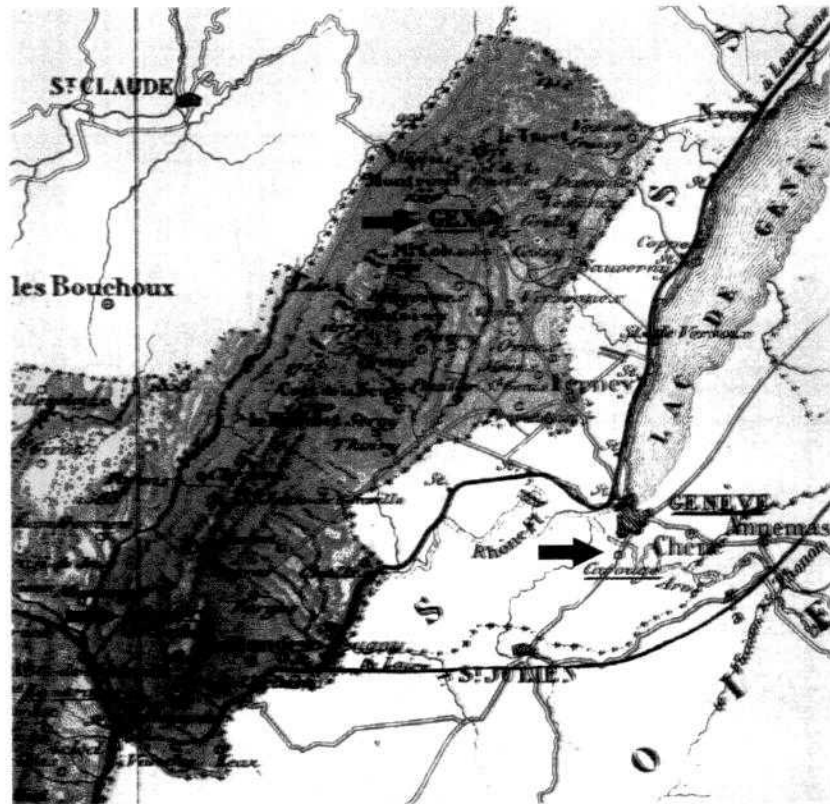
Mélanie's assessment is valuable on two counts. It reinforces the clear influence of Madame Rendu on her daughter and it gives us an understanding of the education that Sister Rosalie received as a child. From her mother, the future Daughter of Charity acquired her solid, simple faith, her fearlessness, and her love and respect for persons who were poor. As Mélanie pointed out, Jeanne-Marie was "highly intelligent" but her education was essentially practical. She could read and write but spelling was largely beyond her and her correspondence reflects this. She spelled phonetically while expressing herself clearly, forcefully, and even with a certain grace. This combination of example and practical training developed her innate "*bon sens paysan*," or common sense, as well as her good humor. These qualities had characterized Saint Vincent de Paul before her and, as in his case, would serve her well later on. Shortly after Sister Rosalie's death, her cousin, Eugène Rendu, wrote of her:

Sister Rosalie's principal character trait was her common sense, pushed to the point of genius. Those who did not have the honor of meeting her often could not appreciate her moral supremacy and, if I may say so, her ministry to souls, which the confidence that she evoked from all gave her. Persons came from far and wide seeking her advice.⁴⁵

It is this Jeanne-Marie Rendu who will leave her village for the first time, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, to begin a journey that would eventually lead her to Paris. In perhaps the most miserable slum of the French capital she would devote fifty years of her life in the struggle to bring relief to a whole gamut of human suffering. There, far from the rugged soil of the Jura Mountains, the lessons learned from the indomitable Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu would reach full fruition.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Eugène Rendu in *Le Messager de la Charité*, no. 102 (16 February 1856), 1.



Map of the Jura Mountains locating Gex, Carouge and Confort.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

CHAPTER II

THE ADOLESCENT IN SEARCH OF HER VOCATION

It must be admitted from the outset that the details concerning Sister Rosalie's adolescence are sketchy and often contradictory. Having said that, let us now consider that brief but critical period of her life.

We have reached the year 1800 or 1801. Jeanne-Marie is now an adolescent. According to Mélanie several young men wanted to marry her.⁴⁶ At the same time the gaps in her education became evident. The Revolution had ended and calm had returned to the Gex region. Religious women, who had been dispersed during the Reign of Terror, were once again coming together and turning their attention to the education of young girls. Such was the case of the Ursulines of Gex, known, since their return to their families, as the Dames Maçon. Once they were re-established, Madame Rendu confided her daughter to them to be educated. Biographers, as well as witnesses for the Cause of Beatification, differ as to how long she remained with them.

Just as the dates and the length of stay vary from account to account, so does the chronology. According to Armand de Melun, Madame Rendu placed her daughter with the Dames Maçon for two years to complete her education. Thus, she would have left Confort in 1800 at the age of thirteen.⁴⁷

However, according to Mélanie Rendu, Jeanne-Marie knew that her mother was acquainted with Sister Suzanne Palme, the superior of the Daughters of Charity of the Hospital of Gex, and the young girl asked her mother to take her there for a visit. Madame Rendu agreed to her request and made the thirty kilometer journey. Suspecting that Jeanne-Marie was considering the religious life, she probably thought it would not be to the Daughters of Charity as she felt that Jeanne-Marie would not like the sisters' religious garb, particularly the large winged cornette. To Madame Rendu's surprise her daughter was enchanted by it, saying it "suits me; it will hide my face."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 85.*

⁴⁷ *Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 8.*

⁴⁸ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 85.*



Large winged cornette worn
by Daughters of Charity until 1964.
Public domain

It is also Mélanie who tells us that, because she felt that Jeanne-Marie was too young, Sister Suzanne suggested that Madame Rendu place her daughter with the Dames Maçon, where she remained for a year. She added that Jeanne-Marie was fourteen at the time.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, two things are certain. In 1800/1801 Jeanne-Marie left Confort for a boarding school in Gex run by the Dames Maçon where she spent a year, possibly two. Secondly, either before beginning her studies or during them, she met the Daughters of Charity of the Hospital of Gex, which had been founded by Saint Vincent de Paul himself shortly before his death in 1660,⁵⁰ and was drawn to their service of those who are poor.

It would appear that the education Jeanne-Marie received at Gex and later at Carouge, near Geneva, was largely domestic. The young women were being prepared to be wives and mothers. However, the human and Christian formation was solid and in this climate Jeanne-Marie's religious vocation took root.

There is agreement that Jeanne-Marie was a serious student who took readily to the semi-cloistered life of the Ursulines. Yet, despite her fondness and admiration for her teachers, she felt called to serve God and persons who were poor, as did the Daughters of Charity of the Hospital of Gex. Armand de Melun tells us that the young girl heard a canticle on the happiness of the Daughters of Charity in the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

⁵⁰ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 52.

service of those in need and that, in later years, she loved to repeat one of the stanzas.⁵¹ It went as follows:

The spittle and rags
of a poor dying person
are my jewels
and my uplifted spirit.
Approaching his bed
all covered with vermin
I feel born in my spirit,
in the zeal which guides me,
a divine strength.⁵²

Notwithstanding the vague nature of these details, it would also appear that during this period Jeanne-Marie was in close contact with the pastor of Gex, Monsieur Pierre-Marin Routh de Varicourt, who gave her spiritual direction and assisted her in discerning the will of God in her life. Because Jeanne-Marie was so young, the pastor encouraged Madame Rendu to send her to Carouge where “several pious and zealous clergymen” had established a boarding school for young girls run by “women of great merit.”⁵³ Madame Rendu acquiesced and Jeanne-Marie continued her education there, as well as her spiritual journey, prior to entering the Daughters of Charity.



Mountainous area of Gex.
Public domain

⁵¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 9.

⁵² *Cantique de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité*, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Doc. 2^{bis}.

⁵³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 86.

After six months at Carouge, the future Sister Rosalie returned to Gex and began a six-month postulancy. This is a period during which the candidate shares the life and apostolic work of the sisters of the congregation that she hopes to enter. Considered a time of discernment, both she and they try to determine if the vocation is real, if the candidate is suitable for the life to which she feels that she has been called, and if the congregation can provide an environment in which this particular young woman can grow in her love and service of God and neighbor. While Monsieur de Varicourt continued to guide her, Sister Suzanne, as the local superior, assumed direct responsibility for Jeanne-Marie's initial formation.

Once again there are discrepancies in the documentation. What we do know with certainty, however, is that in the *Register of Postulants 1801-1808*, the original of which can be found in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, we read:

Arrival Gex, 13 February 1802. Sister Palme is proposing two postulants. One of them is 27 years old and appears to have a solid vocation. She is strong, knows how to read and write reasonably well, and to sew. She appears to be a good candidate with whom we hope to be satisfied. However, she could only contribute 300 francs and a trousseau as described in Sister Jacquino[t]'s note.

Arrival the second is 23 years old. She has exactly the same qualities and capabilities as the first and the same desire to enter our Company. Sister Mathieu.

Sister Rendu was also sent with the first two.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *Registre des Postulantes (1801-1808)*, photocopy of the original, in AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Doc. 11.

It is interesting that no further details are given concerning Sister Rosalie. There is no apparent explanation for this omission.

But let us return briefly to the Hospital of Gex and to Jeanne-Marie Rendu before she arrived at the newly established Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity on 25 May 1802. Aside from the broad lines of the chronology, little is known of the evolution of Jeanne-Marie Rendu's vocation. What we do know comes largely from Armand de Melun, who probably heard it from Sister Rosalie herself. A confidant of Sister Rosalie's, he assures us that her initial thoughts of dedicating her life to the service of God and those in need dated from Jeanne-Marie's first communion in a cellar in Confort. Melun writes, "There were before the altar a priest [Father Colliex], who was preparing himself for martyrdom, and a virgin who promised God whom she was receiving for the first time, to love him all her life in the person of the lowly and the poor."⁵⁵

Melun adds, "From the age of reason, Jeanne had thought of consecrating herself to God. None of the joys of the world attracted her. She wanted no part of its celebrations or glitter. At the same time, she felt drawn by its groans and misery."⁵⁶ Her stay in Gex and Carouge, her contact with the Ursulines (Dames Maçon) and with the Daughters of Charity, her experience of both the contemplative life and the direct service of persons who were poor, and the spiritual guidance of Father de Varicourt, all combined to define and solidify Jeanne-Marie's calling.⁵⁷ Thus it was that when she learned that her friend Armande Jacquinet, a young woman from Lancrans, was leaving to enter the Daughters of Charity in Paris, her own desire to give her life to God became clear. Melun tells us, "Jeanne no longer hesitated. She opened her heart to her friend and revealed her aspirations, her hopes, and her long prayers to obtain from God the grace to enter his service."⁵⁸

Although she was not yet sixteen years old, Jeanne-Marie wanted to leave immediately for Paris with Mademoiselle Jacquinet. The latter tried to discourage her precisely because she was so young. She knew that her mother, too, would oppose this decision and her consent was an absolute requirement. So, "Jeanne went to

⁵⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

her mother, told her of her vocation, which she had nurtured for a long while and which God was approving by providing her with an opportunity to follow it, and, on her knees, begged for her consent and her blessing."⁵⁹

She was not to obtain it immediately. Prompted by "prudence and motherly love," Madame Rendu argued against a vocation that she felt was not "solid" or "sufficiently thought out."⁶⁰ In the end she would yield to her daughter's entreaties, but not without the conviction that "the trip, time, and distractions would dissipate the illusions of this first impulse and soon bring her daughter back to her."⁶¹

To that end, she gave Jeanne-Marie a letter for Father Emery, Superior General of the Sulpicians whose Motherhouse was only a short distance from that of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. He was the young girl's godfather and a close friend of her grandfather. Madame Rendu had hoped that he would be able to convince her daughter of the "foolishness" of the step that she was taking.⁶²



Jacques-André Emery, S.S. (1732-1811),
Superior General of the Sulpicians - 1782-1811.
Godfather of Jeanne-Marie Rendu (Sister Rosalie).
Public domain

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

And so they set out, these three young women from the Jura, to begin their lives as Daughters of Charity. Melun describes the tearful departure that, in later life, Sister Rosalie must still have remembered vividly. He says that the young girl, who bid farewell to her mother that day, did so with a desire to fulfill the will of God in her regard, but also with “a bleeding wound in her heart.”⁶³ Indeed, for mother and daughter, there was probably the vague realization that this was a final separation. They would see one another only once again and the pain would remain. Melun says that his friend:

...always felt keen sorrow for the loss of or separation from a person who was dear to her. Neither time nor the practice of resignation could ever lessen the suffering caused by separations. Her limitless charity could not replace any of her affections. It only increased her capacity to love and, therefore, to suffer in those whom she loved.⁶⁴

Although Sister Rosalie lived only about thirteen years in her mother’s home, it seems important to reiterate here that Madame Rendu was the strongest influence in her life during these formative years. Only six letters of Sister Rosalie to her mother have been preserved, although there were undoubtedly others. They all reflect her great love for her mother and the pain of their separation. In 1853 she wrote:

I share in your suffering. I am immeasurably afflicted not to be able to go to you and to tell you this in person. Yes, my dear and tender Mother, believe that I am making a great sacrifice and that it costs me dearly. I continue to hope that you will remain with us and that I will be able to give both of us this just and desired consolation.⁶⁵

Sister Rosalie also speaks of her mother in letters to other family members. They, too, reveal her affection and her concern that her

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Veuve Rendu*, 9 September 1853, AFCEP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 267.

mother be well cared for. She could not offer this care herself but she made certain that Madame Rendu had all that she needed.

What precisely did she learn from her mother that helped to make her the woman that she became? In many respects, the young girl was a reflection of the older woman. In addition to the solid, simple faith that feared nothing previously mentioned, there was the same generous, respectful outreach to persons in need. Mother and daughter shared themselves and whatever they had with others. At her mother's side, the child and the adolescent also developed a capacity to love family and friends. She imbibed her mother's quiet courage in the face of danger and her willingness to take risks. As she left the Jura for the last time, Jeanne-Marie Rendu had within her those qualities that would one day make her the "Apostle of the Mouffetard area," qualities that had been mirrored for her by her mother, Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu.



Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu (1769-1856).
Portrait painted by the pastor of Lancrans around 1850.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris
Courtesy of Sister Mary Frances Barnes, D.C.

CHAPTER III

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

INITIAL FORMATION

The Daughters of Charity were founded by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac in Paris on 29 November 1633. The beginnings were modest. On that day a few young country women gathered in Louise de Marillac's home. Formed by her and by Vincent de Paul, they would transcend the strict social barriers of the day to work with the Ladies of Charity in the service of the sick poor. Moreover, these mostly peasant women, excluded by the lack of wealth and education from traditional religious orders, would enter into a new form of consecrated life, uniting contemplation and action, called forth within the Catholic Church by the need to serve the sick poor.

It is not our purpose here to provide a history of the Daughters of Charity, but a few key elements of their story are essential to an understanding of Sister Rosalie's early years among them. The initial work of those early sisters had been limited to an auxiliary one – that of helpers of the Ladies of Charity in their visits to the sick. Circumstances and the ever increasing needs of a wide sector of the population, not only in Paris but in the provinces, would soon alter that. The sisters would begin to branch out on their own into hospitals, schools, and orphanages, as well as into homes for the aged, the mentally ill, and galley slaves, all the while continuing the care of the sick in their homes.

During the lifetime of the founders (1633-1660), until the Company was suppressed and the sisters dispersed by the Robespierre government in 1793, their growth was dramatic and spread beyond the frontiers of France. As mentioned above, the Revolution struck differently from province to province and some works continued throughout the Reign of Terror, as was the case with the Hospital of Gex, while others disappeared. In Paris, all the novices and sisters were obliged to return to their families where they remained until after the death of Robespierre on 28 July 1794. Then, little by little, they began to return and, once again, to take up the service of those in need in Paris and beyond. Their numbers, however, had drastically diminished either because of deaths, or the fact that a certain number of them could not or did not return. More significantly, perhaps, was

the fact that no young women were entering the Company to take their place. Yet another political change in France was to alter this.



Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821),
 General of the French Revolution;
 First Consul of the French Republic – 1799-1804;
 Emperor of the French and King of Italy – 1804-1814;
 and restored as Emperor March – June 1815.

Public domain

By 1800, just as Jeanne-Marie Rendu was discerning her vocation, a young Corsican general, Napoléon Bonaparte, was rising to power. The need for the Daughters of Charity to return to works upon which much of French society had become dependent became increasingly apparent to his newly formed government. The hospitals in particular, and later the wounded of Napoléon's Grand Army, called out for nurses. So it was that Sister Thérèse Deschaux, superior of the Hospital of Auch, approached the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Antoine Chaptal, for authorization to accept candidates who would be formed for the service of the sick. The interests of those who were poor, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and the French government coincided. The Minister asked Sister Deschaux to have Sister Antoinette Deleau, Superioress General at the time (1790-1804), send him a formal request. She did so, probably in late November or early December 1800, since the response from the Minister of the Interior is dated "1 Nivose, Year 9" (22 December 1800).

In her request, Sister Deleau makes several points.⁶⁶ First she reminds the Minister that it is the government that “wants [them] to take up the service of suffering humanity once again.” She goes on to “assure him of [their] zeal to do so,” but she points out that this is impossible because of the lack of sisters caused by the suppression of the Company during the Reign of Terror. She even warns him that the sisters may have to withdraw from some of the places where they were allowed to continue their work during the Revolution because, “having lost a large number of sisters over a period of several years, [they] were not allowed to train pupils to replace them.”

While the very future of the Company depended on the good will of the government, Sister Deleau is, nonetheless, clear on the conditions of their return: “We ask, therefore, that if our services to the poor are agreeable to the government, that it authorize us to train persons suitable for this, which requires a particular type of education which Sister Deleau, as First Directress, offers to provide for them.”

She then reminds him that previous governments have accepted the Company’s conditions, namely, the right “to select the pupils and to place and to transfer the sisters in keeping with their talents or the needs of the hospitals” and asks that the present one do the same. These conditions appear to be non-negotiable and, to reinforce her stand, she informs the Minister that the Company is seeking no financial support for the project at this time.



Sister Antoinette Deleau, D.C.
Superioress General – 1790-1804.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

⁶⁶ Sister Antoinette Deleau, *Request to the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Antoine Chaptal for authorization to accept candidates who would be formed for the service of the sick*, manuscript, AFCP, 7 F 2 – 1a.

At the end, she once again spells out the request, "Therefore, Citizen Minister, we are soliciting from you authorization for a house of formation in which to train pupils for the service of the poor in different civil hospitals and governmental works of charity as well as the freedom for the Sister Directress to place and to transfer the sisters according to the needs."⁶⁷

Indeed, the needs were so great that it did not take long for the Minister to respond favorably. We quote the text here in its entirety as it clarifies the state of the Company of the Daughters of Charity at the time that Sister Rosalie entered it. It reads:

DECREE OF CITIZEN CHAPTAL, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR
1 Nivose Year 9
(22 December 1800)

The Minister of the Interior, considering that the laws of 14 October 1790 and 18 August 1792, while suppressing corporations, had reserved to the members of the Establishments of Charity the right to continue their acts of charity, and that it is only in contempt of these laws that these institutions were totally disbanded.

Considering that the necessary assistance to the sick can be assiduously administered only by those vowed by their state to the service of the hospitals and directed by the enthusiasm of the Charity;

Considering that among all the hospitals of the Republic, those that are administered with the greatest care, intelligence, and economy, are those that have called back into their bosom the former pupils of this sublime institution whose sole aim was to form them for the practice of the acts of a boundless charity;

Considering that only a few aging individuals remain in this precious association which causes us to

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

fear a speedy dissolution of an institution which is an honor to humanity;

Considering, finally, that the care and virtues necessary for the service of the poor must be inspired by example and taught by the lessons of daily practice, *it is decreed:*

I. Citizeness Del[e]au, Superioress of the Daughters of Charity, is authorized to form pupils for the service of the Hospitals;

II. The Orphan Hospital on rue du Vieux-Colombier is placed at her disposition for this purpose;

III. She shall gather together persons she believes useful to the success of her institution and shall choose pupils she judges suitable to fulfill its aim;

IV. The government shall pay room and board, in the amount of 300 francs, for each of the pupils whose parents are recognized as being in absolute poverty;

V. All the pupils shall be subject to the regulations of the interior discipline of the house;

VI. The funds necessary to supply for the needs of the institution will be taken from the general expenses of the hospitals. They shall not exceed the annual sum of 12,000 francs.

Signed: CHAPTAL⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Jean-Antoine Chaptal, *Decree of Citizen Chaptal, Minister of the Interior, 1 Nivose, Year 9*, in "Moniteur universel du 9 nivose an IX, n^o 99," 22 December 1800, AFCP, 7 F 2 - 1b.



Jean-Antoine Chaptal, Minister of the Interior
1800-1804.
Public domain

Sister Deleau and her companions took over the house at 11, rue du Vieux-Colombier on 20 January 1801. The government had met her conditions and even granted her financial support that she had not sought. It was a time of general rejoicing. In her letter to the sisters of the Company of 1 January 1802 she wrote:

You have been for religion in France what the Dove was for Noah... By your return to our houses, you have, as it were, displayed the olive branch that enables people to realize that the waters of the revolution have receded.⁶⁹

Thus, when the three young women from Confort arrived in Paris on 25 May 1802, they found a company that was rebuilding itself after a traumatic era. The novitiate, or seminary as it is called by the Daughters of Charity, had been officially reopened and confided to an experienced formation directress, Sister Gillette-Julienne Ricourt, who was then 41 years of age and who had been an assistant to the formation directress prior to the Revolution.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Sister Antoinette Deleau, *Circulaire*, 1 January 1802, AFCP.

⁷⁰ Sister Catherine Amblard, *Circulaire*, 1 January 1822, AFCP.

As with so much else concerning Sister Rosalie's early years, there is little documentation of this critical period in her life. There is nothing in the oral or written testimony for her cause to enlighten us. What we do know comes from general sources and from Sister Rosalie herself in her written testimony to Étienne-Michel Faillon, S.S., for a biography of Father Emery.⁷¹

The formation that the founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, desired for their Daughters was one that sought to balance contemplation and the service of those in need, that is prayer and action. Their beginnings had marked a turning point in religious life for women by giving form to the concept of a consecrated life outside the walls of the cloister, where women came together in community to give themselves to God for the service of those who were poor. By 1802, the idea had become deeply rooted and imitated. Thus, formation stressed the primacy of a mission of service, but in a Vincentian spirit which required deep spiritual rootedness of the community as a whole and of each individual sister. The sisters were called upon to practice humility, simplicity, and charity among themselves, with those with whom they collaborated in their work, and especially with those whom they served. They were to be totally "given to God for the service of persons who are poor"⁷² whom they were "to serve with compassion, mildness, cordiality, respect, and devotion."⁷³

The primary responsibility for this formation devolved on the formation directress, in this case, Sister Ricourt. The basic formation documents were the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Common and Particular Rules of the Company. It must be admitted that little emphasis was placed on Saint Louise de Marillac, who was not canonized until 1934, and whose true significance for Vincentian spirituality began to be recognized only in the 1980's.

Such would have been the formation that the young Sister Rosalie received. One key factor in that formation was missing, however. The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, who was also the Superior General of the Daughters of Charity, was not able to play his role as spiritual guide for the company.

⁷¹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 80-84.

⁷² *CED*, 9:534.

⁷³ *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor* (Emmitsburg, 1976), Chapter VII, Article 1.

From the earliest days in the history of the community, Louise de Marillac had insisted on the necessity of preserving this linkage with the congregation founded by Vincent de Paul. Saint Louise went on the offensive when, in 1646, Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, approved the Company of the Daughters of Charity with the following stipulation:

...the said confraternity [of the Daughters of Charity] shall be and shall remain in perpetuity under the authority of and dependent upon my said Lord, Monseigneur the Archbishop [of Paris] and his successors....⁷⁴

The fact that the archbishop agreed that Vincent de Paul would remain at the head of the company "so long as it will please God to preserve his life"⁷⁵ did not appease her. In November 1647, she wrote to Vincent:

It seems that God gave my soul great peace and simplicity during my imperfect meditation on the need for the Company of the Daughters of Charity to remain continuously under the guidance given it by Divine Providence in *spiritual as well as temporal matters*. At that time, I believe that I came to understand that it would be more advantageous for the Company to fail completely than to be under another's guidance, since it would seem to be contrary to the will of God.⁷⁶

In the end she prevailed. On 18 January 1655, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, issued a new approbation to replace that of 1646 which had been sent but somehow disappeared. This time, the dependence, in perpetuity, of the company on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission was established:

⁷⁴ CED, 13:558.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Louise Sullivan, D.C., ed., trans., *Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise de Marillac: Correspondence and Thoughts* (Brooklyn, 1991): 234; see also 364.

...it pleased us to approve once again the said new confraternity and its statutes and regulations contained herein [which differ from those of 1646 only on minor points⁷⁷] and to grant to the said suppliant [Vincent de Paul] and to his successors as superiors general of the said Congregation of the Mission the power to direct the said confraternity under our authority and jurisdiction.⁷⁸

However, while the Napoleonic government readily recognized the need for the Daughters of Charity, it had no such feeling for the Priests of the Mission. Indeed, their very relationship to the Daughters of Charity was seen as a threat by the government. By a decree of 27 May 1804 the Congregation had been re-established, but only for missions outside of France, hence the title "Priests of the Foreign Missions." Napoléon would recognize the nomination of Vicars General Claude-Joseph Placiard and Dominique-François Hanon, but would refuse to grant them any authority over the Daughters of Charity.⁷⁹ It would only be in 1815, after the fall of Napoléon, that they would be re-established in France and allowed to resume their rightful role. Ironically or perhaps providentially, that role was largely filled in the interim by none other than Father Emery, Superior General of the Sulpicians, and Sister Rosalie's godfather.

⁷⁷ CED, 13:571, note 1.

⁷⁸ *Act of Approbation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity signed by Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, Cardinal de Retz. 18 January 1655*, Archives Nationales: L.1054. Hereinafter cited as AN; CED, 13:571.

⁷⁹ *Actes du gouvernement français concernant la Congrégation de la Mission dite de Saint-Lazare*, Archives de la Congrégation de la Mission, Paris. Hereinafter cited as ACMP.



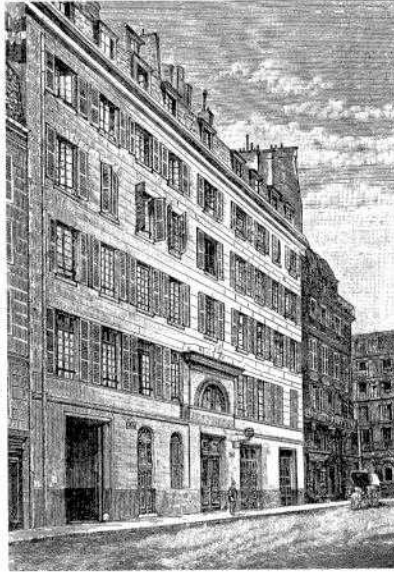
Claude-Joseph Placiard, C.M.
 Vicar General – 1806-1807.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

Sister Rosalie herself, in her testimony concerning this man to whom she says she “owes [her] holy vocation,” speaks of his place in her life and in the life of the Company at this still troubled epoch.⁸⁰ She points out that he was an advisor to Sister Deleau, and would continue in this role with Sister Deschaux when she replaced Sister Deleau as Superioress General.⁸¹ She recalls that, during her seminary, Father Emery “had a very close relationship” with the newly re-established Community, giving instructions and advice, rooted in his own devotion to Saint Vincent, and hearing confessions.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 82.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 81-82.



Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity – 1801-1815.
11, rue du Vieux-Colombier.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

On a personal level, Sister Rosalie describes him as a spiritual advisor and confidant who visited her every day, something that he could do without too much difficulty, since the two houses were separated by only a five-minute walk. She gratefully recognizes Father Emery's exceptional kindness to her and the advice that he gave her, advice that made "a great impression" on her and which was always "clear and brief" and, even when it entailed a correction, was always marked by "charity and a spirit of faith." According to his godchild, in all his dealings with her and with the community he was "a true priest."⁸³

It is interesting to note that, in this testimony, Sister Rosalie attributes to Father Emery the maxim usually attributed to her, namely, "My child, a priest and a Daughter of Charity must be like a milestone on a street corner where all those who pass by can rest and lay down their heavy burdens."⁸⁴ Inculcated into her in her formative years, it would become the defining notion behind her service to all those who came to her little parlor on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois seeking her aid, be they rich or poor.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*



Roadside milestone or road marker.

Public domain

Another adage that Father Emery surely learned at the school of Saint Vincent de Paul, and which in his “great wisdom” he passed on to his young charge, was not to run ahead of Divine Providence but “to take one day at a time.”⁸⁵ This would prove invaluable to the young sister who seems to have had a great deal of difficulty in adjusting to her new life. She certainly believed that she had been called to it by God so, with her characteristic stubbornness, she would be determined to stay and become a Daughter of Charity. This intensity, coupled with the separation from her family and the Jura, however, appears to have taken a toll on her health.

Curiously, since the Company generally documents, albeit briefly, and preserves the seminary experience of every sister, we have no notes from Sister Ricourt about Sister Rendu. Indeed, we know very little about this critical period in her life. The biographers and witnesses are in agreement on one point only and that is that her stay in the seminary of the Motherhouse was brief, probably six months. The dates given for her departure, her age, and even the reasons behind the change are contradictory. Only Melun speaks of her health.⁸⁶ He attributes her medical problems, if medical problems there were, not to the Parisian climate, which could certainly be an explanation for a young girl accustomed to the pure air of the Jura, but to her “extreme physical and moral sensitivity.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 27-28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

Did he learn of that from his friend Sister Rosalie herself? Most likely, since he enters into considerable detail and, while no one confirms his remarks, neither does anyone contradict them. He tells us that, at this time, his friend was:

...subject to all types of emotions and affected by everything around her. ...The slightest change in the atmosphere was a trial for her. She sensed a cloud passing. A spider frightened her. The proximity of a cemetery prevented her from sleeping.⁸⁸

Melun then goes on to say that all that young Jeanne-Marie had found so attractive in the life and service of a Daughter of Charity was now a source of “repugnance” to her.⁸⁹ So great was her struggle to overcome this and to adapt to her new environment that she became “dangerously ill.”⁹⁰

While we have no community texts to document her condition, and Sister Rosalie herself says nothing about it, she does seem to confirm that she was ill by acknowledging that a change of air was prescribed when she states, once again in her testimony on Father Emery, “When he saw that I had been placed in the Saint-Marceau district, where there were so many persons in need, he was very satisfied and said to me, ‘This is truly the place that you need. You will be the servant of all these people who are poor.’”⁹¹ Henri Desmet, C.M., in his biography of Sister Rosalie, makes a significant remark on this change of air and Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., who prepared the *Positio*, quotes it. Father Desmet points out that it was a “strange” one since Sister Rendu had “changed milieu but she was still breathing the same air of Paris and in one of the most densely populated and suffocating parts of the city.”⁹²

Desmet also theorizes that not only did Father Emery approve of this curious change but that he was actually behind it and, because of his influence with the Superioress, was able to bring it about. Father Emery was Sister Rendu’s godfather and had promised her grandfather, who was also his friend, and her mother he would look

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹¹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 82-83.

⁹² Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 78.

after her. This probably explains his daily visits to his godchild and his concern for her well-being. He knew her and her origins well, so he realized that what she needed was not the air of the Jura but the vast activity that she had there. He had discovered through his close contact with her that she was “too exclusively absorbed in striving for her personal perfection” and needed something to release the tension and “to free her generosity.” In short she needed to become part of “a great endeavor.”⁹³

The motivation behind the change will probably always remain the object of conjecture. Nevertheless, after a period of about six months, the young sister left the Motherhouse for the house of the Daughters of Charity called Saint-Martin, on rue Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel, in the area of Paris where she was to spend the remainder of her life. Her formation was confided to the local superior, known among the Daughters of Charity as the Sister Servant, Sister Marie-Madeleine Tardy.

Whatever the reason for the selection of this particular house, it would prove to be a wise decision. The sixteen-year-old rapidly recovered her energy and her exuberance. She quickly “became the joy of the little community.”⁹⁴ In her testimony, Sister Saillard, one of Sister Rosalie’s later companions at rue de l’Épée-de-Bois, tells us that her new apostolic work as a religious education teacher “offered a vast terrain for her zeal and her youthful fervor.”⁹⁵ The young novice “understood, as time went on, what Our Lord was asking of her and set to work with the courage that never failed for a single instant throughout her long career.”⁹⁶

As she settled happily, and with restored health, into this life of service, Sister Rosalie began to understand what the Revolution had meant to the Daughters of Charity in the French capital. While most had been obliged to return to their families, some, like her new companions, had been allowed to remain. They set aside the then familiar white-winged cornette and assumed lay attire, but they continued to devote their lives to the service of those in need. Their deeds revealed them for who they were but “they were forgiven for their faith because of their charity.”⁹⁷ As elsewhere in France, they were tolerated because they were needed.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 29.

⁹⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 62.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 28.

Thus, it was in an environment of total dedication to the service of those who were poor and with quiet courage that the young Sister Rendu completed her novitiate. She taught catechism to little girls whose religious formation had all but disappeared during the Revolution. Father Desmet tells us that, when school was not in session, she also visited the homes of those living in poverty.⁹⁸ He does not give his source, but it is in all likelihood an accurate statement since this had been a work dear to the Daughters of Charity since their origins.

Besides regaining her health and zealously giving herself to the service of those in need, the young novice also won the hearts of all her companions. The older sisters fell under her charm as “she went well beyond her duty... and revealed... the kind of energy that no task could deplete.”⁹⁹ So it was that when her novitiate time with them came to an end, the sisters were reluctant to see her leave. According to Melun, Sister Tardy approached the Superioress General and said, “I am very pleased with this little Rendu; give her the habit and leave her with us.”¹⁰⁰ And so it would be. Again the records of the Daughters of Charity are strangely silent as to exactly when this occurred. All that appears in the *Register of Entrances into the Seminary, 1801-1808*, under the date 25 May 1802, reads as follows:

Jeanne-Marie Rendu, legitimate daughter of Antoine Rendu and Marianne [sic] Laracine, her father and mother, baptized 9 September 1786, of the commune of Lancrans, department of Léman; postulated at Gex; entered 25 May 1802.

Habit taking...

She brought her trousseau which we returned to her when she went to Maison Saint-Martin in Paris...¹⁰¹

If we are to believe the Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement, who, on 22 December 1856, spoke at the unveiling of a bust of Sister Rosalie

⁹⁸ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 87.

⁹⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Registre des Entrées au Séminaire (1801-1808)*, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Doc. 1.

Before leaving this period in Sister Rosalie's life, some consideration needs to be given to two other factors, namely the "supernatural test" and the Vincentian balance of contemplation and action.

First, let us turn our attention to the "supernatural test" which is recounted by Sister Costalin and repeated by Father Desmet in his biography. The exact time of the event is not clear. We do not know if it happened during Sister Rosalie's novitiate period or after her definitive placement in the house, although, since the age mentioned by Sister Costalin is eighteen, it was probably the latter.

In any event, according to Sister Tardy's dying account to two former companions of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, the salient points appear to be as follows. As Sister Rosalie's Sister Servant, she was "astonished" by the "advanced virtue" displayed by her young charge, whom she never had "to reproach for the slightest thing." Once, while she was reflecting on this spiritual "precocity," she decided to subject Sister Rosalie to what she would refer to as a "supernatural test."

So, one day, she handed Sister Rosalie a basket of food, and without further preamble, told her that they were going to visit a sick priest. What she failed to mention was that she had been asked by the Archbishop of Paris to see to the man's needs and keep him from public view because it was believed that he was "possessed by the devil." When they arrived, the young sister was struck by the priest's "desperate expression" but she went silently about her chores. Before leaving, Sister Tardy told her to greet the priest and to ask for his prayers. Barely had she uttered a few words when:

...like a bolt of lightening, the priest jumped to the ceiling of the room and began to run around as if he were flat on the floor. In a terrible voice, he cried out, "Rosalie, Rosalie! How many souls you will tear from my grasp!" He repeated this cry three times. The poor child understood only one thing, namely that he was calling her. Driven by fear, she found herself not only out of the house but at the end of the street in an instant. Profoundly moved, Sister Tardy thanked God for revealing to her what this young sister was.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 44-45.

Whatever the details of this event, while one cannot fault Sister Tardy's motivation, one has every right to seriously challenge her judgment. She, if anyone, was aware of the eighteen-year-old's "extreme sensitivity."¹⁰⁴ After all, Sister Rosalie had been removed from the Motherhouse and placed with her precisely because of it. The results of her little experiment could have proven disastrous, but fortunately they did not. Sister Rosalie appears only to have continued to grow and thrive in the environment of the Mouffetard district. As for Sister Tardy, years later when speaking to two of her companions about Sister Rosalie, who had replaced her as the local superior at the age of twenty-nine, she said, "You have certainly gained from this change. Sister Rosalie is a saint."¹⁰⁵

Now let us consider the question of the necessary balance between contemplation and action, which both Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac deemed essential in the life of a Daughter of Charity. This is particularly important for any reflection on the life of Sister Rosalie because there are those who, while praising her remarkable accomplishments in the service of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district, believe that she sacrificed her own spiritual development in order to devote all her energies to the relief of human misery. We will return to this later on, but we address it here because her difficulties in the seminary, a period of intense contemplation, followed by her return to good health once she became involved in the active apostolate, lend credence to such a view. However, a letter that she wrote years later to a seminary sister seems to show how greatly she valued the seminary experience. In 1838, she told Sister Françoise Cowan, who had been a postulant at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois:

I was pleased to learn that you are happy in the seminary. I was certain that you would be content in this holy sanctuary. You are living in a period of harvest. Make good use of this precious time. From every point of view, it is the best of your life. Learn to become a child of Saint Vincent, that is, a Daughter of Charity, heir of the promises that he made to give all to the One who gives Himself without reserve.

¹⁰⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 45.

Be humble, gentle, obedient of heart, and simple as a dove... Goodbye, my dear little friend. Be assured of my sincere and affectionate devotion in the love of Our Lord.¹⁰⁶

Sister Rosalie would certainly have to struggle throughout her life to maintain the essential balance between prayer and action. The overwhelming misery that surrounded her daily made it inevitable. But the attraction to prayer and contemplation that she had developed with the Ursulines and deepened in the seminary would remain with her. Moreover, she was soon to learn that without it neither she nor anyone else could long persevere in the vocation which she firmly believed she had been called to by God.

Thus, in 1803, Sister Rosalie Rendu began in earnest her life as a Daughter of Charity in what was then Paris' XIIth arrondissement. One can hardly imagine a more unlikely setting for a child of the Jura Mountains to thrive, but she certainly did. Armand de Melun, who shared her work there for some twenty years, described it as he knew it as late as the time of Sister Rosalie's death:

...the Saint-Marceau district... is still today the prototype of suffering and the homeland of misery. There the person who is poor is poorer than elsewhere, filth more unhealthful, disease more deadly. Hard work itself, which ordinarily raises up and beautifies all around it, looks like a ruin in this neighborhood and appears as misery because it is generally carried out at night, on rag piles, or milestones, or in the gutter.

...In these narrow, winding streets, in rooms too low-ceilinged and damp to be used as stables, whole families vegetate pell-mell on the floor or on straw, without air, light, heat or bread.

The moral and intellectual life equals the physical existence. After so many years during which

¹⁰⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Sister Françoise Cowan*, 26 March [1838], AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - La 6.

worship was outlawed, instruction neglected, one cannot easily find a child who knows how to read or a woman who remembers her prayers. Souls severed from truth have become as poor as the bodies. The way needs to be reopened to the Church, the school, and the workshop. Everything needs to be rebuilt or repaired.¹⁰⁷

Instead of being frightened by the overwhelming task that faced all those who felt called upon to bring some relief to this most abandoned sector of humanity, Sister Rosalie was energized and challenged by it. She had at last found what she had been seeking since her youth reaching out to those in need in Confort or Gex. So it would be here that she would seal her covenant with God by vow, most likely in May-June 1807. Once again, oddly enough, we have no record, but it was customary among the Daughters of Charity to pronounce their vows for the first time five years after their entrance into the seminary. Jeanne-Marie Rendu had entered the company on 25 May 1802.

In keeping with the custom established by the founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, these vows were simple and private, pronounced aloud only the first time, and renewed annually. This did not imply anything, however, but complete dedication for a lifetime.

Sister Rosalie's dispositions were revealed in a letter to her aunt, Jeanne Laracine. On 28 April 1807, she wrote:

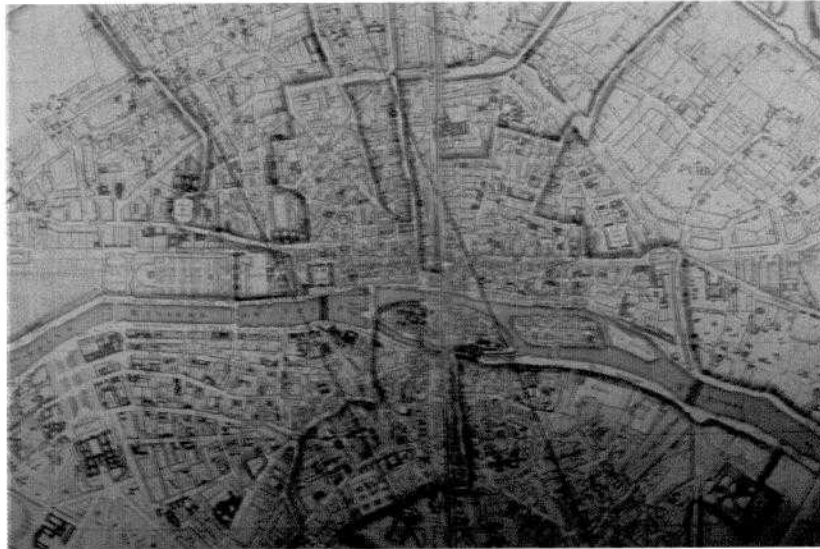
...the duties of my holy state give me little time because the service of those who are poor requires continual care from the Sisters of Charity who have taken as their heritage this honorable task – which is a great satisfaction for me – to be employed in the service of these poor ignorant persons who do not know the One who created them.

Oh, yes, my dear Aunt, every moment of the day makes me discover the happiness I enjoy of having been called to a state which affords me all that I need to work out my salvation with confidence.... Please,

¹⁰⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 30-31.

my dear Aunt, pray to Our Lord for me so that He will grant me the grace to accomplish His will as I should.¹⁰⁸

By the time Sister Rosalie pronounced her vows for the first time, she was already well known and loved by the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. She was now prepared to undertake her life's work as a Daughter of Charity totally "given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor."¹⁰⁹ She was twenty-one years of age. The great works were yet to come.



1802 map of Paris.

XIIth arrondissement in lower area of map, right of center, dark outline.
Public domain

¹⁰⁸ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Jeanne Laracine, 28 April 1807, AFCP, 8J2 Ro - Le 1 JL 1 Ro - La 1.*

¹⁰⁹ *CED, 9:533-534.*

CHAPTER IV

A NEW STORM GATHERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Article 8 – The infirmed sisters or those no longer serving

because of age are supported at the expense of the hospice where they became ill or grew old.

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

Signed by Napoléon Bonaparte and by the Minister of Cult,
Monsieur Portalis¹¹⁰



Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis (1746-1807),
Minister of Cult – 1801-1807.
Public domain

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

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

¹¹⁰ Decree of the Napoleonic government which seemed to assure the re-establishment of the Company of the Daughters of Charity signed by Napoléon and Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis, Minister of Cult, 16 October 1802, AN: F.19.6344.

permitted to resume their traditional habit. When speaking of Sister Rosalie's arrival at the Maison Saint-Martin, Sister Saillard said, "She arrived there wearing a little muslin dress made from an old infirmary curtain."¹¹¹ It seems to have taken the intervention of the Pope for this to change. Indeed, in December 1804, the Holy Father, Pius VII, who had come to Paris for the coronation of Napoléon as Emperor, visited the Motherhouse on rue du Vieux-Colombier. It has been noted that:

...he seemed surprised that the sisters had not resumed wearing the traditional habit of their order... He spoke of this to the Emperor, telling him that the good Daughters of Charity looked like widows. At his urging the Emperor authorized the sisters to resume wearing their traditional habit [the cornette]. This took place in the Spring of 1805 [25 March, feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, on which the Daughters of Charity annually renew their vows].¹¹²

On that occasion,

...there was great celebration in the house on rue du Vieux-Colombier. Cardinal [Joseph] Fesch [the Emperor's uncle] came to say the community mass and the Emperor's mother, herself, assisted at it.¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 62.

¹¹² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 265-66.

¹¹³ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* (1900), 586.



Cardinal Joseph Fesch (1763-1839),
 Archbishop of Lyon – 1803-1839.
 Half-brother of Letizia Bonaparte and uncle of Napoléon Bonaparte.
Public domain

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

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

Melun speaks of the difficulties of those years.¹¹⁴ However, Father Desmet goes into even greater detail than Melun concerning

¹¹⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 28.

this era for the sisters of rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel. He tells us:

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

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

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

¹¹⁵ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 84-85.

sanctifying. If you have little, give this little with a generous heart which compensates for and which is like a supplement to what you cannot give them. Make your conduct ever more blameless before God and before others.¹¹⁶

A little later on, she urged them:

In order to continue the service of those who are poor, accept everything that can honestly be required of you in the present circumstances provided there be nothing contrary to religion, the Church, and your conscience.¹¹⁷

And so they did, wherever they could.

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

PRINCIPAL ESTABLISHMENT: Paris
 NUMBER OF HOUSES: BEFORE 1793: 461; IN 1807: 260
 NUMBER OF SISTERS: BEFORE 1793: 3,300; IN 1807: 1,598¹¹⁸

The convocation opened on 27 November 1807 at the Tuileries and was presided over by Napoléon's mother, Madame Letizia, and by his uncle, Cardinal Fesch. The Superioresses of forty different institutes, along with their Assistants, participated. At that time, Sister Deschaux, who had replaced Sister Deleau at the head of the

¹¹⁶ Sister Antoinette Deleau, *Circulaire*, 1 February 1792, AFCP.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 April 1792, AFCP.

¹¹⁸ *Number of houses before 1793 and in 1807*, AN: F.19.6344.

Company, asked that the name “Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul” be reserved to the Company. Her request was granted.¹¹⁹



Letizia Bonaparte (1750-1836).
 Mother of Napoleon Bonaparte and half-sister of Cardinal Joseph Fesch.
Public domain

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

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

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

¹²⁰ Sister Deschaux asks the Napoleonic government for financial assistance for the Company. All the houses that the Daughters asked for their service were granted, AN: F.19.6247; See also AN: F.19.6344.

Decree of 8 November 1809.¹²¹ It contains within it the core of the controversy, and we quote it in its entirety:

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

Palace of Fontainebleau, 8 November 1809

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

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

We have decreed and we do decree what follows:

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

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

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

¹²¹ *Bulletin des Lois*, 2^e semestre, #252, article 4838.

Article IV. Our Ministers of Cult and of the Interior are charged with the implementation of the present decree which, along with the attached documents, shall be inserted into the Bulletin of Laws.

Signed: Napoléon

By the Emperor

The Minister Secretary of State, signed: Hugues B. Maret¹²²



Hugues-Bernard Maret (1763-1839).
Minister Secretary of State – 1804-1811.

Public domain

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

¹²² *Ibid.*

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

Surely the Vincentian tradition played a vital role. As mentioned earlier, the jurisdiction of the Superior General had been viewed by Louise de Marillac as vital to the preservation of the spirit of the Company. Nevertheless, the original statutes, submitted to the Archbishop of Paris in 1645¹²³ did not contain such a stipulation; nor did the *Act of Establishment of the Company* by the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, on 20 November 1646.¹²⁴ It is this text that those favoring episcopal authority would put forth during this post-revolutionary struggle for control over the Company. Louise de Marillac, in her lifetime, never experienced this kind of internal conflict, but she seems to have been convinced of its inevitability because, as she told Vincent de Paul on 5 July 1651:

The basis for this establishment, without which it would appear impossible for the said Company to subsist or for God to derive from it the glory that He seems to want it to render to Him, is that it must be erected either with the title of Company or of Confraternity and must be entirely under the jurisdiction of and dependent upon the venerable guidance of the Most Honored Superior General of the Venerable Priests of the Missions, with the consent of their Company, so that, in association with them, it might share in the good they accomplish so that the divine goodness, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, might grant our Company the grace to live in the same spirit with which His goodness animates their honorable Company.¹²⁵

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

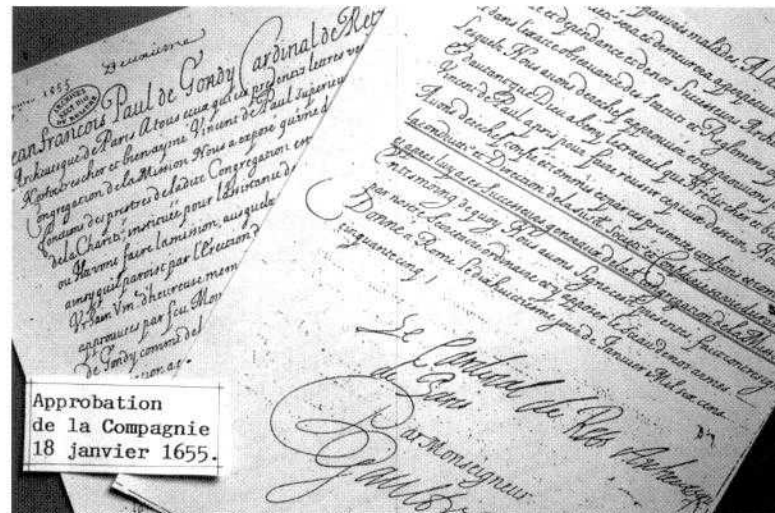
¹²³ *CED*, 13:551-556.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 557-565.

¹²⁵ Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings*, 364.

the Mission would also be the Superior General of the Daughters of Charity. The Act of Approbation by Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, on 18 January 1655, states unequivocally:

Insofar as God has blessed the work that our said dear and beloved Vincent de Paul has done to bring about the success of this pious design [the founding of the Daughters of Charity] we have confided and committed to him once again and, by this present act, confide and commit to him the conduct and direction of the above mentioned society and confraternity [the Company of the Daughters of Charity] during his lifetime and, after him, to his successors, the Superiors General of the said Congregation of the Mission.¹²⁶



Act of Approbation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity by Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, 18 January 1655.

Underlined area clarified the Superior General of both congregations.

National Archives of Paris

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

¹²⁶ CED, 13:572.

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

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

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

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

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

¹²⁷ *The superiors of the Daughters of Charity submit statutes which place the Company under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris*, AN: F.19.6240; See also AN: F.19.6344.

¹²⁸ *Dossier Filles de la Charité*, ACMP.

of the Mission of Saint-Lazare that Saint Vincent designated to be, in perpetuity, Superior General of the Sisters of Charity and it is always he whom they choose."¹²⁹

Napoléon moved to gain absolute control over all "sisters of charity" in his realm. Meanwhile, Father Hanon, the exiled Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission and Superior of the Daughters of Charity, strove to ensure that "things would be left as Saint Vincent had arranged them."¹³⁰ Such would not be the case. The Emperor was determined to see all governmentally approved congregations of women subject to the bishop of the places where they were located. Thus, on 18 February 1809, he issued a decree requiring all communities of sisters to submit their rule, incorporating this new regulation, for government approval. The deadline for compliance was 1 January 1810. The penalty for non-compliance was legal dissolution. Father Hanon's worst fears seemed about to be realized. The Company of the Daughters of Charity was divided into two opposing camps, the "Vincentines," who wished to retain the traditional governing structure with its dependence on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, and the "Jalabertines," who wanted to be under the authority of the local bishops. This latter group was named for Jean-François Jalabert, one of the vicars general of the Archdiocese of Paris, who was at the forefront of those who wanted diocesan control of the Company.

The ensuing struggle was as complex as it was bitter and nearly resulted in the Daughters of Charity facing "their last moments in France."¹³¹ Such, fortunately, was not the case. The matter was finally resolved and the jurisdiction of the Superior General once again recognized. But this was only in 1814, with the abdication of the Emperor and the later restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815. Father Hanon returned to Paris, where he sought to begin the healing process among the sisters.

Father Hanon realized only too well how difficult it would be for the two groups to live and work harmoniously. There were those who had been expelled by the government for their opposition to its policies¹³² as well as " those who have not laid aside [their] habit

¹²⁹ *Father Hanon sends corrected statutes to the Minister of Cult*, AN: F.19.6240.

¹³⁰ *Letter of Father Hanon to Cardinal Fesch*, January 1809, AN: F.19.6240.210.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Jean-Marie Planchet, C.M., *Le Calvaire des Vicaires Généraux ou Un Double Schisme* (Paris, undated manuscript), ACPM, 38.

or abandoned [their] ministry with the poor; those sisters who have preserved these without adopting novelties, and without taking part in the agitations around them. They have always observed their vows, and preserved the sentiments transmitted to them by your excellent mothers."¹³³ By welcoming back those who had been exiled because of their refusal to comply with government regulations as well as those who had continued to serve while remaining faithful to the tradition of the Company, Father Hanon hoped to restore peace and charity. He concluded his Circular by urging reconciliation. He wrote, "Let there be absolute silence and general forgetfulness of the past. Show the same justice, regard, affection, and kindness to all the sisters without exception, whatever may have been their previous sentiments, language and conduct."¹³⁴

In order for harmony to be restored, there had to be union around the leadership of the Company. On 20 February 1815, Paul-Thérèse-David d'Astros, a vicar general of the Archdiocese of Paris, transmitted to the Company the decision of Pope Pius VII of 19 January 1815 concerning them and their government.¹³⁵ Father d'Astros had been named Apostolic Visitor for the entire Company of the Daughters of Charity. He had also been charged by the Holy Father to convoke an assembly of the sisters for the election of the Superioress General. Sister Marie Durgueilh (1810-1815), who had assumed office after the resignation of Sister Judith Mousteyro (1809-1810), had never been elected and the legitimacy of her office had not been recognized. According to the Pope's decision, Father d'Astros, assisted by Father Hanon, was to preside over the election as the Superior General had done since the time of Saint Vincent.¹³⁶

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

¹³³ Dominique-François Hanon, *Circulaire*, 1 January 1815, AFCP.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Paul-Thérèse-David d'Astros, *Circulaire*, 20 February 1815, "Dossier Hanon," AFCP.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

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

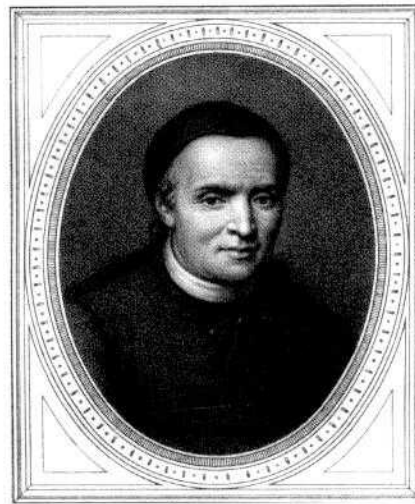


Pope Pius VII – 1800-1823.
 Courtesy of the Vincentiana Collection
 DePaul University Libraries, Chicago, Illinois

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

¹³⁷ Dominique-François Hanon, *Circulaire*, 24 February 1815, AFCEP.

On 16 September 1815, Father Hanon again wrote to the sisters. He asked that all the dispersed sisters return; that there be a sincere and total reuniting of all hearts; and that the Rule, the former good order, and unity in government be re-established. He then went on to stress the importance of the role of local superiors in making any necessary changes or reforms in themselves, their sisters, and their houses so as to restore the “exact observance of the Rules and the Holy Vows.” He assured them that if they could bring this about they would have “the merit and the consolation of freeing the admirable work of our Holy Founder [Saint Vincent] from the terrible rust that is tarnishing it and which is visibly eating away at it and [that they] will restore its original luster.”¹³⁸ This would eventually come about, but Father Hanon would not live to see it. He died on 24 April 1816.



Dominique-François Hanon, C.M.
Vicar General – 1807-1816.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

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

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

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 September 1815, AFCP.

from 1843 to 1874, and was probably the most influential after Saint Vincent himself, stated that the sisters who had contributed to the congregation's restoration met with opposition and were even blamed "by the sisters who then governed their Company... since the spirit of the Motherhouse was not what it would later become."¹³⁹

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

It must be admitted from the outset that we do not have any solid evidence relative to her thoughts or actions with regard to the government of the Daughters of Charity during the period of 1807-1815. It is safe to assume that the house where she lived, Saint-Martin, followed the procedure that these same sisters had followed during the Revolution. That is to say, that they continued to live their lives quietly, in the spirit of their founders, and to serve those who were poor. The testimony of Sister Rosalie herself on Father Emery is revealing on this point. After briefly summarizing the events of 1808, she goes on to say that many sisters had consulted Father Emery about how they should act and he had "urged them to remain at their posts." Then she added, "All those who followed his advice never had any reason to regret having done so."¹⁴⁰

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

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

¹³⁹ Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M., *Notice sur le rétablissement de la Congrégation de la Mission après la Révolution de 1789* (Paris, 1870), 16.

¹⁴⁰ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 83.

"We often deceive ourselves. We reason about things of which we have no knowledge. We judge without having the grace to do so. We speak without recalling these words of Sacred Scripture, 'place a lock upon your lips.' Herein lies all the evil. The community is built in the image of the Church; there is one head. In following Him, we are sure not to go astray."¹⁴¹

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

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

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER V

AT THE SERVICE OF THE POOR OF THE MOUFFETARD DISTRICT

EDUCATION

As cited earlier, Viscount de Melun described, in shocking detail, the physical, social, spiritual, and moral misery of the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district in the years following the Revolution of 1789.¹⁴³ Since it was the area in which Sister Rosalie spent her entire adult life, it would be good to situate it within the French capital of her era, with its extremes of luxury and destitution sometimes within a few short blocks of one another. Such was the Mouffetard district with its indigence and its nearby neighbor, the Saint-Germain quarter, with its opulence.

A tourist in Paris today is hardly likely to visit this section of the XIIth arrondissement of yore. It is known variously as the Mouffetard district, because of one of its two XIVth-century streets; the Saint-Médard quarter, named for the parish church built there during the VIIIth century; or the Saint-Marcel (Saint-Marceau) district after one of its oldest streets. It is now part of the Vth arrondissement – the Latin Quarter – with the Sorbonne, Cluny Museum, Panthéon, Luxembourg Gardens, and numerous cafés and boutiques along Boulevard Saint-Michel. The Mouffetard district, as those speaking or writing about Sister Rosalie generally call it, has undergone some gentrification but it is still mostly poor. The outdoor markets on Saturday attract Parisians but few visitors.

Situated on the Left Bank, a short walk from Notre-Dame, the district had its beginnings as a small town, Saint-Médard, which grew up around the church of that name as early as the IXth century. It developed little by little, becoming a working class neighborhood that was annexed to the city of Paris in 1724. In 1789, the Revolution came with its promises of a better life for all. By the time it was over, the rich of the capital had lost most of their possessions and the poor were left poorer than before.

¹⁴³ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 30-31.



Church of Saint-Médard with market in the square.

Rue Mouffetard on the left.

Public domain

From 1802-1856, the period of Sister Rosalie's life in Paris, the population of the capital went from a little over 500,000 to nearly 2,000,000. There was a massive construction effort. It was directed, however, toward the creation of new districts. The oldest parts of the city were left to further deteriorate. The Mouffetard district was one of the most neglected.

By the time Sister Rosalie arrived there the quarter was made up, almost exclusively, of large working class families. It is important to note here, as Paul Droulers, S.J., points out in his work, *Politique sociale et christianisme*, that "in common parlance, the word 'worker' is a synonym for 'poor' and this poverty becomes misery, a lack of the strict necessities of life, the moment there is the shortest layoff from work."¹⁴⁴ The author also asserts that "until 1914 every working class family, with three or more children, was registered with the 'Bureau de bienfaisance municipal' [Bureau of Public Assistance] because it was viewed as incapable of providing for itself only on the father's wages."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Paul Droulers, S.J., *Politique sociale et christianisme* (Paris, 1969), 24-25.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Moreover, working conditions were deplorable. The work day was 12 hours or more. The going daily wage for men was 2 francs, for women, 1 franc, and for children, 50 centimes. Men frequently died young, leaving their families in complete destitution. Illness or unemployment yielded similar results.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, during Sister Rosalie's era, two revolutions, in 1830 and 1848, wreaked havoc on the quarter, bringing commerce and industry almost to a halt. And to complete the misery of the people, three cholera epidemics, one in 1832, one in 1849, and one in 1854, claimed numerous lives and left other victims debilitated.

Louis Chevalier, in his *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses*, Abbé Isidore Mullois in his *La charité et la misère à Paris*, and André Latreille, Étienne Delaruelle, Jean-Rémy Palanque and René Rémond in volume III of their *Histoire du catholicisme en France*, support this assessment. Combined with Viscount de Melun's description of the area and Sister Rosalie's own testimony, they paint a grim picture of the district in which Sister Rosalie would labor her entire adult life. In several of her letters, she describes the lives of the people that she and her companions were called upon to serve. For the most part, they were "day workers, laundresses, street cleaners, menders of clothing, heavy laborers, workers in tanning factories, rag pickers, tinkers, and wandering merchants."¹⁴⁷



Daily life in the Saint-Marcel district on rue Mouffetard.

Public domain

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Empress Eugénie*, June 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le. The original of this letter has been lost; copy in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris donated by Eugène Rendu.

In a June 1840 report concerning the newly re-established Ladies of Charity addressed to Father Étienne, who was, at the time, Procurator of the Congregation of the Mission, Sister Rosalie described the living conditions of the working poor of the district. She wrote:

I believe... that I must enlighten you on the comportment and habits of those who are poor in the parish of Saint-Médard. They are numerous and have no resources in the quarter because there are no rich families. Most are caught in low-paying jobs. There are usually a number of children, so the family burden is great. They are generally very wretched. Unhealthy housing and the lack of food, even the bare necessities, often lead to disease.¹⁴⁸

Their working conditions alone would place these people among society's most vulnerable. To that must be added malnutrition, "The high cost of bread is a heavy burden which arouses strong protestation. The people are angry."¹⁴⁹

As if all this were not bad enough, extreme winter weather also added to the misery of the population. In February 1837, Sister Rosalie told her friend Cyprien Loppe, "All our poor people were ill, including the doctors. I assure you it was worse than the cholera epidemic. We have lost a number of people, and it is not over yet. The aftermath has been dreadful. The elderly are dying in great numbers as are the children."¹⁵⁰ In the same letter, Sister Rosalie informed Loppe that she and four of the sisters had also been ill. They could not, however, stop their activities on that account because those who were poor were in an even worse condition and their needs too great. Nor was the following winter any better. Once again, in a letter to Cyprien Loppe, we learn something of the extent of the devastation caused by the weather. Sister Rosalie wrote:

Providence has helped us. The resources were beyond what we had hoped for... But, how little it was when

¹⁴⁸ *Report of Sister Rosalie to Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M., on the re-establishment of the Ladies of Charity*, June 1840, Drawer 183, ACMP.

¹⁴⁹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 24 May 1829, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 22 February 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 36 L9.

compared to the cruel misery! We distribute 2,000 rations of soup each day... We have had enormous difficulties. Besides that, we have experienced illness because our sisters have suffered from the cold and all the rigors of the season.¹⁵¹

Again, in March 1845, Sister Rosalie spoke of the rigors of the Parisian winter. She told her cousin Mélanie:

The winter is very severe. I have never seen so much snow and ice. Our poor are constantly after us. We have 16,000 of them in our quarter. Their demands are infinite. We are all exhausted.¹⁵²

How did Sister Rosalie and the other sisters, first of the house on rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel and later on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, try to respond to these overwhelming needs? An examination of the works in which Sister Rosalie served or initiated will provide an answer to that question.

As has been pointed out earlier, Sister Rosalie began her life as a Daughter of Charity in the Maison Saint-Martin on rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel. In 1819 this house was transferred to a nearby more spacious one, on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.¹⁵³ Thus, her entire community life was spent in what was essentially one house. It had become, in the years following the Revolution of 1789, more precisely during the Consulate of Napoléon Bonaparte, a "maison de secours" (house of charity). When Sister Rosalie arrived there in 1802, it was one of four such houses of public assistance in the former XIIth arrondissement. In his biography, Melun describes this new concept designed to replace the miserable failure of the Revolution which had confiscated property, suppressed religious orders, taken over hospitals and charitable institutions, and put in their place a register called *Le Grand Livre de la bienfaisance publique*, where the names of those in need

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18 February 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 57 L15.

¹⁵² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 17 March 1845, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 190.

¹⁵³ *Letter of the Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement to the members of the General Council for the Administration of Hospices which resulted in the house of the Daughters of Charity, called Saint Martin, on rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel being transferred to a larger house in the neighborhood on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois*, 22 April 1819, Archives de l'Assistance Publique Paris, cote 18. Hereinafter cited as AAPP.

were to be transcribed. Invalids, widows, orphans, and abandoned children were to receive pensions instead of alms. The responsibility for distributing them devolved on the state. They were never paid.¹⁵⁴

Napoléon's goal was to re-establish the pre-revolutionary collaboration between Church and State. Thus, he set about reorganizing the system of public assistance in hospitals and in newly created municipal bureaus of public assistance, or "bureaux de bienfaisance," for each arrondissement. The latter would also be called "bureaux de charité" (bureaus of charity) during the Restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy (1815-1831), returning to the appellation of "bureaux de bienfaisance" with the July Monarchy in 1831.¹⁵⁵ The administration was to be lay but direct service was to be carried out by the recently re-established religious congregations. State support was to be allied to more traditional forms of "charity."¹⁵⁶ It is once again from Melun that we learn of the works of the Maison Saint-Martin when Sister Rosalie arrived there:

The house on rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel had been designated as one of the four "maisons de secours" [houses of charity] of the XIIth arrondissement. A pharmacy, a depository for clothing and household linens, and a free school for children who were poor were set up in it. The administrators took care of drawing up a list of indigent families. The house of charity provided each family with two pounds of bread each month, a little meat in case of illness or convalescence, a little firewood during the winter, and, every two years, a shirt or a blanket.

The sisters were responsible for the distribution of medicines, teaching school, visiting the sick, and for distributing assistance with the support of the commissioners [administrators] and the Ladies of Charity.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 37-38.

¹⁵⁵ Claude Dinnat, *Sœur Rosalie Rendu ou L'Amour à l'œuvre dans le Paris du XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2001), 67-68.

¹⁵⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 34-39.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.



Sisters informally teaching children in the Mouffetard district.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

Sister Rosalie enthusiastically undertook her new functions: teaching little girls from poor families and visiting the sick in their homes. Let us turn our attention now to the first of these: education. We do not know the precise number of children in school during these early days. An enumeration of properties, found in the Archives of Public Assistance in Paris dated 1 January 1827, lists four schools for girls in the XIIth arrondissement, one of which was “rue de l’Épée-de-Bois, with 221 girls and two sisters.”¹⁵⁸ By contemporary standards the teacher-pupil ratio is an aberration. It was far less so in XIXth century France, particularly in the cities. Father Beaudoin points out that similar statistics are seen in recent *Positiones* on founders of religious congregations of teaching sisters in the XIXth century. It appears that classes of 100 or more were common in the cities, although the teacher frequently had one or more assistants, who were given no official recognition.¹⁵⁹

Class size alone would have prohibited an extensive curriculum, as would have the limited education of the teachers themselves. It must be remembered that, as was pointed out earlier, Sister Rosalie, herself, had very little formal education. The goal

¹⁵⁸ AAPP, cote 18.

¹⁵⁹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio*, 39, note 31.

seems to have been to teach basic reading, writing, arithmetic and a great deal of catechism. Even later on, when there were more sisters in the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois – 6 in 1828; 8 in 1829; and 12 in 1856 – this goal did not change.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, it was perceived as the only appropriate one for little girls from indigent families. In a June 1854 letter (the original of which has been lost) to Empress Eugénie, wife of Emperor Napoléon III, Sister Rosalie stated, with her usual conviction, that it was essential “to return purely and simply to the principles of former times: to teach girls [from poor backgrounds] reading, writing, their language, religion to its full extent, arithmetic, and needle work.”¹⁶¹ She saw such a pedagogical approach as “very useful for the interests of the children, for the customs of the poor, and... for society in general.”¹⁶²

This is undoubtedly the curriculum that Sister Rosalie followed during her first years as a Daughter of Charity. Later on the number of sisters and pupils would increase and Sister Rosalie would no longer teach. In 1815, at the age of twenty-nine, she became the superior of the house. Education, however, remained central to the service of those who were poor in the Mouffetard district. Her role now was one of supervision.

While the curriculum remained limited, the manner in which it was presented was to be of the highest quality. Teachers obviously needed basic knowledge of the subject matter to be taught, but they especially needed to be able to effectively communicate that knowledge to their young charges. Overworked as the teachers were, Sister Rosalie once refused the services of a young woman who wanted to teach with the Daughters of Charity because, as she told her friend, Cyprien Loppe, this woman “has only personal knowledge and does not know how to convey it to others.”¹⁶³

The sisters who observed Sister Rosalie’s comportment and heard her words are in agreement on the importance she placed on the quality of the instruction given. In her testimony on Sister Rosalie’s life, Sister Angélique [Euphrasie] Tissot, who had spent her first six years as a Daughter of Charity teaching school under Sister Rosalie’s guidance, recalled:

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹⁶¹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Empress Eugénie*, June 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 22 February 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le36 L9.

Sister Rosalie insisted that we be on time and that the little rule [*Particular Rules for the Sisters in Schools*] be faithfully observed. "I insist upon this also, she told us, so that you will become accustomed to exactitude and order... Your mission is so beautiful that you must not lose a single moment in carrying it out. Remember that only you are going to teach these children to know and love God. Their mothers will not do it. Recall that you are paid to teach. You will fail in justice if you do not do your best to do it well."¹⁶⁴

According to Sister Tissot, Sister Rosalie recognized, probably from her early days in the classroom, that teaching these children, for whom school was "a trying experience" and who would "rather be doing manual work," was very difficult.¹⁶⁵ She pleaded with the sisters:

Cherish them. Be patient. You will see that they will change. Above all, Sisters, do not discourage them. Later they will feel your affection and want to please you.¹⁶⁶

Sister Costalin also speaks of the place that the education of little girls who were poor always held for Sister Rosalie, even after the other works of the house expanded. She always had time for it, visiting the school twice each day and supporting the sisters involved in this demanding apostolate. If, during these visits, she saw that a sister was tired or losing her patience with the children, she would find a discrete way to replace her for a few minutes, allowing her to recoup her energy or good humor.¹⁶⁷

Sister Rosalie's visits were marked by humility and simplicity. She quietly supervised instruction from the doorway and graciously gave any needed advice later.¹⁶⁸ She did not shy away from the unpleasant aspects of this service to children. Sister Costalin continues:

¹⁶⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 54.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 36, 51.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

Our mother liked to pass unnoticed. She would not tolerate any distinction of persons. Nothing distinguished her to the numerous visitors to the house. She always wore a white apron like the rest of us ...and was careful to perform the most humble tasks. Almost everyday she found time to clean the toilets for the day classes.¹⁶⁹

While the classes were overcrowded, the curriculum limited, and the teachers undertrained for their task, the results seem to have been enviable. Melun tells us, albeit with his tendency to hyperbole, "Nowhere did the children read more distinctly or write more correctly. Others did not know their prayers better. Their dresses were clean, their expressions intelligent, and their countenances open."¹⁷⁰

If Sister Rosalie favored a "no frills" approach to education, she also wanted it to reach as many children as possible and to be practical. On the first point, Melun recounts that, as Sister Rosalie went about the Mouffetard district on her visits to the sick in their homes, she was ever on the lookout for little girls who were on the streets instead of in school. When she found one, "she sent for the mother, scolded her for her negligence, and explained all the advantages of a Christian education to her."¹⁷¹ If the reason the child was not in school was not neglect but rather a lack of space in public education, "Sister Rosalie would take the little one by the hand and bring her herself to the sister teaching the class." Despite the sister's protest that there was no room there either, Sister Rosalie would find a way to have the child accepted.¹⁷² To her, overcrowding was preferable to another child lost to the streets. She was forced to recognize, however, that overcrowding had its limits. Beyond a certain point in numbers no learning could be achieved, to say nothing of what such a situation would mean for those who were trying to teach. Melun tells us that to alleviate this:

Sister Rosalie, with her usual energy, went about setting up classes on [nearby] rue du Banquier. She

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁷⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 63.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 64.

appealed to everyone she knew to be concerned with providing a good education for those in need. She succeeded in raising the funds necessary for the work. By numerous personal contacts and by enlisting all the influence that she had at her disposition, she was able to convince the city of Paris to assume responsibility for this school. Another sisters' house was established there and three classes were opened.¹⁷³

Thus it was that little girls from poor families in this miserable area of Paris received an elementary education that would later enable them to earn a modest living and raise a Christian family. The opening of the school on rue du Banquier, and its subsequent erection as a separate house of the Daughters of Charity, is a good illustration of Sister Rosalie's ability to place the good of those in need before any personal satisfaction she might experience by starting or expanding a work. She was able to "let go" and let the seeds she had planted be harvested by others. Nevertheless her loving heart followed it from a distance, and she was always there to support and encourage. Who received the credit was unimportant to her.¹⁷⁴

Sister Rosalie saw very quickly that the education the Daughters of Charity were providing also needed to be practical. Thus it was that the *ouvroir* was opened as an adjunct to the school.

Technically speaking, an *ouvroir* was a workshop, supported by public assistance, where piecework was provided for young girls and women living in poverty to help them to earn a modest living. A workshop of this type would open at 5, rue de l'Épée-de-Bois when this building was purchased in 1843.¹⁷⁵

There is evidence, however, of an *ouvroir* for little girls at an earlier date. A listing of properties found in the Archives of Public Assistance in Paris, dated 1 January 1827, mentions four *ouvroirs* for girls in the XIIth arrondissement, one of which was "rue de l'Épée-de-Bois with 28 girls and 1 sister."¹⁷⁶ We already know that Sister Rosalie understood that some of the children found school to be a

¹⁷³ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 65; see letters of Sister Rosalie Rendu to Madame Badin, AFCP, 28 August 1848, 8J2 - Ro - Le 217 B2; 3 October 1848, Le 222 B6; 7 December 1848, Le 225 B8; 15 November 1849, Le 233 B13; 3 November 1850, Le 246 B17.

¹⁷⁴ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 131-132.

¹⁷⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio*, 41.

¹⁷⁶ AAPP, cote 18.

“trying experience,” and that they would “rather be doing manual work.” They were also frequently among the least gifted and most troublesome. So it was that, according to Sister Tissot, as soon as she was able to do so, Sister Rosalie selected some of these children from the various classes and confided them to an experienced, successful teacher, in this case Sister Augustine Chassaigne, to whom she gave the following instructions:

You will render great service to our sisters and to these poor children... You will teach them reading, writing, and arithmetic. You will get what you can from them. Let your little lessons be directed especially to leading them to love our good God. Sometimes they lack motivation as much as intelligence. They do not want to learn anything and end up being scolded. With you they will do a little less studying and a little more sewing. That will be better for them and will motivate them.¹⁷⁷

The endeavor was successful. It was soon expanded to other girls and would eventually evolve into an *ouvroir*, properly so-called. The approach described here, however, dates from 1827, well before the arrival of Sister Chassaigne, who did not come to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois until 1842.¹⁷⁸ Very early on, then, Sister Rosalie reached out to children who struggled with the regular curriculum and provided an education for them that was more in keeping with their interests and needs. In this she was following the Vincentian tradition in the education of children who were poor, first developed by the foundress, Saint Louise de Marillac. In the XVIIth century, Louise had combined reading, writing, and arithmetic with practical training and religious instruction first, for little country girls and, later, for city children, all of whom were poor.

The era was different but Sister Rosalie, like Saint Louise, implemented the Core Values of Vincentian Education by insuring for her young charges a formation that was holistic, integrated, creative, flexible, excellent, person oriented, collaborative, and focused.¹⁷⁹ The

¹⁷⁷ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 55.

¹⁷⁸ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio*, 41.

¹⁷⁹ Louise Sullivan, D.C., *The Core Values of Vincentian Education* (New York: Niagara University, 1995), 28.

process began for her when she entered the classroom for the first time as a novice. It would continue all her life, thus ensuring for many in the Mouffetard district an education capable of helping them to become better, more self-sufficient persons with a solid foundation in their faith.

Now let us examine the other major service of those who were poor in which Sister Rosalie was involved from her earliest years with the Daughters of Charity, namely, the service of the sick poor in their homes. This had been the initial work of the Company and would be a central focus of Sister Rosalie's apostolic zeal throughout her life.



Present day street sign indicating rue Mouffetard.
Public domain

CHAPTER VI

AT THE SERVICE OF THE POOR OF THE MOUFFETARD DISTRICT

CARE OF THE SICK POOR IN THEIR HOMES

On 1 August 1617, a then little known French priest, Vincent de Paul, took up his duties as pastor of the church of Saint-André in the tiny village of Châtillon in southeastern France, near the Swiss border. On 21 August of the same year, the seminal event for the Vincentian mission of service to those who were poor took place there. At first sight, nothing appears to be out of the ordinary in the incident. It would, however, have far reaching consequences. It proved to be the first act in Vincentian health care – the service of the sick poor in their homes.

The story has become well known since Vincent, himself, recounted it. On Sunday morning, 21 August, while he was vesting for Mass, he was informed that there was a family in the parish in great misery because they were all poor and sick and had no one to care for them. His immediate reaction was to preach, and he obtained the desired result. Some fifty women of the parish rushed to the aid of the family, as did Vincent himself.¹⁸⁰ The very amplitude of the response caused him to consider the efficacy of this outpouring of generosity. Louis Abelly, Bishop of Rodez and the Saint's first biographer, offers us Vincent's personal reflections on the experience:

This undoubtedly shows that these people have great charity, but it is not well organized. The poor sick family will be overwhelmed with so much in such a short time, most of which will spoil. Afterward they will be no better off than before.¹⁸¹

That very evening, the notoriously slow acting Vincent had laid the foundation for home health care. At the end of his account of the incident he relates what he did the following day, "I proposed

¹⁸⁰ *CED*, 9:244; see also *CED*, 9:209.

¹⁸¹ Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul*, John E. Rybolt, C.M., ed., W. Quinn, F.S.C., trans., 3 vols. (New Rochelle, 1993), 1:72.

to all those good ladies, who had been animated by charity to visit these people, to group together to make soup, each on her own day, and not only for them but for those who might come afterwards."¹⁸² Vincentian health care – home nursing – was initiated.

The beginnings were humble. Little by little the Confraternities of Charity, as they would be called, spread throughout the French provinces. Then, as Vincent's influence expanded to the Court of King Louis XIII, they were begun among the most wealthy and prominent women of Paris. Here the groups became known as the Ladies of Charity. They would reach out to those who were poor in the capital. What would prove to be a very different undertaking was the service of the sick poor of the countryside. The Ladies soon realized that they needed help. It was to come in the person of Louise de Marillac and the country girls that Vincent sent to her to be trained to work with these Ladies. On 29 November 1633, a few of these village girls grouped together in Louise de Marillac's home and the Company of the Daughters of Charity was born.

The service of the sick in their homes would expand to hospitals and hospices, but this initial thrust would remain. At the time of the death of the founders in 1660 the Daughters of Charity were in "houses of charity," which combined home nursing and the education of little girls of meager means, in Paris and throughout the provinces. Their number would continue to expand until 1789. Then, in 1793, some houses were forced to close as the sisters were dispersed, but some, such as the Maison Saint-Martin where Sister Rosalie went



Families receiving assistance of bread and firewood
at a "Maison de Secours."
Public domain

¹⁸² *CED*, 9:244; see also *CED*, 9:209.

in 1802, would remain open and continue their service to the sick poor and to children.

The “bureaux de bienfaisance,” created by the Napoleonic government following the Revolution, brought in lay administrators, but the essence of the service provided by the Daughters of Charity did not change. Louise de Marillac had begun the tradition of close collaboration with lay and civil authorities when, in 1639, she drew up a contract with the city officials of Angers for the Daughters of Charity to take over nursing care at the Hôpital de Saint-Jean-l’Évangéliste.¹⁸³ Thus, when the “maisons de secours” were established, the Daughters of Charity moved into the system without too much difficulty and sometimes with considerable success. An increase in meaningful collaboration occurred when Sister Rosalie became superior of the house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. The works of the “houses of charity,” as conceived by the Napoleonic government, were similar but not identical to those of the era of the founders. The sick poor were visited in their homes and assisted “corporally and spiritually” as they had been since the beginning.¹⁸⁴ Under the new regime, the sisters’ role was to deliver the medicines, visit the sick, and distribute assistance in conjunction with the administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance.¹⁸⁵

Early on, the administrators saw that they faced a dilemma: how to keep the list of clients up-to-date, adding those who found themselves suddenly in need either because of illness or unemployment, and eliminating those who were not from the neighborhood or who no longer needed assistance. The aftermath of the Revolution of 1848 furnished them with a useful example of potential abuses inherent in administration from afar. Eager to assist the indigent families of the Mouffetard area that had been particularly devastated by the conflict, the administrators generously provided all who presented themselves with assistance. Things got out of hand quickly as all the needy and less needy of Paris descended upon their distribution centers. But the administrators had much earlier discovered the benefits to be derived from close collaboration with religious women and volunteers who knew these families well and could readily and reliably attest to their changing conditions. Sister Rosalie, the sisters,

¹⁸³ Louise Sullivan, D.C., *Vincentian Mission in Health Care* (Saint Louis: Ascension Health, formerly Daughters of Charity National Health System, 1997), 25-29.

¹⁸⁴ *CED*, 13:423.

¹⁸⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 39.

and their lay collaborators filled this role extremely well. Some of the sisters who were involved in this service were paid by the Bureau of Public Assistance, as were the school teachers.¹⁸⁶

We do not know exactly when Sister Rosalie stopped teaching and began devoting most of her energy to the service of those who were sick or indigent. It was certainly her principal activity once she became superior of the house in 1815. It seems, however, to have happened before that as her reputation is based largely upon it and that reputation was already well established in 1815. Melun tells us:

When, at the age of twenty-eight [or twenty-nine, depending on the month she was appointed, which we do not know], she was named superior, the quarter celebrated her appointment as a feast. To express their joy, the administrators [of the Bureau of Public Assistance] gave her a gift of a complete set of clothing.¹⁸⁷

It is interesting to note here that, as with other significant community events in Sister Rosalie's life, there is nothing in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris concerning her appointment as superior. The only reference to this is the paper wrapper around a community publication of January 1816 that is addressed to, "My dear Sister RENDU, Daughter of Charity, at the "Maison de Bienfaisance" [House of Charity] Parish of Saint-Médard, rue des Francs-Bourgeois, Faubourg Saint-Marceau, near Scipio in Paris." Community publications were customarily sent in the name of the superior of the house. There is no reference to Sister Rosalie on the wrapper of the same publication in January 1815. She was most likely appointed sometime in 1815. [The wrappers, which have since disappeared, were in the archives of the house of the Daughters of Charity in the Parish of Saint-Médard, later transferred to 32, rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, known today as the "Maison Sœur-Rosalie."]

Whatever the date, it is this Sister Rosalie whom we must come to know not only for her accomplishments but also as the person behind those deeds. Let us look first at the work itself, and then let us try to discern something of the character of the woman who became the "Apostle of the Mouffetard district."

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 181-82.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

As mentioned previously, the house of the Daughters of Charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was one of the four designated "maisons de secours" in the XIIth arrondissement. As superior of the house after 1815, Sister Rosalie also had full charge of the work. She was the liaison with the civil administration and she directed the work of the sisters involved in the services provided.



Providing for the needs of those who are poor.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

It must be pointed out from the outset that Sister Rosalie herself had no professional formation for the care of the sick. Neither did the other sisters of her house who served the sick. As in the early days of the Company, they distributed food and medicine and performed some basic health procedures, particularly one that continued to be widely used, bloodletting. As with the first sisters, Sister Rosalie and her companions were trained by those sisters already skilled in this admittedly dangerous treatment. We learn from Sister Tissot, who was a school teacher, how this training was done:

Sister Rosalie insisted that all the young sisters who taught school learn how to let blood and to prepare dressings... Every morning from 7:00-8:00 A.M., and on Thursdays and Sundays, we were expected to go, each of us in turn, to the treatment room as soon as we learned that there would be a bloodletting. We

were expected to hold the basin and to watch the sister performing it very carefully. Our good Mother also came to let blood, a procedure that was very common at the time. She explained how we should go about it. She told us, "I will not have you read a treatise on bloodletting. If you realized the danger, you would be too afraid. Place your confidence in God, make the sign of the cross, ask your guardian angel to guide your hand, and pay strict attention to the explanations you are given. This is the training all our sisters have received and nothing has ever gone wrong for them here."¹⁸⁸

Sister Rosalie had been attracted to the Daughters of Charity by the care of the sick poor she had witnessed, and in which she had participated, as a postulant in their hospital in Gex. Moreover, as a young teacher, she had visited the sick poor on Sundays and during school vacations. Thus, she was as prepared as she could have been to assume responsibility for this vital work in an area of Paris where the sick would otherwise receive no assistance at all.

Sister Rosalie also had the rare gift, for such a strong personality, of knowing her limitations and engaging in the collaboration she needed to assure quality service. None were more important in this service than doctors. One such collaborator and advisor was a Doctor Jarroilhet. It appears that, in 1828, he was criticized to the administration of the Bureau of Public Assistance for not leaving his office often enough to care for the sick. His letter to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour, Administrator of the 16th division of the Bureau of Public Assistance and Sister Rosalie's close collaborator and friend, reveals not only his contributions to the assistance of the sick in this miserable quarter, but also those of Sister Rosalie and her companions. He wrote:

...it would be impossible to see all the sick clients of the "bureau de charité" and to follow up on their illnesses which, ordinarily, present no danger.... It is enough for me to see them when they are seriously ill and to tell the sisters what needs to be done. Moreover,

¹⁸⁸ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 57.

I have always been called whenever the case merited it and [the sisters] have followed my instructions exactly. I can only be satisfied with the manner in which they act toward the sick poor. Moreover... I provided three periods for free medical consultation for the poor and for workers in the neighborhood. One was on Wednesday at 1:00 P.M. at the sisters' house... I am pleased here to pay justice once again to the Sisters of Charity who have always seconded my [work] with all the zeal of which they are capable.¹⁸⁹

Sister Rosalie had an even closer medical collaborator, Doctor Dewulf, whom she first met in 1835 when he was a medical student and lived in the Mouffetard district. François-Albert Chappoteau, C.J.M., a Eudist priest and Doctor Dewulf's grandson, testified to this during the Cause of Beatification. He said that her memory had remained alive in his family because of "the very great influence" she had upon his grandfather.¹⁹⁰ She had cared for him during a period of serious illness when he was a student, and later supported him by her advice. Early on, she brought him to visit the sick and the indigent of the Mouffetard district. These lessons never left him and once he became a doctor, as he practiced medicine in the quarter, he continued to respond to Sister Rosalie's appeals.¹⁹¹ A letter to Doctor Dewulf reveals how much she had come to rely upon him for the care of the sick poor. During the summer of 1838, the young doctor had gone to Calais to visit his mother who was ill. The number of seriously ill patients in the district must have increased because Sister Rosalie urged him to return to Paris. She wrote:

You are often asked for... I believe that it is wise to recommend that you not prolong your absence more than two weeks. Do all that you possibly can not to go beyond that time frame... Let us know the time of your departure and be exact in the details.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ *Letter of Doctor Jarroilhet to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour*, 23 December 1828, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - SM, XXXV.

¹⁹⁰ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 11.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Doctor Dewulf*, 22 August 1838, ACMP, Chappoteau papers.

This collaboration was to continue for a lifetime. Doctor Dewulf eventually became Sister Rosalie's personal physician, and it would be he who would care for her during her last illness. According to his grandson, so great was Doctor Dewulf's veneration for her that when he was "called to her bedside shortly before her death for a bloodletting, ...[he] collected a few drops of her blood on a cloth that he piously preserved."¹⁹³ This remained in their family until fall of 2003, when they presented it to the Company of the Daughters of Charity just prior to Sister Rosalie's Beatification on 9 November.

Sister Tissot's testimony and Doctor Jarroilhet's letter show that not only did the sisters visit the sick in their homes, but also that the ailing came to the "treatment room" in the sisters' house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois for care. And, remarkably for a poor area of XIXth century Paris, they even sought and received preventative care. Again it is Doctor Jarroilhet who tells us:

...to prove, in a yet clearer way, that the indigent population has always called forth my zeal, I have only to urge you to look into the number of children who have been vaccinated since I have been associated with the "bureau de charité." You will see that our quarter is one of those where vaccinations are the most commonly given.¹⁹⁴

Nevertheless, Sister Rosalie's great joy was to seek out the sick poor in their homes. The truth of this and the impact that it had on the people of the Mouffetard district is, perhaps, best summed up by a descendant of these very people, a humble newspaper merchant who testified during her Cause of Beatification. The 66-year-old Albert Billaud knew of Sister Rosalie from his grandfather, from workers of his parents' generation and had heard of her from people of every class with whom he chatted as he sold them the evening paper.¹⁹⁵ He responded with great simplicity to the questions addressed to him about her, telling the Tribunal:

¹⁹³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 12; see also *Ibid.*, 72-74, for the testimony of Doctor Dewulf's daughter on the same subject.

¹⁹⁴ *Letter of Doctor Jarroilhet to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour*, 23 December 1828, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - SM, XXXV.

¹⁹⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 20.

Sister Rosalie's charity for the poor was limitless. Day and night, she gave of herself for them and for their children without counting the cost. One might say that she never took any rest. She went into homes to visit the sick and the suffering. She did the cleaning and gave them the care they required. She usually brought along some little delicacy for their meal in her basket. The old people used to say, "When they beatify her, we want to see her with her basket on her arm."¹⁹⁶

Melun also speaks of Sister Rosalie's devotion to the sick poor and her fidelity in visiting them in their homes and obtaining assistance for them:

As soon as Sister Rosalie learned that one of her... clients was ill, she hastened to the bedside. If other duties obliged her to leave the sick, she constantly sought news of them, was preoccupied about them, and shared her concern for them with all around her. The doctors, themselves, for whom the great number of [sick] left so little time for personal involvement or emotion, could not withstand her entreaties. She implored with such fervor, she beseeched them with such consternation, that they took special care of her... clients. Their respect, their admiration, and the desire that she called forth in all of them to share in her works... led them to increase the number of their visits and to make every effort to save her "beloved poor."¹⁹⁷

Melun tells us of the beneficial effect of Sister Rosalie's visits on the sick themselves and on their families. She brought peace and resignation for the dying and calm and courage for those who would be left behind. The family would not be abandoned. For those who would recover, she brought little delicacies to facilitate the process: a warm bathrobe, a comfortable chair, some fruit that had been given

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 51.

to her.¹⁹⁸ Thus, the physical care of the sick and their families was never separated from spiritual assistance. In this, Sister Rosalie was continuing the tradition of Vincentian health care that dated from its origins.

The sisters' house itself, however, was to become a magnet drawing all types of persons needing assistance. They came to the little "dispensary" for medicines and for treatments, where a doctor was available for the more serious cases on a weekly basis, but they also came for spiritual and material assistance. Frequently all these aspects of poverty – physical, material, and spiritual – combined to produce misery in individuals and in whole families. The collaboration between Sister Rosalie and Monsieur Colette de Baudicour is revealing in showing the people served and their needs.



"Dispensary" at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

In her testimony during Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification, Marthe-Jeanne Colette de Baudicour speaks of the value that her great-great-uncle, who was Administrator of the 16th division of the Bureau of Public Assistance in the Saint-Marcel district when Sister Rosalie became the superior of the "house of charity" there, placed on their collaboration. Although his role was that of an administrator with general responsibility for the "house of charity," he preserved all 403 letters that he received from Sister Rosalie between 7 August 1841 and 14 February 1849. Mademoiselle Colette de Baudicour inherited them from her grandfather who had "put them into a packet with

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

explicit instructions to his descendants to take great care of them in the hope that someday the cause of the Servant of God would be introduced.¹⁹⁹

Presenting all these letters here would, of course, be out of the question. Nonetheless an examination of them, underlining certain relevant points, will be useful in determining the type of persons in need that Sister Rosalie and the sisters served; her manner of dealing with civil authority; and something of the woman behind the action. Before beginning this examination, it would be well to point out that these "letters" were essentially notes recommending clients for various forms of assistance.

Let us turn now to the first point, namely the type of client served. It is certain that all types of persons in need came to the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and were welcomed and served by Sister Rosalie and the sisters. Nevertheless, she seems to have had a special predilection for one of the most vulnerable segments of the population of the Mouffetard district, namely, the elderly. The vast majority of Sister Rosalie's letters to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour seek assistance for them. She speaks of the elderly who are lame, blind or infirm. She pleads for those who suffer from the cold. Each client is listed by name, address, age, and infirmity. She specifies the amount of money that each one needs and one has the clear impression, as the administrator of public assistance must have had, that she knew each of them personally.²⁰⁰

Sister Rosalie's concern for the aged of the quarter is also seen by an unusual request to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour. On 4 December 1828, she wrote to him:

I come to you to ask for the authorization to distribute to the elderly, who cannot come to your office without aid, the assistance that your charity so kindly gives them each month. They are all good and excellent people in need. I will be careful to note any deaths because, at their age, these are days of grace....

O, Monsieur, how grateful we are for the good you do for these unfortunate people! We join our prayers

¹⁹⁹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 23.*

²⁰⁰ See *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, 53-60*, where 24 letters are reproduced.

to theirs that God may reward you, even in this life, for your good works. I assure you that your aid is well used and that all these people deserve your kind attention.

With my respect and profound gratitude,

Your very humble servant,



I assisted nine infirm octogenarians for the month of December. I will give out letters only with your permission.²⁰¹

It would appear that her request was granted. When one reflects on the tension, even animosity, that often existed between Church and State, particularly since the Revolution of 1789, this kind of relationship with civil authority was extraordinary. Nor was Sister Rosalie afraid to speak of spiritual matters to those who, in principle at least, assisted persons who were poor for social and/or political reasons rather than religious ones.²⁰² That Monsieur Colette de Baudicour saved her letters, which he could have looked upon as only business correspondence, indicates the extent to which Sister Rosalie touched his life and added a dimension to his civil service.

²⁰¹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour*, 4 December 1828, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Bi.

²⁰² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 53-60.

This brings us to our second point, namely, Sister Rosalie's dealings with civil authority. Monsieur Colette de Baudicour was surely the civil administrator with whom she dealt for the longest period of time and with whom her personal relationship appears to have been the closest. He responded favorably to her requests for vouchers for the people whom the sisters served. In her notes, she repeatedly thanks him for his devotedness to all in need. He appears to have been her superior as an administrator, but he was also her collaborator and her friend who hoped, that one day, she would be declared a saint.²⁰³

But he was not the only civil administrator with whom Sister Rosalie dealt. There is a letter dated 10 March 1820 to Monsieur Hucherard, Administrator of the Bureau of Public Assistance on rue d'Enfer.²⁰⁴ On 10 April 1836, Sister Rosalie wrote to another lay administrator, Monsieur Chaurent, Commissioner of the Poor of Paris, on behalf of two young men. One had already been placed in a public institution and she was seeking a place for the second. The tone of her letter seems to indicate that this is not her first dealing with the Commissioner. It also reveals how well she knew her clients and how eloquently she could plead their cause. She concludes, "If I am indiscreet in my requests, forgive me and find me guilty only [of trusting] in your immense charity which never tires of doing good." She then goes on to add a list of her clients for his consideration.²⁰⁵

We also have three letters of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur François, Secretary of the Town Hall of the XIIth arrondissement. This time she is writing on behalf of two men needing employment, and she urges Monsieur François to find work for them in the upcoming census. She evidently obtains this favor so she urges him to find additional work for one of them because of his difficult family circumstances.²⁰⁶

While we possess only three letters to him, the conclusion of the third would seem to indicate a closer collaboration. Sister Rosalie writes:

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰⁴ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Hucherard*, 10 March 1820, Departmental Archives, Tarn-Garonne, Dossier Hucherard.

²⁰⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Chaurent*, 10 April 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 18.

²⁰⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur François*, 7 July 1836 and 16 July 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 24 and Le 25.

It has been ages since you have given me the opportunity to do something that would please you. Please do not forget me. I would be delighted if you thought of me if you had some poor person whom you wanted to place in a hospice. I know that you have more resources than I do but I would be very grateful to share in your good works since this is the only way I have of showing my deep gratitude.²⁰⁷

In addition, in the Archives of the Bureau of Public Assistance in Paris, there are two letters of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Breton, who was treasurer of the work for victims of the 1849 cholera epidemic.²⁰⁸ Thus, it is evident that Sister Rosalie collaborated closely with the civil authorities responsible for the assistance of those who were poor.

In his biography, Melun speaks at length of this collaboration and of the influence that Sister Rosalie exerted on the administrators whose “advisor” and “friend” she became. He tells us:

...[the administrators] chosen solely for the common good, with no preoccupation with political parties or systems, quickly discovered that no one understood better than Sister Rosalie the true situation of those living in poverty. From the beginning, they recognized her deep knowledge of the evils [besetting the indigent] and the remedies [for them]; the needs and the assistance [required]. She had a satisfactory response to all their questions, a solution for every difficulty. The aid that they confided to her for distribution multiplied in her hands and produced a hundredfold. Since, at the same time, she rejoiced in attributing to them the joy and the honor of her good works, she quickly became their advisor and their friend. Everything was carried out in keeping with her advice, or rather, by her hands. She was at one and the same time their commissioner and their Lady of Charity.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 July 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 25.

²⁰⁸ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Breton*, two letters, AAPP, Dossier œuvre du choléra.

²⁰⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 40-41.

The Revolution of 1830 would bring about renewed hostility between Church and State. Clergy and religious were removed from the administration of hospitals and hospices. Public “assistance” replaced “charity” in official communications and documents. Many of the administrators with whom Sister Rosalie had collaborated so successfully were removed and replaced by those who were openly anticlerical and determined to undermine the influence of the sisters in the assistance of those in need. According to Melun, who was working with Sister Rosalie during this period, she was untroubled by this and continued to seek to collaborate with them as she had in the past, humbly and gently sharing her expertise and, in the end, like their predecessors, they too “fell under the amiable yoke of her charity.”²¹⁰

It was this singular ability to collaborate with the existing political structure – as did Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac before her – that enabled Sister Rosalie to accomplish all that she did for the benefit of those weighed down by poverty. With the admiration and perhaps the exaggeration of a friend, Melun summed up how the recipients of Sister Rosalie’s charity viewed her role in the services they received:

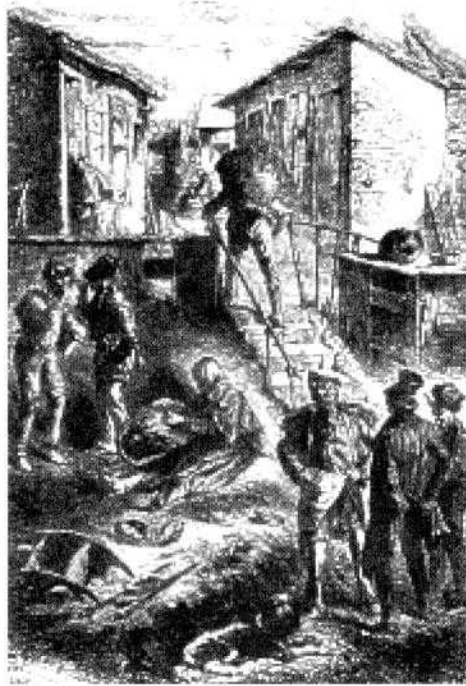
Under successive regimes and until the end of her days, Sister Rosalie was, in the eyes of those who were poor, the representative of all the good that was accomplished in the Saint-Marceau district.²¹¹

For Sister Rosalie, as for Saint Vincent, “the poor [were her] burden and [her] sorrow.”²¹² Where did she get the energy to carry out this potentially overwhelming task for nearly a half century in probably the most miserable area of Paris? Where did she get her strength – physical, human, and spiritual – to face the challenges that the onerous needs of the poverty stricken inhabitants of the Mouffetard district presented on a daily basis?

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Pierre Collet, C.M., *La Vie de St. Vincent de Paul, Instituteur de la Congrégation de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité*, 2 vols. (Nancy: Leseure, 1748), 1:479.



Rag-pickers of the 1830's.
Public domain

Thus far we have spoken only of Sister Rosalie's work with schoolchildren and the sick poor. Many other works will come to expand or complement these. So the question remains: "How did she do it?" Moreover, we must address here the question raised by her critics – and there are critics – "Did these marvelous deeds come at the price of her own spiritual growth and of her responsibilities to the sisters with whom she lived, and to the Company of the Daughters of Charity of which she was a member?" We shall now attempt to address the first of these concerns, that is "Did Sister Rosalie's tireless service of those who were poor interfere with that union with God to which she was called by her vocation as a Daughter of Charity?"

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE WORKS

SOURCES OF SISTER ROSALIE'S ENERGY FOR THE SERVICE OF THOSE WHO WERE POOR

Just as it is in the case of Vincent de Paul and his collaborator, Louise de Marillac, it is easy to lose the person behind the amazing catalogue of Sister Rosalie's accomplishments in the service of those who were poor. The mystic tends to disappear behind the person of action. Apostolic zeal clouds the examination of other equally important qualities and virtues. Moreover, for the founders of the Daughters of Charity, achieving the necessary balance between prayer and action, within the context of consecrated life lived in community, was a constant challenge, albeit a struggle, because of the crushing needs of those whom they were called upon to serve. Yet attaining this balance was the essential quality of their vocation. Late in her life, Louise de Marillac wrote a somewhat disconcerting letter in this regard to the early sisters who shared her vocation of service. In the very last letter that we have from her, dated 2 February 1660, five weeks before her death on 15 March 1660, she told Sister Jeanne Delacroix, Superior of the Hospital of Châteaudun:

I am sure that you are very busy and also that you take great care to help our sisters to strive for holiness... You realize that, without this, external actions, although they are for the service of those who are poor, cannot be very pleasing to God, nor can they merit a recompense for us because they are not united to those of Jesus Christ who always worked in the sight of God, His Father. You are well-rooted in this practice, my dear Sister, and thus you experience the peace of a soul that is dependent upon her Beloved.²¹³

²¹³ Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings*, 678.

Elsewhere Louise had stressed this same point. In 1645, she warned the sisters of the Hospital of Angers that service without personal holiness was “useless” to them. She wrote:

...it is not enough to be engaged in the service of the sick... although this is a blessing you will never be able to esteem enough. What is necessary is to have true and solid virtues which you know are essential to carry out well the work in which you are so happy as to be employed. Without that, my Sisters, your work will be almost useless to you.²¹⁴

While daunting, the task of discovering how Vincent and Louise attained this necessary balance and found the spiritual energy to serve such a large sector of suffering humanity is facilitated by thousands of pages of their own writings, as well as by the numerous biographies and studies that have been written on them these past three hundred years. We are less fortunate with Sister Rosalie.

We possess only 322 letters written by her, plus the aforementioned notes requesting assistance for individual clients. Moreover, the biographies that have appeared tend to stress Sister Rosalie’s social works or her extraordinary activity during the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1849, and 1854. Furthermore, they are largely a retelling of Armand de Melun’s biography.²¹⁵ This latter text is of inestimable value for any work on Sister Rosalie and we cite it extensively. Guillaume-André de Berthier de Sauvigny, C.J.M., and Léonce Celier, both of the Historical Commission for Sister Rosalie’s Cause of Beatification, support this view as does Father Beaudoin, who prepared the *Positio*.²¹⁶

Despite the unquestioned importance of Melun’s work, however, it too fails to reveal the consecrated woman behind the social action. In his biography, *Le Vicomte de Melun d’après ses Mémoires et sa Correspondance*, the Church historian, Monseigneur Louis Baunard, points out this deficiency when he writes:

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

²¹⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 306-311.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 307-308.

Some may have wanted such a work to have gone beyond the surface and the author, rather than being satisfied with painting the Servant of God's outpouring of charity, to have been able to penetrate [Sister Rosalie's] interior spiritual and religious life where the love of neighbor bursts forth from the brilliant flame of the love of God. We have seen enough of Sister Rosalie, the servant of those who were poor. We have not seen enough of the Spouse of Jesus Christ.²¹⁷

Let us now try to discern, beneath the cornette of the servant of those who were poor, the visage of the "Spouse of Jesus Christ," and determine the source of the seemingly inexhaustible energy that enabled Sister Rosalie to serve the poorest and most abandoned inhabitants of the Mouffetard district of Paris for more than half a century. To do this, we will rely primarily on Sister Rosalie's correspondence and on the testimony of those who knew her best. Since we, like Monseigneur Baunard, believe that her energy was rooted in the love of God, we shall seek to discover how this love manifested itself.

Vincent de Paul told the first Daughters of Charity that they were to be totally "given to God for the service of persons who are poor."²¹⁸ Before all else, they were called to unconditional commitment – the gift of their lives and of their whole being to God. The Vincentian scholar, André Dodin, C.M., points out that Vincent de Paul, in his writings, repeats some form of the expression, "Let us give ourselves to God," 573 times.²¹⁹ This *sine qua non* of the life of the Daughter of Charity, Servant of the Poor, is reflected in the evolution of the *Rule of the Sisters of the Hospital of Angers*, the first hospital staffed by the Daughters of Charity and, as such, the prototype of those that would follow. This foundation dates from 1639, six years after the establishment of the Company. Vincent and Louise had learned from experience just how difficult it is to keep one's priorities straight.

There are three copies of this rule preserved in the National Archives in Paris. It is evident that one of them was a draft as it contains

²¹⁷ Louis Baunard, *Le Vicomte de Melun d'après ses Mémoires et sa Correspondance* (Paris, 1880), 437-438.

²¹⁸ CED, 9:534.

²¹⁹ André Dodin, *Monsieur Vincent parle à ceux qui souffrent* (Paris, 1981), 49.

numerous additions and corrections. Initially Vincent de Paul had written that the Daughters of Charity were going to Angers “to assist the sick poor” and “to honor Our Lord, Father of the Poor.”²²⁰ He then crossed out the sentence and reversed the order, placing the spiritual motivation, “to honor Our Lord, Father of the Poor,” first, thus giving us the text as it appeared on 1 February 1640. The change is not stylistic. It recognizes the spiritual basis necessary for all effective service of those who are poor.

This is the tradition in which Sister Rosalie was formed as a servant of those who were poor. Did it remain the basis of her prodigious accomplishments, or did the very magnitude of the misery that surrounded Sister Rosalie cause her, on occasion, to lose focus? What does she, herself, tell us of this perennial struggle and how did those around her perceive her?

As a child in Confort, Sister Rosalie had been attracted by prayer. She found an environment favorable to the expression of her piety when in boarding school with the Ursulines in Gex. Because of this, she was drawn to their semi-cloistered way of life. At the same time, she was attracted by the service of the sick that she had witnessed among the Daughters of Charity at the hospital in the same city. She seems to have been able to discern, even at the age of fifteen, that the vocation of the Daughters of Charity combined the two great loves of her life: love of God and love of persons who were poor. All her life, she continued to repeat a canticle she had heard at the time, describing the spirit in which the Daughter of Charity was called to serve all those in need.²²¹ Thus Sister Rosalie knew, from the very beginning, that the energy required to devote herself to the service of those who were poor and abandoned came only from God.

In 1807, when she sealed, by vow, the gift of herself to God to serve Him in the person of those who were poor, she again expressed her awareness that the strength to persevere in so difficult a vocation came from God. It seems appropriate to cite it again here:

...the duties of my holy state give me little time because the service of those who are poor requires continual care from the Sisters of Charity who have taken as their heritage this honorable task – which is

²²⁰ *Filles de la Charité, Dossier Angers*, AN: S.6160.

²²¹ *Cantique de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité*, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Doc. 2^{bis}.

a great satisfaction for me – to be employed in the service of these poor ignorant persons who do not know the One who created them.

Oh, yes, my dear Aunt [Jeanne Laracine], every moment of the day makes me discover the happiness I enjoy of having been called to a state which affords me all that I need to work out my salvation with confidence.... Please, my dear Aunt, pray to Our Lord for me so that He will grant me the grace to accomplish His will as I should.²²²

But these are early texts we have already cited when speaking of the beginnings of her vocation and her first steps as a Daughter of Charity. What do we know of Sister Rosalie once the demands of the service of persons who were poor became such that they could have become all-consuming? Let us look first at her correspondence with her family and see what it reveals on this point.

The 39 extant letters of Sister Rosalie to members of her family show clearly her preoccupation with the overwhelming needs of those whom she, and the sisters of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, served. Indeed her correspondence with her cousin, Eugène Rendu, while expressing her love of family, frequently includes requests for this man of considerable influence to intervene on behalf of persons in need.²²³ Over and over she advances the needs of those whom she is called to serve as her reason for not writing to her family or not being able to visit them. On one occasion she told her mother, "I am ashamed, my dear mother, for having gone so long without writing to you. You will forgive me because of our incessant work."²²⁴

²²² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Jeanne Laracine*, 28 April 1807, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 1 J1 1 Ro - La 1.

²²³ See: *Letters of Sister Rosalie to Eugène Rendu*, AFCP: 1 October 1848, 8J2 - Ro - Le 221 ER 1; 12 December 1849, Le 236 ER 2; 5 March 1850, Le 241 ER 3; 8 July 1850, Le 243 ER 4; 28 October 1850, Le 245 ER 5; 27 March 1853, Le 265 ER 6; 14 August 1854, Le 277 ER 8; 18 March 1855, Le 287 ER 9; 23 June 1855, Le 288 ER 10; 9 August 1855, Le 290 ER 11; 9 August 1855, Le 291 ER 12; n.d., Le 299 ER 13; n.d., Wednesday, Le 300 ER 14; 12 June, Le 301 ER 15.

²²⁴ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Veuve Rendu*, 22 November 1848, AFCP, 8J2 Ro - Le 224; See also *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Veuve Rendu*, 14 April 1851, Ro - Le 250; *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Chaplux, Pastor of Confort*, 13 July 1852, Ro - Le 259, Ro - La 26.

On the other hand, Sister Rosalie's letters to her mother, to her cousin, Mélanie Rendu, to her aunt, Jeanne Laracine, and to her cousin, Abbé Philibert Neyroud, reveal her great affection for her family, for "all those who are dear [to her]," and the pain that separation from them caused her.²²⁵ In 1828 she wrote to her friend and confidant, Mélanie Rendu, who lived in Lancrans, "We must make sacrifices to separate ourselves from those we love."²²⁶ This sacrifice became particularly acute for Sister Rosalie when her mother became ill. While she knew that Madame Rendu was being well cared for by family living in the area, it pained her not to be able to look after her personally. She wrote to the Pastor of Lancrans urging him to visit her mother as often as possible. Then she added, "Oh, how painful it is for me not to be able to assist her myself. I am making a real sacrifice to [our] Good God to be separated from her."²²⁷ She also expressed her pain to her mother:

I certainly share in your suffering. I am infinitely afflicted not to be able to tell you this in person. Yes, my dear and tender mother, know that I am making a great sacrifice. It costs me a great deal.²²⁸

Coupled with the pain of separation was a certain sense of guilt for leaving to others the care of her mother, whom she longed "to hold in [her] arms."²²⁹ She regretted seeing her sister fulfilling a "duty" that she herself could "not fulfill."²³⁰ But this feeling of guilt was overcome by her profound gratitude and constant prayer for those who reached out to her family in her stead. A letter to Mélanie Rendu sums up these often repeated sentiments. She wrote:

A thousand and another thousand times thank you for all that you have done for my dear relatives.

²²⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 19 March 1832, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 9; See also Ro - Le 53; Ro - Le 197.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1828, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 5.

²²⁷ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur le Vicaire de Lancrans*, 26 February 1850, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - La 25.

²²⁸ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Veuve Rendu*, 9 September 1853, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 267.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur le Vicaire de Lancrans*, 2 February 1847, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 206.

They have received and continue to receive from you abundant proof of your good and charitable heart which, after the example of your honorable parents, is always open to those in need. Continue to extend your goodness, your wise advice, and your consoling care to them. You have a right to our gratitude. It can never be properly expressed. Know, my dear and true friend, that the memory of it will be in my prayers for the remainder of my life.²³¹

By Sister Rosalie's own admission, the pain of separation from her family was compounded by her great "sensitivity."²³² She made the joys and sorrows of those she loved her own. The death of her cousin, Sister Victoire Neyroud, Daughter of Charity, was a source of anguish to her. She wrote to her cousin, Abbé Neyroud, pastor of the church in Saint-Geney:

I have put off writing to you because I am indisposed due to my grief at the death of my dearly beloved Sister Victoire. I suffered from this and am still doing so. I cannot get used to this loss. It is leaving a huge void in my heart. In your prayers for her, do not forget me. I have great need of them.²³³

Sister Rosalie expresses the same grief at the loss of Sister Victoire in a letter to Monsieur Chaplux, pastor of the church in Confort. "I am sad and afflicted to no longer have her among us. She has left a great void in my heart."²³⁴

It is clear that separation from those she loved was painful for Sister Rosalie. Yet in her pain we find her clinging to her vocation that she understood could "come only from God."²³⁵ In suffering, which seemed to increase rather than diminish with the passage of time, she found strength in her love of God, particularly the suffering Christ. After the death of Sister Victoire she wrote:

²³¹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 14 July 1841, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 53.

²³² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Neyroud*, 5 February 1852, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 256.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Chaplux*, 13 February 1852, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 257.

²³⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 24 May 1829, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 6.

Pray to our Good God to grant me the spirit of faith which will strengthen me in my weakness and give me the courage to make the sacrifices that He asks of me. They are never-ending. The means to grow in virtue are not lacking.²³⁶

Elsewhere, in a letter to her cousin, Mélanie, she spoke of the need to remain united to Jesus Crucified. She said:

Let us support one another on the way of the Cross and let us walk in the footsteps of our Divine Master. Following His example, let us carry [our Cross] with courage and confidence in His infinite Mercy.²³⁷

By 1855, Sister Rosalie was fully aware that not only would she never see her loved ones in Confort again, but that she could not even write to them herself because she was losing her sight. A note that she added to a letter to her mother, written by one of her companions, Sister Vincent, reveals both her anguish and her recognition that the strength to bear this trial came only from union with God. She told her mother, whom she had seen only once since she left Confort at the age of fifteen:

My dear Mother,

I am sending you a few lines which will show you the extent of my infirmity. How keenly I feel the deprivation of not being able to tell you more! I do not need to ask you to pray for me so that [God] will grant me patience and resignation.

Your affectionate daughter,

Sister Rosalie²³⁸

²³⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Neyroud*, 5 February 1852, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le - 256.

²³⁷ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 8 October 1830, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 7.

²³⁸ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Veuve Rendu*, 18 July 1855, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 289.

By uniting her sufferings to those of Jesus Crucified, Sister Rosalie was imitating the foundress of the Daughters of Charity, Louise de Marillac, who, in 1643, had begun using the seal that was to become the seal of the Company. It bore the image of Jesus Crucified surrounded by the words of Saint Paul as she had modified them, “the Charity of Jesus *Crucified* urges us.” Life had taught Louise that her vocation was to unite herself to Jesus on the Cross. A text in her *Spiritual Writings*, dating from the period prior to the founding of the Daughters of Charity in 1633, is revealing. She wrote:

God, who has granted me so many graces, led me to understand that it was His holy will that I go to Him by way of the Cross. His goodness chose to mark me with it from my birth and He has hardly ever left me, at any age, without some occasion of suffering.²³⁹



Imprint of sealing wax of Louise de Marillac dating from 1643
which became the seal of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

Late in her life, in a conference to the sisters entitled “On the Pure Love We Have Vowed to God,” Louise de Marillac asked her Daughters, and those who would follow them, to respond unreservedly to the call of Christ on the Cross. She urged them:

Let us take the first step in following Him which is to exclaim, “I desire it thus, my dear Spouse, I desire it thus. As proof thereof, I am going to follow You to the foot of Your Cross which I choose as my cloister. There, I shall leave behind all earthly affections because Your voice has called me and urged my heart to forget my people and my father’s house so as to be

²³⁹ Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings*, 711.

open to Your great love. Therefore, at the foot of this holy, sacred, and adored Cross, I sacrifice everything that might prevent me from loving, with all the purity that You expect of me, without ever aspiring to any joy other than submission to Your good pleasure and to the laws of Your pure love."²⁴⁰

While Sister Rosalie had never read these lines, since the writings of Louise de Marillac were not published until the late XIXth century, she had certainly absorbed the teaching and made it the central element of her own spirituality, as it had been for the foundress and for those first Daughters of Charity. Sister Rosalie found the courage to separate herself from the family she loved so deeply and devote her life to the service of those who were poor in her union with Jesus Crucified. Moreover, her seemingly boundless energy in this service derived its sustenance from her vision of Jesus Crucified, loved and served in each person weighed down by misery that she encountered.

What else do we know of this "brilliant flame of the love of God" that burned in Sister Rosalie's heart and sustained her energy in the service of those who were poor?²⁴¹ First, it was rooted in her great confidence in the mercy and providence of God in her life, and in the lives of all those with whom she came in contact.

Sister Rosalie's love of God was a humble, confident love. She considered herself an unworthy instrument. It appears that the more her reputation and influence grew, the more she believed that she needed divine mercy. It is appropriate to note here that, at the time, it was very unusual and, perhaps in the case of Sister Rosalie, unique, for a religious woman to be held in such high regard by virtually all sectors of society. Guillaum-André de Berthier de Sauvigny, C.J.M., of the Historical Commission for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification, pointed this out in his testimony. He declared:

I have been asked what I think about Sister Rosalie's reputation for sanctity in the society of the era. I consider such a reputation to be truly exceptional at this time for a religious woman placed in the circumstances in which the Servant of God found

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 828.

²⁴¹ Baunard, *Le Vicomte de Melun*, 437-438.

herself. There are preachers, founders of [religious] orders or of works who have enjoyed a comparable renown but few, if any, religious women. What strikes me is this unanimous concert of praise coming from all classes of society and the full spectrum of opinion. In the eyes of her contemporaries, Sister Rosalie appeared as the incarnation of Christian charity in its purest and most unquestioned form.²⁴²

In all that she did, Sister Rosalie attributed the good that was accomplished to God and any short-comings or failures to herself. In a letter to Cyprien Loppe, she wrote, "There is a void in my soul when I realize what I do not accomplish. And what I do is so imperfect. I am sad that this is so despite my hectic life."²⁴³

Sister Rosalie considered herself a sinner and the cause of the misery that surrounded her. When, in spite of all that she and her collaborators tried to do, she learned that in the Mouffetard district there still remained persons in need who were not served, she used to exclaim:

See what blame I deserve.... God will rightly hold me responsible for all these failures, for all this suffering. Great God, when will you give this quarter a more worthy and devoted servant so that you may bestow more blessings on these poor people?²⁴⁴

When she was praised for the good that she had achieved or reminded of the recompense that she would one day receive from God because of it, she was embarrassed and sought to contradict it. On one occasion, when she was doing just that, the oldest sister in the house, Sister Mélanie, responded, "You are perhaps right, Mother, but God, in seeing you, will say, 'Here is an old servant who has been in her house for fifty years, I must not leave her outside.'"²⁴⁵

In 1880, Claude-Philibert-Édouard Mounier, who had been a cabinet minister in the French government after the Revolution of

²⁴² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 28.

²⁴³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 12 February [1836], AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 16 L3.

²⁴⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 213.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

June 1848, wrote to Sister Rosalie's cousin, Eugène Rendu. He said that he had been sent to Sister Rosalie on behalf of Alphonse de Lamartine, Chief of the Executive Branch, to thank her for all that she had done for so many during this troubled period. He added that he still remembered her surprise, calm, and serenity in listening to him, and her response, "Sir, I thank you for what you are saying to me but I did not do what I believed to be my duty to receive expressions of gratitude. I serve God. It is from God that I await my recompense."²⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Sister Rosalie's conviction that she was an unworthy servant did not lead to discouragement because it was allied to an unshakable confidence in the mercy and providence of God. The resources of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois were extremely limited and the needs of those whom the sisters served limitless. There were even times when there were no funds at all but, according to Father Desmet, Sister Rosalie did not worry. She had learned over the years that Providence never failed her. She would say to the sisters, "Let us accept... all that comes our way. God will send us enough money and enough goods, provided we use them well."²⁴⁷

It is in this same context that Desmet quotes another saying attributed to Sister Rosalie, but without indicating his source. He writes:

...She also used to say, "Fear nothing, Sisters, you will never be without assistance so long as your two hands are like this." She would then stretch out one hand in the gesture of giving and extend the other to receive. She then added, "If one hand closes, it will be useless for the other to reach out.... Give with measure.... Manage well the goods of the poor and God will give to you in abundance."²⁴⁸

Sister Rosalie was quick to acknowledge the role of Divine Providence in the service the sisters rendered. After the particularly

²⁴⁶ Letter of E. Mounier to Eugène Rendu, 25 September 1880, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - SM - XV.

²⁴⁷ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 121.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

rigorous winter of 1838, she wrote to Cyprien Loppe, "Providence assisted us. The resources were beyond what we had hoped for."²⁴⁹

Nor did she limit her confidence in Providence to material things. She trusted in it also, and perhaps more so, in the spiritual domain. When a niece was considering the consecrated life she wrote, "...all is subordinate to the designs of Divine Providence. She is asking God to make known His will to her."²⁵⁰

Allied to confidence in the goodness and mercy of God was a sincere desire to unite her will to the divine will. Sister Rosalie had many occasions throughout her life to submit her will to that of God. This was never easy for her, particularly when, as we have seen, it involved separation from those who were dear to her, be they family, sisters in community or collaborators. Indeed, it would be here that Sister Rosalie's weakness might be found. It appeared very early as manifested in her suffering when Sister Tardy left the Maison Saint-Martin and in her emotional attachment to some things that her beloved first Superior left behind.

Later on, Sister Rosalie herself would acknowledge this weakness to her friend, Armand de Melun, who described the circumstances in his biography. He wrote:

Upon her arrival in the Saint-Marceau district, [Sister Rosalie] had developed such affection for Sister Tardy that, when the [superior] left the house of charity to go to the Hospice des Ménages, she was inconsolable. She admitted that, for years, she found it difficult to forgive the sisters of the Ménages for having taken her beloved superior away from her. Anything that [Sister Tardy] had left behind became sacred for her. The new superior wanted to combat this excessive attachment so she determined to remove any reminders of Sister Tardy. Poor Sister Rosalie was desperate. Age and the practice of overcoming herself had not yet brought her to the fullness of resignation. All that she could salvage from the process was a shoe that had belonged to this person whom she missed so much. She preserved it very carefully.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 18 February 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 57 L15.

²⁵⁰ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 18 May 1828, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 5.

²⁵¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 199-200.

Giuseppe Guerra, C.M., who was the second theologian to examine Sister Rosalie's writings during the Process of Beatification, found a similar weakness in a letter which Sister Rosalie wrote on 13 February 1844.²⁵² In it, she confided to Mother Renée-Caroline Le Chasseur, Superioress of Bon-Sauveur in Caen, the chagrin that the sickness and death of two sisters of her community had caused her. She wrote:

It has been forever since I have had the honor and the pleasure of communicating with you. For the last six months I have had many sources for grief and great sacrifices to make. Two of my dear companions have succumbed to long and painful illnesses. My heart... has been broken under the weight of the cross. They suffered greatly but with admirable resignation and patience. They experienced peace and calm which gave them supernatural strength. They enjoyed all the riches of the Church, and their gratitude to God and to us deeply moved them.

Yes, my good Mother, I have lost two holy daughters. My heart felt some movements of revolt against the hand that struck us. However, I am confident that these two angels will obtain mercy for me. They will pray for me so long as I strive to imitate them. I am secure in this belief. You will sometimes pray for me, will you not, my good Mother? You have compassion for the weak and for all sorts of infirmities, remember me in your fervent prayers.²⁵³

But more than these manifestations of "extreme sensitivity" which appeared during times of great trauma, Sister Rosalie realized that, in the long run, self-seeking could blind her to the designs of God in her life. She warned the sisters against losing sight of their place in the divine plan, and of falling into self-absorption. She

²⁵² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 92-93.

²⁵³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 13 February 1841, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le BS 80.

saw preoccupation with personal needs and desires as “our most dangerous enemy.”²⁵⁴



Framed crucifix from Sister Rosalie's parlor
at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

Sister Rosalie frequently reflected upon the struggle required to place the will of God before one's own, and she insisted that both she and the sisters of her house strive to eradicate “self-love” from their lives. When warning them of its dangers, she spoke passionately, using expressions that were “so opposed to the moderation of her language.”²⁵⁵ On one such occasion, when speaking of the insidiousness of self-seeking, she told them, “Look for it and you will find it at the bottom of everything. It disguises its appearance to trick us and to bring about our ruin. We must grab it by the throat and strangle it.”²⁵⁶

It is, perhaps, this simplicity, this seeking of the will of God rather than her own in all things, that explains Sister Rosalie's ability

²⁵⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 35, 53.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

to relate to all sectors of society from the most elevated to the most humble. She appears never to have put herself forward but to have spoken to all who approached her with humility and respect. Sister Costalin tells us:

In her admirable naïveté, she was surprised that people came to seek her advice. "I don't understand, Sisters, why these individuals come to ask for my opinion, but the Parisians are like that. I make it clear to them, nonetheless, that I am a poor country girl, lacking in education, intelligence, and common sense and that I tended animals in my native village." Then, despite her characteristic seriousness, she would start to laugh and add, "Our Good God is well aware that it is not my fault." And then she would go on, simply and seriously, to edify and to impress her multitude of visitors.²⁵⁷

In displaying this attitude, Sister Rosalie was imitating the founder of the Daughters of Charity, Vincent de Paul, who spoke to the great ones of his day in similar terms. Both were equally comfortable with those who were rich and those who were poor. Both kept their eyes fixed on God and sought to encounter and serve Him in all whom they met. Again, it is Sister Costalin who describes Sister Rosalie's manner in greeting the "multitude of visitors" who came to the little parlor on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. She tells us that her superior used to say:

"I derive what I can from [these visits]," she said one evening, when the crowd had been particularly large. "I point out the misery of my poor, so that [my visitors] may think of giving me something for them." She added, "There are people who come expecting to see an important person but when I approach them their expression clearly says, 'Is this all there is?'" The less polite they were, the more imperious or demanding,

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

the more cordially they were received. In her mind, it was an attitude of profound justice which made her act this way.²⁵⁸

It was on occasions such as these that Sister Rosalie would go on to reiterate to the sisters Father Emery's counsel to her when she was very young. This counsel became a guiding principle in her attitude toward the rich, as well as toward those who were poor in whom she saw the face of God. She would say "Sisters, ...we are *milestones*. All have the right to lay their burden upon us without our having the right to complain about it."²⁵⁹

It is apparent from all that has been said, and all that could be added, that Sister Rosalie's "love of neighbor burst forth from the brilliant flame of the love of God."²⁶⁰ This, however, is invariably not enough to silence her critics. They are quick to point out that she lived her life as a Daughter of Charity and that, as such, she had specific obligations with regard to her spiritual life. These were clearly outlined in the Rules and tradition of the Company. Yet Sister Rosalie does not seem to have always been faithful in strictly observing them. The unrelenting demands of serving the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district occasionally caused her to follow to the letter the adage of Saint Vincent "to leave God for God,"²⁶¹ that is, to leave the God she found in prayer in the chapel to encounter Him present in those whom she served. Even her great admirer, Armand de Melun, admits this. He states:

Her numerous occupations often prevented her from devoting a lot of time to meditation and prayer. However, as soon as she was alone for an instant, her sisters would find her on her knees, in deep recollection. She rejoiced at her long periods of sleeplessness because, in this way, God granted her the time to pray.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Baunard, *Le Vicomte de Melun*, 437-438.

²⁶¹ *CED*, 9:319; 10:3, 95, 226, 541, 595; 13:556, 565.

²⁶² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 217-218.

Moreover, Sister Rosalie was the superior of the house and therefore had the obligation of providing a good example to her companions. Sister Thérèse Deschaux, who was Superioress General of the Company from 1804-1809, composed a manual for local superiors. In it she wrote:

The principal preoccupation of the Sister Servant [local superior] must be the observance of the Rules, especially four-o'clock rising, fidelity to mental prayer, repetition of prayer, Friday Conferences, and respect for silence in appointed places and at appointed times. She should give example herself to her sisters and let them know, from time to time, that this exactitude is the best means for acquiring the spirit of the community and of persevering in it.²⁶³

How did the sisters of her house, to whom she owed this example of exactitude to the Rule, and who were likely to model their own lives and service on hers, perceive Sister Rosalie? Sister Costalin recounted that even toward the end, when Sister Rosalie was ill, she "rose faithfully at four A.M." to make her meditation and that she "left mental prayer with her countenance illuminated by a holy expression."²⁶⁴

Sister Costalin goes on to say that Sister Rosalie was "very vigilant in preserving the time of prayer for her companions," however, circumstances would arise that would force them "to leave God for God" and accompany their superior on a visit to someone needing their assistance. When this occurred, Sister Rosalie would say:

"Sister, let us begin our prayer!" She would then outline the subject and divide it into points in a few simple and clear words. She assumed a stance of holy recollection, with her eyes cast down, and she observed absolute silence. If we were in a carriage, the shades were lowered and nothing could distract her.²⁶⁵

It is incontestable that these times for "leaving God for God" occurred

²⁶³ *Cahiers des Sœurs Servantes, pour elles seules*, AFCP, 1062 a II.

²⁶⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 45.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

in Sister Rosalie's life and that, according to Sister Cécile Maurin, the fifth witness in the Process of Beatification, she sometimes "arrived late at the sisters' refectory [because] her charitable visits did not allow her always to be on time."²⁶⁶ However, we learn from Sister Saillard that her superior performed her spiritual exercises "with great exactitude [and] that she was the first one [to arrive] in the chapel."²⁶⁷

More significant, perhaps, is the fact attested to by many that Sister Rosalie, in the midst of constant activity, sought to remain united to God or, as Saint Vincent would put it, "always to walk in the presence of God."²⁶⁸ Again it is Sister Costalin who tells us:

The presence of God was familiar to her. We would often find her on her knees between visits or business matters. "I am trying to put myself once again in the presence of God," she would reply in response to our indiscreet inquiries.²⁶⁹

Armand de Melun, Sister Rosalie's close collaborator in much of her activity, also testifies to this. He writes:

In the midst of the crowd, on her errands and on her visits, her heart prayed. While she was fulfilling her charitable duties, everything around her became a subject of meditation and of pious reflections. She said to a sister whom she was sending out, "Never do I make my meditation so well as I do on the street. Passersby for me are no longer anything but trees in a forest. I agree with the saint who compared the world to a large woods where the soul must never let itself be distracted by the underbrush."

When she went out with one of her sisters, either on foot or in a carriage, she remained silent, responding to the questions or remarks addressed to her only by

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁶⁸ *CED*, 9:180; see also *CED*, 9:291, 340, 422, 479; 10:730.

²⁶⁹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 34.

a word. She was in conversation with God.²⁷⁰

While, as mentioned above, Sister Rosalie tried to preserve the time set aside for prayer for the sisters of the house, they too found themselves in situations where this did not seem possible. Melun tells us of the advice given by Sister Rosalie on one such occasion:

Like Our Lord, [Sister Rosalie] took the most ordinary events, the most commonplace facts as images of the spiritual life and made them the subject of her teaching. The sisters, detained by other obligations, had not been able to take care of the laundry until quite late. They complained that they did not have time to make their mental prayer. Their superior told them, "You can make it right here, without leaving your work. Reflect that your souls should be as white as these soapsuds and as light so that they can mount toward God; and that you will succeed in making your consciences as white and pure as this linen only by washing them in the waters of repentance."²⁷¹

Sister Rosalie's solution did not meet with universal approval within the Company of the Daughters of Charity. From the testimony of those who knew her well, this combining of work and meditation dictated by Rule appears to have been the exception rather than ordinary practice. Reflecting upon the great charitable activity Sister Rosalie was involved in from her earliest days in community, Sister Saillard said:

These exterior works, far from being detrimental to the young sister's piety, united her daily, more and more, to Our Lord who had chosen her as his spouse. Humble and hidden, she drew from his Divine Heart, the source and model of all charity, an ever more tender compassion for his suffering members. They represented for her the One who had taken

²⁷⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 218.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

upon Himself our weaknesses, who had borne our sorrows.²⁷²

Sister Saillard adds that Sister Rosalie also saw God in her sister companions, whom Jesus had likewise “chosen for his spouses.”²⁷³

In the midst of her hectic life Sister Rosalie nourished her capacity to remain in the presence of God through spiritual reading. According to Melun, her preferred works were the *Imitation of Christ*, the writings of Saint François de Sales, whom she called her “dear friend and compatriot,” since he also was a native of the Jura, and especially the life and thoughts of Vincent de Paul. She sought to model her life on that of the founder and frequently quoted his maxims.²⁷⁴

She also knew and loved Sacred Scripture well. Sister Costalin said that Sister Rosalie “had great devotion to the Epistles that were read every Saturday and she told [the sisters] to consider them as letters coming from heaven.”²⁷⁵ Moreover, she had them memorize 1 Corinthians 13 in which Saint Paul sets forth the attributes of charity.²⁷⁶

If Sister Rosalie tried to remain constantly in the presence of God, whom she saw in the persons who surrounded her, she also lived in the company of the Blessed Virgin and the angels. Her devotion to Mary dated from her childhood. She grew up close to the chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Réconfort, and she used to bring her sisters and playmates to pray there to reward them for their good behavior.²⁷⁷

As noted earlier, when Sister Rosalie entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity in 1802, her godfather, Father Emery, Superior General of the Sulpicians, was the spiritual guide for the newly re-established congregation. In her testimony concerning him in 1830, she stated, “He also powerfully exhorted us to have devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin. He recommended that we never fail to recite our rosary each day.”²⁷⁸ This devotion to Mary lasted her entire life. During the last years, as her sight failed and her activity was

²⁷² Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 62.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁷⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 219.

²⁷⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 40.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

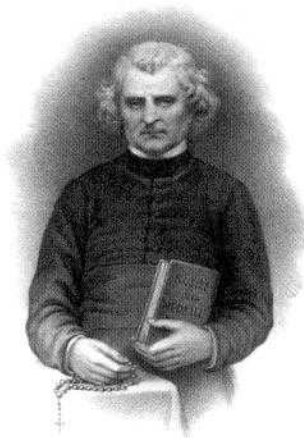
²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

more limited, the rosary became her constant companion.²⁷⁹

Moreover, devotion to Mary had been a characteristic of the Daughters of Charity since their origins. In 1644, Louise de Marillac made a pilgrimage to Chartres where she consecrated the young company to Mary.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, in her *Spiritual Testament*, recorded by the sisters who attended Louise de Marillac during her final moments on earth, the foundress told her companions and their successors, "Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, that she may be your only Mother."²⁸¹

Sister Rosalie was certainly aware of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin who appeared in 1830 to Sister Catherine Labouré in the chapel of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, at 140, rue du Bac in Paris.²⁸² Although she does not speak directly of them, she, like all the local superiors of the houses in Paris, went there each month for a conference given by the Director General, Jean-Marie Aladel, C.M. She must have gone to the chapel to pray to Mary as well as to Jesus, her Son. She also occasionally visited other Parisian sanctuaries dedicated to Mary, such as Notre-Dame-des-Victoires and Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérance in the nearby church of Saint-Séverin.

As a result of the apparitions of 1830, a medal was struck in



Jean-Marie Aladel, C.M.
Director General of the Daughters of Charity.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

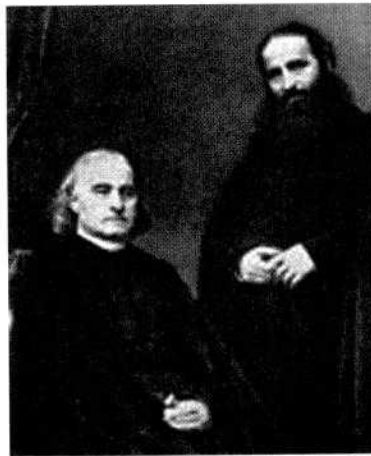
²⁸⁰ See Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings*, 121-122.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 835.

²⁸² René Laurentin, *The Life of Catherine Labouré, 1806-1876*, Paul Inwood, trans. (London, 1983), 66-81.

honor of Mary Immaculate. It was widely distributed and quickly became known as the "Miraculous Medal."²⁸³ Given the difficult situations that Sister Rosalie and her companions faced on a daily basis, it is probable that they too distributed the medal to those whom they served in the Mouffetard district. However, we have only one documented case indicating Sister Rosalie had done so. This comes to us from Marie-Théodore Ratisbonne, S.J., whose brother, Alphonse, had suddenly been converted from Judaism to Catholicism after having received the medal from the Baron Théodore de Bussières.²⁸⁴

It seems that Sister Rosalie had discovered, in the district, a certain family that was poor. The mother was dying and would leave two young daughters, aged 11 and 14, behind. The father showed little interest in his children and he willingly agreed with his wife to confide them to Sister Rosalie, whom the couple asked to take responsibility for the girls' instruction. Since the family was Jewish, Sister Rosalie thought of Father Ratisbonne's recently established work for the conversion of Jews to Christianity. She, therefore, spoke to Father Aladel and asked him to approach Father Ratisbonne. In the meantime, she gave the children Miraculous Medals and confided them to a pious woman of her acquaintance.



Marie-Théodore Ratisbonne, S.J. (right) – 1802-1884,
and his brother Alphonse Ratisbonne (left) – 1814-1884.
Public domain

²⁸³ Laurentin, *The Life of Catherine Labouré*, 79-81; 259-261.

²⁸⁴ Mère Benedicta, *Le Très Révérend Père Marie-Théodore Ratisbonne*, 2 vols., Volume I: 279, 284.

Years later, Father Ratisbonne wrote of his meeting with Father Aladel:

The Sister of Charity, who was the organ of the Blessed Virgin in this matter, was Sister Rosalie Rendu, the same [sister] who, from her poor house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, in Paris, was for many years the force behind a very powerful movement of Christian charity.²⁸⁵

And in a letter to his brother, Alphonse, Théodore said:

The first two catechumens were sent through the intermediary of Father Aladel and a Sister of Charity. What a good omen! The Miraculous Medal is following the same pathway. Courage, courage! Neophytes will soon multiply like the medals. They will attract one another for the greater glory of God and of our good Mother.²⁸⁶

The great misery of the people to whom Sister Rosalie devoted her life could, at times, seem insurmountable. She derived her strength



First version of the Miraculous Medal.
Public domain

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume I: 279.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume I: 284.

to continue the struggle from her union with Christ, whom she served in each victim of poverty who came into her life. The horrors of the material world that surrounded her did not separate her from the spiritual reality in which she also moved. Melun states:

...in the midst of this perpetual contact with humanity, [Sister Rosalie] never lived separated from God, his saints [or] his angels. While exterior occupations seemed to tear her away from her interior [life] and to precipitate her outside of herself, her soul was in communication with the divine will, with the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and with the prayers and merits of the celestial spirits. From this perspective and this association, she gained the strength to master her human nature, devotedness to her brothers [and sisters], the love of mortification, and detachment from transitory things.²⁸⁷

Sister Rosalie saw the service of those who were poor as a sharing in the work of the guardian angels. When she taught the young sisters the dangerous task of letting blood she would tell them, "Make the sign of the cross and ask your guardian angel to guide your hand."²⁸⁸

Desmet, who once again fails to cite his source, tells us that when Sister Rosalie and her companions were to distribute soup to the elderly, she would say, "Sister, let us greet these good elders' angels. The angels are proud to guide the poor in whom God dwells. We are going to share in their ministry."²⁸⁹ However great or small the task called for in the service of persons who were poor, Sister Rosalie remained united to God, His mother, and His angels. From this, she derived the energy to remain faithful to God in the total gift of herself in service to those in need.²⁹⁰

In the *Positio*, Father Beaudoin points out another, "often forgotten," aspect of Sister Rosalie's spiritual life, namely her devotion to the Holy Spirit.²⁹¹ Here again, perhaps unknowingly, she was imitating a key element of Louise de Marillac's spirituality.

²⁸⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 232.

²⁸⁸ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 57.

²⁸⁹ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 310.

²⁹⁰ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 62, 65.

²⁹¹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Exposé des Vertus*, 19.

The feast of Pentecost, celebrating the coming of the spirit of love into the Church and the world, held special meaning for the foundress. To prepare herself, Louise de Marillac made a retreat each year between Ascension and Pentecost. The feast was also a reminder for her of the special graces she had received from God at the time of Pentecost. It had been on Pentecost Sunday, 4 June 1623, that she had received the light which revealed her vocation to her.²⁹² In 1642, on the eve of Pentecost, a floor of the Motherhouse suddenly collapsed. There were no casualties. Once again this feast marked Louise's spiritual journey toward union with God. She saw in the accident a sign of the special protection of God for the Company, but she also saw it as a call to her to sacrifice everything and everyone to Him.²⁹³ In 1651, she wrote to the sisters of Nantes, "Pray for us, my dear Sisters, that Our Lord Jesus Christ may bestow His Spirit upon us... so that we may be so filled with His Spirit that we may do nothing or say nothing except for His glory and His holy love."²⁹⁴

It was in this tradition that Sister Rosalie was formed as a Daughter of Charity. We find it echoed in her correspondence and in her instructions to her sisters. She concludes a letter to Mélanie Rendu in 1830, in which she tells her that the sisters may be obliged to leave Paris because of the insurrection, "May the gift of peace and joy of the Holy Spirit super-abound in your soul."²⁹⁵ On another occasion, when one of her nieces was considering a religious vocation, Sister Rosalie wrote, "I am praying for her and that her parents may be enlightened by the Holy Spirit."²⁹⁶

From Sister Tissot's testimony we learn of the advice that Sister Rosalie used to give her companions when she sent them to the rich and powerful of the day to seek assistance in providing service for those in great need in the Mouffetard district:

These gentlemen do not need lofty phrases. On your way, you will pray to the Holy Spirit to favorably dispose their hearts. You will begin by thanking

²⁹² Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings*, 1-2.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 768.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 351.

²⁹⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 8 October 1830, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 7.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 March 1832, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 9.

this gentleman or that lady for the service they have already rendered me. Then you will make my little request. You are not the one who will make the matter succeed; it is the Holy Spirit to whom you are going to pray. It is the Holy Spirit who touches hearts and inclines them to good.²⁹⁷

All of these reflections on Sister Rosalie's interior life, based on her own correspondence and on the testimony of those who knew her well, would seem to substantiate Sister Saillard's appreciation of her superior. In her testimony, she stated that the love of God pushed Sister Rosalie "to belong only to Him... and to consecrate herself to [Him] in the person of those who were poor."²⁹⁸ It was her union with God that enabled her, as a true Daughter of Saint Vincent, "to give herself to God to love Our Lord and to serve Him in persons who are poor."²⁹⁹

It is certainly true that there were times when she left God in the chapel to reach out to Him in the suffering humanity around her, or through her multiple duties to obtain assistance for them. She, likewise, on occasion, encouraged her sisters to do the same. In this she was imitating the founder, for whom those who were poor were his "burden" and his "sorrow."³⁰⁰ If she did, momentarily, lose her focus, then we must agree with the opinion expressed in the "votum" of Philippe Roche, C.M., the first theological censor for her Cause of Beatification, and with which Father Beaudoin seems to be in accord.³⁰¹ Father Roche states:

"Because of the motive!" At last, there it is, the expression which says it all concerning Sister Rosalie. It is the pearl of great price that suddenly shines forth in these humble writings. At the end of this letter to the Superioress of Caen,³⁰² it moves us for the first time. But it goes to high places as we find it again in one

²⁹⁷ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 58.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁹⁹ *CED*, 9:592; see also *CED*, 9:43, 62, 270, 534; 10:126, 336, 475.

³⁰⁰ Collet, *La Vie de St. Vincent*, 1:479.

³⁰¹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 205.

³⁰² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 1 March 1840, AFCP, Ro-Le 131 BS 70.

of her candid letters to her Archbishop, Monseigneur [Denis-Auguste] Affre, [S.S.] to whom she dares to send her very awkward advice, couched in timorous compliments, but "*because of the motive.*"³⁰³

For Sister Rosalie, "*the motive*" for all of her actions, indeed for her life, was love: love of God and love of persons who were poor and in



Denis-Auguste Affre, S.S. (1793-1848),
Archbishop of Paris – 1840-1848.
Public Domain

whom she saw God. For half a century she found, in the love of her God, her spiritual, human, and emotional energy to serve those living under the crushing burden of misery. It is perhaps fitting to allow her friend and collaborator for much of this time, Armand de Melun, to have the final word on this subject:

Her charity was drawn from the highest and purest source. It came directly from the heart of Jesus Christ. It had all the conditions required by the Apostle, Saint Paul; but it was human as well as supernatural.

³⁰³ Archives of the Archdiocese of Paris, 4 R 17. Hereinafter cited as AAP; *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 92.

Sister Rosalie loved the poor in God, as the suffering members of the Savior. She also loved them as a mother loves her children, with her heart and with her blood, with her emotions and with her tears. She practiced holy abnegation and supernatural devotedness. She possessed the exquisite delicacy and sublime weaknesses of a woman.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 192.

CHAPTER VIII

EXPANSION OF THE WORKS OF RUE DE L'ÉPÉE-DE-BOIS

SISTER ROSALIE'S CREATIVITY AND DARING IN RESPONDING TO THE UNMET NEEDS OF THOSE WHO WERE POOR

United to God, whom they served in the person of the poor, Sister Rosalie and her companions sought to respond to the ever-growing needs of the people of the Mouffetard district. As we have seen when Sister Rosalie began her life as a Daughter of Charity she had worked, first at the Maison Saint-Martin and later in the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, in both the education of little girls and health care. Once she became superior of the house and the desperate needs of the people became even more evident to her, she searched for new ways to respond to them. This would require creativity, because resources were extremely limited, and daring, since some of her methods were as yet unproven and elicited reticence and even opposition. Nevertheless, she persevered in her attempts to provide services for the needy that would accompany them from the cradle to the grave. Father Emery's words, uttered when he heard that his young godchild was being placed in the Saint-Marceau district, were to prove prophetic: "This is truly the place that you need. You will be the servant of all these poor people."³⁰⁵ And so she would be for nearly half-a-century.

Let us now examine these new initiatives in chronological order. As Father Beaudoin notes in the *Positio*, Sister Rosalie's biographers and the witnesses for the Cause of Beatification speak of these undertakings in greater or lesser detail. It is difficult, however, in most instances, to know precise dates or exactly how the works functioned.³⁰⁶ The most complete listing comes from Sister Saillard who states:

The day classes had become very numerous. Soon there was a day shelter [for children too old for the day nursery and too young for the school]; a day nursery, which allowed mothers living in poverty to

³⁰⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 83.

³⁰⁶ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio*, 74.

work without abandoning their babies; the *ouvroir*, which was open to young girls, who would later increase [the numbers coming to] the social center and the Children of Mary and finally go on to the meetings of Christian Mothers. A day shelter for the elderly was the last of her works.³⁰⁷

First, the *Day Nursery Saint-Marcel* (1844). In today's society, the provision for and the funding of quality, affordable day care is a major political issue that a candidate for public office ignores at his or her own peril. Such was not always the case. The wealthy had no interest in it, since they could easily hire wet nurses and governesses to care for their children when they were young, and then place them in boarding schools as they grew older. Babies of women who had to work if their families were to survive were left without any reliable care. It would only be toward the mid-nineteenth century that four Frenchmen, among them Armand de Melun, would initiate this necessary work in Paris. It spread quickly throughout the French capital, due in great measure to Sister Rosalie's influence. She had seen the great need and opened a day care above the school, staffed by the sisters on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.³⁰⁸

The purpose of the day nursery was to provide care for newborns while their mothers worked. A new concept, it met with opposition from the very beginning. According to Melun, who was intimately involved in the work, this resistance centered around two points. The work was seen as encouraging mothers to neglect their duties to their children, and as posing a health hazard by having babies so close together in one place.³⁰⁹

Sister Rosalie, however, was undeterred. She considered the first objection without merit as the babies were in the nursery only when their mothers were at work. Moreover, the women came several times a day to nurse their infants. She commented:

Why accuse poor women of forgetting their maternal obligations for doing what women, who have neither

³⁰⁷ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 63.

³⁰⁸ Jeanne Danemarie, *A travers trois Révolutions, Sœur Rosalie, Fille de la Charité* (Paris, 1947), 133.

³⁰⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 65-66.

their work nor their misery as an excuse, do every day without provoking complaints or reproach?³¹⁰

Sister Rosalie also refused to be dissuaded by the second objection, concerning the danger of exposing infants, crowded into a single space, to disease. Her response was to point out to her critics the contrast between the healthy appearance of the children of the nursery and the sickly bodies of the infants huddled in the squalor of their family's miserable lodgings. She welcomed the children and saw to it that they were clean and cared for.³¹¹

The nursery was a great success. Its reputation spread and it became a model for others. The then Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Denis-Auguste Affre, S.S., had blessed it the day it opened. He joyously told those assembled:

Oh! Paris, city admirable for your charity, if ever again the celestial anger should weigh down upon you, you can... obtain grace from God by raising your children to heaven.³¹²

Perhaps more indicative yet, of both Sister Rosalie's reputation and the success of the day nursery, was the visit to it by the Emperor Napoléon III and the Empress Eugénie on 18 March 1854. A painting, by the artist Édouard-Alexandre Sain, commemorates the event. While Sister Rosalie had been chagrined earlier by the visit of the Emperor's representative, who had come to present her with the Cross of the Legion of Honor, this time she joyously received the Imperial Couple. Melun explains why:

She saw in this display of interest a lesson, for all civil officials, of goodness and charity toward the lowly and the weak and a recommendation to all those holding positions of public authority, whatever their rank or power, to be attentive, caring, and compassionate toward the unfortunate whom sovereigns do not disdain to visit.³¹³

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

³¹² Danemarie, *A travers trois Révolutions*, 133.

³¹³ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 143.



"Visite de l'Empereur et de l'Impératrice à la crèche de Sœur Rosalie."
 Visit of the Emperor and Empress to Sister Rosalie's Day Nursery,
 painted in 1855 by Édouard-Alexandre Sain (1830-1910).
Public domain

But, on a much more personal level, the day nursery was Sister Rosalie's "recreation, her pride, [and] her relaxation. She showed it to her friends [and] to strangers and went up there whenever she had a free moment."³¹⁴ And she was beloved by the children and their mothers.

Other than these general considerations, we know little of the daily functioning of the day nursery. All the information we have comes from a single letter that Sister Rosalie wrote on 26 November 1852 to Madame Dussaussoy, wife of General Dussaussoy, Commandant of the Département Lot and Garonne-Agen, in response to her friend's request for information.

The Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris possess four letters from Sister Rosalie to Madame Dussaussoy between 21 February 1848 and 26 November 1852. They reveal a close friendship between the two women. Sister Rosalie seems to have known the family well. She expresses concern for Madame Dussaussoy's health,

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

for her husband and her father. When she lost her son, Sister Rosalie wrote, "I learned with sorrow of the grief you experienced at the death of your dear son. We are praying to God for the repose of his soul and for your consolation and preservation."³¹⁵ Sister Rosalie regrets not being able to go to see her friend, and hopes they can meet again in Paris should she come there from Pau.

Sister Rosalie also shares her own concerns: her sorrow at the loss of a sister companion and her chagrin in being awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor. Madame Dussaussoy is obviously a woman of means and influence since Sister Rosalie elicits her help in arranging a marriage between a certain Monsieur Collar and Isabelle de Serre, the godchild of the Dowager Queen of Naples.³¹⁶ It appears likely that Madame Dussaussoy wants the financial report for the day nursery so that she can either help Sister Rosalie obtain some necessary funding, or assist in fundraising in her own region.

Money was always in short supply at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, but the situation must have been more acute with the day nursery since the whole concept lacked broad public support. We will quote the entire report here as it reveals Sister Rosalie's creative response to an on-going challenge:

General Observations

At the Saint-Marcel Day Nursery, the expense for each infant averages 55 centimes per day. Insofar as they are able, the mothers make a small contribution of 15 centimes per day for the child. This, therefore, reduces the expense for the establishment to 40 centimes per day.

Each woman, who rocks the infants, receives 1 franc, 50 centimes a day. She receives no food.

By establishing an average of 35 infants a day, a day nursery would cost 1,200 francs, if a contribution from

³¹⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Dussaussoy*, 26 November 1852, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 214 GD 2 Ro - La 42.

³¹⁶ See *Letters of Sister Rosalie to Madame Dussaussoy*, 21 February 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 210 Ro - La 41 GD 1; 26 November 1852, Ro - Le 214 Ro - La 42 GD 2; 14 March [1852], Ro - Le 258 Ro - La 43 GD 3.

the mothers is required for all the infants and after all the expenses have been met. The cost of clothing is not included in this total.

Means we use to procure the funding vary and are sometimes difficult.

We have *subscriptions* of 5 to 10 francs per year.

We *create cradles*, which involves a one-time donation of 50 francs. This represents approximately the initial expense for the bed and bedding. In this case, a plaque, bearing the donor's name, is placed in the room. When a day nursery is opening, we easily obtain this kind of gift.

We have *Complete Foundations*, averaging an annual sum of 100 francs. The infant is placed in a cradle for which the complete cost is paid by his/her benefactor. If we receive a gift of 150 francs, the child's mother can also be excused from the 15 centimes contribution. For these foundations, a plaque, with the inscription:

Complete Foundation by Monsieur...

is placed at the head of the bed.

The Saint-Marcel Day Nursery, which has great difficulty in raising the funds necessary for its existence, also utilizes collections, sermons, lotteries etc.³¹⁷

The day nursery was another step in Sister Rosalie's work for women and children. Others would follow. This endeavor caused the Daughters of Charity to ask if this work should spread to other houses of the community located in similar neighborhoods. The decision of the General Council in this regard reflects the reticence of the public at large. On 4 February 1846, it was decided that:

³¹⁷ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Dussaussoy*, 26 November 1852, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - La 44.

...no propositions which might be made in this matter would be accepted because the time and circumstances do not seem to guarantee us the good we would hope to accomplish by devoting ourselves to these services. This could come about in more favorable conditions and then, if such be the Will of God, this work could be combined with those that have already been confided to us.³¹⁸

And, indeed, not too long afterwards, the Daughters of Charity, undoubtedly influenced by the model of the Saint-Marcel Day Nursery, would begin this work in other houses of the French capital. Thus, many more women and children would be better served.

Second, the *Day Shelter for Children* (1854). With both the day nursery and the school, Sister Rosalie and the sisters were able to provide care and education for children who would otherwise have received little or none at all. Nonetheless, she was to discover, to her dismay, that numerous children were “falling between the cracks” of the public assistance system. They were the ones who were too old for the day nursery and too young for school.

To respond to this need, despite the financial burden it would impose on an agency that was already struggling to survive, Sister Rosalie added a day shelter to the day nursery for these children. While details also remain sketchy here, we know that it opened in 1854. This we learn from a letter of Sister Rosalie to the mayor of the XIIth arrondissement on 26 November of that year. In it she says, “Our Day Shelter is entirely finished and in a few days we will bring in the numerous children who are awaiting admission.”³¹⁹

Before continuing our discussion of this work, in which the city of Paris was to employ the Daughters of Charity for the first time,³²⁰ it would be worthwhile to look a bit more closely at this letter. It shows the kind of relationship of collaboration that Sister Rosalie was able to maintain with civil authorities, who, as a group, were not always favorably disposed to the Catholic Church. In this letter, Sister Rosalie suggests the names of two women as possible “inspessresses”

³¹⁸ *Registre des Conseils Généraux 1846*, 4 February 1846, AFCEP.

³¹⁹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, mayor of the XII^e arrondissement*, 26 November 1854, AFCEP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 280.

³²⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 68.

for the work on behalf of the arrondissement. She does so gently and respectfully, assuring the mayor that the work would benefit from their "intelligence" and "zeal."

More significant, perhaps, is the human and spiritual tone of the letter. Sister Rosalie tells Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud that she is "very happy" to learn that his health is improving. Then she adds, "I thank God for this new grace that He is granting our arrondissement. We have too great a need of your devotedness and your solicitude for Him to raise up an obstacle to it by illness."³²¹

What, then, do we know of the shelter itself? It appears to have been a sort of "welcome center" where children, who might otherwise have been forced "to vegetate in the gutters or die under the wheels of a carriage," could come during the day to play and to learn. We do not know how many children there were but the number must have been significant because Melun speaks of Sister Rosalie's "little battalions." He is, however, undoubtedly exaggerating when he claims that "all the children of the neighborhood abandoned the streets for the shelter."³²² Be that as it may, the city government was sufficiently impressed by the sisters' work with the children to take over the operational costs while leaving the actual work to the Daughters of Charity.

Sister Rosalie also took great pleasure in visiting the shelter. These visits gave her the opportunity to see the sisters in action and to admire their creativity and dedication in finding pleasant ways to instruct, occupy, and amuse what surely must have been an unruly band.³²³ Thus, the small house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was serving children from birth through the end of primary school.

Third, the *Ouvroir* (1849). While providing for the youngest of her charges, Sister Rosalie turned her attention to the eleven-to-fourteen-year-old girls who had completed elementary school but whom she judged too young and too ill-equipped to enter the work force. For them, she expanded the concept of practical training that, as we mentioned earlier, had begun before 1830 for children having difficulty with the usual school curriculum. According to Sister Cécile Maurin, tradition had it that Sister Rosalie was concerned about girls

³²¹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud*, 26 November 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 280.

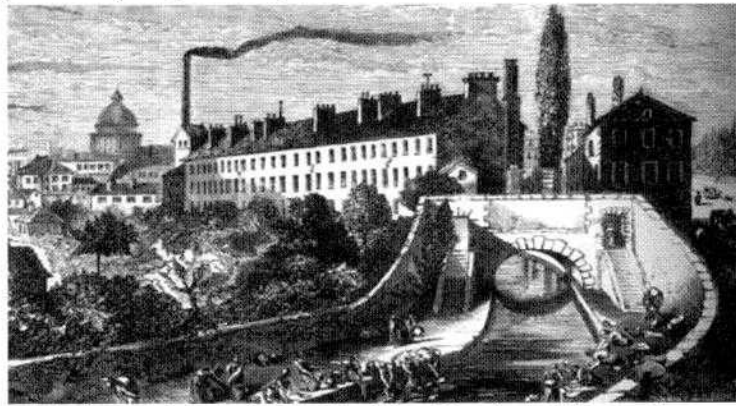
³²² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 68.

³²³ See Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 133.

of this age from working class families, and that she asked the sisters to have them come on Thursday mornings to initiate them to domestic tasks.³²⁴ It would appear, however, from other testimony, that at least some of the participants were older, as was customary in *ouvroirs* of the period.

Sister Tissot speaks about this work and states that several of the students “stayed to complete their apprenticeship and became good workers and later [the] best animators to lead the [group] of young girls who came to the social center.”³²⁵ Another witness, Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe de Montmahaut, who had known Sister Rosalie since childhood, relates simply that the *ouvroir* was a prelude to the “schools of domestic science” that would come later in France.³²⁶ Finally, Father Desmet, unfortunately once again without citing his source, quotes a former student, “I was at the *ouvroir*.... We worked well there. Oh, how well [Sister Rosalie] formed all of us! We were not lazy. We learned everything. Nothing was too much for us.”³²⁷

Sister Rosalie’s correspondence with Madame Badin, whose husband was the administrator of the Gobelin factory in Paris and later of a similar one in Beauvais, shows her efforts on behalf of these girls and young women and her success in finding work for them.³²⁸ Together they helped many women and their families escape misery.



Gobelin factory along the banks of the Bièvre River in the XIIth arrondissement.
Public domain

³²⁴ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 17.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

³²⁷ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 129.

³²⁸ See *Letters of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin*, 1 September 1848, AFCP, 8J2 Ro - Le 218 B3; 11 September 1848, Le 220 B5; 16 January 1849, Le 227 B9; 9 May 1849, Le 230 B12; 15 November 1849, Le 233 B13.

Before leaving the subject of the *ouvroir*, we should examine this collaboration between Madame Badin and Sister Rosalie. It is another example of the development of a deep friendship that had its roots in the love of God and in the service of those who were poor. We possess twenty-four letters of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin, written between 18 July 1848 and 5 February 1855. The texts, in the Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, are photocopies. The originals remain in the possession of the Badin family, indicating the value they place on them.

It appears from the letters that, while she lived in Paris, Madame Badin was intimately involved with the work of the Ladies of Charity. This group, founded by Vincent de Paul, himself, in 1617, for the service of the sick poor in their homes, had been disbanded during the period of the French Revolution of 1789. In early 1840, Father Étienne, who, at the time, was the Procurator General of the Congregation of the Mission, and Viscountess Le Vasseur, wife of an Advocate General in the Court of Paris, set about starting it anew.

Madame Le Vasseur had made a pilgrimage to Saint Vincent's birthplace near Dax in southwestern France and came to realize that this seminal work of the Apostle of Charity had disappeared. Upon her return to Paris, she approached Father Étienne because she saw the urgent need for such a service in the capital for families living in misery, whose numbers were growing daily. Encouraged by the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Affre, and Father Étienne, she gathered together a group of twelve women to form the first re-established Confraternity of the Ladies of the Sick Poor. Monseigneur Affre and Father Étienne put them in contact with the pastor of the Parish of Saint-Médard and with Sister Rosalie.

The results of this collaboration extended well beyond expectations. In the *Life of Monsieur Étienne*, we read:

The pastor of Saint-Médard rejoiced to have found auxiliaries to support his ministry for those in need. The sisters, delighted to see themselves assisted in their heavy task, did not know how to express their gratitude to the pious persons who shared their devotedness. The poor blessed their new benefactresses and often gave them the most desirable of recompenses for their dedication by returning

sincerely to God and to the practice of the Christian life.³²⁹

During the very first year, the twelve Ladies and the sisters of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois made 5,000 visits and distributed 10,727 francs to the sick poor in the parishes of Saint-Médard and Saint-Pierre-du-Gros-Caillou. As a result, the work quickly expanded to other parishes and even to the provinces. By 1852, there were 519 members in Paris who had distributed 338,574 francs in 22 parishes in the city.³³⁰

We have two reports to Father Étienne from Sister Rosalie on the accomplishments of the Ladies, dated 30 March and 9 June 1840.³³¹ They reveal that the services rendered went far beyond visits to the homes of the sick poor, although their Rule was formulated on the original drawn up by Vincent de Paul. The Ladies prepared persons who were poor to receive their First Communion, helped to have marriages regularized by the Catholic Church, and had children enrolled in Catholic schools. In the report of 30 March, Sister Rosalie wrote enthusiastically:

I am pleased to speak to you of the satisfaction that we are experiencing at seeing the good the Ladies of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul are doing for the sick poor of our quarter. They have visited 392 sick persons.... These honorable Ladies render various services with a charity and an understanding worthy of the holy mission which has been entrusted to them. Please, Father, express our gratitude to them. We share this most sincerely with those who are poor and urge them to continue their kind and charitable concern.³³²

While Sister Rosalie asks Father Étienne to express to the Ladies her gratitude, and that of the sisters and of those who were poor, it is certain that she did so herself whenever the opportunity presented itself. Encouragement, support, and gratitude were staples of her collaboration with all those who shared in her ministry. This explains,

³²⁹ Édouard Rosset, C.M., *Vie de Monsieur Étienne* (Paris, 1881), 240-242.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 232-242.

³³¹ *Dames de la Charité*, ACMP, Tiroir 132.

³³² *Ibid.*

in no small measure, her ability to find and retain collaborators from all levels of society including the public and private sectors. Her correspondence with Madame Badin illustrates this.

It is evident from Sister Rosalie's letters to her that Madame Badin was active in this work. We do not know if she was part of the original twelve, or if she later became a member, as the first letter we possess is dated 18 July 1848. By this time, Madame Badin appears to have been the President of her group since Sister Rosalie sent a list of people needing clothing to her stating that, if she could not take care of this matter herself, she should turn the names over to another Lady.³³³

The letters are filled with requests for all types of services for persons needing assistance, and Sister Rosalie returns often to "knock at the door of [Madame Badin's] charitable heart."³³⁴ She seeks assistance for children,³³⁵ widows,³³⁶ wives of insurgents who had been on the losing side during the Revolution of 1848,³³⁷ and piecemeal for the young women in the *ouvroir* as mentioned above. She also does not hesitate to ask Madame Badin to intervene with her husband when his influence is viewed as essential for the development of the works. Such was the case when she sought to obtain the buildings on rue du Banquier for the expansion of the school. She was very specific on what she wanted him to do on her behalf, and had no doubt that it would be accomplished. She tells her friend, "I am counting completely on him and on you for the realization of this good work."³³⁸ She was not disappointed.

But Sister Rosalie was never simply the suppliant dealing with the powerful on behalf of her "beloved poor." Madame Badin was a collaborator and a cherished friend. Sister Rosalie cared about her, her well-being, and her family. When she heard that Madame Badin had lost her father-in-law she wrote, "I understand your pain and share it with all my heart." She then goes on to say that she will pray for him and have others do so too. She asks Madame Badin

³³³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin*, 11 September 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 220 B5.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 222 B6.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1848, AFCP, Ro - Le 216 B1; 7 September 1848, Ro - Le 219 B4; 3 November 1850, Ro - Le 246 B17.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1849, AFCP, Ro - Le 233 B13.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 August 1848, AFCP, Ro - Le 217 B2.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 222 B6.

to remember her to her husband and to assure him that she and the sisters “share his justified grief.” She then reminds the family of the just reward that awaits their beloved. She tells them, “The good that Monsieur Badin has done should be a consolation for you. God will not fail to reward him.”³³⁹

Sister Rosalie was distressed when her friend had to move to Beauvais. Her concern was for herself but also, and especially, for the suffering inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. She wrote:

I do not want to delay any longer to ask news of you and to share mine. I am better and am profiting from this to repeat our deep affection and my sincere regret to see you so far away. It is a real deprivation for me. Our poor experience the void and, with reason, regret the loss they have sustained.³⁴⁰

She encourages her friend to not only continue in serving those who are poor, but to pay attention to her own health. She writes, “You [now] have more time for yourself. Take care of the poor. They will be less demanding than in Paris. You had so many concerns [here] that your health was the victim.” She then urges Madame Badin to send news as often as possible and to provide “details of what interests [her].” Here, as elsewhere, Sister Rosalie’s thoughts are of others.³⁴¹

Before leaving Sister Rosalie’s correspondence with Madame Badin it would be worthwhile to point out an important element of her charity which we find there, namely its universality. The letters show that Madame Badin’s sister had lost her husband. As a result, there were apparently some financial problems that might have interfered with her ability to provide for her son’s education. Sister Rosalie did not hesitate to use her own influence on behalf of this family, which had done so much for those who were poor for so long. She assured Madame Badin, “I will write to her and to the Reverend Superior. He must receive her son among the scholarship students. There are obligations that I shall not fail to point out.”³⁴²

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1 September 1848; note on the same paper dated 7 September 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 218 B3.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1850, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 246 B17. *

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

Thanks to her friendship and collaboration with Madame Badin, the indigent inhabitants of the Mouffetard district and the young women of the *ouvroir* were better served. Women and their families began to move out of misery and Sister Rosalie was deeply grateful. In the very last letter to Madame Badin that we possess, she acknowledges her friend's lifetime work, "You have sown well. Others will reap the harvest. You will have a great share in the merits of this work of charity."³⁴³

Fourth, the *Patronage (Social Center)*. Sister Rosalie was reluctant to see young women formed by the sisters leave completely. She feared that work and family responsibilities would cause them to abandon the practice of their religion. So it was that when, around 1840, her friend and collaborator Armand de Melun began, in collaboration with Jean-Léon Le Prevost and other confreres of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, to develop social centers for boys, she followed the initiative with interest.³⁴⁴

We do not know precisely when the social center opened at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, but according to Sister Tissot, Melun came frequently to talk with Sister Rosalie about this work. She saw its merits and its possible adaptation for young women and so she set about implementing it in the house.³⁴⁵ Melun quotes her as saying, "The work is good.... God will see that it succeeds.... We will begin next Sunday."³⁴⁶

The program was a simple one: instruction on religious and social responsibility, practical advice, sharing, and recreational activities. Sister Rosalie came herself, on occasion, to speak with the young women. She also persuaded some of the Ladies to come and to serve as mentors for them. We learn from Sister Tissot how quickly the work grew and how popular it became for the young women. In the beginning the sisters invited young women they knew, and encouraged them to bring their friends to the meeting. Later, the young women themselves did the recruiting. The method proved successful,

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4 February 1855, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 286 B24.

³⁴⁴ See Amédée d'Andigné, *Un apôtre de la charité, Armand de Melun 1807-1877* (Paris, 1901), 171-172; Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum Officium Historicum Parisien, *Beatificationis et Canonizationes Servi Dei, Joannis Leonis Le Prevost, Sacerdotis, Fundatoris Instituti Religiosorum S. Vincentii a Paulo (1803-1874), Positio Super Virtutibus Ex Concinnata* (Rome, 1988), 197-198, 237, 376, 392-395.

³⁴⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 55.

³⁴⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 75.

indeed, "The first time forty came. Some Ladies also came. Three months later, there were eighty young women. Later their number increased to one hundred thirty."³⁴⁷ Thus, these young women were helped in their Christian, personal, work, and family lives. But still it was not enough. Something additional was needed.

Fifth, the *Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel*. We are not certain of the date, but we learn from Sister Saillard³⁴⁸ and from Melun that Sister Rosalie founded, in the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, an association for young women who had been leaders in the social center but were now working or married and were, therefore, too old for the group or unable to attend the meetings because of their schedules. She asked these women to become mentors to the younger ones, to assist the Ladies who worked with the group, and to replace Sunday meetings with visits to the homes of those in need or other works of charity.³⁴⁹

Sister Rosalie took a special interest in the members of the association and introduced them herself into the service of those who were poor. She taught them the respect and gentleness that they were to bring to this privileged work. Each one gave what she could. Melun speaks of a particularly touching example:

...two young laundresses, who had neither money nor free time, came each week to collect the laundry for a poor old woman who had been confided to their care. They brought it back the following week, laundered and repaired.³⁵⁰

By working so closely with these young women, Sister Rosalie hoped to influence both their workplace and their home. She supported them as they made their way into the world of work which would be theirs for the remainder of their lives. Should they go on to more responsible positions, the lessons of the social center and the Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel would enable them to be good mentors for the apprentices working under their supervision.

Young mothers learned how to raise their children and how to maintain a Christian atmosphere in their homes. Even in the last

³⁴⁷ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 55.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁴⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 77.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

years when she became blind and could no longer leave her bedroom or little parlor, Sister Rosalie followed the activities of the association closely. She was anxious to hear about the meetings and about each of the members. She did not hesitate to send for them to encourage them or to reprimand them for some failure.

Her gratitude for the assistance of the Ladies was unflinching and she made certain that they were aware of this. Together with them, she sought ways to improve the work. The Sunday before her death she was occupied in up-dating the by-laws for the association.³⁵¹

Thus, through a combination of creativity and daring, Sister Rosalie found a way to provide integrated, holistic service from the cradle through adulthood and family life. All this was accomplished while the children or young adults remained within the social milieu in which they were born and where they would, in all likelihood, live out their lives. In her testimony, Sister Saillard wrote that Sister Rosalie:

...did not want to place children in orphanages; she thought that it was much more useful for young girls to experience the miseries of their poor home and the struggles of life than to spend a long time cut off [from them] and [then] find themselves, without transition, in a world with the dangers of which they were unaware. She did not want to open orphanages which are so numerous today.³⁵²

Sister Saillard's contention is supported by Sister Rosalie's own writings. Her letters to the Empress Eugénie³⁵³ and to a friend who was teaching young children³⁵⁴ reveal that she was adamant in her view that the education provided by the sisters should conform to the needs of the district, and that the children should not be removed from it only to return later unhappy and ill-adapted.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁵² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 63.

³⁵³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Empress Eugénie*, June 1854, AFCP, 8]2 - Ro - Le.

³⁵⁴ Cited by Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 61-62.



Empress Eugénie-Marie de Montijo (1826-1920),
wife of Emperor Napoleon III.

Public domain

Circumstances beyond her control, however, would oblige Sister Rosalie to alter, at least in some cases, her opposition to orphanages. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and, especially, the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1849, and 1854, would produce many orphans in the heavily hit Mouffetard district. Thus, in 1851, when misfortune struck the Orphanage of rue Pascal, she sent Daughters of Charity from rue de l'Épée-de-Bois to serve the children there.

Sixth, the *Orphanage of rue Pascal* (1851). In his biography, Melun credits Sister Rosalie, aided by the able and generous assistance of Madame Jules Mallet, with the foundation of this work.³⁵⁵ This, however, does not seem to have been the case. Much later, in a note added to a letter of Sister Rosalie's to Madame Mallet, dated 30 January 1854, Madame de Witt, Madame Mallet's daughter, states, "Letter to my mother, Madame Jules Mallet, who had founded in the neighborhood, the asylum for little orphans, rue Pascal, Saint-Marcel district, during the cholera [epidemic] of 1849."³⁵⁶

This seems to be substantiated by a letter of Madame Mallet herself in which we learn that the two Sisters of Providence, who had been running the orphanage on her behalf, had fallen ill themselves and that she was going to turn to the Daughters of Charity for assistance. She wrote:

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁵⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Jules Mallet*, 30 January 1854, Original; Bibliothèque protestante française à Paris, 756(2): p. 92.

My poor sisters, directresses of the house for the orphans, are both sick and are being recalled by their community. I hope to get some [sisters] of Saint Vincent de Paul. This would be a great security for me because my good Sister Rosalie would thus be their superior and I could withdraw little by little.³⁵⁷

Madame Mallet did indeed obtain Daughters of Charity from the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. Sister Rosalie placed 79 children at rue Pascal and became deeply involved with their care. She frequently went there to see that everything was in order. By 1852, though, the number of children had increased to a point where the facility was no longer adequate. The children were moved to a larger facility on rue Ménilmontant. Another group of Daughters of Charity assumed responsibility for the work which continued to prosper and which bore the marks of Sister Rosalie's presence, particularly "the simplicity in which [the children] were raised, and the ...thought that, after their first communion, [they] would be returned, as far as possible, to the common life and to an apprenticeship outside."³⁵⁸

Thus, Sister Rosalie's experience with an orphanage was limited. She preferred to serve children within their own social milieu.

From this examination of the works due to Sister Rosalie's initiative, it is apparent that her great thrust was toward work with women and children. There was, however, another group that touched her heart and whose sufferings she sought to alleviate, namely the elderly.

Seventh, the *Shelter for the Elderly* (1852). During an era when society in general had no safety nets for its most vulnerable members, those who could no longer work because of age and growing infirmity were in particular need of assistance. We have already seen that most of Sister Rosalie's requests for assistance addressed to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour, who was Administrator of the 16th Division of the Bureau of Public Assistance in the Saint-Marcel District, were for food, clothing or money for elderly men and women served by the "house

³⁵⁷ Madame de Witt, *Une belle vie, Madame Jules Mallet, née Oberkampf (1794-1856), Souvenirs et Fragments* (Paris, 1881), 109-110.

³⁵⁸ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 162.

of charity” of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois.³⁵⁹ She used all her influence to find placements for the elderly at the Hospital for the Incurables or at Bicêtre which, at this time, provided care for the elderly and mentally ill no longer able to remain in their own homes.

It was not always easy to convince elders that the time had come to give up their independence and humble dwellings to seek care. It took all Sister Rosalie’s powers of persuasion to obtain their consent, and her concern for them did not stop when she had found them a place. Sister Tissot tells us that:

...she gave [those being placed] a letter for the chaplain [containing] ...some money to be distributed to them, from time to time, [in the form of] tobacco or alcohol. She remained in touch with them by interesting letters. I was responsible for this correspondence for three years. I was supposed to tell them that our Mother continued to think about them, that she awaited news of them, and that she urged them to draw closer to our Good God. When one of their letters announced that they had been to confession, I had to respond immediately and tell them how happy she was about the well-being of their soul.³⁶⁰

The placement process, however, could be a lengthy one. The number of elderly needing care was large and places in a hospice were few and widely sought after. With her usual creativity and daring, and without any reliable source of revenue, Sister Rosalie found a temporary solution for her beloved elders when there was danger of their finding themselves on the street.

When the orphanage of rue Pascal outgrew the facility and moved to rue Ménilmontant, Sister Rosalie rented the space as a shelter for elders. There she assembled aged couples, whom she called her “celestial court,” and assured them free lodging until they were admitted to a hospice or died. Their surroundings were simple but clean and safe. They could bring furniture or tools with them, and those who were able could still do some work to help defray expenses.

³⁵⁹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio*, 53-60.

³⁶⁰ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 56.

Sister Rosalie and the sisters looked after the physical well-being of the "guests." They also strove to bring them back to the Church and the sacraments. Many of those who had strayed far from the Christian life in their younger years returned to it in the calm and peaceful environment of the shelter, which became a sort of "gateway to heaven and novitiate for eternity."³⁶¹

Throughout her last years, Sister Rosalie took particular pleasure in visiting the day nursery and the elders' shelter. She frequently brought visitors with her and introduced them to the guests whom she knew by name and whose stories she was able to share with these potential benefactors.³⁶² Nevertheless, the financial base for the elders' shelter was very shaky and a source of permanent concern for Sister Rosalie despite her conviction that Providence would provide. Melun states:

The expenses for the shelter did not exceed a few thousand francs annually. But the house resembled the [guests] whom it served. There was no revenue attached to it. It depended on daily good will for its rent. This never failed. At the end of each quarter, anonymous hands regularly came to bring the money necessary for the next period. Nothing in this liberality, however, could be thought of as a commitment or even a promise. The incertitude troubled Sister Rosalie.³⁶³

During her last illness, she often spoke of the shelter and of her desire to see it on firm footing before she died. She was frequently heard to say, "I will only die happy if I can give this work a solid and lasting character and assure my poor elders that they will never be put out of their home."³⁶⁴

At the moment of Sister Rosalie's death, her wish had not yet been realized. There was still no guarantee that this work, that was so dear to her heart, would survive her. However, eight months after her death, on 1 October 1856, her beloved elders took up residence in a house purchased in the district to provide, in perpetuity, shelter

³⁶¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 84.

³⁶² See *Ibid.*, 80-85.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

for the elders of the XIIth arrondissement. The initial funds had come from Sister Rosalie's friends. Then the Bureau of Public Assistance took over the work and assumed a major portion of the expenses. This collaboration of the public and private sectors to meet the needs of the elderly, which was a part of Sister Rosalie's legacy, found a fitting monument to her in the "Saint [sic] Rosalie Shelter."³⁶⁵

From 1830 to 1856, Sister Rosalie expanded works in education and health care that already existed at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, providing services to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district that extended from the cradle to the grave. These required creativity and daring on her part; all the more so because they developed during a tumultuous and often deadly era in France.

While she was seeking to alleviate the affliction of the already suffering population, the external forces of war and disease would descend upon them turning misery into death and devastation. The times would be dangerous but Sister Rosalie, with the quiet, unshakable courage that she had learned from her mother during the Revolution of 1789, would meet all challenges. Regardless of personal peril, she would be on the barricades and at the bedside of the cholera victims. For better or for worse, these are the events upon which Sister Rosalie's reputation is based. We shall now try to follow her during this troubled period and discover the woman of God behind the heroine.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

CHAPTER IX

REVOLUTION AND DISEASE: 1830-1854

SISTER ROSALIE AS HEROINE ON THE BARRICADES AND AT THE BEDSIDE OF CHOLERA VICTIMS

The Sister Rosalie that we turn to here is unquestionably the best known. She is most often viewed as a heroine of nearly mythical proportions. Her biographers portray her standing on the barricades during the fury of the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Moreover, not only is she seen defying death in the streets of Paris but also at the bedside of victims of the cholera epidemics that wreaked havoc in the Mouffetard area in 1832, 1849, and 1854. This image of the heroine is accurate. We do not dispute it. The problem lies not in presenting this reality but in limiting Sister Rosalie's life to these actions, however extraordinary they may be.

Given Sister Rosalie's character and up-bringing, it is not surprising that she reacted to events as she did. Born in 1786, she was not yet three-years-of-age when the Bastille was stormed and the Revolution of 1789, known simply as "THE French Revolution," began. The century that followed was unique in French history, or the history of any nation for that matter. It was an era of unprecedented political change as the government moved, generally amidst turmoil, from a monarchy to a republic, to an empire and then, once again, from a monarchy, to a republic to an empire.

Sister Rosalie experienced the Revolution of 1789 from a distance. She would live the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 firsthand. In Paris itself, she saw the end of the Consulate and the entire First Empire – Napoléon I (1802-1815); the Restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy – Louis XVIII and Charles X (1814-1830); the July Monarchy – Louis-Philippe (1830-1848); the Second Republic – Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (1848-1851); and the beginning of the Second Empire – Napoléon III (1852-1870).

Along with this radical political change came social and religious upheaval. The Industrial Revolution created prosperity for the middle class, but misery for the new urban poor who had been drawn to the capital by the false hope of a better life for themselves and their children. The Catholic Church, decimated during the Reign of

Terror, was restored but wounded. In varying degrees, anti-clericalism was ever-present. Today's supporters would be gone tomorrow.

Through it all, Sister Rosalie never lost her focus: to serve Jesus Christ in the person of those in need be they poor or rich, government forces or insurgents. All that was necessary to become the object of her solicitude was to need it. The form of government interested her only in its impact on those who were poor. Such an apolitical perspective was risky, even dangerous. Yet she remained undaunted and went about doing good for all those whose lives she touched with the quiet courage she had learned from her mother during the terrible days of the Reign of Terror.

Let us now turn to Sister Rosalie as a revolutionary heroine. Until 1964, the Daughters of Charity wore a blue-gray habit which was modeled on the peasant costume of the Île-de-France, the area of the country surrounding Paris where the Company was founded. It was the dress of the first country girls who came to the infant community. It consisted of a skirt, pleated in the back, a jacket with wide sleeves, an apron, a white collar, and a white cap that covered the head. As time went on, a second, large white head covering called a "cornette" was adopted to protect the sisters against the elements. After the restoration of the Company in the XIXth century, starch was



The dress of the first country girls who came to the community consisted of a skirt, pleated in the back, a jacket with wide sleeves, an apron, a white collar, and a white cap that covered the head. As time went on, a second, large white head covering called a "cornette" was adopted to protect the sisters against the elements.

Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

added. Thus, it became “winged” and captured the imagination of artists worldwide as the symbol of charity.

Sister Rosalie wore this cornette for the better part of her life as a Daughter of Charity. Walking the streets of Paris in it, she became synonymous with charity in the Mouffetard district and throughout the French capital. Consequently, when she mounted the barricades in 1830 and 1848, she was highly visible and identifiable. While it was clearly a courageous act, it was also a dangerous one and would bring her condemnation as well as admiration. She was equally impervious to both. Nothing deterred her from reaching out to help wherever the service of those in need called her, be it on the barricades or at the bedside of the sick and dying.

The *Revolution of 1830: les Trois Glorieuses – 27, 28, 29 July*. The question most frequently asked concerning this very brief revolt is, “Glorious for whom?” There is no simple response. Indeed, historians, both French and non-French, continue to debate its origins, participants, and significance. The Revolution of 1789 had, once and for all, broken the aura of the Divine Right of Kings and its demand for unthinking respect and blind obedience, which had previously surrounded the French monarchy. While the absolute monarchy was gone forever, neither presidents, nor emperors, nor kings could establish a stable regime accepted by the majority of the French people. Consequently, political unrest, particularly in Paris, became a constant.

Since Sister Rosalie remained apolitical, forging working relationships to benefit those who were poor with whatever government was in place, we will limit our discussion to the proximate causes of the street fighting that broke out in Paris on 27 July 1830, and to her actions during the three-day uprising and the period following it. The spark that turned unrest into rebellion seems to have been kindled by Charles X when, on 25 July, he issued a set of ordinances. These were laws passed without the approval of Parlement. Charles X naively and arrogantly believed that this was his right, and that the ordinances would be accepted without opposition. Had these ordinances been adopted, they would have dissolved the recently elected opposition Parlement before it had even met; reduced by half the number of deputies; deprived nearly three-quarters of the already minuscule electorate of the right to vote; and sharply curtailed freedom of the press.



Charles X (1757-1836),
King of France – 1824-1830.
Public domain

Instead of servile acceptance, the new laws created generalized alarm. François-René de Chateaubriand, a well-known French writer widely viewed as conservative and supportive of the monarchy, recorded his shock upon reading them. He wrote, "I could not believe my eyes... [they revealed] a total ignorance about the present state of society."³⁶⁶

This shock, however, was not immediately apparent. Lulled by a false sense of security, on 26 July the police began to move to implement the newly promulgated restrictions on the press. Rather than comply with the new laws, but reluctant to continue to print liberal newspapers, many publishers closed down their print shops and laid off their workers. It must be remembered that, during the XIXth century, there were a large number of small, mostly liberal newspapers, published in Paris by about 5,000 print-workers. It was a Monday, the usual day off for these workers. Many of them were milling about trying to keep cool in the thirty-two-degree C / ninety-degree F heat. At the same time, Adolphe Thiers, an influential liberal politician, and a small number of liberal deputies were meeting to discuss a response to the ordinances. Thiers drew up a petition, which

³⁶⁶ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, Volume III, P. Clarac (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), 159.

forty-three of his colleagues signed, urging the newspaper editors to ignore the ordinances and continue to publish. While the petition contained inflammatory declarations such as "The government has violated legality. We are no longer required to obey,"³⁶⁷ it was not intended to incite a revolution but to preserve freedom of the press. When, later that evening, the police tried to forcibly shut down a printing press in the center of Paris, there were a few scuffles with the crowd of onlookers. Nevertheless, the city was quiet by midnight.

The next day, 27 July, there were more minor skirmishes as the police proceeded to close down print shops and arrest journalists and editors. The level of unrest continued to rise as illegally published newspapers circulated through the crowds now in the streets. To further ignite the volatile situation, 1,500 armed troops were brought in to defend government buildings. The first deaths occurred in the late afternoon when mounted police, in an attempt to clear roads, charged into a crowd of demonstrators.

The night of 27-28 July saw intense revolutionary activity as demonstrators became insurgents. They broke into gun shops, made



Street scene of the 27, 28, 29 July 1830 Revolution.
Public domain

³⁶⁷ Pierre Rosanvallon, ed., *La Monarchie impossible* (Paris, 1994), 298.

primitive cartridges for the stolen weapons, and placed themselves under the command of some veterans of Napoléon's armies. By dawn of Wednesday 28 July, approximately 4,000 barricades had been erected across the narrow winding streets of the capital. The battle lines had been drawn. All it took was a single shot – fired from where or by whom, no one knew – for full-scale military clashes to develop. They would continue until, on 29 July, government troops were finally withdrawn from Paris.

At first glance, one would expect the army to triumph. They were better equipped and trained for battle. However, they lacked adequate food and water in the oppressive heat. Moreover, they were accustomed to fighting in open fields not in narrow streets. Nor were they prepared to respond to the guerrilla tactics so cleverly employed by the insurgents. Furthermore, they were demoralized. Charles X had abandoned Paris for his summer residence at Saint-Cloud, so they were left to guard empty buildings. They were also unaccustomed to fighting other Frenchmen, so their loyalties were divided. Their officers were confused by the street fighting and soon realized that they could not win. Thus, they began a strategic withdrawal which their troops readily executed. The revolutionaries had apparently won. They celebrated their surprising victory in the streets. Five days later, on 2 August, Charles X abdicated in favor of his grandson.

The influential politicians then invited Louis-Philippe, the leader of the Orléaniste branch of the royal family, to assume the post of Lieutenant-General in an interim government until the young prince came of age to take the throne. It immediately became evident that this would never happen: Louis-Philippe was crowned "King of the French" on 9 August 1830.³⁶⁸

So, we return to our initial question, "Glorious for whom?" If the July Revolution had been brief, it had also been bloody. In two days of street fighting, roughly 2,000 people had lost their lives: 200 soldiers and 1,800 revolutionaries. In addition, more than 5,000 had been seriously wounded: 800 soldiers and 4,500 insurgents.³⁶⁹ It is unclear just who all the revolutionaries were and what their agenda was other than the desire to overthrow the authoritarian rule of the Bourbon king. If there were journalists and students in the group, the dead and wounded came largely from the working class. They were,

³⁶⁸ Sharif Gemie, *French Revolutions: An Introduction* (Edinburgh, 1999), 1-26, 36-41.

³⁶⁹ Pamela Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (London, 1994), 62.

however, generally skilled laborers who, if not well-educated, were able, nonetheless, to enter into the political debate. In a word, they were not the illiterate, unskilled workers of the Mouffetard district.

When the dust had settled, the insurgents quickly realized that yet another autocratic government was in place. Nonetheless, the July Revolution did bring about some positive change. It increased the number of eligible voters; encouraged schooling; limited child labor; and permitted a bit more liberty to the press. But the big winners, for whom the *Trois Glorieuses* were indeed glorious, were the liberal politicians and the bankers. Once solidly in place, the liberal government, headed by Louis-Philippe, would do little to better the lives of unskilled workers and their families who, since 1825, had suffered the economic crisis besetting France. The result of this policy of neglect would be more years of civil unrest during which those who were poor continued to be the losers.

The Revolution of 1830 was a far cry from that of 1789, but it still had far-reaching consequences: ultra-royalism would never again be the dominant political culture in France and the Catholic Church, which had practically been an arm of government during the reign of Charles X, would face yet another wave of government sanctioned anti-clericalism. Nor did the liberal policies of the Louis-Philippe era bring about national stability. Rather, the *Trois Glorieuses* marked the beginning of a cycle of revolutions which continued to erupt throughout the XIXth century.³⁷⁰

Let us now examine Sister Rosalie's role during the terrible days of 27, 28, 29 July 1830. It should be noted that the Mouffetard district was not a focal point of this revolution. There were no barricades in rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. This, however, did not prevent Sister Rosalie from being directly involved nor did it shelter her from danger. The relative quiet of the neighborhood turned the sisters' house into a field hospital for the treatment of the wounded. It made no difference to Sister Rosalie, or to her sister companions, whether the injured were soldiers or revolutionaries; they all received the same devoted care.

While the sisters of the house provided most of the care for those who had been wounded, Sister Rosalie frequently went into the streets where fierce fighting was taking place. Combatants on both sides of the barricades urged her to seek shelter. She refused. Her

³⁷⁰ Gemie, *French Revolutions*, 36-38.

early days in the Mouffetard district had taught her that revolution did little to ameliorate the condition of those living in poverty. They bled and died only to see their misery increase. Thus, she went about pleading for an end to the hostilities. Eventually the gunfire ceased and the dead were buried.³⁷¹

In addition to her nearly constant presence in the streets, Sister Rosalie was involved in several well-documented actions that took place at the height of the July conflict and in the turbulent times following it: a highly dangerous rescue of a Civil Guard officer, Louis-Joseph Baccoffe de Montmahaut; her warning to and hiding of the archbishop, Monseigneur de Quélen, in the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois just before the episcopal palace was sacked by an angry mob; and her confrontation with the Prefect of Police who had issued a warrant for her arrest.

The Rescue. Monsieur Baccoffe was Sister Rosalie's age and had undoubtedly known her and her family as his father had land in the Gex-Confort area. His wife became Sister Rosalie's close friend and helper. Thus, in a moment of "terror," when her husband was missing, she turned to Sister Rosalie. The details were recounted by their daughter, Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe de Montmahaut, then 80 years-of-age, on 21 July 1912. She had first met Sister Rosalie in 1838. Seventy-four years later, the details of this initial encounter were still vivid in her mind.

In November-December 1838, the six-year-old had accompanied her family to the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. They were warmly received by Sister Rosalie and her sister companions. The little girl presented Sister Rosalie with a small donation. She never forgot her response, "How happy my poor people are going to be!" Then the child looked around at the Spartan little parlor, furnished with benches, and said, "I will buy you some beautiful chairs." Ignoring the attempts of her family to silence her, she added, "It is prettier at my aunt Ravinet's house." Unabashed by her young friend's frank observation, Sister Rosalie revealed in a few words her own preferential option for those who were poor, "That is because she is rich and I am poor." Little Mademoiselle Baccoffe had learned a powerful lesson. Before leaving, she promised that, once a

³⁷¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 162-163.

grownup, she would give Sister Rosalie money. She was faithful to her promise.³⁷²

It is not surprising then, that Marie Baccoffe could recount in detail an event that had taken place two years prior to her birth. The facts are that her father, Commander of the government troops in central Paris, was missing for two days during the heaviest fighting. He generally checked on the horses quartered in the Saint-Marceau district and was reported to have last been seen near there. Moved by his wife's desperate appeal, Sister Rosalie set out to find him. There was no sign of him around the stables so she continued on to the center of the city where the fiercest fighting was occurring. Undaunted by the danger she was in, she searched for him among the dead. There she found him barely breathing and rapidly losing blood from multiple gunshot wounds. She somehow persuaded some of the combatants to help her move him to safety where he could be treated. He recovered. She had saved his life at great peril to her own.³⁷³

When one reflects on this brief account of heroism, two questions arise: "Where did Sister Rosalie get the courage or the audacity to go out alone, in the midst of battle, to try to find her friend?" and "How did she remain unharmed?" We have already spoken of the quiet courage she had learned from her mother. This is certainly the basis for her response to the situation. Marie-Anne Rendu had hidden fleeing clergy at great risk to herself and her family. Stealth, however, was a key ingredient in her success. Mounting the barricades, clad in a large cornette, was quite another thing. Either side had ample opportunity to kill or wound her. She knew this and went anyway. Was it recklessness? Despite appearances, such does not seem to be the case. Rather we find here her conviction that, if God was calling her to assist those in need, Divine Providence would protect her. She was not reckless but she was fearless. Physical danger did not deter her nor, as we shall see later, did the wrath of the powerful.

God may have protected her but why did the combatants? This phenomenon clearly shows how well-known and respected she was by people who could agree on little else. Her tireless devotion to the needs of others won for her the right to speak, to be taken seriously, and to act. Her warnings were not always heeded but they were never silenced by force. She was the symbol of goodness and

³⁷² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 68.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 68-69; see also Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 208-211.

charity that insurgents and government troops alike needed, so she passed among them unharmed and even assisted.

Nor was this the first time that Sister Rosalie found herself involved with the military. According to Armand de Melun, she had entered into the fray as early as 1814. She was only twenty-seven years of age when this incident took place. Paris was occupied by the troops of the European nations allied against Napoléon. Sister Rosalie heard that a Russian soldier was to be executed for a violation of military discipline. Accompanied by an old woman, she went to the Russian encampment and demanded to speak to the commanding general. When he appeared, she dropped to her knees before him and pleaded for the soldier's life. Melun reports the ensuing dialogue:

"You know him and love him a great deal?" exclaimed the officer upon seeing the ardor of her request.

"Yes, I love him," she answered, "I love him as one of my brothers, redeemed by the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I am ready to give my life to save his."³⁷⁴

The condemned man was pardoned as a result of her intervention. Melun goes on to say that Sister Rosalie, who had most likely recounted the incident to him, hurried home "astonished at what she had just done and frightened at her own daring."³⁷⁵

Further occasions calling for bravery would not be lacking. The violence of the Revolution of 1830 did not end with the withdrawal of government troops from Paris on 29 July, or with Louis-Philippe's elevation to the throne as "King of the French" on 9 August. This revolution, as others in French history, was in essence a civil war with Frenchmen killing Frenchmen. When it ended, the time had come to settle scores, for the victors to punish the vanquished. The Church found itself prominently among the vanquished in the eyes of Louis-Philippe and the new liberal government. A violent wave of anticlericalism followed, often carried out by unwitting mobs.

The only letter of Sister Rosalie that we have for the year 1830 is one, dated 8 October, to her friend and cousin, Mélanie Rendu. It begins, like so many others, with words of comfort at a time of

³⁷⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 113.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

suffering. It moves quickly, however, to Sister Rosalie's alarm at the deterioration of the relationship between Church and State. She fears a possible repetition of the terrible events of 1793 when the Company of the Daughters of Charity was suppressed and the majority of the sisters were obliged to return to their homes.

It is clear in her letter that preparations were being made for another dispersal of the sisters. She describes the situation and her plans to her cousin, whose assistance she is seeking:

Enormous evils are afflicting France. We have reason to seek the mercy of God which we greatly need. The newspapers are inexact in their accounts of what is going on. I am limiting myself to telling you – and this is between us – that we are close to returning to our families, if our superiors so direct us. Circumstances will probably force them to do so. Also, my dear friend, please let me know if you would have a dwelling in Lancrans for my two Neyroud cousins and me and possibly Sister Jacquinod Cary. [Could the latter possibly be the Mademoiselle Jacquinot, with whom she entered the Daughters of Charity in 1802?] We have not yet reached this point but who knows whether it might happen when we least expect it. I believe that we should take precautions. If God grants us the grace not to make use of them, then we will be in for a pleasant surprise.³⁷⁶

Sister Rosalie does not want to alarm her family. Only as “a measure of prudence” was she sharing her “fears” with Mélanie and her cousin's mother. Twice more in this letter, Sister Rosalie speaks of her “fear.” She also acknowledges that “worry and fatigue” had taken their toll, but that she is better. This image of a woman who is fully aware of the danger in which she and her sisters were living and serving counterbalances that of the revolutionary heroine, seemingly unconscious of the perils surrounding her.

This letter also reveals Sister Rosalie's organizational abilities, even in stressful situations. Although she is making evacuation plans

³⁷⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu, 8 October 1830, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 7.*

"with tears in [her] eyes and a heavy heart," she is attentive to the smallest details. She assures her cousin that she and her companions will have adequate resources and thus will not be a financial burden to the family. Moreover, she intends to bring the furniture, linens, and decorations from the sisters' house and chapel with her. These were gifts to her and therefore the property of the Community. She states, "The agency cannot dispute this with me. I am in full compliance in this matter."³⁷⁷

We should note here that Sister Rosalie's critics have faulted her for inadequate record keeping. It is true that she often gave money to persons who were poor as fast as she received it, but this incident is another indication that she was careful in rendering an account of the goods of the community, the agency, and the poor.

Was Sister Rosalie being an alarmist? Had the situation really deteriorated to such a point that she would even consider leaving her "beloved poor" and returning to Confort? She acknowledges in this same letter, "It is very quiet here. This quarter, as you know, is isolated from all the vast tumult." She is also forced to admit that, like so many others, the revolution and its aftermath had taken her by surprise. She writes, "Three months ago, how far I was from expecting these terrible upheavals that are doing so much harm."³⁷⁸

It is clear from other sources that Sister Rosalie was not over-reacting. Nor would her "fear" prevent her from risking personal danger to help others who faced even greater perils. The violent anti-clericalism was all too real. The Jesuits of Paris, and other religious, were expelled from their residences.³⁷⁹ Closer to home, the Vincentian Priests and Brothers were fearful of a repetition of 1793. Adrien Dansette may be accurate in down-playing the anti-clericalism of the Louis-Philippe era when, in 1948, he states, "if one reflects on the terrible excesses of the great revolution [of 1789], one can assess the relative impact of the violence [of 1830]; it is more than a squall but it is not a cyclone."³⁸⁰ However, the people who had experienced the events of 1793 were all too conscious of how quickly the situation could degenerate.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ See Paul Thureau-Dangin, *L'Église et l'État sous la Monarchie de Juillet* (Paris, 1880), 81.

³⁸⁰ Adrien Dansette, *Histoire Religieuse de la France Contemporaine*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1948), 1:286.

During the worst days of the July conflict, Father Étienne, future Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, and his confrere, Father Aladel, future Assistant General and Director of the Daughters of Charity, dressed in lay attire and mixed with the crowds in the streets in an effort to learn if anything was plotted against the two motherhouses. They had reason to be apprehensive. Father Étienne described the attacks on religion that were occurring around them thus:

These were not directed only at the Monarchy but the Faith itself was subjected to its rigors; religious communities invaded, devastated, and their members dispersed; Priests were pursued and mistreated; the Archbishop of Paris himself is the object of the fury of the populace. He was obliged to put on a disguise and to hide in order to escape the dangers that threatened his life. We thought that the horrible days of 1793 were again upon us.³⁸¹

The Congregation of the Mission was also taken unawares by the July revolution. Three months earlier, on 25 April, they, along with Sister Rosalie and thousands of Parisians, had participated in the triumphal return of the relics of Saint Vincent de Paul, which had remained hidden since the sack of Saint-Lazare in 1789, to the chapel of their new motherhouse on rue de Sèvres. Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen, Archbishop of Paris, presided. The Archbishop expressed his aspirations for the solemn translation of the relics as follows:

Yes, we maintain this hope because it is the desire of our heart and our consolation that through the protection and intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul, under whose patronage we are placing the faithful of our diocese and, more especially, the numerous Associations of charity that are established within it; that God will receive greater glory, religion will be practiced more faithfully, the fountain of almsgiving will flow more fully and more abundantly, good works

³⁸¹ Étienne, *Notice sur le rétablissement*, 30-31.

will multiply and charity will perpetuate its reign among us. As a result of this, we will soon see the prejudices that separate, the bitterness that irritates, and the passions which divide, fade and disappear. We will also see a solid and durable peace, which true French people must be intent upon and never allow to be altered, grow strong in our beautiful homeland in the shadow of a beneficent and revered scepter.³⁸²

Those hopes were never realized. Three months later, the Bourbons were gone and the divisions ever deeper. While the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Dominique Salhorgne, C.M. (1829-1835), as well as students, novices, and other nonessential personnel, left the capital for the provinces, the Daughters of Charity remained in Paris. Both motherhouses were preserved from damage and the priests and sisters unharmed.³⁸³



Dominique Salhorgne, C.M.
Superior General – 1829-1835.

Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

³⁸² Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen, *Mandement de Monseigneur l'Archêveque de Paris, qui ordonne que le Te Deum sera chanté dans toutes les Églises de son Diocèse, en actions de grâces des grâces de la Translation solonnelle du Corps de saint Vincent de Paul et qui publie les Procès-Verbaux dressés à l'occasion de cette Solennité* (Paris, 1830), ACMP.

³⁸³ For more detail on this period, see Edward R. Udovic, C.M. *Jean-Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Revival* (Chicago, 2001), 146-158.

Several reasons have been put forth for this. The first is the appeal that Father Étienne made to the liberal mayor of Paris, Alexandre-Louis-Joseph, Comte de Laborde, who had earlier assisted the Congregation of the Mission when he had been an influential opposition deputy.³⁸⁴ Secondly, when a mob gathered to tear down the cross from atop the chapel of the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission, Father Étienne reprimanded them and then rushed to summon aid from the police. They responded and the crowd was dispersed.³⁸⁵

The third reason is a bit more complex. We referred earlier to Saint Catherine Labouré and the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin which led to the Miraculous Medal. They took place in July and November of 1830. The message of Mary to the young Sister Catherine on 18-19 July speaks of the “misfortunes” that will befall France and the protection the Company will know during them. Sister Catherine, herself, recounts it:

The times are evil. Misfortunes will befall France. The throne will be toppled. The entire world will be upset by misfortunes of all sorts.... But, come to the foot of the altar. Here I will spread graces over all persons who ask for them with confidence and fervor: both the great and the small.... My child, I particularly love to shower these graces on the Community. I love it very much.... The moment is coming when the danger will be great. It will appear that all is lost. There, I will be with you! Have confidence! You know of my visit and the protection of God and that of Saint Vincent for the two Communities. Have confidence! Do not be discouraged! Then I will be with you, but it will not be the same for other Communities. There will be victims... even among the clergy of Paris... the cross will be scorned... The streets will run with blood. The archbishop will be stripped of his vestments... the entire world will be sad.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 152, note 48.

³⁸⁶ Laurentin, *The Life of Catherine Labouré*, 75-76.

Fourthly, when looking back at the Revolution of 1830 and its aftermath, Father Étienne, who had been Procurator General during this terrible period, attributed the protection of the two communities to the “general movement toward charity” that marked the time after the Translation of the Relics of Saint Vincent de Paul. He cites the founding of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.³⁸⁷

Fifthly, Edward Udovic, C.M., puts forth a “less mystical explanation of why the community remained unscathed.” It was quite simply because it “did not meddle in politics and was committed to obey whatever government held power.”³⁸⁸

We have no way of knowing whether or not Sister Rosalie was aware of the details of the apparitions. We do know, however, that she was living its reality. The Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission were protected. Blood was flowing in the streets, and other congregations of men and women were not so fortunate as to be spared. By February 1831 the archbishop, himself, would be forced into hiding. Once again we find Sister Rosalie directly involved in the struggle.

As pointed out earlier, the government of Louis-Philippe was strongly anti-clerical. While its most overt and violent manifestation was certainly in Paris, the provinces were not spared. The Bishop of Châlons in Champagne, Monseigneur Marie-Joseph-François-Victor Monyer de Prilly, who knew Sister Rosalie well from working closely with her during his student days as a seminarian at Saint-Sulpice, wrote to her in November 1830 to tell her of the burning of the minor seminary in his diocese. He told his mentor and friend:

We also, my dear Sister, have the honor of being persecuted. [Brigands] set fire to my minor seminary. Fortunately, the firemen rushed to us and saved the house. Without them, it would have been reduced to ashes. However, because our youngsters were continuously threatened and insulted and because, even after this attempt, [the brigands] revealed their plan to burn the house, I had to have [the boys] leave and return to their families.

³⁸⁷ Étienne, *Notice sur le rétablissement*, 32.

³⁸⁸ Udovic, *Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*, 157.

These poor children did not have a moment's rest. We had to watch over them while they slept. They did not dare to undress for fear of being surprised by another attack. It was truly pitiful to witness such wickedness and cruelty on the one hand and such gentleness and innocence on the other. They were like lambs whose throats enraged wolves wanted to rip out. However, wolves only devour [their prey] to appease their hunger. Instead, these villains had but one pretext and one motive, the desire to do evil. We were forewarned that we would be astounded by the circumstances, and that nothing would be like what we saw in other eras or during the first revolution. We accept what comes and have no other desire than to see the Will of God accomplished in all things. We need to assist one another by our prayers. May our Lord grant us peace and respond to the desires of those good souls who implore Him and strive to assuage His anger.³⁸⁹

Sheltering Monseigneur de Quélen. Back in Paris, the church and rectory of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois were pillaged on 14 February 1831. The episcopal palace was to be attacked on 15 February. The night before, however, Sister Rosalie learned of this plan to punish Archbishop de Quélen for what was popularly believed to have been his role in the promulgation of the Ordinances of 25 July. A man in apparent need, to whom Sister Rosalie offered a voucher for bread, refused it telling her, "Sister, we don't need vouchers. Tomorrow we will sack the archbishop's palace."³⁹⁰

Sister Rosalie's reaction was that of her mother who, those many years ago in Confort, had hidden a bishop in their home. With the same courage Sister Rosalie warned Monseigneur de Quélen of the danger, and offered to hide him in the sisters' house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. He accepted and remained several days. The palace was indeed pillaged while the military passively stood by.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Letter of Victor Monyer de Prilly to Sister Rosalie, 20 November 1830, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Lc 9.

³⁹⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 165, note 1.

³⁹¹ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 211-212.

According to Melun, several religious also found refuge in the house.³⁹² Monseigneur Monyer de Prilly's letter, cited above, would seem to confirm this. However, only one is clearly identified. In his testimony during the diocesan process for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification, Adolphe-Marie-François Cabon, C.S.Sp., a Spiritan priest, mentions that the Jesuit Procurator, Father Genesseau, had sought and been given refuge at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. He was apparently still there in 1832.³⁹³ Whatever the number, one thing is certain, this was a very dangerous situation, far more perilous than hiding the bishop in Confort. The volume of traffic in and out of the house, of people of all political persuasions, threatened everyone there with discovery and the ensuing dire consequences. However, the refugees were never betrayed. The same general respect that protected Sister Rosalie on the barricades safeguarded her and those around her once again.

But the trouble was far from over. A letter to her cousin Mélanie, dated 19 March 1832, reveals Sister Rosalie's consternation. She wrote:

Oh! How miserable we are in Paris! Religious persons are persecuted. You have no idea of the fears that one rightly has for the future.... We expect anything at all. You must pray for us so that we will make good use of all these trials.³⁹⁴

Sister Rosalie's assessment of the situation was correct. On 5-6 June 1832 there were further bloody conflicts producing 800 victims in Paris.³⁹⁵ According to her biographers, it was at this time that some religious women who ran a school for little girls in the area of the insurrection turned to Sister Rosalie for protection. They had heard about rumors circulating in the streets that their establishment would be set afire. After assuring the sisters that they and the children would be unharmed, Sister Rosalie found several trustworthy armed men who agreed to stand guard around the building. Probably influenced by the sensitivity with which Sister Rosalie reached out to all in need,

³⁹² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 165.

³⁹³ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 7.

³⁹⁴ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 19 March 1832, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Lc 7.

³⁹⁵ J. Lucas-Dubreton, *Louis-Philippe* (Paris, 1938), 265-272.

the leader ordered his men to be quiet so as not to awaken or frighten the children or the sisters. Indeed, all were protected and the edifice remained intact.³⁹⁶

Confrontation with the Prefect of Police. The difficulty Sister Rosalie was to have with her superiors as a result of this incident has led to some confusion as to whether it occurred following the Revolution of 1830 or in 1848, as it was often assumed that the superior general in question was Father Étienne who was not elected until 1843. Melun, Desmet, and more recently Dinnat, however, place it in 1832.³⁹⁷ An interview in 1935, by Maurice Collard, C.M., with the then Superior General, François Verdier, C.M., which is part of the written testimony submitted for the Diocesan Process for Sister Rosalie's beatification in 1953, appears to both support and contradict this assumption.³⁹⁸ The final quote from Father Verdier states, "The blame was placed in such a way that [Sister Rosalie] was not mistaken by it and she believed that she was permitted to be heroic a second time."³⁹⁹ The "second time" presumably was during the Revolution of 1848.

Notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that this confrontation with the Prefect of Police occurred in 1832 as the prefect involved, Monsieur Henri-Joseph Gisquet, held this office only from 1831 to 1836. Nonetheless, one can be reasonably certain that the behavior that led to "blame" occurred during both revolutions. The government and the superiors of the Company were definitely concerned about it in 1830 as well as 1848. Governmental displeasure with Sister Rosalie could translate into problems for the Congregation of the Mission, as well as for the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Moreover, the government in power clearly resented her aiding and abetting those whom they looked upon as enemies. Yet Sister Rosalie, as a Daughter of Charity and as the daughter of Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu, could hardly have acted otherwise. What then was she doing to stir up the high and mighty? She hid and/or facilitated the escape of men accused of participating in the revolts.

The facts concerning Sister Rosalie's encounter with the Prefect seem to be that word of her activities had reached him, leading him to sign a warrant for her arrest. However, cooler heads prevailed.

³⁹⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 166.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167-169; Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 214-217; Dinnat, *Sœur Rosalie Rendu ou L'Amour*, 115-116.

³⁹⁸ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 78-80.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

The officer charged with executing the warrant convinced the Prefect that such a move would lead to an uprising in the Mouffetard district, where Sister Rosalie was beloved by all regardless of their political persuasions. But Monsieur Gisquet was not completely deterred. He decided to go to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois to warn Sister Rosalie of the measures being prepared against her. When he arrived, he had to wend his way through the crowd of persons who were poor waiting to see her. He asked if he could speak with her in private. Sister Rosalie did not recognize him but, as was her custom, she welcomed him politely and explained that he would have to wait until she had received all those awaiting their turn to see her. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the story is that this powerful and angry man did indeed wait. When the last of the needy had left, Sister Rosalie returned and asked the Prefect how she might assist him. The following dialogue ensued:

“Madame,” responded Monsieur Gisquet, “I did not come seeking service but rather to render you one. I am the Prefect of Police.... Do you realize, Sister, that you are seriously compromised? In contempt for the law, you helped an officer of the former royal guard to escape. By his open revolt against the government, he had deserved the most serious punishment. I had already given the order to arrest you. I withdrew it upon the supplication of one of my officers. However, I have come and I want to hear from you how you dared to place yourself in a position of revolt against the law.”

“Monsieur le Préfet,” replied Sister Rosalie, “I am a Daughter of Charity. I do not have a flag. I go to the aid of the unfortunate wherever I encounter them. I try to do good for them without judging them. I promise you, if ever you, yourself, are being pursued and you ask me for help, it would not be refused you.”⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 168-169; Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 214-215.

While this conversation surely revealed Sister Rosalie's courage and her commitment to all in need, it did not convince the Prefect of the validity of her position. As he was leaving, he turned to her and said, "I am willing to close my eyes on the past... but I beg of you, Sister, do not begin again. It would be too painful for us to take punitive action against you."⁴⁰¹ Sister Rosalie's response indicated that she had no intention of heeding the prefect's warning. She told him, "Truthfully, I cannot promise you this. I feel that if a similar situation presented itself, I would not have the courage to refuse assistance. A Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul never has the right, whatever the consequences, to fail in charity."⁴⁰²

Indeed, the following week Sister Rosalie was again assisting fugitives from the police. This time both Sister Rosalie and the escapee were nearly caught right in the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. An officer, from the province of Vendée, had come to thank Sister Rosalie for the help that she had provided for some of his men. While he was there, the police commissioner arrived. Sister Rosalie told the officer of the danger he was in and urged him to flee. In the meantime, she engaged the commissioner in conversation for an hour, allowing the man to escape. It appears that the commissioner later discovered her ruse and chided her for it. She told him, "I did it as much for you as for him. I wanted to spare you the distress of arresting him and the trouble of imprisoning him. Did I not do the right thing?"⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 170.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 170-171.



XIXth century Police Commissioner.
Public Domain

While the commissioner would not go so far as to admit, even to himself, that Sister Rosalie was right, he must have reflected on the fact that, in those troubled times when, in a few hours, the vanquished once again became the victors, it was wise not to make too many enemies. Thus, he did nothing against her. This state of affairs became evident in the Mouffetard quarter when a representative of the government enacted an unwise measure for the population. They rose up against him. They massed before his house shouting threats. The terrified man turned to Sister Rosalie for help. She hastened to his home immediately, not pausing to reflect that he belonged to the same government that had issued a warrant for her arrest. When she arrived, she recognized the would-be insurgents. She chastised them for leaving their work to become involved in a potential riot which could have dire consequences not only for them but for their families. They heeded her admonition and left. The riot was avoided and the bureaucrat was safe. And, more importantly, in Sister Rosalie's eyes, there was no more bloodshed in a quarter that had seen so much.⁴⁰⁴

The government, however, was not content to let the situation continue. Sister Rosalie was judged incorrigible and indeed she

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

was. So, they turned to the superiors of the company. In 1832, the Superior General was Dominique Salghorne, C.M. (1829-1835). These superiors were obliged to bring the government's remonstrances about her "imprudent and ill-considered" behavior to her attention.⁴⁰⁵ They certainly did so, but they did not remove her from the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois where she remained as superior until her death in February 1856. Sister Rosalie's critics cite this as an example of disobedience.

The government surely knew what it was doing when it changed the issue from a conflict between an individual sister and civil authority to a matter of religious obedience. Opinions are divided on both the thought behind the admonition she received and the intent of her superiors when they issued the reprimand. Father Collard's testimony sheds some light on the matter. Once again we turn to his interview with Father Verdier, during which the superior general stresses the distinction between the official position that superiors are obliged to take publicly and their innermost thoughts. They must always keep before them the good of the company and the risks it would face were they to ignore the complaints of the government. There seems, nonetheless, to have been no direct order for Sister Rosalie to terminate her activities. Thus, there is no question of a failure in formal obedience. Whether in 1830-1832 or in 1848, and most likely during both revolutions, superiors must have been concerned not only because of the delicacy of the company's relationship with the government, which was often anti-clerical, but especially because Sister Rosalie's actions, be they reckless or heroic, placed her companions, as well as herself, in very real danger.

Father Verdier goes on to reflect that, for Sister Rosalie, the inner conflict was to weigh submission to the counsels of prudence she had received and her duty of charity. Charity obviously and "rightly," in his opinion, prevailed. Father Verdier asks the questions that must have challenged superiors in these grave matters and persuaded them not to remove her from the Mouffetard district. Moreover, they surely realized that such a move would have given rise to a whole different set of problems since Sister Rosalie's "beloved poor" would never have allowed her to go gently into the night. The superior general asks:

⁴⁰⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 79.*

Finally, can you imagine a Daughter of Charity driving away a poor soul threatened with being executed? A Daughter of Charity turning him in? But that is what would have imprinted an indelible blemish on the reputation of the Community...⁴⁰⁶

Thus, Sister Rosalie continued, with a clear conscience, and with no direct interference from major superiors, to protect and assist those whom the vagaries of war had turned into helpless fugitives. Let us now turn our attention to the Revolution of 1848.

The *Revolution of 1848*. The Revolution of 1830 had brought a constitutional monarch, Louis-Philippe, "King of the French," to power. The Revolution of 1848 would force him to abdicate, giving birth to the Second Republic on 25 February. The high hopes that had followed the Orléaniste's rise to the throne were quickly dashed for the vast majority of the population. His eighteen-year reign was marked by turmoil and violence, economic crises, the increasing misery of the working classes, and, in 1847, famine. Added to this were some excessively bitter winters and a cholera epidemic. Nearly seventy years after the Revolution of 1789, the ideals of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" were an impossible dream for most. The persons living in poverty in Sister Rosalie's "diocese," as she called the Mouffetard district, were increasingly "*Les Misérables*" whom Victor Hugo portrayed so poignantly in his novel of the same name. Hugo wrote:

It sometimes happens that, even against all principles, even against liberty, equality and fraternity, even against universal suffrage, even against the government of all by all, that, from the depths of its anguish, its discouragement, its destitution, its frenzy, its distress, its stench, its ignorance, its darkness, this great mass of desperation, the rabble, protests and brings the battle to the people.... These are dismal days because there is always a certain amount of justification even in this madness, suicide in the duel. And, these words that are meant to be insulting:

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

"beggars, rabble... populace," establish, alas! the fault of those who rule rather than the errors of those who suffer; the failures of the privileged rather than the fault of the disenfranchised.... The frustration of this crowd which suffers and bleeds, its violence in opposition to the principles that are its life, its actions against the law, are a popular coup and must be repressed.⁴⁰⁷



Louis-Philippe (1773-1850),
"King of the French" – 1830-1848.
Public domain

And they would be. But what had led to this madness, which Sister Rosalie had foreseen so plainly as early as 1840? She expressed her apprehension to a friend and former collaborator, L.C. de Falvelly, in November of that year. She wrote:

In Paris, we are on a volcano. Every day we fear a revolution. Spirits are riled up; minds are tormented. It is true that we are so wicked that we need to be chastised. Irreligion is at its height. The population is demoralized. Never have we seen such a great torrent of corruption.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 5^e Partie, Livre 1^{er} (Livre de Poche, II), Chapitre 1, 1577-1578.

⁴⁰⁸ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to L.C. Falvelly*, 15 November 1840, AFCEP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 147 - La 8.

Sister Rosalie was not overreacting. In February 1848 the volcano of revolution erupted.

Let us now turn briefly to the confluence of circumstances that transformed street violence into revolt. One hundred and fifty-eight years ago, the Revolution of February 1848 brought about the rebirth of the Republic in France. Unlike the Revolution of 1830, which was essentially political in nature, the uprisings of February and June 1848 were rooted in the social conditions of the day and influenced, at least in part, by Christian social thought. They would have far reaching effects on society as a whole, as well as on French economy and culture. The anti-clericalism which followed the Revolution of 1830 abated. The dedication of numerous Catholics, including Armand de Melun, Jean-Léon Le Prevost, and Frédéric Ozanam, and the spread of charitable works had brought many closer to the Church. By the time the tragic events of 1848 occurred, Sister Rosalie had already become a symbol of charity in the midst of turmoil. The bloody events of February, and particularly June, 1848 would only enhance that image. While an in-depth examination of all these factors is clearly beyond the scope of this study, it should be pointed out that 1848 is considered by many historians as a key moment in the development of the democratic tradition in France and across Europe.

The principal players in 1830 had been the King, Charles X, members of the National Assembly, the King of the French, Louis-Philippe, liberal politicians, wealthy bourgeoisie, and bankers. The gains had been largely in the political arena. Louis-Philippe represented a compromise: a constitutional monarch. By 1848, the conditions in which those who were poor lived and worked had become intolerable. The government of Louis-Philippe, supported by the bourgeoisie, became ever more conservative and authoritarian. Meanwhile, liberal, democratic ideas took hold among the working classes. On 10 February, in the newspaper, *Le Correspondant*, Frédéric Ozanam urged Catholics to adopt a preferential option for the working class and to support movements toward democracy. Meanwhile, the factors leading to revolt were in place: government scandal and economic collapse that left 750,000 workers unemployed while prices rose. Troubled by what he saw around him, Ozanam wrote to his friend Joseph-Théophile Foisset, editor of *Le Correspondant*:

We must look after the people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who are rightly

demanding a greater role in public affairs, job security, and protection from misery.⁴⁰⁹

The very day that the principal founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul addressed this plea to his friend, that is, 22 February 1848, the masses took to the streets. Fifteen hundred barricades were erected in the poorest districts of the capital. Ironically, the Mouffetard district was not one of them. The Civil Guard was sent immediately to quell the rebellion. But some of the soldiers abandoned their posts and joined the insurgents. On 24 February, in a state of panic, Louis-Philippe abdicated. On 25 February, Alphonse de Lamartine and Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin formed a provisional government and proclaimed the Second Republic. As in 1830, the Mouffetard district had not been the center of the turmoil. The inhabitants, who had lived in misery for so long and had barely escaped the ravages of the famine of 1847, had little hope that government, whatever its form, could or would do anything to alleviate their plight. They accepted the Republic, but had not had anything to do with bringing it about. Indeed, Sister Rosalie, who saw those who were poor as the losers in every armed conflict, urged patience.



Barricaded street with dead insurgents.
Public domain

⁴⁰⁹ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Joseph-Théophile Foisset," Paris, 22 February 1848; Frédéric Ozanam, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1978), 2:379.

Once established, the provisional government moved quickly. It opened national workshops to provide work for the thousands of unemployed. It decreed freedom of the press, the right of assembly, and universal suffrage. This latter, of course, is universal male suffrage. The number of eligible voters went from 240,000 to 9,000,000. On Easter Sunday, 23 April, they voted for their representatives, including fifteen clergymen. This is a rather dramatic indication that the February 1848 Revolution, at least at the beginning, had none of the anti-clericalism that characterized so much of the Revolution of 1830 and its aftermath. On 24 February, a spontaneous procession was organized to transfer the crucifix and sacred vessels from the chapel of the Tuileries, which the insurgents had sacked, to the church of Saint-Roch. Monseigneur Affre, Archbishop of Paris, expressed his joy at the moderation and religious sentiment of the people. Preaching at Notre-Dame, Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, O.P., considered the greatest "pulpit orator" of the XIXth century, announced an alliance between the young Republic and the Church. He told the assembled faithful, "We are assisting at one of those hours when God reveals Himself. Yesterday He went through our streets and the entire world saw Him."⁴¹⁰ Even the parish priests, who had suffered so greatly during the First Republic, joined in the celebration and blessed the "Liberty Trees" that were being planted about the city.

But all was not calm. The poor working classes remained the object of considerable debate. The first issue of a newspaper entitled, *L'Ère Nouvelle*, "The New Era," was published on 15 April. Frédéric Ozanam was one of the principal contributors. In this republican, democratic newspaper he found a platform to express his strongly held convictions: democracy, the defense of those who were poor, the demands of justice. He went so far as to set forth a plan for social reform that went contrary to the tenets of economic liberalism. Nor did it take long for him to incur the wrath of conservatives, who had come to look upon democracy as a danger that needed to be rooted out by whatever means necessary.⁴¹¹

In the midst of this political and social turbulence, Sister Rosalie and her companions continued to minister to all in need, whatever their views. The spring of 1848 saw numerous popular celebrations.

⁴¹⁰ B. Chocarne, *Le Révérend Père Lacordaire* (Paris, 1866), 517-522.

⁴¹¹ Georges-Albert Boissinot, *Un autre Vincent de Paul: Jean-Léon Le Prevost (1803-1874)* (Montréal, 1991), 217-222.

On Holy Thursday, the people commemorated the national feast of Fraternity. On the Champs-Élysées, the army and the Civil Guard received the new flag while 300,000 spectators proclaimed the Republic and the Assembly. But the closing of the national workshops on 22 June would change all that. The next day, another insurrection exploded in the streets of Paris. And this time the barricades and fighting were right outside the sisters' house and all along rue Mouffetard. Despite the general euphoria the new republic inspired, Sister Rosalie had seen storm clouds gathering on the horizon. On 27 March 1848, she wrote to her friend, Cyprien Loppe, who was living in Rouen, "We are in a violent state here. You cannot imagine what Paris is like. This revolution is in no way comparable to that of 1830."⁴¹² The February uprising had been violent and produced many victims, but the June insurrection was deadly. Moreover, it would prove disastrous for her "beloved poor" of the Mouffetard district. They had already taken up arms and erected barricades by 18 June, when Sister Rosalie wrote once again to Cyprien Loppe to ask for prayers. She described the volatile situation, "...our needs are great. Never have we seen such anxiety as at the present time. Our poor are dehumanized, demoralized, and adrift. There is atrocious disorder."⁴¹³



Distribution of barricades in Paris during the June 1848 uprising.
Public domain

⁴¹² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe, 27 March 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 212 L38.*

⁴¹³ *Ibid., 18 June 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 215 L39.*

And when fighting broke out, the reality was even more horrifying than imagined a few days earlier. According to Melun, who had likewise lived this terrible time, Sister Rosalie described the horror thus, "I believe that if, at that moment, you had descended into hell, you would not have found a single devil there. They were all in our streets. I will never forget their faces."⁴¹⁴



Fighting in the streets of Paris – 1848.
Public domain

Once again, the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois became a refuge and a field hospital for the wounded and dying regardless of which side they had fought for. Sister Costalin, who lived and worked with Sister Rosalie during those terrible June days, recalled the events in her testimony for the Cause of Beatification. She stated:

The insurrection was at its height. Our courtyard and entry hall were covered with straw on which the wounded and those who had died on the barricades were lying. We had come together for a little [spiritual] reading when a military aide to Cavaignac arrived: "The General has sent me to tell you that, because he cannot overcome the obstinacy of the district, he is going to go after them with hammer and thongs (an expression of the era). He is holding an escort at your disposition to take you and your sisters out if

⁴¹⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 174-175.

the insurgents do not surrender in two hours." The superior responded, "Sir, thank the General and tell him that we are the servants of those who are poor and also their mothers and that we want to die with them."⁴¹⁵

It is worth noting that General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac would become Chief of the Executive Branch of the new government. His message shows the concern and respect that he had for Sister Rosalie and the little community of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, and his desire to see that no harm came to them. They were grateful for his warning and offer of safe passage but they chose to remain with their "beloved poor." Once again Divine Providence protected them.



General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac (1802-1857).
Chief of the Executive Branch, 28 June 1848-10 December 1848.
Public domain

There are other incidents, from this period, of extraordinary courage and daring on the part of Sister Rosalie. One involved an officer of the security police. He was being pursued by the insurgents when he succeeded in finding refuge in the sisters' house. Sister Rosalie went out into the courtyard and placed herself between the officer and his pursuers, crying out, "We don't kill here! ...In the name of my fifty years of devotedness, for all that I have done for you, your

⁴¹⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 49.

wives, and your children, I ask you for this man's safety." And the man was saved.⁴¹⁶

During these terrible June days, Sister Rosalie was frequently seen circulating in the Mouffetard neighborhood where some of the fiercest fighting was taking place. In a letter to Eugène Rendu in 1880, Claude-Philibert-Édouard Mounier, a government minister at the time of the June 1848 uprising, speaks of Sister Rosalie's heroism:

During the days of June 1848, huge barricades were raised close to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. The fighting was terrible there, as it was in certain other points in Paris, when Sister Rosalie thrust herself into the midst of the turmoil and climbed the barricades, ready to give her life to stop the musket fire. Her attitude, gestures, and exhortations were understood. She saved the lives of a number of men.⁴¹⁷

Another account of Sister Rosalie's actions in 1848 comes from Albert Billaud. His testimony during the Cause of Beatification is particularly moving. He had heard of Sister Rosalie from his grandfather and his great-uncle as well as workers of his parents' generation who had known her or known of her. He was a simple newspaper vendor who worked nights, and he often talked about her with his customers who came from a wide spectrum of social classes. His responses to questions addressed to him, however, reveal how profoundly Sister Rosalie had touched the lives of the humble people to whose service she had dedicated her life. He tells what he had learned of her heroism in 1848:

During the revolution she did unbelievable things. Only our Good God knows about it. She went everywhere. She passed everywhere. The guns stopped when they saw her coming. They even helped her to cross the barricades. The insurgents offered to accompany her. She came to the aid of the wounded and the dying.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 177-179; Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 231.

⁴¹⁷ Letter of E. Mounier to Eugène Rendu, 25 September 1880, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - SM - XV.

⁴¹⁸ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, *Positio; Sommaire*, 21-22.

Sister Rosalie's activities in 1848, as they had been in 1830-1832, are legendary. Sister Louise-Clémence Saillard, who had been with Sister Rosalie in 1851-1852, during the initial stage of her own formation, recounts what she heard and observed in her testimony for the Cause of Beatification, written 46 years after Sister Rosalie's death:

She was known and loved by these people whose mothers, wives, and children she had raised, whom she had assisted and consoled in all their suffering. This memory, which she evoked, gave her power, at the time of the revolution of 1848, to cause guns to fall from the hands of the insurgents, who were pursuing, to the threshold of the house, men they wanted to execute. Threatened with death herself, compromised if she refused to hand them over, she calmly addressed them, "I fear only God. Grant me the lives of these unfortunates. It is the first thing I have asked of you since I have been in your midst." The [fugitives] escaped over the garden wall while this discussion was going on. They never forgot the woman who had saved their lives.⁴¹⁹



Sister Rosalie stopping insurgents from pursuing the enemy.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Finally, the gunfire ceased, but not before the Church of France suffered a devastating loss. On 25 June, urged on by Frédéric Ozanam and Emmanuel Bailly, who had been the first President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (1833-1844), the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Affre, mounted the barricades to plead for an end to the fratricide. Two of his vicars general accompanied him. He carried with him a declaration from the government forces, calling upon the rebels to lay down their arms and promising them amnesty. At the first barricade, he encountered a more or less receptive crowd but, at the entrance to the Saint-Antoine district, he faced a violent and recalcitrant mob. Shooting resumed and he could barely be heard in the chaos. Suddenly he collapsed. A bullet had struck him in the area of the kidneys. During the night of 26-27 June he died of his wounds. We do not know who fired the bullet that killed him. It is generally believed to have been a fanatic among the workers. The archbishop was surely recognized. He had assisted at many celebrations that church and state observed together after the proclamation of the Second Republic. He was respected by the people and trusted by the government. He was as safe in the midst of the tumult as anyone could reasonably expect to be in so dangerous an undertaking. But he was shot and fatally wounded. No one can stop a fanatic in the midst of mayhem, but more, perhaps, than anything else, this tragic incident shows the veneration that all the combatants had for Sister Rosalie, who had become the very symbol of goodness and charity in



25 June 1848, shooting of Archbishop Denis-Auguste Affre on the barricade near Saint-Antoine district.

*Courtesy of the Vincentiana Collection
DePaul University Libraries, Chicago, Illinois*

the capital. Divine Providence, and her quiet but tenacious courage to reach out in service to all in need, protected her.

Once calm was restored, the ruthless process of settling scores began. The government had won and went about rooting out and punishing those who had dared to take up arms against it. All resistance was to be crushed. To this end, all suspects were rounded up. Fifteen thousand were shot without any legal recourse. Twenty-five thousand were arrested and eleven thousand among them were sent to prison or were deported to a penal colony.⁴²⁰ The insurgents had, for the most part, come from the poor working classes. The wealthy population had always looked upon them as rabble rousers and dangerous. The terror of the rebellion led them to call for blood. A politically savvy government knew it had to oblige. So Sister Rosalie had another cause: to obtain the release of prisoners from the Mouffetard district whom she believed had been “more misguided than guilty.” Moreover, she never hesitated to go to the highest levels of government when the well-being of those who were poor required it. We learn in a letter from General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac’s mother to Sister Rosalie that the latter had written to her to plead her cause, and to ask Madame Jean-Baptiste Cavaignac to intervene with her son for poor workers who were the only source of support for their families. However, she sometimes encountered insurmountable obstacles, as in this case. Madame Cavaignac responded with regret, and with a testimony of her respect for Sister Rosalie:

When you spoke to my son about those men, whom you believed to be more misguided than guilty, and he told you to send him their names, there was not yet a question of review boards. He must have thought that those who would be designated, on the recommendation of people worthy of trust, as deserving a pardon would be pardoned and released. However, since the establishment of review boards, they alone, after reviewing the verdicts, pronounce on the fate of the accused. But, my son has nothing to do with this, at least at the present time. The review boards alone decide, confirm, or revoke verdicts already handed down. You know well, Mother, that

⁴²⁰ Dinnat, *Sœur Rosalie Rendu ou L'Amour*, 167-168.

if matters depended on us, your very word, you the holy servant of [all who are] poor of this district whose mother and providence you have been for forty-six years, you know well that your guarantee would be the best of all. However, once again, from the moment that everything was placed in the hands of judges, it is for them alone to pronounce...⁴²¹

We do not know how many, if any, of the Moufflard insurgents in government custody and awaiting execution or prison for their participation in the revolution, Sister Rosalie was able to save. We can be certain that she tried every avenue open to her to achieve this goal. The bloody days of June had taken the lives of a thousand government troops and thousands of rebels, many of whom, unlike February, lived in the area of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and whom Sister Rosalie knew personally. This was a terrifying reminder that she was absolutely correct in her conviction that, in these fratricidal conflicts, those who were poor were always the losers.

While all this was going on, the Second Republic was formally established and Napoléon I's nephew, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, was elected its head. Within three years, he would be crowned Emperor Napoléon III. Once again, all the bloodshed had led to yet another authoritarian ruler whose government did little to alleviate the lot of the poor working classes.

If all of this were not enough, three cholera epidemics would decimate thousands more poor and unfortunate people. The heroism that had characterized Sister Rosalie during the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 would appear again as she, the sisters of her house, and her many collaborators struggled against this invisible enemy. Just as she had fearlessly mounted the barricades, so she would, perhaps, run an even greater risk, as she went about tirelessly bringing aid and comfort to the sick and dying, their families and even burying the dead. Let us now turn to this horrifying time for the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district.

The *Cholera epidemics of 1832, 1849, and 1854*. 1832 was a very bad year. The unrest and violence that had followed the Revolution of 1830 continued. As mentioned earlier, illness and malnutrition

⁴²¹ Letter of Madame J. Cavaignac to Sister Rosalie, 30 October 1848, G8202, BNP, catalogue of autographs, Charavay, no. 56147.

were an everyday occurrence in the Mouffetard district. Furthermore, families lived crowded together in unhealthy tenements. Because of working conditions, men died young leaving their wives and children with no support. Poverty became misery. Those struggling to survive in these sub-human conditions were defenseless against the onslaught of any disease. According to the Prefecture of Police in this era, the years leading up to the 1832 cholera epidemic had been marked by an outbreak of smallpox which began in 1830. Then came word that cholera was making an inexorable march across southern Europe, leaving innumerable dead behind. In July 1832, it struck France. It was not long before up to one hundred persons a day fell victim to it in the Mouffetard district.

It is not surprising that we have no correspondence from Sister Rosalie at this time. The needs of the sick were so overwhelming that she and the sisters of her house barely had the time to eat, sleep, or pray. Therefore, we turn once again to her friend and collaborator, as well as her biographer, Armand de Melun, to learn of Sister Rosalie's comportment in the face of the disease that had come to attack her "beloved poor." The aura of mystery surrounding cholera brought not only illness and death but also terror that led to frenzy. Even the doctors who risked their own lives to care for the stricken were feared and sometimes attacked. Thus, the service provided had to be physical, spiritual, and psychological. The victims and their families needed to be treated, calmed, and consoled.

The beginning of Melun's account is somewhat astonishing, especially in light of Sister Rosalie's actions in 1830 and 1848 when she seemed to be utterly fearless in the face of physical danger. Melun tells us that before cholera had claimed its first victim in the Mouffetard district, she was:

...assailed by great terror: she foresaw the ravages the disease was going to wreak within her district.... She trembled for her poor, for her sisters, for everyone. Her soul was troubled and she asked God to take this chalice from her.⁴²²

All this changed, however, when cholera struck the neighborhood and took its first life. Melun states that:

⁴²² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 156.

...all her fears dissipated and she became intrepid. So long as the contagion lasted, no weakness, no trouble, no fear touched her soul. She was always the first to sit up with the sick [and to accept] fatigue. She was at the head of all the devotedness that she inspired. She animated her collaborators with her spirit of faith and her charity. She lent very active and intelligent cooperation to government measures and individual efforts. She organized field hospitals and made good use of the generosity of her helpers. Everywhere she established order, speed, and continuity of assistance.⁴²³

Sister Rosalie's greatest problem during the early days of the epidemic was trying to diffuse the rumors of poisoning and the desire for revenge that ran rampant among the people. They needed someone to blame for this mysterious and deadly disease that had befallen them and their loved ones. The most obvious targets were the doctors and pharmacists who were treating the victims. They were suspected of injecting poison into the sick. The inhabitants of the Mouffetard district never suspected Sister Rosalie and were open to her even in the midst of their rage. Her name was enough to protect those pursued by an angry mob. Melun provides an example of the power of Sister Rosalie's name and reputation. He writes:

One day Doctor [Hippolyte-Louis] Royer-Collard was accompanying a cholera patient who was being carried, on a stretcher, to the Hôpital de la Pitié. As soon as he was recognized, the [crowd] cried out:

"Murderer! Poisoner!"

He vainly tried to lift up the sheet covering the sick person's face and to prove that, by accompanying him, the doctor was trying to save him, not bring about his death. The sight of the dying person added to the frenzy. Cries and threats doubled. A worker

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

threw a sharp hand tool as Doctor Royer-Collard, completely out of arguments, cried out:

“I am a friend of Sister Rosalie.”

A thousand voices immediately responded:

“That is different.”

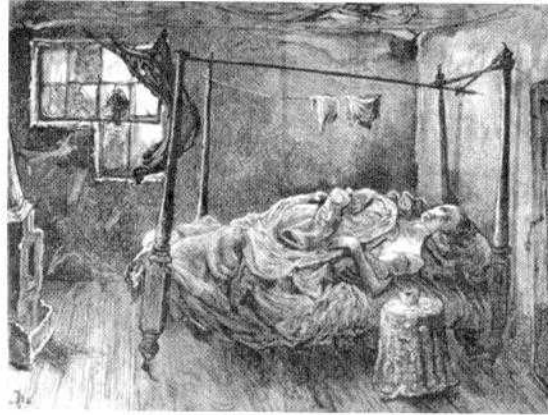
The crowd moved aside, cleared [a pathway], and let him pass.⁴²⁴

While this frenzy of the mob was irrational, it was also understandable. The full horror they faced is made clear by Dr. Joseph-Claude-Anthelme Récamier. In his *Recherches sur le traitement du cholera morbus*, written in 1832 and based on his lived experience, he describes the progression of the disease:

The sick person is overcome, almost all at once, with dizziness, vomiting, diarrhea, painful cramps in the extremities, and a sudden drop in body temperature causing [the victim] to take on the appearance of a corpse. This causes the eyes to [appear to] sink into the head and facial features to contort grotesquely. The pulse weakens ...and disappears in a few hours. ...The fingernails and fingertips turn blue. This progresses to the lips and around the eyes. Then, to a greater or lesser degree, reaches the entire surface of the body. ...Breathing is short, rapid, and gasping. The breath feels cold. All these symptoms of asphyxiation quickly end with the extinction of life.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴²⁵ Joseph-Claude-Anthelme Récamier, *Recherches sur le traitement du cholera morbus* (Paris, 1832), 25-26.



Death of a cholera victim.
Public domain

As has been made evident, “extreme sensitivity” was Sister Rosalie’s dominant characteristic.⁴²⁶ It was the source of her great compassion for all who suffered. It meant, also, that she was personally affected by the tragedies around her. She grieved for the sick, the dying, and the disconsolate survivors of the epidemic. Nevertheless, she was able to control her emotions and remain calm and unshakeable as she organized relief services for her “beloved poor” struck down by disease.

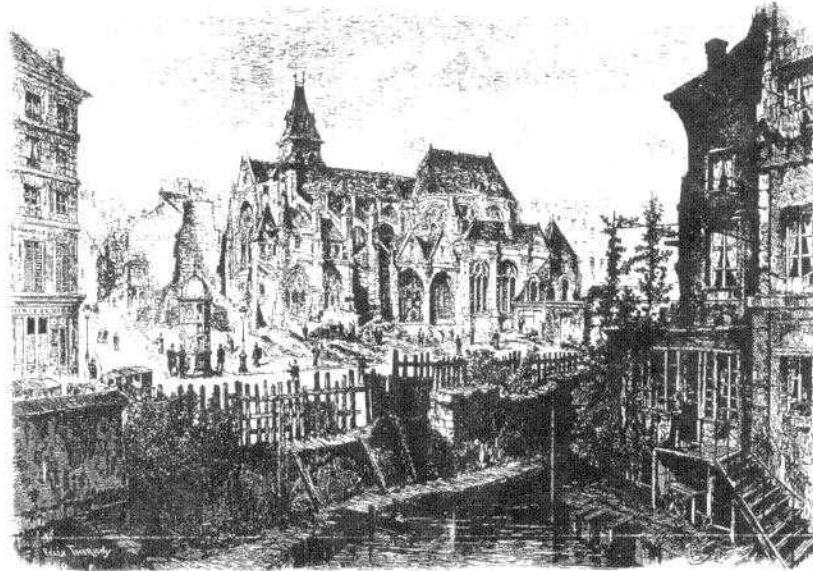
Once again Sister Rosalie became a heroine. The newspaper vendor, Albert Billaud, who told of her deeds at the time of the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, speaks also of her actions during the cholera epidemics. Her efforts to provide decent burial for the dead seem to have spanned both the revolutions and the epidemics. With evident awe, he recounted the following anecdote:

She also did unbelievable things for the dead. Monsieur Louis, an old carpenter from the Mouffetard district, could tell you, if he was still alive, that she asked him for boards she [then] used to make coffins to bury the dead whom she had gathered up from the streets. She repeated this deed during the cholera epidemics. She put the bodies in a pushcart, brought them to the church and then took them to the cemetery.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 189-190.

⁴²⁷ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 22.

Seemingly fearful that such conduct would appear beyond even Sister Rosalie, he added, "I can affirm that all those who spoke to me about Sister Rosalie were scrupulous witnesses who had preserved a faithful recollection of these events and the actions of Sister Rosalie."⁴²⁸



Church of Saint-Médard along the banks of the Bièvre River.
Public domain

The epidemic that struck Paris in March did not release its hold on the inhabitants until the end of the summer. In the Mouffetard district it left behind exhausted workers, widows, orphans, and elderly who had somehow survived their decimated families. Sister Rosalie and the sisters of her house had escaped, bone weary but unscathed, despite their close service to the victims. During the immediate aftermath their work changed, although it was equally intense: aid for stricken families, comfort for widows, placement of children and elders. They continued tirelessly to alleviate the misery that two years of insurrection and disease had worsened. And those who had survived would face another tragedy, the flood of 1836 (a river, La Bièvre, with its filth and pollution from the nearby tanning factories, ran through the Mouffetard district).

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

Before moving on from this first epidemic, there is one further anecdote that sheds light on the principal players in the tragedy. This one concerns Monseigneur de Quélen, who was still Archbishop of Paris. As described earlier, warned by Sister Rosalie that his residence was to be pillaged the next day, 15 February 1831, Monseigneur de Quélen had fled from the episcopal palace and found refuge in the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. He was safe but the damage was extensive. Many of the insurgents involved became cholera victims leaving behind widows and orphans. Moved by charity and compassion, he pardoned his attackers and adopted several of their orphaned children.

1849 saw the return of cholera. This time there was not the general frenzy and paranoia that found mobs attacking health care providers as in 1832. This epidemic, however, was deadlier in the Mouffetard district. On a single day, in the parish of Saint-Médard, one hundred and fifty deaths were recorded, and this figure did not include children. This scourge was more selective, choosing its victims in the poorest neighborhoods in the capital while sparing the rich and even the doctors and religious who expended their energy to serve the afflicted. It was in the attics and cellars of decaying tenements, where those who were poor huddled together, that it selected its victims. The famine of 1847 and the bloody revolt of 1848, plus the deplorable conditions in which they worked and lived, made those who were poor ready prey.

Once again, in an effort to explain the inexplicable, the frightened victims and their survivors sought someone to blame. This time rumor had it that the epidemic was a government plot to weaken the working classes and to punish them for the 1848 insurrection. Only when some prominent and wealthy figures succumbed to the disease did the people come to realize that no one in government had started the epidemic and that they were powerless to stop its ravages. Poverty and misery were the real villains. Only meaningful social change would alter that, and it would be a long time in coming.⁴²⁹

As in 1832, Sister Rosalie was apprehensive before the epidemic struck. But once it claimed its first victim, she marshaled her considerable resources of calm, courage, faith, and devotedness to lead the struggle against it. Many of the sick were brought to the sisters' house to be assisted. As their number increased, Sister Rosalie

⁴²⁹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 158-159.

and her companions had little time to eat, sleep, or pray. Despite this, only one sister was stricken and she recovered.

However great the devotedness of Sister Rosalie, she could not have carried on the battle alone or even with the support of the sisters and doctors. As they had in 1832, many courageous volunteers came to work with her. Among them were members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded on Frédéric Ozanam's twentieth birthday, 23 April 1833. In the beginning, it was known as the Conference of Charity. In 1834 the name was officially changed to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. We will return to this subject in the next chapter as we study the vast network of charity Sister Rosalie was able to build as a result of her genius for collaboration, which brought together the rich and the poor, the powerful and the humble, the young and the old, in a concerted effort to serve Jesus Christ in the person of those in need in the Mouffetard district.

In the *Bulletin de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul*, for 1849, Frédéric Ozanam recounts the work of the confreres during the epidemic. For a two-month period, some of them placed themselves under Sister Rosalie's guidance and direction "as the first founders of the Society had come together fifteen years earlier."⁴³⁰ And, when calls for help came to Sister Rosalie from outside Paris, she sent some of her volunteers, although this added to the work of those who remained in the Mouffetard quarter. Thus, more than 2,000 victims received physical and spiritual assistance. In addition to food and medicine, they brought hope, and "faith returned to the houses they visited."⁴³¹

It was at this time, also, that Sister Rosalie came to the aid of the smallest victims of the scourge, the children orphaned when their parents succumbed to cholera. As previously mentioned, despite her reluctance to putting children in orphanages, she and some sisters of her house entered into collaboration with Madame Jules Mallet who had founded an orphanage on rue Pascal. In just a few days they admitted seventy-nine children. Sister Rosalie was able to place other children with willing families.

1854. The 1849 epidemic finally ended, and once again it left those who were poor yet poorer. In their misery they were easy prey for the next attack. It came in 1854, two years before Sister Rosalie's death. She was sixty-eight-years-of-age and in failing

⁴³⁰ *Bulletin de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul*, vol. 1 (1849), 250-252.

⁴³¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 160-161.

health. Nevertheless, she once again gave her all to bring relief to her "beloved poor." On 16 August, she wrote to the pastor in Confort telling him, "We are very busy and the cholera only spreads. We are losing many people. There is desolation."⁴³² A letter of Sister Rosalie to a certain Mademoiselle Duriquem, dated a week earlier, shows that she was once again placing babies orphaned by cholera, even outside of Paris, with adoptive families. She recounts an event that must have been repeated numerous times:

I am sending you a little girl who is in good health. She had very good parents whom we had known for a very long time. They are worthy of consideration from every point of view. We have tried to make a good choice. I am confident that little Catherine Neu, who is eight months old, will please her dear little mother, your niece.⁴³³

As in 1832 and 1849, Sister Rosalie, her companions, the doctors, and her valiant and devoted volunteers, worked tirelessly to bring succor to the victims and support to the survivors of the 1854 scourge. This epidemic, like its predecessors, finally ended, leaving behind desolation and misery. Those who had worked at Sister Rosalie's side, or under her direction, would continue the struggle with her to bring relief to the people of the Mouffetard district.

The portrait we have attempted to draw in this chapter is that of Sister Rosalie Rendu, the heroine. It is a realistic one. Her comportment during revolutions and cholera epidemics was clearly heroic. Sister Rosalie herself, however, would be the first to admit that she could never have accomplished all that she did without collaborators. Indeed, her genius for collaboration may well be the most significant challenge that she presents to all those who, in this XXIst century, seek to bring aid to the overwhelming needs of those who are poor around the world. We will now turn our attention to the vast network of people with whom she shared her ministry until her death.

⁴³² *Letter of Sister Rosalie to the Pastor of Confort*, 16 August 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 278 - La 30.

⁴³³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mademoiselle Duriquem*, 8 August 1854, Original, M. Mézières 27, rue Saint-Sulpice, Paris.

CHAPTER X

SISTER ROSALIE'S NETWORK OF CHARITY

GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

In chapter IX, we spoke of the extraordinary deeds of Sister Rosalie during the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1849, and 1854. We also commented on the fact that she could never have achieved these feats alone. She was able to touch so many lives because of the vast network of charity that grew up around her. Sister Rosalie was its heart and guiding spirit. Nearly everyone who approached her, either to receive or provide assistance, became a valued part of her charitable enterprise. We will now turn our attention to the groups and individuals with whom Sister Rosalie shared her vocation of service of Jesus Christ in the person of all those in need.

For twenty years Armand de Melun was one of Sister Rosalie's closest collaborators. Throughout those years, he saw the services of the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois expand well beyond initial works in education and health care. As Sister Rosalie's reputation grew, more and more people came to her. She never turned them away without some form of help. The misery that surrounded her was so great that it easily challenged all the resources she had at her disposition. Yet the words her godfather, Father Emery, had spoken to her when she was a sixteen-year-old novice remained ever in her heart and on her lips, "a Daughter of Charity must be like a milestone on a street corner where all those who pass by can rest and lay down their heavy burdens."⁴³⁴ Inculcated into her in her formative years, it would become the defining notion behind her service to all those who came to her little parlor seeking aid, be they persons who were rich or persons who were poor. Melun tells us that his friend readily consecrated her time, her strength, and her life to "her poor," that is all those in need in the Mouffetard district. He then adds:

...but the expansion of her charity could not be held within these limits. It had to overflow beyond them.

⁴³⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 82.*

The Sister of Charity of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois became the Sister of Charity for everyone.⁴³⁵

With this expansion came an ever-increasing demand for collaborators. Melun tells us how Sister Rosalie viewed this necessity:

In her eyes, nothing less than all the forces of public and private charity were necessary to fight against the invasion of poverty. The collaboration of Church and State, of organizations and individuals seemed indispensable to her in the [struggle] against so terrible an enemy. In this arena, she did not understand rivalries, oppositions, jealousies, or the fear of seeing funding sources dry up because of the multiplication of works. Charity is like God. The more one asks of it, the more it gives.⁴³⁶

The details given by Sister Rosalie's biographers and collaborators concerning the nature and extent of her work with these groups and individuals are a bit sketchy. Nevertheless, we shall try to glean what we can from the information available to us. Let us first consider the associations that grew up around the "house of charity" on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. Before continuing, it should be pointed out that we will not discuss the Ladies of Charity here, despite their considerable importance among the associations with which Sister Rosalie collaborated, as we have already done so in Chapter VIII, section three: *Ouvroirs*.

First, the *Society of Saint-François-Régis* (1826). In 1824-1825, Jules Gossin, who would become the second President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (1844-1847), set about establishing this work. Its goal was to facilitate civil and religious marriage for couples who were poor in the Department of the Seine, and to legitimize their "natural" children. He was a relative of Monsieur Colette de Baudicour, administrator of the 16th Division of Public Assistance, which encompassed the Saint-Médard district, and a close collaborator of Sister Rosalie. It is undoubtedly through him that Gossin made her

⁴³⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 87-88.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

acquaintance. As soon as the work was approved by the archbishop of Paris, on 13 February 1826, he sought Sister Rosalie's collaboration. In Marthe-Jeanne Colette de Baudicour's testimony for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification, she recounts the beginnings of the association:

My great-uncle, Monsieur Gossin, Founder of the Society of Saint-François-Régis and second President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, had been struck by the intelligent way in which [Sister Rosalie] interested those of wealth in the misery of those of meager means. In the life of Monsieur Gossin we can read, "This woman of great intelligence, and with a great heart, immediately understood the usefulness of the work undertaken." It involved welcoming into her house of charity the newly born Society of Saint-François-Régis, which had asked her for hospitality.⁴³⁷

Later, the association established offices in the Saint-Sulpice area. Nevertheless, close collaboration with Sister Rosalie remained constant. According to Sister Tissot, a companion of Sister Rosalie at the time, a certain Monsieur de Portès, a professor at the Law School and member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, came to the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois every Sunday afternoon to regularize marriages of couples from the Mouffetard district. Sister Rosalie seems to have favored this arrangement because, according to Sister Tissot:

Couples living in poverty are only half-hearted about doing this. It is essential to facilitate the means for them. They would not go to the office near Saint-Sulpice. It is better for us to inconvenience ourselves for them, to send someone to accompany them, if need be, and to place ourselves at the disposition of this gentleman to assist him in his efforts.⁴³⁸

While we do not have any further information about the

⁴³⁷ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 23.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

society, collaboration with Sister Rosalie seems to have borne fruit. In a publication describing the work, written by Jules Gossin, we learn that, between 1826 and 1844, 11,077 couples had their marriages rectified and 9,000 children were legitimized.⁴³⁹

Second, the *Work of the Holy Family* (1844). Jean-Léon Le Prevost and the confreres of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul founded this work in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. Its goal was to bring working class families together, thereby helping them to improve their living conditions, and lead them back to God and the Church. The number of families increased and additional groups were formed. In 1848-1849, one was founded in the parish of Saint-Médard. The members met in the house of the Missionary Fathers of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritains, on rue des Postes. By 1850, there were 700 participants.⁴⁴⁰ Once again, Sister Tissot tells us of Sister Rosalie's collaboration in a new work established to assist families who were poor or working class in the Mouffetard district. She says that Sister Rosalie went to the Sunday meetings and "took one of our young sisters with her. She would point out the zeal of these young people, adding that they would be our judges if we did not give ourselves to God as we should."⁴⁴¹ In his testimony for Sister Rosalie's cause, the Spiritan priest, Father Cabon, speaks of the arrival of the new Spiritan Superior, François-Marie-Paul Libermann, C.S.Sp., at rue des Postes, in December 1848. The district was just recovering from the terrible events of the Revolution of 1848 but the new superior, "with the collaboration of Sister Rosalie, lent himself to all the works of charity that presented themselves to him."⁴⁴²

Father Libermann, himself, describes the early work of the group in an undated letter, probably from March 1849. Father Cabon includes it in his testimony:

We assemble the... workers of the quarter in the chapel. About four or five hundred come three times a week. Yesterday there were about seven hundred. They behave perfectly well and listen attentively.

⁴³⁹ Jules Gossin, *Manuel de la Société charitable de Saint-Régis de Paris* (Paris, 1851), 182-183.

⁴⁴⁰ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum Officium Historicum. Parisien, *Joannis Leonis Le Prevost, Positio*, 75.

⁴⁴¹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 55.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

Fifty of them registered for first communion. There are old men with white hair among them. We are going to teach catechism to them on a regular basis to prepare them for this holy action. The vast majority of these men are June insurgents who fought on the barricades. From the first meeting, there were one hundred and fifty of them. Sister Rosalie, who was present, recognized more than sixty of them whom she had treated after the combat. They had multiple bullet wounds.⁴⁴³

Thus, another work for those in need in Sister Rosalie's district flourished. She supported the endeavor, never seeking any credit for herself. However, incredible as it may seem, there are other examples of such selfless collaboration on Sister Rosalie's part with incipient groups dedicated to improving the lot of those reduced to poverty.



François-Marie-Paul (Jacob) Libermann, C.S.Sp. (1802-1852).
 Founder of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – 1841;
 congregation joined with the Spiritan Fathers in 1848 and Libermann was elected
 Superior General – 1848-1852.
Public domain

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

Third, the *Annals of Charity* (1845). When we speak later of individuals with whom Sister Rosalie collaborated, Armand de Melun will be of major importance. Here we will mention only his role in the creation of *Les Annales de la Charité*. He was the founder of this review, which sought to publicize existing works of charity and to examine questions and institutions concerned with the lot of the working class poor. In 1860, the title changed to *Revue d'économie chrétienne*. The final issue was published in 1884.⁴⁴⁴

We learn little from Melun, himself, about Sister Rosalie's influence on this undertaking. It would be one of his early collaborators, Alexis Chevalier, who would praise it on the occasion of Sister Rosalie's death. At the same time, he announces Melun's intention to write Sister Rosalie's biography. He states:

Like so many others, we would also like to share what we know of this beautiful life, totally devoted to charity [and] ...the role she played in all the works of our era. We would have especially liked to show the encouragement which she gave with such benevolence... at the beginning of our *Annales*. However, we must leave the glory of recalling the qualities of this admirable Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul to a more worthy and skillful hand. Such a coveted honor rightly goes to the founder of this review for whom the good sister was an advisor and a support.⁴⁴⁵

Fourth, *Work of the Neighborhoods* (1848). There are similarities between this work and the work of the Holy Family which began earlier. Founded by Father Louis-Pierre Pététot, a diocesan priest, who would serve as pastor in several parishes in Paris, its goal was to bring indigent families, living in Paris neighborhoods, back to the regular practice of their faith. Sister Rosalie was aware of this work but we are unable to determine what role, if any, she may have had with it. A letter from Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin, dated 4 February 1855, indicates that the latter had been involved in this endeavor while she lived in Paris. Sister Rosalie tells her friend:

⁴⁴⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 92.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 275.

The work of the neighborhoods continues to do much good. You have sown well. Others will harvest. You will share abundantly in the merits of this work of charity.⁴⁴⁶

While Sister Rosalie's collaboration with and support for these associations is significant, her involvement with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, at its origin, is of major importance as the Society continues to our day and has spread throughout the world. We shall now examine this phenomenon in greater detail.

Fifth, the *Society of Saint Vincent de Paul* (1833). The beginnings of the Society are similar to those of other Vincentian groups: the Ladies of Charity (1617), the Congregation of the Mission (1625), and the Daughters of Charity (1633). Each began with a very small number of persons who shared a vision of service to the people of God, and who came together in fraternal community to support one another in the pursuit of that vision. As with its predecessors in the Vincentian Family, the Society's vision was and is the service of Jesus Christ in the person of those who are poor.

The story of how a "Provident God" brought the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul into existence is well known. We will just sketch the broad outline here and focus on Sister Rosalie's role at its origin. On 5 November 1831, an eighteen-year-old intellectual, Frédéric Ozanam, of whom we have previously spoken, arrived in Paris from Lyons, to pursue his studies at the Sorbonne. He was disappointed, even appalled, by what he discovered in the capital of Louis-Philippe. He was also homesick and in need of companionship. He first found this fellowship in the person of the great physicist, André-Marie Ampère, also a native of Lyons, who opened his home to Frédéric. There he experienced support for his faith in a violently anti-Catholic Paris, "one of the capitals of unbelief."

⁴⁴⁶ Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin, 4 February 1855, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 286 B2.



André-Marie Ampère (1775-1836).
 Welcomed Frédéric Ozanam into his home
 when young Frédéric arrived to study in Paris.
 French physicist.
Public domain

It was at this time that Frédéric came into contact with Emmanuel Bailly. In his youth Bailly had thought of becoming a Vincentian priest, or Lazarist as they are known in France. While he did not join them, the discernment process deepened his love and veneration for Saint Vincent de Paul, which was a long held tradition in his childhood home. His brother, Ferdinand, did enter the Congregation of the Mission, but Emmanuel was destined to serve God and those who were poor as a layman, a husband, and a father. Indeed, his oldest son would be named Vincent de Paul and would later become an Assumptionist priest. While at one time Assistant General, he is best remembered as a journalist and founder of the Catholic daily, *La Croix*, which is still in circulation. Bailly's second son, Benjamin, would likewise be ordained a priest in the same congregation. Known in religion as Emmanuel-Joseph, he would be the third Superior General of the Assumptionists from 1903 to 1917.

Bailly was a former professor of philosophy at the Oratorian College, a secondary school for boys, in Juilly outside of Paris. In 1830, he opened a boarding house for students in the capital, at 11, Place de

l'Estrapade, adjacent to his own home and near the Law School and the Panthéon. He transformed it into a focal point of spiritual and intellectual activity, which later turned to works of charity.

Bailly was doubly well prepared for the task. In addition to his understanding of and ability to work with and motivate young students, which he had developed during his time in Juilly, he had rich experience in associations dedicated to the apostolate of service to those in need well before 1830. During the period of the Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830), he had been a member of the powerful "Congregation," a pious association composed of religious and laity who joined together to pray and serve those who were poor. Louis-Philippe looked upon it as subversive since, among the members, there were illustrious names connected to the Bourbons and to the Church. With the opposition of the press, the theater, and the university, as well as the government, the "Congregation" was destined to disappear.



Vincent de Paul Bailly, A.A. (1832-1912). [Left]
Emmanuel-Joseph (Benjamin) Bailly, A.A. (1842-1917). [Right]
Public domain

Bailly was also a member of the "Société des Bonnes Oeuvres" (Society of Good Works) which took care of orphans, sick workers, and abandoned children. This too would be terminated because the government considered it a propaganda tool favorable to the Monarchy and the Church. Bailly, nonetheless, was unwilling to abandon Catholic students to the virulently anti-Catholic environment of the university. Thus, when the worst of the crisis of 1830 was over, he activated discussion groups, known as conferences, to replace the

earlier "Société des Bonnes Etudes" (Society of Good Studies), which the government surely looked upon with a jaundiced eye. Among them were the Literature Conference and the History Conference. This latter would evolve into the Conference of Charity and, ultimately, into the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Initially the History Conference, which met weekly, was a sort of debating society. The Catholic members defended their faith and the Church against the attacks of their anti-Catholic companions. One evening, in the spring of 1833, during the weekly meeting, everything changed. As with other Vincentian groups, the catalyst leading to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was simple. In this case it was a comment, which became a challenge for the Catholic students. It came from a certain Jean Broet, an adherent of Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Count de Saint-Simon, whose doctrine was in vogue at the time. Saint-Simon had renounced his title and all its rights and privileges and had become a supporter of the revolutionaries during the Revolution of 1789. He wrote a number of books in which he preached a kind of socialism without using the term. He proposed a system of government in which the State would inherit individual fortunes and distribute the monies available to each person according to his or her work and needs. He viewed this as a replacement for traditional Christianity, which he judged as failing to respond to the necessities of those who were poor. His ideas spread rapidly not only in France but beyond, particularly among young, idealistic intellectuals.

The challenge has been variously paraphrased, but the core of Broet's message is consistent:

"You are right. Christianity did wonders in the past but it is now dead. You who boast of being Catholic, what do you do? Where are the works that prove your faith?"⁴⁴⁷

While Ozanam vigorously defended the Church against this attack, later, when the Catholic students were alone, he admitted that Broet was right, at least in part. They had to go beyond words. So Ozanam raised the challenge once again:

⁴⁴⁷ Jacques Lamarche, *Frédéric Ozanam: fondateur de la Société Saint-Vincent-de-Paul* (Montréal, 1997), 33.

“What must we do to live our Catholicism? ...Let us no longer talk so much about charity. Let us put it into practice and go out to assist those who are poor.”⁴⁴⁸

Thus, a young student’s verbal assault on the Church became the seed that would give birth to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul several weeks later. While the exact nature of what the students hoped to accomplish was yet to be defined, from the very beginning, they sought to establish “another kind of association, exclusively Christian, where charity alone would preside, with the peaceful goal of honoring Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of a few people who were poor.”⁴⁴⁹

On 23 April 1833, in the early evening, six young members of the History Conference wound their way to number 18, rue Petit-Bourbon near the church of Saint-Sulpice. It housed the newspaper, *La Tribune Catholique*, which appeared every two days. Their mentor, Emmanuel Bailly, who owned the paper and was its principal contributor, welcomed them. He invited them into his office. They numbered six: Frédéric Ozanam, the leader of the group, who was celebrating his twentieth birthday, his very close friend, François Lallier, as well as Auguste Le Taillandier, whom the 2004 Rule of the Society credits with the “initial inspiration,” Paul Lamache, Jules Devaux and Félix Clavé. All were students in either law or medicine and all were in their twenties.

Through the years, Ozanam would look back at the contributions of Bailly and these “first members” of the little group and acknowledge their role as “founders.” He sometimes did this publicly, as with Bailly, and sometimes through his correspondence. This would be the case of Lallier and Le Taillandier, whom Ozanam nominated as “the two oldest members” of the Society for membership on the General Council at its meeting of 21 January 1851. Ozanam profited from the occasion to pay tribute to all the “founders” and to underscore their responsibilities as such. The proposition passed unanimously, with Bailly casting a vote.⁴⁵⁰

That very day, Ozanam wrote to Lallier to tell him of the news, “It was unanimously decided that you and Le Taillandier, as founders

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ “L’origine de la Société,” in *Manuel de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1845), 185.

⁴⁵⁰ *Procès-verbaux du Conseil Général*, 21 January 1851, ASSP, Registre 111.

FONDATEURS DE LA SOCIÉTÉ SAINT-VINCENT - DE - PAUL



B



C

A - Frédéric OZANAM
(1813-1853)



A



G



D



E

B - Jules DEVAUX (1811-1880)
C - Paul LAMACHE (1810- ?)
D - Auguste LE TAILLANDIER (1811-1886)

E - François LALLIER (1814-1886)
F - Félix CLAVÉ sans document (1811- ?)
G - E. J. BAILLY (1793-1861)

Founders of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
(does not include photo of Félix Clavé).
International Office of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Paris

of the Society... would be members of the General Council."⁴⁵¹ Ozanam had already written to Le Taillandier in 1837 stressing both the essential part that his friend played at the beginning and the responsibilities flowing from it. He appears to encourage Le Taillandier to establish a Conference in Le Mans, where the latter was living after his recent marriage. He writes:

Will you do nothing in Le Mans? Will you not give us brothers, you who were one of our fathers, you who were, as I recall, the first author of our Society? May our entire lives be lived under the patronage of those to whom we consecrated our youth: Vincent de Paul, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ, our Savior.⁴⁵²

In those early days, no one could have foreseen the result of their modest initiative. None had any direct experience in serving the teeming masses that lived in abject misery, huddled together in squalid hovels. They needed guidance. This would come from Bailly, president of the nascent Conference, who would be a sort of spiritual advisor and a symbol of wisdom and prudence. However, it would be a woman, the then forty-seven-year-old Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu, "Apostle of the Mouffetard district," who would accompany them on their first steps in visiting those who were poor in their homes, which they had chosen as the goal of the Conference of Charity.

The little group lacked not only experience but resources. They were students so money was in short supply. The new treasurer, Jules Devaux, passed his hat to take up a collection at this and all subsequent meetings but the result was limited indeed. Nor was the small amount that Bailly paid those who submitted articles to the *Tribune* enough to make up the deficit. Sister Rosalie knew all the

⁴⁵¹ Sacra Congregatio De Causis Sanctorum Officium Historicum. Parisien. *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei, Friderici Ozanam, Patris familias, Primarii Fundatoris Societatis Conferentiarum S. Vincentii a Paulo, (1803-1874), Desquisitio de Vitae et Auctuostate.* Rome, 1988. Unedited letter cited in Ozanam, *Positio*, 207.

⁴⁵² "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Auguste Le Taillandier," 21 August 1837, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 1:276.

Note: The new emphasis placed on the role of Le Taillandier in the 2004 *Rule of the Society* appears to be based on Gérard Cholvy, *Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), L'engagement d'un intellectuel catholique au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2003), 239. See also, Charles Ozanam, *Vie de Frédéric Ozanam, Professeur de Littérature Etrangère à La Sorbonne*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1889), 137.

indigent workers and their families along with the sick and elderly living in the XIIth arrondissement. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the Bureau of Public Assistance gave her vouchers for distribution to persons who were needy in the quarter. Bailly and his wife knew Sister Rosalie well and shared her love for and desire to come to the assistance of the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district, who were desperately poor. Thus, he sent Devaux forthwith to her. The resultant collaboration and guidance would, along with the influence of Bailly, transform the History Conference into the Conference of Charity and ultimately into the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Before examining Sister Rosalie's work with the founding members of the Society, two observations seem appropriate. The first concerns "THE FOUNDER," Ozanam or Bailly? Let it be stated from the outset that this subject has been widely treated without arriving at any firm conclusion. No attempt will be made to do so here. Sister Rosalie, who tolerated no disputes among those serving her "beloved poor," would have been deeply chagrined by an article published on the occasion of her death by Léon Aubineau in the 11 February 1856 editions of the newspapers *L'Univers* and *L'Union Catholique*, which became a platform for furthering Bailly's claim to this honor. It would not be because she opposed this designation for her friend, but because she wanted the focus to always be the better service of those in need.

Time seems to have softened the discourse. Frédéric Ozanam is now called the "Principal Founder." As for Bailly, Georges-Albert Boissinot, S.V., the biographer of Jean-Léon Le Prevost, an early and influential member of the Society, has put forth an explanation which gives the merited recognition to both Ozanam and Bailly. He writes, "The Conference, however, had a prehistory. If Ozanam remains its principal founder, Bailly could be called its ancestor."⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ Boissinot, *Un autre Vincent de Paul*, 72.



Frédéric Ozanam at 20 years of age
by Louis Janmot, friend and member
of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

International Office of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Paris

Father Boissinot then goes on to speak of the critical role played by Bailly in mentoring not only Ozanam and his companions, but also several future members of the Conference of Charity: Gustave de la Noue, Maxime de Montrond, Louis Levassor, Claudius Lavergne, and Frédéric's cousin, Henri Pessonneaux.⁴⁵⁴

The dispute, however, came later. For Ozanam, Bailly, and all the others who gave themselves to God to create what Ozanam would later refer to as "a network of charity that would encircle the world," there was no question as to who among them was "THE FOUNDER." As with the Vincentian groups founded before them, "it was God."

The second observation is that, contrary to the establishment of an association of laywomen, the Ladies of Charity, whom Vincent de Paul himself had founded in 1617, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is the first Vincentian lay organization composed entirely of men. In 1625, Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission, a community of priests and brothers dedicated to preaching and bringing

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

the sacraments to country people. It later expanded to seminaries and the reform of the clergy. These works had a profound influence on the Church of France in the XVIIth century. Nonetheless, Vincent de Paul's great gift was to call forth the generosity and spirituality of women. During an era when wealthy women were essentially decorative and poor women were reduced to the most menial of tasks, he and his friend and collaborator of thirty-six years, Louise de Marillac, saw the full potential of women, rich and poor alike. Their collaboration with these women transformed the service of those in need. Vincent was certainly successful with the Priests of the Mission, but his attempts to establish confraternities of charity composed of both laywomen and laymen were largely ineffective. It would only be in the XIXth century that the newly formed Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and later the newly re-established Ladies of Charity, would work together with the Daughters of Charity, especially Sister Rosalie, to bring Vincentian service to those in need in the most poverty-stricken quarter of the French capital.

So it was that, in these early days, Frédéric and his companions became what he would call "auxiliaries of the Sisters of Charity."⁴⁵⁵ Let us now examine how the service of those who were poor in their homes, which was the first work of both the Ladies of Charity (1617) and the Daughters of Charity (1633), became the primary service of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The young university students had certainly heard of Sister Rosalie. As we have seen, the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois had become the headquarters of charity for the destitute inhabitants of the Mouffetard district well before 1831. Thus, as they took their first steps in the service of those who were poor, they placed themselves at her school. A history of the Church in France, published in 1966, reveals that, long after the fact, the significance of Sister Rosalie at the beginning of the Society was still indisputable. We read:

The fact is well known and remembered in the history of the church: the first and principal activity of Ozanam and his companions was the visit [of those who were poor] in their homes in this Parisian quarter of rue Mouffetard which to this day has retained its

⁴⁵⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Frédéric Ozanam, Positio, XXIV.*

working class character. There, a Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, Sister Rosalie, labored for many years. She also was the inspiration for Armand de Melun. It is she, who, from the beginning, oriented the Confreres of the Society.⁴⁵⁶

The house of charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was an excellent place for the young men to begin their service in the Vincentian spirit not only because of Sister Rosalie's total dedication to the service of those in need, but because the house had a tradition of welcoming young Catholic students and initiating them to the service of those who were poor. We have already mentioned two of them, Cyprien Loppe and Doctor Dewulf. We will return to this subject later but, for now, we will limit our considerations to the early members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

In his life of Ozanam, Father Lacordaire describes the initial steps of the founding members:

These eight [they were in fact seven] thus had this inspiration to prove once again that Christianity can accomplish in favor of those who are poor what no doctrine could do before or after it. While innovators wore themselves out with theories for changing the world, these [young men], who were more self-effacing, set about climbing up to the floors where the misery of the quarter hid. These students of yore could be seen in the prime of youth, visiting, without revulsion, the most abject hovels and bringing the vision of charity to the inhabitants who knew only misery.⁴⁵⁷

For her part, Sister Rosalie would welcome these eager young men with open arms, her heart filled with joy. She would often repeat to her sister companions, "Oh, how good these young people are, oh, how good they are." The needs of the poor inhabitants of the

⁴⁵⁶ L.J. Rogier, G. de Berthier de Sauvigny, Joseph Hajar, *Nouvelle Histoire de L'Eglise, vol. IV, Siècle des Lumières, révolutions, restauration* (Paris, 1966), 448.

⁴⁵⁷ Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, *Notice et panégyrique sur Ozanam* (Paris, 1872), 223-224.

Mouffetard district were so great that there was more than enough work for these willing and generous volunteers. Even the Bureau of Public Assistance looked favorably on the project. A certain Monsieur Lévêque, a friend of Bailly's, recounts:

For seven or eight years, as administrator of the Bureau of Charity for the [XIIth] arrondissement, I had... from 450 to 500 indigent households, for whom Sister Rosalie was... the visible [hand of] Providence. [Among them were] families worthy of greater interest. I asked Sister Rosalie to make a choice and put the Conference in contact with those she considered better disposed to welcome the visits of our novices in this practice of charity.⁴⁵⁸

But she did not simply refer families and supply vouchers for food or clothing. She shared with the young students her heartfelt convictions on the manner in which each poor person was to be served. It was to be in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, who told his early collaborators that they must not be deterred by the appearance or behavior of persons who are reduced to misery but rather, "turn the medal and... see with the eyes of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is present to us again in the person of these poor people."⁴⁵⁹

According to Sister Rosalie's close collaborator, Armand de Melun, when she met with the members of the Society, either alone or as a group, she:

...recommended to them patience, which never considers the time spent listening to a poor person as wasted, since this person already takes comfort in the good will that we demonstrate by attending to the recitation of their sufferings; understanding, more inclined to pity than to condemn faults that a good upbringing did not ward off; and finally, politeness, so sweet to a person who has never experienced anything but disdain and contempt.

⁴⁵⁸ Cited by Marcel Vincent in *Ozanam, une jeunesse romantique* (Paris, 1994), 275-276.

⁴⁵⁹ *CED*, 11:32.

“Oh! my dear children, ...love those who are poor, don't blame them too much. The world says, 'It's their fault. They are cowardly, ...ignorant, ...vicious, [and] ...lazy.' It is with such words that we dispense ourselves from the very strict obligation of charity. Hate the sin but love the poor persons [who commit it]. If we had suffered as they have, if we had spent our childhood deprived of all Christian inspiration, we would be far from their equal.”⁴⁶⁰

And they listened. These intellectuals from the Sorbonne, these elite in law and medicine, placed themselves at the school of this humble Daughter of Charity whose own formal education was limited indeed. Her name opened the doors of the hovels of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district to them. Because her “beloved poor” trusted her, they trusted them. And when their visits were over, the students returned to her little parlor to recount what had happened and to receive her advice and encouragement. Well before Vatican II, Sister Rosalie and her young collaborators were practicing “apostolic reflection,” a sharing together of events and situations occurring in the service of those in need in order to discern more clearly what God was asking of them. This practice has become widespread in parishes and religious congregations in recent years. However, it was not in common use during Sister Rosalie's era. This exercise is also an answer to Sister Rosalie's critics, who accused her of activism. Neither she nor her collaborators lost sight of the spiritual foundation of their service. Under her guidance, the Society took form with each confrere focused on its “peaceful goal of honoring Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of a few people who were poor.”⁴⁶¹

In her usual way, Sister Rosalie took no personal credit for the good accomplished. Rather, she rejoiced that the work of God for her “beloved poor” was being carried out by these dedicated young men. Once again, it is Melun who tells us of his friend's reaction:

Seeing so many poor people led back to the Church through the ministry of this Conference, so many children being sent to Christian schools, so many

⁴⁶⁰ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 99-100.

⁴⁶¹ “L'origine de la Société,” 185.

workers enrolled in pious associations, in seeing, above all, the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul support one another [against] the weaknesses of human respect; follow the law that they taught to poor persons; and practice the virtues that they preached, she blessed these young men and thanked her holy patron for having showered on them a breath of his spirit and a ray of his charity.⁴⁶²

And, Sister Rosalie's companion, Sister Saillard, adds:

Sister Rosalie sometimes told us how happy she was to see young men, like Ozanam, ...bringing assistance to their poor [families] and carrying wood on their shoulders that they were happy to deposit in their miserable hovel.⁴⁶³

According to a report of Gustave de la Noue, the number of members of the Conference continued to grow from seven, at the first meeting, to at least 70 by May 1834.⁴⁶⁴ With rapid growth came the question of how best to handle both the service to those in need and the meetings, which were becoming cumbersome. Already, at this epoch, in a letter to Ernest Falconnet, Ozanam put forth the idea of extending throughout France, "a vast and generous association for the assistance of the working classes."⁴⁶⁵ In a letter to Léonce Curnier, Ozanam gives form to his dream for the Society "to encircle the world in a network of charity."⁴⁶⁶

Thus, on 3 November 1834, Ozanam wrote to Bailly from Lyons cautiously broaching the subject of a possible division of the Conference saying, "The meeting of the charity, which has become more numerous, could be divided into sections."⁴⁶⁷ He wanted to proceed slowly so as not to upset his mentor. At the 16 December meeting Ozanam stood to present a five-point plan to divide the

⁴⁶² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 123-124.

⁴⁶³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 63.

⁴⁶⁴ Boissinot, *Un autre Vincent de Paul*, 105.

⁴⁶⁵ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet," 21 July 1834, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 1:143.

⁴⁶⁶ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Léonce Curnier," 3 November 1834, *Ibid.*, 1:152.

⁴⁶⁷ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Emmanuel Bailly," 3 November 1834, *Ibid.*

Society into four sections, each with its own funds. No sooner had he finished, than Paul de la Perrière, who would be the most vocal opponent to the division, rose to demand that the proposal be tabled until the next meeting. Bailly then appointed a commission to study the matter. The seven members included Ozanam and Le Prevost. A week later, at the 23 December meeting, Bailly announced that the commission had decided a division at that time would be premature. The great fear seems to have been that it would lead to weakening the bonds of friendship and support that had existed among the members from the beginning.

While Christmas provided a time for peaceful reflection on the matter, the calm did not last into the New Year. At the next meeting, that Ozanam would refer to as "this notorious meeting of the last day of December 1834," Joseph Arthaud reintroduced Ozanam's proposal.⁴⁶⁸ The subsequent discussion was heated, the depth of opposition apparent. An exhausted Bailly proposed a truce and closed the meeting as all exchanged wishes for 1835.

Bailly, however, could not bring himself to attend the 6 January meeting. Le Prevost presided in his place. In an effort to replace emotional outbursts with reasoned discussion, he created two commissions, one favorable, the other opposed to the division. On 17 February, with a positive response from both commissions, Bailly announced that in the future the Society would be divided into three sections which would meet separately.

The following week, it was decided to limit the sections to two. Bailly would remain president of both. Ozanam would be the vice-president of the first section, with La Perrière serving as secretary. This section would soon be known as the Conference of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Levassor would be the vice-president, and Le Prevost the treasurer, of the second section which would become the Conference of Saint-Sulpice. Each section held its own meeting on 3 March.

The little Conference of Charity had survived its first crisis, a crisis of growth. From now on, it would go forward throughout Paris, throughout France, and ultimately throughout the world, "and receive into its bosom all those young men who desire to unite themselves to it by prayer and to participate in the same works of charity in whatever country they are found."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to François Lallier," 17 May 1838, *Ibid.*, 1:305.

⁴⁶⁹ *Règlement de 1835*, article I (Paris, 1836).

With the division, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul took on its true physiognomy. It would no longer be limited to the parish of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Indeed, Sister Rosalie would request and receive a conference for the parish of Saint-Médard. Rather than coming from the Sorbonne, these students would come largely from l'École Polytechnique and l'École Normale Supérieure. We have no exact date for its establishment, but Ozanam would refer to it as the "most pious Conference in the capital."

It is in light of this account of the division of the Society into Conferences, based essentially on the minutes of the pertinent meetings, that the report of Claudius Lavergne must be viewed.⁴⁷⁰ It claims that unanimity had been reached when it was learned that Sister Rosalie proposed the division.⁴⁷¹ It is not our purpose here to enter into the debate surrounding the text. Rather, it seems that while Sister Rosalie's name does not appear in the minutes, she could well have influenced the outcome. She did, indeed, want a Conference at Saint-Médard and she worked in close contact with all involved. She understood the importance of mutual support in the very demanding service these young men were undertaking. Nonetheless, her focus was ever the same: the better service of those who were poor. If she believed, and it appears that she did, that dividing the group into sections would further this goal, then she surely communicated this to the confreres. So, one way or another, she played a significant role at this decisive moment in the history of the Society.

There are two other areas in which Sister Rosalie's influence, although not specifically mentioned, was certainly key: the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the first Rule of the Society. Let us examine them.

First, the *Patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul*. From its earliest days, the members of the Conference of Charity had devotion to Saint Vincent de Paul. This is hardly surprising given the influence of Bailly, whose spirituality and service were permeated with his spirit. But it is especially due to Sister Rosalie, under whose gentle guidance these generous and enthusiastic young men became "Vincentians." As they entered the hovels of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district, they strove to discover the image of the suffering Christ in the ravaged faces surrounding them. They learned from

⁴⁷⁰ *Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Première Conférence (1833-1835)*, ASSVP, Registre 101.

⁴⁷¹ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 165-166.

Sister Rosalie that charity is neither philanthropy nor socialism. It is much more, and can only be nourished by faith. A letter of Ozanam reveals just how well this truth had been embraced. He wrote to Louis Janmot:

It seems that we must see in order to love; and we see God only with the eyes of faith; and our Faith is so weak. But we see poor persons with our bodily eyes. They are there and we can place our finger and our hand into their wounds... and we can say with the apostle, "Tu es Dominus et Deus meus [My Lord and my God]."⁴⁷²

However, the Society was not officially placed under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul until 4 February 1834. The proposal came at the weekly meeting, but not from Ozanam or Bailly. Rather, according to the minutes, it would be Le Prevost "making himself the interpreter of the wishes of several members, [who would] ask that the Society place itself under the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul, celebrate his feast, and in addition, recite a prayer at the beginning and end of each meeting."⁴⁷³

The minutes then go on to say that "no proposal could be more warmly received by the Society; all the remarks to which it gave rise can be summarized by congratulations and praise for the member who authored it."⁴⁷⁴ After Le Prevost, Ozanam rose to ask that "the Society place itself under the protection of the Most Holy Virgin and choose one of her feasts to honor her in a special way." The feast of the Immaculate Conception was chosen. It is worth noting that these two proposals were "the first adopted unanimously."⁴⁷⁵

Le Prevost's proposal was a sort of baptism for the Society. The patronage of Saint Vincent was official and the Conference of Charity would henceforth be the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. More and more the confreres would turn to Vincent for inspiration. In 1838, Ozanam would confirm this:

⁴⁷² "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Louis Janmot," 13 November 1836, in *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 1:242.

⁴⁷³ *Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Première Conférence (1833-1835)*, ASSVP Registre 101.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Now, in place of the *Imitation [of Christ]*, we read *The Life of Saint Vincent de Paul* so as to be more imbued with his example and traditions. His is a life that we must continue, a heart where we must warm our hearts, an intelligence where we must seek light.⁴⁷⁶

The confreres of the ever-expanding Society had learned well from the example and traditions of Saint Vincent, but also from the living examples of his spirit and traditions: Emmanuel Bailly and Sister Rosalie Rendu.

As we have discussed the origins of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, we have frequently spoken of Jean-Léon Le Prevost, and of the central role that he played during the early years of its existence. Perhaps before moving on, it would be worthwhile to discover, albeit briefly, who this man was.

Like Ozanam, Le Prevost came from the provinces, in his case Normandy. He was born in the little Norman town of Caudebec-en-Caux on 10 August 1803. His up-bringing was Catholic but, when Le Prevost arrived in Paris in 1825, he had renounced his desire to enter the seminary and had abandoned all religious practice. In 1833, he recounts how this had happened:

I left Lisieux, where I was at the time, to spend my vacation with my mother. [I was accompanied] by a good friend, [who was] generous but very ill advised because his light did not come from above. While I was totally unaware of it, he had already shaken my faith. Nevertheless, while in Le Havre where we had come, I knelt down that evening – he was already asleep – and recited my rosary. Then, after I had finished and placed it on the table, by some distraction that I cannot explain, I put the lamp on top of it. I forgot the rosary that was under it. A week later, all my bonds with God had been broken.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to François Lallier," 17 May 1838, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 1:308-309.

⁴⁷⁷ *Letter of Jean-Léon Le Prevost to Victor Pavie*, 12 July 1833, copy ASV: LLP 1:45.

Unlike Ozanam and the early confreres, Le Prevost was not a university student. His secondary education with the Jesuits at the Collège Royal in Rouen had provided him with a solid foundation in the classics and a love for literature, history, music, and art. However, before he could pass his baccalauréat, his father's business went into bankruptcy and he was forced to abandon his studies and seek employment. He worked briefly in a notary's office in Caudebec, and then, despite his lack of a diploma, as an instructor, first in Belfort in Alsace and then in Lisieux. But, in February 1825, he was obliged to give up his position to a candidate who possessed the desired credentials. With few options, he set out for Paris. He was 22.

Le Prevost was dazzled by the "City of Light" and set about imbibing its arts and culture. Wonderful as it all was, however, he soon came to realize that he had to earn his daily living. He was destined to do this as a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Cult. Preparing documents and writing letters hardly challenged Le Prevost's keen intelligence and literary bent. Thus, he frequented the artistic and literary gatherings of the capital. He came to know Victor Hugo, the great poet of the epoch, personally, and the critic Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve. In the midst of this, Le Prevost had the good fortune to meet and develop a life long friendship with Victor Pavie, a young student and Christian poet from Angers. Through him, he met other students from the same place. Like Le Prevost, they loved literature, art, and music. But, they were also a circle of friends involved in the Catholic movement of the 1830's. Victor Pavie would have a strong influence on his new friend, and eventually he would lead him along the path to conversion.

Romanticism attracted Le Prevost. He had certainly read Chateaubriand but it seems to have been the poets, particularly Lamartine, who reawakened the faith of his childhood in him. Lacordaire also played a role. But it was especially the example and friendship of Pavie that revealed the face of God to him. In 1832, he told his friend, "You were my star here: when I no longer knew where to go, I looked above and I advanced toward the point that you, yourself, occupied."⁴⁷⁸

In 1832, for the first time in his letters, the name of God appears, and in Him, Le Prevost discovers the sole source of love. Six

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24 April 1832, copy ASV: LLP 1:14.

months later the cholera epidemic broke out in Paris. We have already spoken at length of its devastation. However, for Le Prevost, it was another step in his journey back to God. He lost two very close friends to it. Faced with the relentless attacks of the disease and the ever-present sight of death, he spoke again of God:

Oh, how bitter this word [death] is! What deep sorrows it contains! For the past month, how many people around us have had to resign themselves [to it], to bow under its irresistible assault, and vanquished by the horrible struggle, to say to the Conqueror, "your will be done."

The Conqueror is God. How weak humans are and how little they resist! It is truly pitiful.⁴⁷⁹

When faced with a perceived evil like that with which the characters in Albert Camus' *The Plague* struggled, all but those whose faith is unshakable turn their backs on God or rage against Him. Paradoxically, it was this very drama that brought Le Prevost back to God. Three months later, he told Pavie:

With the help of God, I at last emerge from the shadows, from incertitude, and from doubt. Once again, I become a believer. I feel that my bonds have broken and that I am climbing toward the truth. My prayer is no longer vague or uncertain, thrown out haphazardly toward an unknown god. It follows a natural slope to God whom I feel, see, and hear, and under whose eye I am, at this instant, as at all others. I know, my friend, that you will share in my happiness...⁴⁸⁰

After receiving the sacrament of reconciliation, Le Prevost set out in earnest to discover his vocation. He challenged himself, as Jean Broet would challenge the students of the History Conference, "But it doesn't suffice to believe. My faith must have a form. There must

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

be works. I must fulfill the duties of a Christian."⁴⁸¹ He prayed, but his vocation of service was still unclear to him. In the meantime, he tried to live his newly rediscovered faith. This alone would sustain him when he fell seriously ill and nearly died in the autumn of 1833. But the "Provident God" who, the previous spring, had led the first confreres to form the Conference of Charity, was at work in his life.

Le Prevost's interest in literature and the arts gradually gave way to reflection on religious problems. He found like-minded young Catholics at the gatherings held by Count Charles Forbes de Montalembert. While some of the most illustrious personages of the era participated, it would be the youngest of the group, Frédéric Ozanam, who would have the greatest impact on his future life. Ozanam and his fellow Vincentians would take their noon meal in a modest little restaurant near Saint-Sulpice. Because it was located near the Ministry of Cult, where Le Prevost worked, he also ate there. One day, they invited him to join them. In an instant, he discovered his vocation of charity. And, he too came under the tutelage of Sister Rosalie. As already mentioned, she shared in the work of the Association of the Holy Family, and learned from Le Prevost as she established a social center for girls modeled on the one he had begun for boys.

We are not exactly certain of when Le Prevost joined the Conference of Charity, but he was definitely an active member by November 1834. He brought assistance to the poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district in their hovels, and visited young prisoners and elderly persons abandoned in their miserable garrets. He came to know Bailly and Sister Rosalie and became imbued with the Vincentian manner of serving those in need. He went to pray daily in the chapel of the Congregation of the Mission on rue de Sèvres, where Saint Vincent's relics had been transferred. Here he would be inspired to found a religious congregation, the Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul, for the service of workers and those who were poor. He would eventually be ordained a priest. But his Vincentian vocation was nurtured in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul by his contacts with Sister Rosalie. He himself attested to this when he was called upon to testify during the Process of Beatification for Father Libermann. He stated, "When I came to ...rue de l'Arbalète, I had already had the

⁴⁸¹ Boissinot, *Un autre Vincent de Paul*, 58.

honor of knowing Sister Rosalie, the Providence [of God] for all the miseries of this quarter..."⁴⁸²



Jean-Léon Le Prevost (1803-1874).
 One of the earliest members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul;
 Founder of the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul – 3 March 1845 –
 in the chapel of Saint-Lazare.
Public domain

Le Prevost's admission into the Society marked another turning point in its development. He was the first member who was not a student and who, at 30, was considered old. He would become the president of the Conference of Saint-Sulpice which Ozanam would call, "The Queen of the Conferences." While Le Prevost was one of the first dozen members, the little group was already spreading its "network of charity." The growth process would not be slowed.

There is so much more that could be said about Le Prevost, as about Ozanam, but we have essentially limited our discussion to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and the influence of Sister Rosalie at the early stages of its development. What we have put forth is based largely on the works of Georges-Albert Boissinot, S.V., who prepared the *Positio on Jean-Léon Le Prevost* and who published a shortened version of this text, entitled *Un autre Vincent de Paul: Jean-Léon Le Prevost*

⁴⁸² Jean-Léon Le Prevost, *Deposition for the Ordinary Process of Beatification [for Paul-François Libermann]*, Archives de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, Chevilly-Larue.

(1803-1874). It is perhaps fitting to conclude with an observation by Father Boissinot concerning this era and the extraordinary people who gave themselves to God, in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, to serve Jesus Christ in the person of the most needy, as they sought to alleviate the misery of the inhabitants of the most wretched district of the capital:

Emmanuel Bailly, Frédéric Ozanam, Sister Rosalie Rendu, Jacob Libermann, Jean-Léon Le Prevost, ...[and one could certainly add Armand de Melun] what a team of apostles and holy persons walked the area around the Panthéon and rue Mouffetard, called the street of the revolutions!⁴⁸³

Second, the *First Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul*. The growth of the Society from the initial Conference of Charity into an organization of many Conferences, which had spread beyond Paris to the provinces, led to the realization that some form of regulation, based on the lived experience of the members in the service of those who were poor, was essential if the original spirit was to be maintained. Thus, in 1835, Emmanuel Bailly, François Lallier, and Frédéric Ozanam were charged with the task.

Ozanam had clearly seen the need for greater organization. In a letter dated 3 November 1834, he wrote:

It was important... to form an association of mutual encouragement for young Catholics where they would find friendship, support, [and] example; where they would encounter, as it were, a semblance of the religious family in which they were nurtured; where the long standing [members] would welcome new pilgrims from the provinces and show them a kind of moral hospitality. Now the greatest good, the principle of a true friendship, is charity. And charity cannot exist in the hearts of many without spreading to the exterior. It is a fire that goes out if not fed; and charity is fed by good works.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ Boissinot, *Un autre Vincent de Paul*, 247.

⁴⁸⁴ "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Léonce Curnier," 3 November 1834, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 1:152.

As with the first Rule of the Daughters of Charity, the first Rule of the Society was the product of lived experience. For two years, the first confreres had given themselves to God to serve Jesus Christ in the person of those who were poor under the guidance of Sister Rosalie. This humble Daughter of Charity exemplified for them the essential attributes of Vincentian service. But the time had come to codify that experience for the ever-growing number of members, especially those who might never have the opportunity of knowing or working alongside Sister Rosalie.

The *Explanatory Notes*, dated December 1835 and attributed to Bailly, confirm the desire to give form and structure to the nascent Society, and to clarify the identity of the members as Vincentians. We read:

We are now entering upon the formal organization we have long wished for. It has been delayed, for our association has already existed some years. But were we not bound to ascertain that God wished it should continue, before determining the form which it should assume? Was it not necessary that it should be well established – that it should know what Heaven required of it – that it should judge what it can do by what it has already done, before framing its rules and prescribing its duties? Now we have only to embody, as it were, in Regulations, usages already followed and cherished; and this is a guarantee that our Rule will be well received by all and not forgotten.⁴⁸⁵

A bit further, Bailly continues:

It is a movement of Christian piety that united us; we must, therefore, look for the rules of our conduct nowhere but in the spirit of religion – in the examples and words of our Savior – in the instructions of the Church – in the lives of the saints. Such are the reasons why we placed ourselves under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin and of Saint Vincent de Paul, to whom

⁴⁸⁵ *Règlement de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris: Imprimerie de E-J Bailly et Compagnie, 1835), 5-6.

we owe particular devotion, and in whose footsteps we must perseveringly endeavor to follow.⁴⁸⁶

Two years of experience had shown the members that, even with zeal and generosity, they could not respond to every need. Thus, while remaining open to the spirit leading them to discover the ever-changing visage of misery, they set forth their goals:

Jesus Christ wanted first to practice what he must then teach... Our desire, in keeping with our limited strength, is to imitate this divine model. Therefore, the end of the Conference is:

1. to sustain its members in the practice of a Christian life by example and mutual advice;
2. to visit those who are poor in their homes, to bring them assistance in kind... and to offer them religious consolation...;
3. to apply ourselves, according to our talents and the time that we have at our disposition, to the elementary and Christian instruction of poor children, whether free or in prison...;
4. to distribute moral and Christian books;
5. to apply ourselves to all kinds of other charitable works, for which our resources are adequate [and] which are not contrary to the primary aim of the society...⁴⁸⁷

While the members are urged to practice "all virtues," six are considered as most necessary for the accomplishment of their charitable works.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

These are: self-sacrifice; Christian prudence; an efficacious love for one's neighbor; zeal for the salvation of souls; gentleness of heart and humility in words; and especially fraternal spirit.⁴⁸⁸

None of the three confreres working on the Rule had ever read the first Rule of the Daughters of Charity. It did not circulate outside the community. They did, however, witness Sister Rosalie and the other Daughters of Charity, with whom they worked, apply it to their lives and their service of those in need. Echoes of this living Rule are found in the text of the 1835 Rule of the Society: Jesus Christ loved and served in the person of those who are poor; Jesus Christ, Model of all charity; humility, simplicity, gentleness, compassion, respect and devotion in their dealings with those in need; love of neighbor united to zeal for the salvation of souls; service that is at one and the same time "corporal and spiritual;" and finally, charity and union among themselves as they support one another for the service of those who are poor.⁴⁸⁹

The confreres had learned well the essential attributes of Vincentian service. As with the first Rule of the Daughters of Charity, the Rule of the Society has undergone revisions over the years. But in both cases, the essence remains and calls forth rededication to the primitive spirit. Sister Rosalie's Beatification, on 9 November 2003, has led the members of the Vincentian Family to rediscover their roots. In an article written for the *Echoes of the Company*, the internal international communication organ for the Daughters of Charity, José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, 14th International President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, proposed a subject for reflection to the Daughters of Charity which has application for the entire Vincentian Family. He wrote:

I suggest that you meditate on this question: are the times we are living in very different from those of Sister Rosalie Rendu? I would honestly say yes and no. Suffering takes on different forms and the causes of it are different. But people remain the same and they still need the loving care of their brothers and sisters...

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-18.

Will we be able, to find in our own times, other “mothers” who will be willing to believe in lay groups and collaborate in their formation for the service of those who are poor and, later, be able to let these groups spread their wings, respecting and emphasizing their need to be independent? Some of you will say, as did Sister Rosalie one day, “This can be done.” Serving the Church of the poor is well worth the effort.⁴⁹⁰

Just as the providential convergence of the destinies of Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and the founding members of the Ladies of Charity transformed the face of charity in seventeenth-century France and beyond, so the providential encounter of Sister Rosalie, Frédéric Ozanam, Emmanuel Bailly, Jean-Léon Le Prevost, and the founding members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul indelibly marked the service of those in need in the XIXth century, and continues to do so today on five continents. The Vincentian Family, which took its first steps in Châtillon, a tiny village in southeastern France, in 1617, has journeyed to the farthest corners of the earth, fulfilling Ozanam’s dream of “encircling the world in a network of charity.” Sister Rosalie was, and continues to be, of considerable importance in this realization.

Before leaving the subject of groups and individuals with whom Sister Rosalie labored, let us turn our attention to two long-term collaborators with whom she shared her passion for the service of those in need: Armand de Melun and Cyprien Loppe.

Armand de Melun

We have cited Melun throughout this work as his biography of Sister Rosalie was the first. His work bears the marks of a friend and close collaborator who had witnessed many of the events he recounts, and had learned of others from Sister Rosalie herself or from her companions in the house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. But what do we know of him, since he reveals little of himself in his text?

A twin, Armand and his brother Anatole were born at the château of Brumetz in the Department of Aisne in Picardy on 24

⁴⁹⁰ José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, “The Saint Vincent de Paul Society Today,” *Echoes of the Company* 4 (July-August 2004): 330.

September 1807. The family was wealthy, conservative, and loyal to the Bourbons. While Anatole would enter the military, Armand pursued his secondary studies at the Collège Sainte-Barbe in Paris, and later completed his law degree at the Sorbonne. He was admitted to the bar but abandoned all professional activity after the fall of Charles X in 1830. He did not need to earn his living. His family fortune precluded that necessity. More of a dilettante in his youth than Anatole, Armand read, traveled, and was a regular visitor to the salons where young Catholics met to discuss the future of Catholicism. There was nothing in his early years that foreshadowed a dedicated servant of and strong advocate for the working class.

That would change when Melun began to frequent the salon on rue Bellechasse of the Russian expatriate and mystic, Madame Anne-Sophie Symonov Swetchine, a wealthy, charitable woman who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1815 at the age of 33. Melun was an intellectual, whereas Madame Swetchine responded to those in need without distinguishing between the charitable and the social. It would be she who, during the winter of 1837-1838, would speak to her young friend, Armand, about Sister Rosalie who, "in the Saint-Médard district, the poorest and most abandoned in Paris, had become Providence for all those [living] in misery and who had caused herself to be accepted there with the incomparable power of the empire of charity."⁴⁹¹

Moved by Madame Swetchine's portrait of Sister Rosalie, Melun asked for a letter of introduction to her. Everything about Sister Rosalie spoke of simplicity and humility, but she had too much experience with those who came to offer their assistance, more out of curiosity than fervor, only to abandon the service after their first direct contact with the abject poverty of the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. Thus, Melun went to the little parlor of the house on rue de

⁴⁹¹ Comte Le Camus, ed., *Mémoires du Vicomte A. de Melun: revues et mises en ordre par le Comte Le Camus*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1891).

Note: Bibliothèque Nationale. 8 L n 27 39650 (1-2). This book is no longer available. The Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris has a typewritten text with the following note by Philippe Roche, C.M. "At the Bibliothèque Nationale, where I went, I was shown the catalogue card but was told that these two volumes could not be found. Father Chalumeau had them in his hands shortly after 1955. He copied what concerned Melun and Sister Rosalie since photocopies did not exist at that time. Thus it is what Father Chalumeau copied that we have here." Since we have been unable to obtain the book, we are quoting the copied text from pages 192-207 of the original: (early 1838).

l'Épée-de-Bois armed with Madame Swetchine's letter, confirming his great desire to become one of Sister Rosalie's collaborators.

To better understand the transforming effects of this encounter on Melun's future life, let us consider this account of his attitude toward those who were poor prior to his collaboration with Sister Rosalie. He writes in his memoirs:

Until then, I had never visited a person living in poverty. I knew only those who held out their hand to me on the street. Those in the country were assisted by my family. They came to the house for bread and medicine. When they were sick, my mother and sisters went to see them. I did not have to be concerned about them. As for those in Paris, until now I left it to the [Bureau of] Public Assistance and the houses of charity to know them and take care of them. I put a few [francs] in the collection in my parish and gave a few [centimes], not many, to the beggars of whom I was highly suspicious. My most generous alms, if I remember correctly, had been the 20 francs I paid for a ticket to the ball at the Opera, that good King Charles X had sponsored in order to alleviate the hardships of the terrible winter of 1829 on its unfortunate [victims].... In the state of mind in which I found myself, this life of Sister Rosalie in the midst of those who were poor struck me as a revelation of an unknown world which attracted me...⁴⁹²

Melun goes on to describe his excitement, mingled with trepidation, as he discovered this unknown world, just a few streets away from the Sorbonne where he had spent three years studying law. "It seemed to me that I was entering a large hospital ward, assisting at all kinds of surgery, and remaining stupefied before such great suffering and such misery."⁴⁹³ Alone, the young man made his way cautiously through the narrow, dirty streets until he found the little

⁴⁹² Le Camus, *Mémoires de Melun*.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. He entered in the company of two persons who were obviously poor. He admits that everything was new to him, "...the district, the house of charity, and also the life and activities of Sister Rosalie and the Sisters of Charity."⁴⁹⁴

Sister Rosalie welcomed him "almost as well as if [he] had been a person weighed down by poverty."⁴⁹⁵ She remained skeptical, however. She, therefore, set about testing this young intellectual, who by his own admission was more attached to the theoretical grandeur of religion than to the practice of Christian charity. She sent him out on the very first day to visit families who were living in misery. He acknowledged that he was uncomfortable at first. However, once he was with these "good people" for a time, sharing himself with them and especially listening to their stories, it became difficult for him to leave. He soon found himself returning several times each week to walk the streets that were now becoming familiar, visiting families he was coming to know not as "the poor" but as fellow human beings struggling with the joys and sorrows of their existence while trying to hold on to a glimmer of hope. It is not surprising that, by 1839, he was an active member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. In a letter to Madame Swetchine, dated 12 July 1840, Melun speaks of his transformation since his initial contact with Sister Rosalie, the sisters of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district, and the confreres of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. He tells his friend, who had set it all in motion:

As for me, dear friend, I no longer have any doubt about my vocation. I fought against science and I struggled with all the great philosophical questions while the time for discussion still lasted.

I had my years of reflection and my hours of speaking, and it always seemed to me that something was lacking in my destiny; that these words and these reflections called for more positive consequences and no longer satisfied my duty.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ *Letter of Armand de Melun to Madame Swetchine, 12 July 1840, Archives Melun, at the home of Madame la Vicomtesse de Mareuil, Antibes.*

The dilettante had become a man of charity. And, because he was independently wealthy and did not need to exercise a profession, he gave himself entirely to it. He remained faithful to visiting the families that Sister Rosalie selected for him, but he expanded his activities for and with her. He wrote some of her letters and often delivered them; drafted petitions on behalf of her many persons in need; and added his influence and support when Sister Rosalie needed to approach civil or governmental authorities for services for her beloved people of the Mouffetard district. At the same time, she became his confidant and mentor. Melun recalls in his memoirs:

From that moment on [his first encounter with Sister Rosalie] until her death, not a week passed without my going [to the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois] not only to visit her poor and walk... the narrow, twisting streets of her kingdom, but to listen to her wisdom and advice on all the works that I wanted to undertake, and on all the difficult situations I was incapable of resolving.

Despite her overwhelming occupations and the crowd from every class and every economic status that filled her parlor, she always had time to listen to me, to adopt my works, and to aid in their beginnings and in their progress....

I never returned from rue de l'Épée-de-Bois without learning a new way to accomplish good and the desire to consecrate yet more time and good will collaborating in Sister Rosalie's works.⁴⁹⁷

The works undertaken by Melun, with Sister Rosalie's encouragement and support, opened in rapid succession: the Society of the Friends of Children (1838); the Agricultural Camp for Orphans in the Department of l'Oise (1839); and Social Centers (1840). We spoke of this latter work in Chapter VIII, section Four, because Sister Rosalie began a social center for girls at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, modeled on the one founded by Melun and Le Prevost.

⁴⁹⁷ Le Camus, *Mémoires de Melun*.

As Melun's charitable activity expanded, he began to read and reflect on the phenomenon of poverty and solutions for addressing it. His perspective had changed as a result of his experiences, particularly his close collaboration with Sister Rosalie in the struggle against the squalor and misery of the Mouffetard district. Thus, he no longer sought remedies in social Catholicism but rather in economics. The first issue of *Les Annales de la Charité*, which, as previously mentioned, Melun founded in 1845, demonstrated that he recognized that private charity alone could not address the overwhelming needs of the working class. As he saw it, the State, independent of political infighting, must work to improve the lot of these victims of the Industrial Revolution. He wrote, "The State alone can manage the gamut of misery and, in a permanent and general way, improve the lot of those who suffer. It must transform into general justice what was only partial charity." Shortly thereafter, through Melun's influence, the Society of Charitable Economics was born.⁴⁹⁸



Armand de Melun (1807-1877).
Friend, collaborator and biographer of Sister Rosalie.
Public domain

⁴⁹⁸ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France* (Paris, 1951), 216-217.

This society corresponded to Melun's thoughts on solutions for the rampant misery afflicting the working class. From his perspective, charity was not simply amassing donations or rendering service, rather it was the application of a science, charitable economics, which required reasoned knowledge of the evils specific to the condition of those living in poverty and the appropriate remedies to be applied to it. Once again, his thought was formed at the school of Sister Rosalie. In his memoirs, he recalls:

I soon grew accustomed to these visits [to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district] and the conversations that preceded and followed them. There I learned so well to discern true misery from its mask; to consider the exaggeration of some and the reserve of others; to distribute to each person what was most appropriate in material assistance, advice, and even conversation.⁴⁹⁹

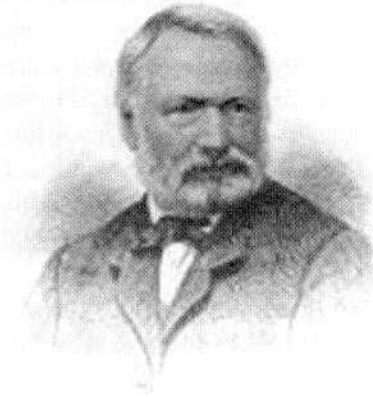
Convinced of the indispensable role of government in alleviating the crushing poverty of the working class, Melun determined to play a role in framing social legislation. Thus, in 1849, he ran for election to the Legislative Assembly under the Second Republic. The question arises: what influence, if any, did Sister Rosalie have on this decision? As we have seen, she, herself, was apolitical. The epoch during which she lived and carried out her ministry was unique in French history. It was an era of unprecedented political change during which the government moved, most often amidst violence and turmoil, from a monarchy, to a republic, to an empire and then again, to a monarchy, a republic, and an empire. Through it all, Sister Rosalie remained focused on the needs of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. She found a way to work with the government and the public sector, whatever the political climate might be. Her only real conflict with civil authority came, as we have seen, when she refused to take sides during and after an insurgency, providing the same assistance to all who sought her aid. Now, one of her closest collaborators and friends would be a part of the government of the Second Republic.

⁴⁹⁹ Le Camus, *Mémoires de Melun*.

We cannot respond, with any degree of certitude, to the question of Sister Rosalie's role in Melun's decision, as he does not provide us an answer. It seems, nonetheless, from what he has told us of his relationship with her that, if she did not encourage the move, she must, at the very least, have supported him as he determined to enter politics to work for the benefit of those who were poor. She was his mentor and, by his own admission, he relied on her guidance. It is highly improbable that he would have gone forward and run for elected office in face of her opposition.

In 1849, Melun was elected a delegate to the Legislative Assembly by the Department of l'Ille-et-Villaine. The early period of the Second Republic was one of relative openness to the Church and conservatives. Even members of the clergy were elected to the Assembly. Thus, the conservative Viscount Armand de Melun was not in an entirely hostile environment. Moreover, despite spirited debate, he would be able, through tact and diplomacy, to gain support for social reform legislation from his fellow conservatives, who feared nothing so much as socialism.

Furthermore, his timing could not have been more propitious inasmuch as he gained the support of Victor Hugo. On 4 June 1848, Hugo had been elected a delegate to the Constituent Assembly. He pronounced his first discourse there on 1 August. At the time, his views were generally conservative and he supported Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's candidacy for the Presidency of the Republic. When Hugo was re-elected in 1849, however, he had become a violent critic of society's failings with regard to those who were poor. He had been transformed into the champion of France's most vulnerable and abandoned: *Les Misérables*. On 9 July 1849, Hugo rose to address the Assembly and to deliver his impassioned *Discours sur la Misère* [*Discourse on Misery*]. In it he lent his support to Melun's proposition to the Assembly to set up a thirty-member commission charged with the responsibility of preparing and examining, as quickly as possible, the laws dealing with prevention and public assistance.



Victor Hugo (1802-1885).
Public domain

Let us consider more closely Hugo's extraordinary presentation to his colleagues, for whom the images of the angry mobs of the Revolution of 1848 remained only too vivid. After the violence of June 1848, relative calm had settled on the French capital. The conservative view was, by and large, that force was the only remedy against chaos. Hugo contradicted this at the very outset. He told the delegates:

We must profit from the silence imposed on anarchistic passions to allow popular interests to be voiced. We must profit from the restoration of order to elevate work; to create social protection on a broad scale; to substitute assistance that strengthens for alms that degrade; to set up, everywhere and under all sorts of forms, institutions of different types, which will reassure the unfortunate and encourage the worker; to grant graciously to the suffering classes, by all kinds of improvements, one hundred times more than their false friends [the socialists] ever promised them! This is how we must profit from victory. We must profit from the disappearance of the revolutionary spirit to bring about the reappearance of the spirit of progress.⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ Victor Hugo, "Discours sur la misère" in *Actes et Paroles 1, Assemblée législative 1849-1851*, 9 July 1849.

Hugo then went on to spell out the nature of the commission he called for, and that Melun had proposed. Its role was:

...to put forth, piece by piece, law by law, but with cohesiveness and maturity, from the work of this legislature, the complete and coordinated code, the great Christian code of prevention and public assistance; in a word, to snuff out the illusions of a certain socialism under the realities of the Gospel.⁵⁰¹

For Hugo, the government, by studying and finding solutions to the misery afflicting the working classes, was not only doing the right thing but the politically wise thing. Only by addressing the questions of misery would the much feared revolution and socialism be contained. The government must provide what the socialists could only promise. He then challenged his colleagues on both sides of the aisle:

This is why I am imbued; this is why I want to imbue all those listening to me with the great importance of the proposition that has been submitted to you [Melun's proposal to create a commission to study the causes of poverty and to find viable solutions for it]. It is only a first step but it is decisive. I want this assembly, the majority and the minority, it matters not, since I recognize neither a majority nor a minority for such questions, I want this assembly to have but one soul to march toward this great goal, this magnificent goal, this sublime goal – the abolition of misery.⁵⁰²

Hugo's conclusion brought all his colleague's to their feet in support of his ideas, and insured the passage of Melun's proposition. He moved them all when he stated:

You see it, Gentlemen, and I repeat it in closing. It is not only to your generosity that I appeal; it is to your wisdom; and I urge you to reflect upon this,

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

Gentlemen, to consider that it is anarchy that opens the abyss but it is misery that excavates it. You have passed laws against anarchy. Now pass laws against misery.⁵⁰³

Hugo's discourse had the desired effect. The commission was formed. The serious work of social reform had begun. Moreover, during the period 1850-1851, Melun was responsible for the adoption of an impressive body of legislation designed to improve the lot of those who were poor:

1. 12 April 1850: establishing a social center for young prisoners;
2. 22 April 1850: addressing unsanitary housing;
3. 10 December 1850: facilitating marriage for couples who were indigent;
4. 22 January 1851: providing legal assistance for those in need;
5. 22 February 1851: [most significant piece of legislation] establishing a contract for apprentices: limiting the workday to 10 hours for those under 14; 12 hours for those from 14 to 16 years of age; prohibiting night work before the age of 16; prohibiting the placement of apprentices with widowers or bachelors; imposing Sunday rest; allotting 2 hours per day for children under 16 to learn, if necessary, to read, write, and do arithmetic, or to receive religious instruction;
6. 30 June 1851: creating credit unions;
7. 7 August 1851: reforming hospitals and hospices.

Melun's own sincerity and personal experience in assisting the working class poor of the Mouffetard district, added to his tact in calming the fears of his more timorous colleagues, certainly gave him credibility. Under Sister Rosalie's guidance he learned first hand of the squalid conditions in which many hard working people had to live and raise their families. He became their voice. In so doing, Melun realized one of the great dreams of his life. He compelled the legislature to consider the question of poverty and to grant a place in

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

the work of the Assembly to those who were poor. Sister Rosalie's influence on Melun was of incalculable importance. Because of it, she was able to leave her mark not only on the Mouffetard district but throughout the capital and beyond.

There is another of Sister Rosalie's collaborators who should be mentioned here because he is illustrative of her giftedness in calling forth the generosity and dedication of students, and of her lifelong affection for them; namely, Cyprien Loppe.

Cyprien Loppe

Due to Sister Rosalie's forty-three letters to Cyprien Loppe, covering the period from December 1835 through March 1851, as well as information provided by one of his living descendants, Monsieur Gauthier, we know him better after his student days in Paris, where he had pursued a law degree and worked as a clerk for a notary from 1831 or 1832 to 1835. Moreover, according to Monsieur Gauthier, it was probably due to Sister Rosalie that Loppe was named "Visiting Counselor" for the Society of Saint-Régis and Commissioner of Public Assistance for the Bureau of Public Assistance of the XIIth Arrondissement. Loppe had come to know Sister Rosalie during that period, and to find in her a mentor whose influence shaped his life as he worked closely with her. A letter from the Bureau of Public Assistance to Loppe, after he had resigned as Commissioner, reveals how deeply he had absorbed Sister Rosalie's love for and commitment to those in need. It says in part, "The Bureau has requested that I express its regrets and ask you to accept its gratitude for the care you so willingly gave the suffering working class confided to you."⁵⁰⁴

This friendship between Sister Rosalie and Cyprien Loppe perdured after he left Paris and became a notary in Boulogne-sur-Mer. The first letter that we have is dated 10 December 1835. It reveals Sister Rosalie's on-going concern for her friend and her interest in the various aspects of his life. She expresses her joy that he is established in his new profession but she also tells him, "I will not speak to you of the void that you have left. It would be selfish; but I cannot fail to mention [the empty space] that my heart feels because you are so far away."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ *Letter of the Bureau of Public Assistance of the XIIth arrondissement to Cyprien Loppe*, 18 January 1836, original in the possession of Monsieur Gauthier.

⁵⁰⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 10 December 1835, AFCEP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 13 L1.

Sister Rosalie acknowledged her chagrin as she reflected on “the hours that [he] so kindly gave [to her],” but her sorrow dissipated when she realized that her friend was accomplishing “the designs of Providence” in his new profession.⁵⁰⁶ She then went on to give news of their mutual friends in Paris. It is interesting to note that in nearly all her letters to Loppe, Sister Rosalie gave him news of the sisters of her house and sent their regards to him. She also never failed to inquire about his family and ask to be remembered to them. Sister Rosalie and Cyprien Loppe were close collaborators in the service of those who were poor in the Mouffetard district, but they were also friends who cared deeply for one another and, as we have seen in the case of Madame Badin, distance did not weaken the bonds of friendship or bring their collaboration to an end.

It would appear that Loppe used his professional education and skill to help his mentor assist those who came to her in need. He handled the accounts and, when he left Paris, this charge was taken over by Daniel-Deray, a friend of Loppe’s, of whom Sister Rosalie speaks frequently in her correspondence with him.

A letter of 25 December 1835 shows reciprocity of service. This time it is Loppe who asks for assistance from Sister Rosalie. We do not know what he requested but her response is telling. She says, “I received your good letter yesterday and the note it contained. Your request will be carried out exactly. I cannot tell you how you please me in giving me the opportunity to do something for your interests. Always act this way with me, without any hesitation. It is the proof of friendship that I hope for.”⁵⁰⁷

The image of Sister Rosalie is that of a woman who is tireless in her service of her “beloved poor.” And it is an accurate depiction of her. A letter of 12 February 1836, nonetheless, shows how close she must have been to Loppe, as in it she admits that she is tired. Melun told us that the fearless Sister Rosalie was frightened before the onset of the cholera epidemics. This letter shows the indefatigable Sister Rosalie as tired and discouraged. After telling her friend the consolation that his letters brought her, she adds:

I still really want to go to Ireland. My Sister Superioress
General [Sister Marie Boulet, 1833-1839] tells me that

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 December 1835, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 14 L2.

she would not object, if my health permits me to make this trip. I am very tired and my soul is empty when I realize what I do not accomplish. And what I do is so imperfect. I am saddened by it despite my frenetic life.⁵⁰⁸



Sister Marie Boulet, D.C.
Superioress General – 1833-1839.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

Sister Rosalie never did go to Ireland. Indeed, there seems to be only one occasion when she left the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois for a period of rest. This did not last long since she returned after a few days because she missed her "beloved poor" so much. There were certainly other occasions when the enormity of the task of bringing relief to the suffering inhabitants of the Mouffetard district overwhelmed her. It would be at times like this that she would share her thoughts and fears with the people who were closest to her. This surely included her sister companions, but we have no record of that. Thus, the frankness and openness of her letters to Loppe reveal an essential aspect of Sister Rosalie's sensitive soul. It is that of a woman for whom works of charity were, as Desmet put it, "gifts of her heart."⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 February 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 16 L3.

⁵⁰⁹ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 154-155.

While she expressed her concerns to Loppe, they never dominated her correspondence with him, or with anyone else for that matter. The needs of those who were poor, and the well-being and happiness of those who collaborated with her in assisting them, was always the focus. Other letters to Loppe make this abundantly clear. The tone set in the 10 December 1835 letter continues through the years. Sister Rosalie often turns to her “dear and great friend,” to ask for help for a person in need. On this occasion it is for a certain Monsieur Clausier. She writes:

I am very grateful to you in advance for all that you are doing and will do for him. ...Take this good work to heart. It will take its place among those that were your continual occupation during your stay in Paris. You must find in your heart the joy that the habit of doing good provides.⁵¹⁰



Bicêtre Hospital, ca. 18th-19th century. Former prison, military hospital, founding home and insane asylum.
Public domain

On 12 September of the same year, she writes to thank Loppe for what he has done for the “unfortunate Clausier.” She goes on to say that she is trying to place him at Bicêtre but needs a letter from Loppe to the ministry in support of this move. It is interesting to note that she seems to take it for granted that he will comply with her request since, without further comment on the matter, she goes on to give him

⁵¹⁰ Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe, 22 July 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 26 L6.

news of his friends in Paris. Among them is a couple, the Coins, who are expecting a baby. She adds optimistically, "Undoubtedly you will come for the baptism."⁵¹¹

Other letters likewise seek assistance for those in need, including requests to borrow money.⁵¹² At the same time, Sister Rosalie repeatedly renews her offer to render any service she can to or for her friend and collaborator. On 25 October 1837, she reminds him, "Be well persuaded, my dear, that I am pleased and happy when you allow me to do something that would give you pleasure. I would burst a blood vessel if you turned to other people."⁵¹³

Sister Rosalie followed the development of Loppe's professional career very closely. She recognized the demands that expanding his client base placed on him, but she still continued to involve him in her ministry. He was so busy that he was unable to think about marrying. Sister Rosalie assured him that this was a wise decision:

You are right to wait awhile before you marry. Enjoy your liberty; that is to say, take care of your business affairs without [other] responsibilities. Then, in a few years, you will be very happy to undertake this great venture. It merits mature reflection. If you are all absorbed by your profession, which demands your full attention, I think you should take on only one important matter at a time. I am telling you what you know better than I.⁵¹⁴

But then, in 1838, she rejoiced to learn that he was engaged, telling him, "Every day at mass, there are thoughts of you. Be very fervent, good friend. Draw down upon yourself the graces necessary for such an important undertaking."⁵¹⁵

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12 September 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 28 L7.

⁵¹² See *Letters of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 4 June 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 22 L4; 3 July 1836, Le 23 L5; 28 May 1837, Le 40 L10; 15 October 1837, Le 46 L11; 6 November 1839, Le 117 L31.

⁵¹³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 25 October 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 47 L12.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 40 L10.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 56 L14.

Spiritual counseling was a significant part of Sister Rosalie's relationship with the many students who shared her service to the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. A letter to Lotpe dated 28 May 1837 furnishes an example of this practice. She tells her friend:

I bless Our Lord for your success and your hopes. If you prosper, you are aware of the source of all these graces: the good parents that you have are surely the instruments which [God] has ...used to cause [these blessings] to flow down on you. Always walk along the path they have marked out for you. May their example, counsel, and wise advice be the rule for your behavior. Honor them and you will have a long life.⁵¹⁶

Sister Rosalie is aware that she can be "preachy." She admits, "Here is a sermon that can be useful for a good son like you. Persevere, my dear, and you will be happy."⁵¹⁷ This awareness, however, did not deter her from continuing to give her young friend maternal and spiritual advice. When the date was set for the wedding, Sister Rosalie's counsel became more precise. On 8 March 1838, she wrote:

There you are on the way to taking indissoluble bonds upon yourself. It is a grave matter. I believe it is the kind of thing that will preoccupy you but we must make you lose your strict composure. Prepare yourself for this important action by prayer, penance, and reception of the sacraments. You must make a good general confession [and] you must be fully aware of the obligations that you are to assume. You understand their extent [and are] conscious of this. Yes, my dear, you are going to marry and assume a responsibility for which you will have to render a strict accounting. You will experience trials and you will know short joys. However, everything will be beneficial to the [one] who fears God. Keep this

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1837.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

thought before you: you must be a model that all those who surround or see you can imitate. Fortify yourself by the grace that is afforded us by prayer, the sacraments, and [spiritual] reading. Sometimes we must [examine] ourselves through Christian recollection. I am certain that your honorable father is giving you advice and, more importantly, example.... Imitate him, my dear. Walk in his footsteps and you will live a long life.⁵¹⁸

Here too, Sister Rosalie is aware that perhaps she is giving unsolicited advice, so she explains to her young friend:

My pen has given way to my heart which loves to communicate with you. I pray to our Good God everyday for you and I have good souls, who draw down blessings on you and your undertakings, pray for you also. I deeply regret not seeing you. It seems like forever since I have had that pleasure. Do not question my affection. It is incomparable and certainly very sincere. ...I tell you and ask you to believe that I am, with all my heart, your devoted and affectionate Sister and friend.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 March 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 60 L16.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*



Cyprien Loppe.
Friend and collaborator of Sister Rosalie.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

The marriage between Cyprien Loppe and Louise-Florence Lefebvre took place on 30 April 1838. At the time of the engagement Sister Rosalie had voiced her somewhat maternal fear that there would no longer be a place for her and her “beloved poor” in her friend’s life. A month before his marriage, Loppe was obliged to cancel a trip to Paris. She gently chided him, “You won’t love us less, will you? ... Farewell, my dear friend. Love me a little [and] you will give some of the [friendship] that I have for you back to me.”⁵²⁰ In the same letter, she also revealed her motherly concern – although she put a positive face on her remarks – that Loppe’s future spouse be right for him. She told him, perhaps with an optimism she did not feel, because she did not know the future bride, “You may be certain of the joy that the news of your future brought me. It seems to be working out well. With all my heart, I ask Providence to give you the companion you deserve. You will make her happy and you will be at peace, which is the way to happiness.”⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 February 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 57 L15.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

Be this as it may, Sister Rosalie quickly developed a deep affection for the new bride. It does not appear the two ever met, but there is warmth in her letters as she sends her affectionate greetings to Madame Loppe. On 21 July 1838, she wrote, "My most heartfelt regards to Madame Loppe. I was certain of your affection for her and I sincerely rejoice in the good choice Providence has made for you; ...and I am confident that the support you give her is constant. Mutually assist one another to grow holy in your union."⁵²²

The news that the young couple was expecting a child was a joy for Sister Rosalie, the little community of sisters of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, and Loppe's numerous friends in Paris. In her New Year's greeting for 1839, Sister Rosalie tells Loppe, "We desire a beautiful boy for [Madame Loppe] and that her health will not be compromised by the birth. We often pray for her in community. See to it that she conserves her strength and takes proper care of herself."⁵²³

Sister Rosalie continued to express her concern and affection for the expectant mother throughout her pregnancy. This time of joyous expectation, however, was tempered by the suffering brought about by illness in the family. Sister Rosalie immediately offered support and assistance. The extent of her network of collaborators is evident in this letter as she directed her friend toward those who could be helpful to him. She urged him:

I hasten to invite you to contact the pharmacist of the Hôtel-Dieu of your city. I know his wife.... Tell him that I am asking him to indicate to you the trustworthy persons you need. Also contact Monsieur Wasson, a cloth merchant. I know he is an honorable man. Tell him that I ask him to do for you what he would do for me. We have no sisters there; however, the religious of the hospital could provide you with good home nurses.

I am distressed about your painful situation. Urge your dear wife not to risk contracting an illness....

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 21 July 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 70 L20.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 86 L24.

We pray and have others praying for the patient and for you. Send me news as soon as possible.⁵²⁴

But death ultimately followed, so Sister Rosalie's next letter expressed her sympathy and that of the little community of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. She wrote:

I don't know how nor can I express my sorrow at the thought of the [grief] that you experienced and that you still endure. Your courage and your faith have been sorely tried. Yes, my dear friend, you must turn to God to strengthen you in such a situation. You have been placed in circumstances which cause you to appreciate the merits and qualities of the person who has been given to you as a friend and companion for life. Let us bless the hand that strikes us and at every moment let us say *Fiat*. All our sisters and all our friends share your pain. We have prayed for you, for the deceased, and for his relatives. ...Farewell, my friend. Please give my affectionate sentiments to your wife and to all those who are dear to you...⁵²⁵

The relative in question appears to be on Madame Loppe's side of the family. Nearly four months later, Sister Rosalie sent her encouragement to the expectant mother, "Is Madame Loppe gradually overcoming her grief? I strongly urge her not to give in to it. Speak to her of my affectionate feelings."⁵²⁶ Throughout the winter and spring of 1839, there are gaps in Loppe's correspondence with Sister Rosalie. On 3 May, she expressed her displeasure with him; however she went on to assure him that she and the sisters shared in his joys and sorrows. Moreover, they were anxiously awaiting news of the birth of their child.⁵²⁷ By 28 June the wait was over. Sister Rosalie exclaimed, "Congratulations on the safe arrival of your dear child. Hug him

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 May 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 64 L17.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 65 L18.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 October 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 80 L21.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 95 L28.

tightly for me and do the same twice over for Madame Loppe while assuring her of my sincere and affectionate devotedness."⁵²⁸

The birth of their first child brought great joy to Loppe's family and friends. Nevertheless, sorrows and trials became more frequent with the passage of time. The years of the reign of Louis-Philippe (1830-1848), which began so auspiciously, became years of strife and tumult. Civil discord combined with economic, social, and religious turmoil. Nor was this overall troubling situation limited to Paris. To this growing national crisis were added, as we have already discussed, bitter cold winters, cholera, and famine. While Boulogne-sur-Mer was at a seemingly safe distance from the capital – there does not appear to have been any revolutionary activity – it had its own troubles. Disease, the financial stress of difficult economic times throughout France, increasing professional and familial obligations, plus the indisputable fact that he was no longer the young, worry free student who had worked so tirelessly beside Sister Rosalie, surely affected Loppe. In the same letter in which she expressed her delight over the birth of the Loppes' baby, Sister Rosalie wrote, "I am distressed by the misfortunes that you have just experienced. These tribulations are touching many people. The weather is terrible here. Our Good God is punishing his wicked children; however, they do not mend their ways."⁵²⁹

Three letters follow: 16 August 1839, 6 November 1839, and 13 February 1840. The letter of 16 August is signed Dewulf. He requests a loan of 1,000 francs needed for the defense of his thesis. After conveying his wishes for the safe delivery of Loppe's child (strangely enough, he seems to be unaware that the baby has already been born), he speaks to his friend as a doctor, "For you, my dear [friend], you have only roses in all this. It is not the same for mothers. It is true that their happiness is greater, however, it is purchased at a higher price." He goes on to share with Loppe an aspect of their mutual lived experience, "I will not speak to you of Sister Rosalie. She is my mother and I am her spoiled child." The letter, signed Dewulf, ends with Sister Rosalie's personal greeting to Loppe, however, she does not ask him to make the loan.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 June 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 103 L29.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 August 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 108 L30.

The letters of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe are somewhat contradictory. She frequently speaks of his troubles, which, at least in part, would appear to be financial. Nevertheless, she continues to ask for his help for her “beloved poor,” including monetary assistance. During this same time period, Loppe sends the sisters an expensive gift. In a letter of 13 November 1838, Sister Rosalie expresses the gratitude of the entire little community of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. She tells her friend:

Last evening, we received the large, beautiful pâté. We will live on it and enjoy it for the entire week. Our sisters join me in sending you our affectionate thanks. You are a thousand times too generous. What is more, let me tell you that you have earned an extra year in purgatory for us to expiate our indulgence. I would love to be able to serve you some here.⁵³¹

After a letter dated 13 February 1840, there is a hiatus of five years in the correspondence between Sister Rosalie and Loppe. This is certainly understandable. We are aware of the overwhelming responsibilities of these frenetic years in Sister Rosalie’s life. While we lack details about Loppe, it would be reasonable to assume that he too was overextended and quite simply lacked the time to write to his friend. On one occasion, earlier, his sister had written to Sister Rosalie for him. Whatever the reasons, it must have cost both of them to be completely out of touch. Be that as it may, on 5 January 1845, the long silence ended when Sister Rosalie sent New Year’s greetings to Loppe and his wife. They were awaiting the arrival of another child. Sister Rosalie told the couple, “I hope you have two girls; I will ask you for one of them for our community.”⁵³²

A year would pass before Sister Rosalie wrote again to Loppe. On 27 February 1846, she apologized for not writing sooner but admitted that she had been ill for two months.⁵³³ Besides revealing Sister Rosalie’s on-going relationship with students who had collaborated with her during their university days in Paris, her correspondence with Loppe tells us about other students such as Daniel-Deray and his

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 13 November 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 84 L22.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 5 January 1845, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 187 L33.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 27 February 1846, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 199 L34.

family, the Coins, and Doctor Dewulf. We learn of the birth of a child and of the death of Monsieur Daniel-Deray's four children in a matter of months. Sister Rosalie tells her friend of happy occasions such as the awarding of the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Doctor Dewulf for his service during the cholera epidemics, as well as financial crises for the Daniel-Derays and the Coins. We hear of the political situation affecting the poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district and their ever-worsening living conditions. The letters are also important because we learn something of what was happening to Sister Rosalie herself and to the sisters of her house. This is the heroic period in her life. Thanks to the openness of her letters to her friend, Cyprien, we see her and some of the other sisters battling illness and exhaustion. Yet, the letters never overlooked the needs of those who were poor. Three letters in 1846 deal with the complicated placement of a child from Boulogne-sur-Mer in Paris. Then, in 1849, we discover that Loppe is responsible for the establishment of a house of the Daughters of Charity in Boulogne-sur-Mer. Sister Rosalie tells him of her gratitude for his continued interest in the sisters and in their service.



Signature of Cyprien Loppe.
Public domain

On 28 March 1851, approximately 16 years after it began, the correspondence between Sister Rosalie and Cyprien Loppe came to an abrupt end with Sister Rosalie ill once again and Loppe passing through another trying period. She wrote:

Tell me, my dear Monsieur Loppe, how are things with you? I am picking up a pen for the first time. For two weeks I had a constant fever which broke only two hours ago. I am taking advantage of this to speak to you of the very real suffering your position is causing me. My heart suffers and would want to be able to alleviate your pain. Tell me or have someone write to me about your position. Count on us. ...Courage,

my dear friend. Our Good God will come to your aid. Trust Him. Abandon yourself to His Holy Will, to Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph.

Farewell, my dear, believe in my inalterable affection.⁵³⁴

With this final letter to Cyprien Loppe, we conclude our consideration of the groups and individuals who were a part of Sister Rosalie's vast network of charity. We now turn our attention to her collaboration with religious congregations, particularly Bon-Sauveur of Caen, and her work with and for priests.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 March 1851, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 316 L43.

CHAPTER XI

SISTER ROSALIE'S NETWORK OF CHARITY

RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS, BON-SAUVEUR OF CAEN, WORK WITH AND FOR PRIESTS

In the previous chapter, we spoke of groups and individuals who made up a significant part of Sister Rosalie's network of charity. Except for the Ladies of Charity, who were re-established in 1840 in the parish of Saint-Médard, these collaborators were essentially men. We will now turn our attention to Sister Rosalie's collaboration with religious women other than the Daughters of Charity, whom we shall discuss in a subsequent chapter.

Once again, the details are a bit sketchy. Melun speaks of several congregations that benefitted from Sister Rosalie's solicitude. His admiration for her activity in this regard, however, has undoubtedly led him to exaggerate her contributions. Nonetheless, bearing that in mind, it is worthwhile to cite his remarks here. He wrote:

Sister Rosalie demonstrated her willingness to welcome and support anyone [who turned to her in need. She did this] in a special way through her efforts to facilitate the growth of religious orders. Like Saint Vincent de Paul, she was [their] friend and auxiliary... and sought only [to advance] their development and reputation. All could say what a holy religious, hearing of her death, said in the name of her order, "We can never replace her."

Whenever a congregation came to open a house in Paris, the sisters turned to Sister Rosalie for advice and assistance. Faced with difficulties and their own inexperience, they could always rely on her guidance and support.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 124-125.

While Melun depicts Sister Rosalie assisting every new congregation establishing a house or work in Paris, we will limit our discussion to those we can document, while acknowledging that there could be others, perhaps many more.

Sister Tissot also speaks of Sister Rosalie's collaboration with religious congregations of women, newly established in the capital. In her testimony for her former superior's Cause of Beatification, she describes Sister Rosalie's comportment when one of these communities sought her assistance:

Sister Rosalie willingly accommodated other communities that turned to her. She used to say, "All [of us] are working for the glory of God." Then, always mindful of the needs of those who were poor, she would add, "Some of them will repay us by their prayers; others may be of help to our families, who have fallen on hard times, by raising their children."⁵³⁶

First, consider the *Daughters of Our Lady of Loretto* (1823). Founded in 1820 in Bordeaux by Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, this congregation of religious women was originally known as the "Association of the Holy Family." In 1823 the community opened its first house in Paris on rue des Vieilles-Tuileries. The following year the little group moved to rue du Regard. As a seminarian at Saint-Sulpice, from 1816-1819, the founder had come to know and collaborate with Sister Rosalie. In his biography of Father Noailles, Eugène Baffie, O.M.I., wrote:

Mutual esteem brought the two of them together and united these two great souls who, from that moment on, challenged one another to [work] for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Later on, when the Founder of the Holy Family sent the first group of his sisters [to Paris], he directed them to Sister Rosalie as the person whose influence could be helpful to them.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 60.

⁵³⁷ Eugène Baffie, O.M.I., *Vertus et direction spirituelle de l'abbé P.B. Noailles* (Paris, 1950), 70.



Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles (1793-1861).
 Founder of the Daughters of Our Lady of Loretto in 1823.
Public domain

As with several other of Sister Rosalie collaborator's, Father Noailles' Cause of Beatification has been introduced, and her name is invoked in the *Positio* along with an account of the development of the house.⁵³⁸ The text recounts a conflict which developed within the community. The facts seem to be that Father Noailles turned to his friend and former classmate at Saint-Sulpice, Count Christophe-Édouard-François de Malet, now Abbé de Malet, and asked him to assume the spiritual direction of the community in Paris. Father Malet had also worked closely with Sister Rosalie and had said his first Mass in the sisters' chapel. With few demands on his time, he gave himself zealously to the task. The result was unforeseen. In 1827, he succeeded in separating the Paris community from their superiors in Bordeaux. Before this occurred, Sister Rosalie intervened to try to prevent it. She failed. The independent congregation became known as the Sisters of Saint Mary of Loretto. In 1872, it united with the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales, founded by Louis Brisson.

While all this was going on, Father Noailles tried to found a community of men known as the "Pauvres-Prêtres" (*Poor Priests*).

⁵³⁸ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, Positio* (Rome, 1985), 134-141.

His institute lasted only from 1822-1826 and never numbered more than five, two of whom had been sent to him by Sister Rosalie. We will see in the section on Bon-Sauveur of Caen, that Sister Rosalie had a special predilection for work for and with priests. Excerpts from two letters to Father Noailles in 1825 are telling in this regard. She encourages her friend:

Letter I. One of my great desires and the continual object of my thoughts is to see your Congregation of Poor Priests established in Paris. I am sure that you would soon be numerous enough to respond to the designs of Divine Providence. I am announcing a new candidate. This good priest's heart is consumed with the desire to give himself unreservedly [to God] by irrevocable vows. He wants to be a Poor Priest.

I know three ecclesiastics who would readily join you if you could establish [this work] in Paris. I am convinced that, if Monseigneur, the Archbishop, were informed of your intentions, projects, and desires, he would do everything possible to bring such a great means of salvation to his flock. I am not saying that this would happen without a struggle but you are well armed, and in the end, you would triumph.

It is surely audacity on my part to allow myself to express my deepest thoughts to you. My trust [in you] leads me on. I am sure of being forgiven because of the motives which prompt me.

Letter II. Oh! my good Father, I would willingly give my life [to bring about] the establishment of the Society of Poor Priests. Through it, the salvation of so many souls would be achieved. I believe this matter is in keeping with the will of God. I ask Our Lord to grant you a long life. May our good Master shower His blessings on your undertakings. May

you continue to be, ever more and more, the worthy instrument He uses to accomplish His designs.⁵³⁹

While the congregation of the Daughters of Loretto did not evolve as either Father Noailles or Sister Rosalie wanted it to, and the Society of Poor Priests lasted only five years, her work with and for them reveals her commitment to priests and her desire to facilitate the growth of newly established religious congregations in the French capital.

Second, the *Augustinians of the Holy Heart of Mary* (1827). On 4 December 1827, a small group of religious women arrived in Paris to open the first house of this congregation founded by Sister Marie de Sainte-Angèle, who until then had been a member of the Augustinian Congregation of Meaux. She was aided in this undertaking by Father Varin, S.J. On the occasion of the centenary of this foundation an article in the Catholic daily, *La Croix*, recounted the event:

On 4 December 1827, at dusk and in a snowstorm, several women, clothed in black dresses, stopped in front of a dilapidated house on rue de l'Arbalète [not far from rue de l'Épée-de-Bois].... Informed by a friend, [Sister Meillerand, the superior of the Hôpital des Incurables,] of their arrival and of their plight, Sister Rosalie sent them potatoes and rice and it was from this that they made their supper.⁵⁴⁰

The gesture was small, but the recipients never forgot it. Every year, on this date, the same meal is served. In the *Book of Customs of the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Holy Heart of Mary*, we read:

4 December – Anniversary of the Foundation

The Sisters are pleased to recall the courage and devotedness of Mother Sainte-Angèle who, armed with confidence in God, on this day, 4 December 1827, placed the foundation [stone] of the work of the Augustinians of the Holy Heart of Mary at number 26, rue de l'Arbalète.

⁵³⁹ Excerpts of two letters of Sister Rosalie to Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, 1825. The originals have been lost. Copies appear in Hélène Foucault, *Vie du Bon Père Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles* (Bordeaux, 1889), vol. 1:301-302.

⁵⁴⁰ *La Croix*, 8 December 1927; see also Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 125.

In remembrance of the meal, so charitably sent by a Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul [Sister Rosalie] to Mother Sainte-Angèle and her Sisters arriving from Saumur, we have ...soup made from rice and potatoes in their skins at supper. The meal is served by a Sister dressed in the habit of the time of the Daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul.⁵⁴¹

Following his account of this event, Melun adds, “[Sister Rosalie] later rendered the same service to the Daughters of the Cross.”⁵⁴² However, we have no further information concerning this.

Third, the *Sisters of Our Lady of Zion* (1842-1843). This congregation is an outgrowth of a work begun by Marie-Théodore Ratisbonne for the Christian education of children of Jewish families coming to Paris from Eastern Europe. We will not go into detail concerning Sister Rosalie’s involvement in this undertaking (as we already did so in Chapter VII when we discussed the Miraculous Medal). However, it is worth repeating here that Father Ratisbonne considered the two little Jewish girls sent to him by Sister Rosalie wearing a Miraculous Medal as a sign that he should go forward with this delicate work.

Fourth, *Five Polish Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul* (1846). It should be noted that only Melun speaks of this group of religious women. This does not mean, however, that his remarks are not accurate. In 1846 Melun was already collaborating closely with Sister Rosalie so, in all likelihood, he either witnessed the events he recounts or learned of them from Sister Rosalie or the other sisters of the house. The facts, as he presents them, are that five Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul, not Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, were expelled from Wilna, Poland, in 1846, and arrived in Paris with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They found lodging near rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. As soon as they met Sister Rosalie their fears vanished. She became their friend; shared her resources with them; visited them daily and helped them to adapt to the new world in which they found themselves as they undertook their ministry to young Polish girls in the French capital.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴¹ *Extrait du Coutumier de la Congrégation des Augustines du Saint-Coeur-de-Marie*, nd., Archives Générales, 29, rue de la Santé, Paris.

⁵⁴² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 125.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 126.

Things prospered for a while, then, according to Melun:

...calumny followed them into exile; poisoned the good they were accomplishing with its venom; and compromised the existence of their work. They were threatened with an order of expulsion. Sister Rosalie supported their cause during this ordeal; comforted them in their suffering; and helped to bring about the triumph of their just cause.⁵⁴⁴

Fifth, the *Little Sisters of the Poor* (1849). Jeanne Jugan, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982, founded this congregation in Saint-Servan in 1839. Their work was, and continues to be, the care of the elderly which, as we have seen, was a service very dear to Sister Rosalie's heart. Thus, when two sisters, Sister Marie Jamet and Sister Marie-Louise, arrived in Paris in 1849 to open a hospice for the aged, Sister Rosalie lent them her assistance. She helped to procure a house for them and their clients at 277, rue Saint-Jacques, not far from rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. Several of Sister Rosalie's biographers give particulars concerning this establishment; however, once again, it is Melun who furnishes the greatest detail. He writes:

On the day the Little Sisters of the Poor arrived in Paris to... assist the elderly, Sister Rosalie welcomed them as her daughters. She sent them mattresses from her house [and] the first utensils for their kitchen. She sought friends and protectors for them everywhere. Her voice opened [religious] communities and boarding houses to them to furnish frugal meals for their poor [residents]. [The sisters] went to [Sister Rosalie] continuously to ask for whatever they needed because her generosity appeared inexhaustible to them. Whatever they asked, she always responded, "Yes, my Sisters, be at peace; you will have it."⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 126-127; see also Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 123.



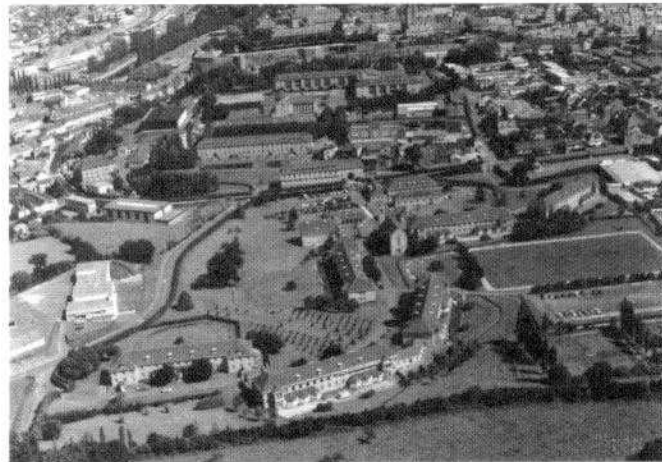
Jeanne Jugan (1792-1879).
 Foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1849.
Public domain

Thus, through Sister Rosalie's assistance of religious congregations, new works for those in need prospered in the French capital. While this collaboration was significant, it was with the Daughters of Bon-Sauveur of Caen that Sister Rosalie worked the most closely and for the longest period of time. In this instance she was not simply assisting in the establishment of a work but was, herself, actively ministering in it. Sister Rosalie's service here is often overlooked, but it was one of the most noteworthy of her long apostolic life. Let us consider it now.

Sixth, *Bon-Sauveur of Caen*. We are not certain exactly when Sister Rosalie began sending persons requiring residential care or supervision to Bon-Sauveur, which was under the direction of the religious congregation of women, the Daughters of Bon-Sauveur of Caen. Her first letter to the superioress is dated 8 May 1836. Her last letter bearing a date was written on 4 August 1849. We owe the correspondence that we do possess to Bon-Sauveur itself. Their archives have preserved 117 letters from Sister Rosalie. Photographed copies (appearing as negatives) were sent to the Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris a number of years ago. At the time of Sister Rosalie's beatification, the community in Caen replaced them with photocopies. These letters tell a story of tireless service to society's most vulnerable: the mentally ill and those unable to survive outside a protective environment. They also reveal,

at least in part, the base of Sister Rosalie's vast network of contacts, as the hierarchy, religious superiors, and families and individuals in distress turned to her in their need. Sister Rosalie's work with Bon-Sauveur of Caen is also another powerful reminder of the universality of her charity. Her "beloved poor" of the Mouffetard district always held a privileged place in her heart, but she never limited her love for those who were poor to them. She did, however, have to prioritize her service beyond the Mouffetard district. Let us now examine more closely this demanding apostolate which she chose to undertake.

What exactly is Bon-Sauveur of Caen? Despite having been destroyed during the 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy, it still exists, having been rebuilt in 1968, and continues to provide many of the same services it offered during Sister Rosalie's era. However, it is now a public institution. What then do we know of it when Sister Rosalie was turning to Mother Renée-Caroline Le Chasseur to respond to the needs of those who could find nothing equivalent to it in the capital? For an answer, we rely on Jean-Vincent-Félix Lamouroux (1799-1825), a French naturalist, biologist, botanist, and zoologist, who was a resident of Caen and a scholar. In 1824, he gave a presentation on Bon-Sauveur before the Académie Royale des Sciences, Arts, et Belles-Lettres of the city. He put forth his observations after visiting this vast institution, covering some 15 acres within the city limits of Caen, frequently visited by outsiders but virtually unnoticed by the local inhabitants.



Present day aerial view of Bon-Sauveur of Caen.

Public domain

The whole was under the aegis of the Daughters of Bon-Sauveur of Caen. This congregation was founded in 1720 by Mother Anne Le Roy. From its origin, it was dedicated to the education of young girls. However, the religious went beyond a traditional education to assist young single mothers and mentally ill women. Along with other religious congregations, including the Daughters of Charity, the Daughters of Bon-Sauveur of Caen were suppressed by the Robespierre government in 1793. In 1805, the congregation and its works were re-established through the combined efforts of Father Pierre-François Jamet, who was beatified in 1987 by Pope John Paul II, and Mother Le Chasseur. This latter was named superioress of the house in Caen in 1827. After the congregation opened houses successively in Albi (1832) and Pont-L'Abbé (1834), she became the congregation's first Superioress General.⁵⁴⁶



Pierre-François Jamet (1762-1845).
Re-established the Daughters of Bon-Sauver of Caen
with Mother Renée-Caroline Le Chasseur in 1805.

Public domain

Sister Rosalie's correspondence is essentially with Mother Le Chasseur, who was re-elected Superioress General in 1841. We have 95 letters written to her between 8 May 1836 and 8 February 1844. A letter dated 25 October 1844 is apparently addressed to the newly elected Superioress General, since in it Sister Rosalie asks to be remembered to Mother Le Chasseur.

⁵⁴⁶ *Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, Positio super introductione Causae et super virtutibus Petri Francisci Jamet* (Rome, 1969), 44-101.

We learn from Lamouroux's account that there were a number of separate buildings on the campus. The largest was for mentally ill patients. It was divided into two completely distinct parts, one for women and the other for men. In 1823 they numbered 170: 100 women and 70 men. The housing varied according to the condition and the care requirements of the patient. It is not our intention here to discuss the details of this care. It suffices to say that the complex represented a quality of service and a respect for the needs of the individual that was rare in the uncharted waters of psychiatric institutions in France and elsewhere.⁵⁴⁷

A second large space was utilized as a dispensary, where the sick and injured could come for emergency services while they waited to be seen by a doctor. Two physicians came once a day, more often in case of necessity. Moreover, the service was extended outside the institution to the homes of the sick where they could be looked after for as long as need be. The Rule of the Daughters of Bon-Sauveur was based on that of the Visitandines, founded by François de Sales and Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal in 1610. It had been their intention for the sisters to visit the sick in their homes, hence their title, but the Church was not yet ready for religious women to move about outside the cloister so this goal was never achieved. It would have to wait for Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac and the Daughters of Charity, whom they founded in 1633. The Daughters of Bon-Sauveur continued this tradition.⁵⁴⁸

Bon-Sauveur of Caen, however, did not limit itself to these vital areas of service. A third building housed a school for the deaf. Some 60-70 pupils boarded there, as many as 20 of them at no cost to their families. Father Jamet was a widely recognized innovator in the education of the deaf. He created a dictionary and grammar for them. He was, moreover, able to combine his erudition with well respected pedagogy. While they were in residence in Caen, the pupils learned reading, writing, elementary mathematics, French, Latin, geography, logic, and religion. Some replaced more advanced classes with training in a trade, which would enable them to earn an honest living later on. Indeed, after their studies, many of them were employed at Bon-Sauveur itself.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ Jean-Vincent-Félix Lamouroux, *Notice sur le Bon-Sauveur, lue à l'Académie Royale des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres de Caen* (Caen, 1824), 8-12.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-17.

Tradition has it that a certain young deaf man arrived at the school that Father Jamet established after having spent a number of years at a similar institution in Paris. He found that many of his classmates, who had less formal training than he, surpassed his skill level. Father Jamet's methods attracted the attention of other well respected educators of the deaf such as Abbé Roche-Amboise Sicard, a student of Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée, often designated as the "Father of Education for the Deaf," and Abbé Goudelin. The latter visited the school in Caen and later sought to persuade other educators of the deaf to adopt the Caen model for similar institutions in France.⁵⁵⁰ The XVIIIth and XIXth centuries were marked by great strides in education for the deaf, not only in France but also the rest of Europe and North America. The school in Caen remained on the cutting edge.

A fourth building housed a boarding school for girls under the age of 14. There were generally between 36 and 40 of them. They studied reading, writing, arithmetic, language, history, geography, and religion. They also learned drawing, music, dance, sewing, and domestic science. As with the school for the deaf, there were girls whose families paid nothing for their child's education. Here, also, it was impossible to distinguish between paying and non-paying students.⁵⁵¹

A fifth building, a free school, was an extension of the above. About 115 little girls from poor families, who lived near Bon-Sauveur, came each day to share in some of the classes offered to boarders. Their program was more practical and designed to help them in their future lives as wives and mothers.⁵⁵²

A sixth building provided rooms for 20 women, where they could stay for varying periods of time. Some simply needed rest. Others sought to regain their physical or emotional health. Still others required time away from an environment which was negatively affecting them. In the peace and calm of Caen many found the balance that was previously lacking in their lives.⁵⁵³

Throughout his presentation, Lamouroux was effusive in his praise of the religious who ran the entire institution. He recognized their dedication, skill, and zeal. In 1823, they numbered 123 professed

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

religious and 62 novices and postulants. They were assisted in their onerous task by about 150 lay employees. It is to the superioress of this institution, Mother Le Chasseur, that Sister Rosalie would plead the cause of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society, who had been recommended to her for placement in a secure therapeutic environment. Consider now Sister Rosalie's requests.

Within Sister Rosalie's correspondence with Mother Le Chasseur, her successor, and Father Jamet, we often find specific names for 18 priests and 31 religious women, 20 of whom are from congregations other than the Daughters of Charity. There are 80 other unidentified unfortunate priests and laypersons. It is not always clear why the individual is seeking admission into Bon-Sauveur. In Sister Rosalie's letters, we find mention of only 20 people who were clearly mentally ill, or who needed to be placed in the school for the deaf. Another 15 were looking for employment. What is evident, however, is that with few exceptions, Sister Rosalie knew well the person for whom she was seeking admission, to the point that she would even hazard a suggestion concerning the best manner of approaching them, gently or firmly.

In her first letter, dated 8 May 1836, Sister Rosalie sought to place a former Carmelite on behalf of her former convent.⁵⁵⁴ Her next letter indicated that the woman had been accepted and would travel to Caen with a gentleman with whom Sister Rosalie was acquainted. What is noteworthy in this letter is that a priest from the diocese of Orléans was going with them to be placed there also.⁵⁵⁵ Thus, Sister Rosalie intensified this special work on behalf of priests who had fallen on hard times, been defrocked by the Church, had become alcoholic, or had abandoned their priestly duties. It was also another occasion for collaboration with the hierarchy. This time it was the bishop of Orléans. Later it would be the bishops of Grenoble, Langres, Nancy, Paris, Troyes, and Versailles.

We have seen that from her earliest years Sister Rosalie had a predilection toward the service of priests. She quite literally acquired it at her mother's knee. Through the years, many of her closest collaborators were priests and seminarians. Her godfather, Father Emery, was a priest who was a close friend of her grandfather. Sister Tardy's "spiritual test" brought her into direct and shocking contact with the degradation to which some members of the clergy had fallen.

⁵⁵⁴ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 8 May 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 19 BS 1.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 May 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 20 BS 2.

Her vast network of charity enabled her to assist a number of them. Sister Costalin relates in her testimony how her superior went about this delicate task:

Monseigneur de Quélen, Monseigneur Affre, and Monseigneur Sibour [successively archbishops of Paris] sent many defrocked priests to her. With admirable discretion, she regulated their expenses; had them come every two or three days to get bread; found lodgings for them in a safe place where she could be informed of their behavior; charged them with errands or had them assist with correspondence so as to occupy their time.⁵⁵⁶

This description of Sister Rosalie's work for and with priests serves to clarify a remark she made to Mother Le Chasseur in a letter of 13 February 1841, "If you only knew of the great number of these unfortunate [priests] who are afflicting the Church of Paris! They do much harm by their misconduct."⁵⁵⁷

The above also explains why Sister Rosalie looked upon Bon-Sauveur as "a bridge to salvation that Providence has provided" for troubled priests.⁵⁵⁸ This conviction is the basis of the zeal with which she went about her task of placing and trying to convince Mother Le Chasseur and Father Jamet to keep these priests in Caen. Numerous examples could be put forth to illustrate this point. We shall limit ourselves to two: Monsieur Clausier and Abbé Lejeune.

We first meet Monsieur Clausier in 1836 when, as mentioned in Chapter X, Sister Rosalie asked Cyprien Loppe to provide assistance for him in Boulogne.⁵⁵⁹ A little over a month later a second letter shows that, by September, it had become evident that Monsieur Clausier was far more than Loppe could deal with, and he had returned to Paris where Sister Rosalie was trying to place him at Bicêtre. In this letter, to justify the move, she asked Loppe to provide her with a letter for the Ministry concerning Monsieur Clausier.⁵⁶⁰ This is the first indication

⁵⁵⁶ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, Sommaire*, 52.

⁵⁵⁷ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 13 February 1841, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 151 BS 80.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 September 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 113 BS 54.

⁵⁵⁹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 22 July 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 26 L6.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 September 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 28 L7.

we have that Monsieur Clausier was a priest. The ministry in question appears to be the Ministry of Cult. We have a similar request from Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur for two Daughters of Charity who were patients at Bon-Sauveur.⁵⁶¹ Evidently, in some instances, expenses for treatment were defrayed by the Ministry of Cult.

Monsieur Clausier would be Sister Rosalie's burden and sorrow for at least the next twelve years. We do not know what she did about him after Mother Le Chasseur's successor refused to take him back. The latter simply returned Sister Rosalie's letter with the terse response, "Ce n'est pas possible" (It is not possible).⁵⁶² This is the final dated letter that we possess. After it there is no documented correspondence between Sister Rosalie and Bon-Sauveur.

We first have mention of Monsieur Clausier in relation to Bon-Sauveur in a letter dated 4 January 1837. He has evidently already been placed there and Sister Rosalie has written to him concerning his behavior. She then wrote to Mother Le Chasseur about him:

How did Monsieur Clausier accept my observations? His entire family, which is quite worthy of your interest, begs you to continue your benevolent charity toward him. Do not believe too readily in the steadfastness of his resolutions. It is clear that he has a very weak conscience. His unrestrained behavior was certainly caused by excessive alcohol. Doctor Leuret, who understands his situation perfectly, will write to your doctor.⁵⁶³

Seventeen other letters give us some insight into Monsieur Clausier's tormented life and Sister Rosalie's refusal to abandon him. We also learn that he sometimes left Bon-Sauveur, and that it became increasingly more difficult for Sister Rosalie to have him readmitted. Only the mutual respect and trust, as well as the genuine friendship that existed between Mother Le Chasseur and Sister Rosalie, made this possible.

⁵⁶¹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 27 February 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 59 BS 21.

⁵⁶² Response, written at the bottom of *Letter of Sister Rosalie to the Superioress General of Bon-Sauveur*, 4 August 1849, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 231 BS 110.

⁵⁶³ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 4 January 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 33 BS 7.

A letter of 25 June 1837 indicates that Monsieur Clausier had fallen back into his old ways. Sister Rosalie told Mother Le Chasseur:

As for Monsieur Clausier, I am comfortable with the fact that you were able to see for yourself just how unbalanced he is. The poor parents are devastated. However, they hope to be able to have him defrocked and placed permanently under the auspices of your charity.⁵⁶⁴

By October, Monsieur Clausier's behavior was no longer simply unacceptable, it was illegal. Sister Rosalie told Mother Le Chasseur that she had written to him and told him that "if he does not resign himself to behave and to spend the winter with you, he will be turned in and abandoned to the police."⁵⁶⁵

In the same letter, Sister Rosalie acknowledges that she is imposing on the generosity and charity of Mother Le Chasseur. She tells her, "I am distressed, my good Mother, to cause you so many problems, so much unpleasantness, because of all these people. All your charity is needed to forgive me for my boldness." This awareness, however, does not deter her from advancing the cause of another lost soul. She concludes, "If you accept [him], you will have a new claim to my gratitude."⁵⁶⁶

The next three letters indicate that Monsieur Clausier was willing to work, and Sister Rosalie supported the idea. But his behavior must still have been troubling because Sister Rosalie informed Mother Le Chasseur that "Monsieur Clausier told his family that he would like to be busy. If you consider that a possibility, it would be a great service to the family. His actions cause his good sisters to die of embarrassment."⁵⁶⁷

Monsieur Clausier made some progress and was able to leave Bon-Sauveur. By 22 July 1838, he had been placed as a secretary with the pastor of a church in Orléans. Nonetheless, Sister Rosalie had some misgivings because she found him "not completely changed

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 39 BS 10.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 October 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 44 BS 14.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 50 BS 18.

but better.⁵⁶⁸ The next few letters assured Mother Le Chasseur that Monsieur Clausier is doing well, but by 27 July 1839, he was back at Bon-Sauveur.⁵⁶⁹ By 1840, he appeared to have regressed. Sister Rosalie cautioned Mother Le Chasseur, "Do not place any confidence in Monsieur Clausier's conversion. It is the oath of a drunkard."⁵⁷⁰

Be that as it may, Monsieur Clausier returned to Paris where his conversion was short-lived. Sister Rosalie once again found herself pleading for his readmission to Bon-Sauveur. On 25 September 1840, she wrote:

Monsieur Clausier did not take long to fall back into his unruly [behavior]. Since his return, he has not spent many days at work. What a calamity for his family! What will we do with him? Would you be good enough to take him back? He has fallen into a stupor.⁵⁷¹

Sister Rosalie evidently succeeded in having Monsieur Clausier readmitted. He was there in 1843 and once again causing difficulty for the institution seeking to care for him. Sister Rosalie expressed her hope that he "will profit from the grace that has been granted to him." Because he believed that he was still under police control, she urges Mother Le Chasseur to tell the employees who work with him not to lend him any money because "he must not have a penny at his disposal."⁵⁷² A few months later, Sister Rosalie expressed her regret at the disturbance Monsieur Clausier continued to cause, and once again pled with Mother Le Chasseur to keep him at Bon-Sauveur even if they had to place him with the sick.⁵⁷³

This is the last letter we have concerning Monsieur Clausier before Sister Rosalie's final letter to Bon-Sauveur which, ironically enough, is another plea to take him back. He must have returned to Paris in the interim. However, Sister Rosalie had lost her powerful allies in Caen. Mother Le Chasseur was no longer the Superioress General and Father Jamet, to whom Sister Rosalie turned as the "true

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 July 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 71 BS 28.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 106 BS 48.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1840, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 131 BS 70.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1840, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 145 BS 76.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 9 November 1843, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 176 BS 95.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8 February 1844, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 179 BS 98.

Good Savior" for all the unfortunate clergy she sought to place at Bon-Sauveur, died in January 1845. Consequently, her request was refused.⁵⁷⁴

Thus ends the saga of Monsieur Clausier. Most likely, for Sister Rosalie, it did not end there. She probably continued to try to place him in a secure environment with varying results. In many respects, Monsieur Clausier is not a success story for either Sister Rosalie or Bon-Sauveur. It demonstrates, however, the total dedication of both to respond to the desperate needs of troubled clergy. As such, it speaks to the Church of our day and calls upon it to do the same.

Before leaving Sister Rosalie's work for and with priests at Bon-Sauveur let us turn our attention to a totally different situation, this one involving a certain Abbé Lejeune. The correspondence of Sister Rosalie with Mother Le Chasseur concerning him is very limited – three letters – but it reveals Sister Rosalie's ongoing willingness to reach out to clergy in need of support and assistance whatever the source of their difficulties and from whomever the appeal came. This time it was from the pastor of Saint-Sulpice.

A little background is in order. In the aftermath of the Revolution of 1830 and the rise to the throne of Louis-Philippe, King of the French, the Catholic Church, which had held a privileged place during the reign of Charles X, was no longer the state religion and found itself in turmoil both within and without. Moreover, Louis-Philippe's views and policies concerning it vacillated. It was in this climate that a little known movement of dissident priests arose. Under the leadership of Abbé Ferdinand-François Châtel, it broke away from the Church of Rome. A child of the Revolution, born in 1795 in Gannat, department of Allier, in the Auvergne region, Châtel was ordained a priest in 1818. His first assignment was as a military chaplain, but his liberal and Gallican (anti-Rome) religious positions soon saw him defrocked by the hierarchy. In 1831, he opened a Gallican church in Paris on Boulevard Saint-Denis. The same year he was consecrated a bishop by Monseigneur Machault, who had been previously consecrated by the Bishop of Cayes in the Dominican Republic, Monseigneur Mauviel. The latter had been consecrated bishop in 1800 by Monseigneur Royer, the constitutional bishop of Paris.

⁵⁷⁴ Response, written at the bottom of *Letter of Sister Rosalie to the Superioress General of Bon-Sauveur*, 4 August 1849, AFCEP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 231 BS 110.



Ferdinand-François Châtel (1795-1857).
 Founded French Catholic Church in opposition to Roman Catholic Church.
 Called himself Primate of All Gaule.

Public domain

While the Constitutional Church, which existed during the years of the Revolution of 1789 and the First Republic, was separated from Rome and judged heretical, there can be no doubt of the apostolic succession and therefore of the validity of Monseigneur Châtel's consecration. Soon a group of ecclesiastics, many of whom had been part of the former Constitutional Church, gathered around him. They broke away from the Church of Rome to establish the new French Catholic Church, thought to be more appropriate to the new liberal regime of the July Monarchy. They renounced the authority of the Pope and the bishops, used French instead of Latin in liturgical services, permitted priests to marry, eliminated confession, fasting, and church fees, and allowed the parishioners to participate in running the churches. By 1835, under the guidance of Châtel, who now called himself the Primate of All Gaule, the French Catholic Church was established in a number of parishes and their installation sometimes led to violent clashes with government forces. In addition to churches, the group had schools and a seminary, edited an almanac and published newspapers, *Le Catholique*, *Le Réformateur Religieux*, and *Le Bon Pasteur*.

Despite its questionable doctrine, especially in that era, the French Catholic Church might have gone on to prosper. However, circumstances conspired against this. Most importantly among

them was a radical change in Louis-Philippe's policies with regard to religion. While Châtel and his followers had received encouragement during the early stages of their movement from the political opposition and some local authorities, by the late 1830's they faced ever greater government hostility. Some of their churches were closed. Then, in 1842, Louis-Philippe decreed the dissolution of the French Catholic Church and the confiscation of their goods. He renewed this order in 1844.

All this led to the persecution of Châtel and his followers. More and more they were obliged to go into hiding. Priests were arrested for practicing a forbidden cult, and an active campaign was undertaken to discredit the French Catholic Church. It was largely successful. Thus, the movement inspired by Châtel gradually disappeared from the religious landscape in France.⁵⁷⁵

Abbé Lejeune was caught in the rise and fall of Châtel's church. He had been ordained by him, but now found himself rudderless in the ecclesiastical milieu in which he was a validly ordained priest without a place or authorization to minister. While neither Sister Rosalie nor the pastor of Saint-Sulpice could alter that, they would do all in their power to help him. Thus they turned to Bon-Sauveur once again to save another lost soul.

A letter of Sister Rosalie, dated 10 June 1838, clarifies the situation. She begins by congratulating Mother Le Chasseur on her re-election, "I congratulate your community on your re-election. It is the spirit of God who presided and who blesses the choice it has made. With all my heart I want it to possess you for a long time."⁵⁷⁶

Sister Rosalie had already written to Mother Le Chasseur about Abbé Lejeune, requesting his admission to Bon-Sauveur as one of "the unfortunate beings who cause the desolation of the Church."⁵⁷⁷ Mother Le Chasseur evidently agreed because Sister Rosalie announces his arrival and describes his situation in detail. She writes:

Poor Monsieur Lejeune, who was the object of my last letter, will leave in a few days. He had not yet been ordained when he wholeheartedly joined Châtel.

⁵⁷⁵ See Iowert J. Prothero, *Religion and Radicalism in July Monarchy France - The French Catholic Church of the Abbé Châtel* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 2005), 362 pp. *Studies in French Civilization Series*, 36.

⁵⁷⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 10 June 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 66 BS 25.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 63 BS 24.

The latter ordained him in keeping with his heresy but [Monsieur Lejeune] did not remain with him for long. Since [his departure], he has spent a year with the Trappists in Laval. He comported himself very well during this entire time. He will do whatever work you think he is capable of, for example caring for the sick, managing the sacristy, or working with the deaf. Besides, you will judge for yourself what he is able to do. The pastor of Saint-Sulpice would gladly do something for him but he must not know this; that is, he must work so as to earn his living.⁵⁷⁸

We do not know anything further about Monsieur Lejeune. Nevertheless, his case, as well as Monsieur Clausier's, clearly illustrate Sister Rosalie's commitment to the well-being of priests who were alienated from the Church, and her long-term collaboration with bishops, religious orders, and pastors in their efforts to respond to this need.

We could cite many more examples of this commitment from Sister Rosalie's correspondence with Mother Le Chasseur. Before moving on, we will examine one more relevant case. This one involves the Congregation of the Mission, and is worth noting because of Sister Rosalie's sometimes strained relationship with them.

Evidently in August 1839, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Jean-Baptiste Nozo, of whom we shall later speak, contacted Sister Rosalie to ask her to assist the Congregation in placing a Vincentian priest at Bon-Sauveur. She did so and he was accepted. On 25 August, she wrote to Mother Le Chasseur to tell her that the Vincentian priest was indeed coming and to request that a carriage be sent from Caen to bring him there. Sister Rosalie subsequently described him without naming him. She wrote that he was 41 years of age and "a worthy priest... one of the most gifted in the community."⁵⁷⁹ Then, on 29 August, she wrote again to tell Mother Le Chasseur that the priest accompanying him would bring a letter from the Superior General and a medical report from the community physician, Doctor Récamier. Then she added:

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 June 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 66 BS 25.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 August 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 110 BS 51.

Oh, how we desire the cure of this good and esteemed priest. He is a precious member of their community and ours.... I am sending you 50 francs for [his] room and board. The Procurator General of the Congregation, Monsieur Étienne, will go to see him sometime next month. He will be pleased to personally recommend him to you and to express the gratitude of the entire community. [He] will also arrange with you for the payment of his room and board and other needs if the amount sent was not enough.⁵⁸⁰

We know nothing further concerning this matter other than the fact that Sister Rosalie told Mother Le Chasseur at the beginning, "I avail myself of your house and of your benevolent charity whenever the occasion presents itself."⁵⁸¹ The whole situation serves to highlight the ambivalence that marked Sister Rosalie's dealings with her superiors throughout her community life. We shall return to this in the next chapter.

Priests, however, were not the only persons for whom Sister Rosalie availed herself of Bon-Sauveur. There were also religious women. Among them were 20 from diverse congregations as well as 11 Daughters of Charity. We now turn to this delicate ministry.

As mentioned above, Sister Rosalie's first letter to the superioress of Bon-Sauveur involved the placement of a former Carmelite. It is evident from the content that, while this is the first letter we possess, it was not the first letter in the correspondence. Sister Rosalie writes:

You welcomed me so warmly when I approached you for two poor religious [women] that I cannot thank you enough for your charity. One of these [women], whose room and board you were willing to set at 350 francs, is ready to leave [for Caen]. We are only awaiting your response to have her set out. She is a former Carmelite, 52 years-of-age, I think. The difficulty of her character and her advanced senility

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 28 August 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 111 BS 52.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 25 August 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 110 BS 51.

caused her to be expelled from her convent. It is this convent that is going to defray the expenses for her care. However, this community is very poor.⁵⁸²

We do not know when or why the hierarchy began to appeal to Sister Rosalie to assist in placing priests in need of the secure environment and services of Bon-Sauveur. Likewise, just how Sister Rosalie became the person to whom superiors of religious orders would turn for the placement of their sisters at Caen remains a mystery. Nevertheless, they did and in a significant number. Work with religious orders of women, including the Daughters of Charity, remained a constant throughout the 13 years of collaboration between Sister Rosalie and the superioress of Caen. This first letter also shows that Sister Rosalie was aware of the physical and mental state of the person being placed, as well as the financial constraints of the religious order. Throughout her correspondence we find her explaining the illness or behavior of the patient and negotiating a payment that was reasonable for both Bon-Sauveur and the congregation involved.

In December of this same year, Sister Rosalie wrote to place a Benedictine nun. This was one of the relatively rare times when she used the word “insane” to describe the person’s condition. She also stated that the Benedictines could pay more for room and board.⁵⁸³ Thus, from the beginning, there seems to have been a sliding scale for payment which Sister Rosalie set with the approval of Mother Le Chasseur. Moreover, in most instances, payment was sent directly to Sister Rosalie who then forwarded it to Caen. She was well aware that she often imposed on Mother Le Chasseur’s goodness. In 1838, she wrote, “Admit it, my good Mother, I certainly abuse your kindness. If you were not so good and so charitable, you would have sent me packing.”⁵⁸⁴

To alleviate this situation, the accounts were kept in Paris under Sister Rosalie’s watchful eye. By this time Cyprien Loppe had left the capital, so accounting and payments were the responsibility of Monsieur Daniel-Deray. While the latter lacked Loppe’s expertise, Sister Rosalie still had confidence in him. Nonetheless, she was well aware that she needed to monitor his work. She wrote to Loppe in February of 1836:

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 8 May 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 19 BS 1.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18 December 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 19 BS 5.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 September 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 76 BS 32.

Monsieur Daniel[-Deray] does all that he can, even more, because he gives me [the time] that he should take for his [own] rest. He is not you, my dear. You knew with just a hint what had to be done. I am always buried under my affairs. You know how inexactitude torments me.⁵⁸⁵

However, in February 1838, Sister Rosalie expressed her complete confidence in Monsieur Daniel-Deray in a letter to Mother Le Chasseur:

I think that you will approve a decision we have made in the interest of order and exactitude in our accounting. At this time, one of our friends, a capable and religious man of absolute integrity, will take over responsibility for the payment of the room and board which is due to you for the sick who have been admitted [to Bon-Sauveur] at our request. His name is Monsieur Daniel[-Deray]. [He lives at] 43, rue du Bac. His wife is also worthy of trust. She offers every guarantee of his financial and moral [probity]. I have informed our financial backers.... You will be happy with this. Show him your confidence. He deserves it from every point of view.⁵⁸⁶

Sister Rosalie promised the superior that, because of these measures, her correspondence and book keeping would be greatly simplified. However, once again she expressed her gratitude for the services rendered; assured Mother Le Chasseur that she was happy to be able to collaborate with Bon-Sauveur; and that she was ever ready to render any service she could for the community of Caen.

The conclusion of this letter shows that Sister Rosalie's mentoring of Monsieur Daniel-Deray had borne fruit. It also reveals one of the secrets of her success with her collaborators: she knew when to be there for them and when to step back and allow them to function with a minimum of supervision. She tells Mother Le Chasseur:

⁵⁸⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Cyprien Loppe*, 12 February 1836, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 16. L3.

⁵⁸⁶ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 23 February 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 58 BS 20.

I will settle the revenue and expenses for the coming trimester with Monsieur Daniel[-Deray]. He will write to you to establish a [working] relationship with you. You need only benefit from this. His exactitude and skill leave nothing to be desired. Place your full confidence in him.⁵⁸⁷

Leinaire
 inscrit sous le n^o 4608
 est dans une pauvreté incomparable
 il est irragulier, a la feuille, son type
 pour le M^ogular ne lui a fait au
 qu'un bien et sans considérer de malade
 incurable le médecin son traitement
 demande un traitement de suite 25 gr
 argent pour payer son loyer 6 F
 6 Bouts de pain — 3-60
 5 Bouts de viande — 2-33
 Total 18 F 03

La Sr Rosalie prie Monsieur Colette
 d'insister sur ces quelques demandes
 soit exautés. Les besoins sont
 extraordinaires et la situation n'est pas
 celle qui est le moins, moins misérable
 J'ai été humblement
 Sr Rosalie

Detailed and signed accounting sheet from
 Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour,
 Administrator of the 16th division of the Bureau of Public Assistance.
 Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

Nor was Sister Rosalie's exactitude with the accounts for Caen an isolated incident. We find the same thing in her dealings with the Bureau of Public Assistance, and in the exactitude with which she accounted for and separated the goods of the community, and of the agency, when threatened with dispersing the sisters in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1830.⁵⁸⁸ She even mentioned her "love of exactitude" in financial matters, perhaps aware of the disapproval sometimes voiced about her in this regard. Notwithstanding, numerous letters contradict such criticism by their precise accounting of expenses for each of her "boarders" at Bon-Sauveur.⁵⁸⁹

All this reveals the magnitude of the task that Sister Rosalie accepted. Alone, it could have monopolized much of her time. However, it was not her only nor even her major responsibility. It piled on top of all the other works of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, and was but a part of her vast network of charity. She was clearly overextended. This brings us to another criticism she faced, namely that she undertook too much and did so without the knowledge or approval of her superiors. Her work on behalf of religious women in need of the services of Bon-Sauveur belies this.

Sister Rosalie placed religious women at Caen on behalf of at least 7 different orders: Benedictines, Carmelites, Religious of Saint-Maur, Sisters of Calvary, Sisters of Saint-Méen, and Sisters of the Retreat. There were most likely others who were not specifically named in the letters that we possess. What is most significant, however, is the placement of the 11 Daughters of Charity. The first such request that we can document came as early as February 1837, and Sister Rosalie was clear that she was making it at the behest of the then Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Marie Boulet. She wrote:

Monsieur Gaschin is bringing you one of our sisters who has been insane for the past six months. She has suffered three bouts of this affliction. She was cured but this relapse seems to us to be more serious. It is impossible for her to remain at the motherhouse. The novices are too likely to see her and be frightened by

⁵⁸⁸ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mélanie Rendu*, 8 October 1830, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 7.

⁵⁸⁹ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Mother Le Chasseur*, 22 July 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 71 BS 28.

this. It is also a burden for our infirm sisters. Our Mother General [Sister Boulet], who knows that I have the honor of [collaborating] with you, has charged me with seeking, in her name, the admission of [our sister] into your institution to be treated if necessary. If [this treatment] is not necessary, she would receive the care that she deserves. She is an excellent Daughter of Charity who has served the poor well. The cause [of her present affliction] was the excessive work and the frightening events that she experienced when the Allies arrived in 1814. We urge you to receive her for the same cost as the other religious: 400 francs for the first trimester, that is, until the month of April. I will pay it at the same time [that I pay for the others].⁵⁹⁰

A letter dated 25 June 1837 would seem to indicate, however, that other Daughters of Charity were already in residence at Bon-Sauveur. Sister Rosalie writes, "I thank you a thousand times over for the news of our good sisters. Our Mother General has commissioned me to thank you for the care you are good enough to provide them."⁵⁹¹

Despite the fact that her correspondence with Mother Le Chasseur was essentially business in nature, there was a certain informality that indicates the two women were not only collaborators but friends. When Sister Rosalie writes in the name of the Superioress General, or to request official documents, however, the tone is formal. In February 1838, she wrote to ask "Madame the Superioress of Bon-Sauveur of Caen" for certificates from the doctor attesting to the mental state of two Daughters of Charity at the time of their arrival "at the said institution." She required separate certificates because they were to be submitted to the Ministry of Cult. The Daughters of Charity were seeking reimbursement for their expenses so the documentation had to be exact.⁵⁹² This is yet another example of Sister Rosalie's exactitude in financial matters.

Other letters follow in which Sister Rosalie spoke in the name of the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, either

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 35 BS 8.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 39 BS 10.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 27 February 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 59 BS 21.

to request the admission of a sister or to express gratitude for the excellent care they were receiving. She did this on behalf of three successive Superioresses General: Sister Marie Boulet (1833-1839), Sister Marie Carrère (1839-1845), and Sister Marie Mazin (1845-1851). The sole regret any of them seemed to have expressed was that there was no house of the Daughters of Bon-Sauveur closer to Paris.⁵⁹³ Moreover, not only did they depend on Sister Rosalie for placement and payment, but she was also the one who saw to it that the sisters had what they needed in terms of clothing or other supplies; kept abreast of their condition, even offering suggestions on how to deal with them; and reported to superiors about all these matters. All this is clear proof that not only would Sister Rosalie not act without the knowledge of her superiors, but that she actively and successfully collaborated with them for the good of the Company. Her work with Bon-Sauveur on behalf of the Daughters of Charity demonstrates the trust they had in her.



Sister Marie Carrère, D.C.
Superioress General – 1839-1845.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1837, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 50 BS 18.

Before concluding our discussion on Bon-Sauveur, it should be noted that not all the persons placed there at Sister Rosalie's request were priests or religious. There were also lay women who needed rest or treatment; deaf persons for the school; and persons looking for employment in a secure environment. Often this was done at the request of a family desperate to find a solution to the problems of a loved one.

There is one other minor but interesting detail concerning Sister Rosalie's work with Caen. In 1840, she stated that she "had just received 200 francs for [a certain] Monsieur Delaunay on behalf of Madame, the Dauphine."⁵⁹⁴ A short time later, on 19 March 1840, she requested a report on him, also for the Dauphine.⁵⁹⁵ The Dauphine in question was Marie-Thérèse of France, daughter of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Like the rest of her family, she was imprisoned during the Revolution of 1789. She was freed in 1795 and sent to Austria in exchange for French prisoners being held there. In 1799 she married Louis-Antoine d'Artois, Duke of Angoulême, and oldest son of the future Charles X. At the death of Louis XVIII in 1824, her husband became the Dauphin of France and she the Dauphine. After the death of Charles X, the legitimists considered her husband the king, thus making her the queen. They never reigned.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1840, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 131 BS 70.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 March 1840, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 133 BS 72.



Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte of France (1778-1851).
 First child of King Louis XVI and his wife, Queen Marie Antoinette.
 Became know as Madame la Dauphine at the death of Louis XVIII in 1824.
Public domain

The letters in which Sister Rosalie speaks of the Dauphine also address several of Sister Rosalie's "protégés" at Bon-Sauveur. Monsieur Delaunay is one among them. Just as the powerful awaited their turn in Sister Rosalie's little parlor, so those patients, supported by the lowly, received the same attention as those supported by the mighty.

Sister Rosalie's correspondence with Mother Le Chasseur provides insight into her character: her devotedness to all in mental and spiritual need, especially priests and religious; her genius for collaboration with all involved in this delicate and demanding ministry; and her willingness to be the instrument of the superiors of the Daughters of Charity in finding and supporting services for their most vulnerable members. Thus, this often overlooked service takes its place as one of the most significant in her vast network of charity.

We have discussed at some length Sister Rosalie's collaboration with groups and individuals, priests, religious, and laity, men and women, which enabled her to transform the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois into the "headquarters of charity" in the XIIth arrondissement.

There is one group, however, of whom we have spoken throughout, but must now consider in greater depth, because they were her closest collaborators, without whose support her extraordinary achievements would never have come about, namely, the Daughters of Charity with whom she lived, loved, prayed, and served.

CHAPTER XII

SISTER ROSALIE'S NETWORK OF CHARITY

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

Whenever Sister Rosalie was praised for her accomplishments or courage, she always gave some variation of the same response, "I am a Daughter of Charity and only that." Indeed, it is doubtful that the little girl, born and raised in the tiny village of Confort in the Jura, would have become the woman she was, and touched all the lives she did, were she not. In nearly all circumstances, her activities, be they simple or heroic, were accomplished by "Sister Rosalie and the sisters of her house." The sisters of the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois were unquestionably Sister Rosalie's closest collaborators. They also taught and cared for children; served the sick and elderly; visited those who were poor in their homes; tended the wounded and dying; stood at the bedside of cholera victims; welcomed and mentored volunteers; seconded her in her work with associations, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the Ladies of Charity; and even wrote some of her letters. Thus, no study of Sister Rosalie's network of charity would be complete without an examination of the life she shared with these equally dedicated women who, like her, were "totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor."

In Chapter VII, we discussed Sister Rosalie's spiritual life in an effort to respond to critics who claimed that she sacrificed prayer so as to respond to the nearly overwhelming needs of the poor masses around her. However, her letters, as well as the testimony of those who lived or worked closely with her, belie this. In Chapter XI, we addressed two other criticisms sometimes leveled against her, namely that she was not sufficiently exact in keeping accounts and that she undertook services for those in need without the knowledge or permission of her superiors. Once again, Sister Rosalie's correspondence and the testimony of persons with knowledge of the matter contradict this. Let us now turn our attention to yet another criticism of her, namely that her community life fell victim to her dedicated service. This allegation is all the more serious as Sister Rosalie was the local superior, or Sister Servant, of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois from 1815 until her death in 1856. As such, she had a profound affect on the quality of the

community life of her companions as well as their apostolic activities as, at this epoch, the Sister Servant was also in charge of all the works of the house. What does the criticism of Sister Rosalie in this respect tell us, how much credence should it be given, and what do we know of her life within the Company? To answer these questions with some degree of objectivity, we shall listen to the voices raised against her as well as the testimonies of love and respect from those who shared her life in community or worked with her and her companions.

The Voice of Sister Rosalie's Critics. Amidst the nearly universal admiration and love that surrounded Sister Rosalie there were some voices raised in protest, claiming that her accomplishments in the service of those who were poor, extraordinary as they might be, came at too high a price. Moreover, it should be pointed out that, with each passing year, her reputation grew. From the highest levels of power and wealth in the capital to the city's most miserable hovels, her name was pronounced reverently. Furthermore, such widespread adulation was unquestionably unique for a religious woman in the Church of nineteenth-century France, particularly one who was neither a foundress nor a major superior. Nor does a close examination of her life and activity totally explain this phenomenon. What is certain is that she was, as contemporary parlance would put it, very "high profile." As such, she would inevitably draw criticism.

The little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was similar to other houses of the Daughters of Charity in Paris at this time. A number of them were in close proximity to Sister Rosalie's house and offered approximately the same services to those in need. Nor was the composition of the houses much different. A document in the National Archives dated 1805 on *The State of the Establishments of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul* lists 21 houses in Paris, including the Motherhouse. Of them, 15 also had schools and the sisters in them visited the sick in their homes. One of these houses had seven sisters (Saint-Merry). Another six, including Saint-Marcel, had six sisters. The remaining houses had five, four, or three sisters.⁵⁹⁶ While we do not know who the sisters were who lived and served the needy in these houses, it is safe to assume that the vast majority were, like the sisters of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, Daughters of Charity "totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor." Nothing

⁵⁹⁶ *État des Établissements des Sœurs de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul*, AN: F.19.6343.

appears to distinguish these houses one from another except Sister Rosalie herself. It is not surprising then that such a situation would provoke criticism within the Community of Daughters of Charity ranging from mild disapproval to resentment or jealousy. Let us now take a closer look at the allegations.

It is important to note from the outset that we know nothing of all this from Sister Rosalie herself, nor of the pain it caused her sensitive heart. This is especially true when the criticism came from her superiors. She was always loyal to them and would never allow her companions to complain about them in her presence. On one occasion, a young sister of the house was joking about Father Étienne's corpulence. Sister Rosalie responded "severely" to her companion, "If we see [our] superiors in God, their humanity will be like the burning bush for Moses which hid the sight of God Himself from him."⁵⁹⁷ Moreover, Sister Rosalie refused to impute any ill-will to them saying only, "Our superiors are very good but they cannot see everything. We must pity [them] as they have a great deal to do and have enormous responsibilities. Let us pray earnestly for them."⁵⁹⁸ Thus, what we do know of any of this comes from the testimony of others who learned of the situation from a third party. Sister Costalin supports this assertion, declaring that Sister Rosalie "had to endure some very delicate trials as our superiors were erroneously influenced concerning her. Although nothing was more painful for her, she never let it show [and spoke of superiors] with incomparable respect."⁵⁹⁹

On several occasions during her life, then, Sister Rosalie appears to have had strained relations with her superiors. In Chapter IX, we discussed the difficulties caused by her comportment during and after the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Now we will address the problems that seem to have resulted from complaints raised against her from within the Daughters of Charity, and even from her own companions. The facts are clear concerning Sister Rosalie's actions at the time of the revolutions, and the reaction of her superiors is comprehensible as both the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity could have been adversely affected by them. Such is not the case for protests raised against

⁵⁹⁷ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, Sommaire*, 46.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

her to the superiors of the Daughters of Charity by members of the Community itself. We know that there were complaints but we lack details relative to the nature of the accusations; how many there were; when they occurred; by whom they were made; and what action, if any, was taken as a result of them.

Notwithstanding, at least some of the criticism, if not most of it, seems to have been occasioned by Sister Rosalie's close dealings not only with the wealthy but also the powerful of the capital. Sister Costalin supports this interpretation when she states in her testimony:

Objections have been raised that [Sister Rosalie's] life was not that of a Daughter of Charity in the ordinary circumstances of life. Yet our blessed Father [Saint Vincent], himself, led a life that was very different from that of his successors.

He assisted at the Council of the Regent [Anne of Austria]; was involved in public affairs; and frequented the [gatherings] of the most illustrious [personages] in France. Such, however, was the guidance of God in his life, that he wanted his sons [the Priests of the Mission] to evangelize only those who were lowly and those who were poor. He preached at court but wanted [his followers] to avoid accepting positions in large cities or in cathedrals.

We cannot blame souls for the particular designs of Providence in their regard especially when the result is for the glory of God and the [good] of the community.⁶⁰⁰

On the surface, this comparison of Sister Rosalie to Vincent de Paul is apt. Both were born in tiny villages, into families of tillers of the soil, but spent most of their adult lives in Paris. Both had easy access to the mighty but retained great simplicity in their dealings with them; Vincent wore his faded but clean and mended cassock to court; Sister Rosalie received all her visitors dressed in her white work

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

apron like all the other Daughters of Charity of the house. Neither sought nor accepted any personal gain from their contact with the wealthy and powerful of France. For both Vincent de Paul and Sister Rosalie these personages were valued and respected collaborators in the Vincentian Mission of service of Jesus Christ in the person of those who were poor. They were never viewed only as funding sources. Rather they found in both Vincent and Sister Rosalie friendship, concern for them and their families, compassion, and support in their joys and sorrows. They were also given assistance, sometimes even monetary, when needed. And they were recipients of prayers and gratitude as both Sister Rosalie and Vincent were keenly aware that these wealthy and influential people were essential to the service of those who were poor.

While these similarities are noteworthy and potential justification for Sister Rosalie in the eyes of her critics, there are striking differences between the Founder and his nineteenth-century Daughter. Vincent was a man, a priest, well-educated, despite his protestations to the contrary, a gifted spiritual director, an outstanding educator and reformer of the clergy, and founder of two religious congregations, as well as the Ladies of Charity. Sister Rosalie, on the other hand, was a consecrated woman, minimally educated, and a local superior in a small house in the poorest district of the capital. More significant yet, Vincent walked the corridors of the civil and ecclesiastical power of his day. Sister Rosalie rarely left the house and, when she did so, it was generally to visit those who were sick and poor in their hovels. The rich and powerful came to her, mingled with those in need waiting to see her, and patiently awaited their turn to speak with her. Sister Tissot recounts such an incident:

One day while [Sister Rosalie] was preparing [a treatment], the doorbell rang and we saw three important gentlemen there. She said, "I ask your permission to finish with this poor man who is suffering." These gentlemen remained in the courtyard while she lanced [a sore].... then she went to greet her visitors who were none other than General Cavaignac, the President of the Republic at the time, his Secretary, and his Minister, Monsieur Falloux. I [Sister Tissot] said to her, "Mother, what

will these gentlemen, whom you kept waiting like that, think?"

[Sister Rosalie] responded, "My daughter, they will think we were doing our duty. We are here for those who are poor."⁶⁰¹

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac formed the early Daughters of Charity to collaborate with the rich so that those who were poor would be better served. Sister Rosalie did the same with the sisters of her house. Sister Tissot recalls:

[Sister Rosalie] knew how to engage her numerous wealthy visitors for the benefit of those who were poor. She could discern, at a glance, what she might expect of them that would benefit [those in need].

When [her visitors] thanked her for her gracious hospitality and her advice, we would hear her respond, "I am the one who is grateful to you. Now that I have the honor of knowing you, I can lay claim to your protection for a poor father of a family who needs a post in the administration; your guidance for a young man who has been referred to me; an occasional visit to a poor sick person; alms to be distributed." She would later say to us, "We render them a service by giving them the opportunity to do good works. We are more blessed than these great ladies in their silk dresses, [traveling about in] their horse and carriage. Come now, my Sisters, they often have many trials and we have the better part. Let us act in a spirit of faith; let us love our Good God; let us not bargain about [our] duty; let us serve the poor well and always speak to them with great kindness."⁶⁰²

When Sister Rosalie dealt with persons of lesser means, such as students who had been referred to her, she would give them tasks

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

to accomplish; for instance, she would have them use their free time to write letters for her concerning the needs of those who were poor or visit the sick. She would not accept their money that she knew was in short supply. One day, Sister Tissot heard her superior say to a student, "My Friend, you need to be liberated before being liberal. Your family is not able to give money. You, give of yourself, now. Later on, you will give what belongs to you."⁶⁰³

Thus, Sister Rosalie involved all who approached her, in keeping within their means, in the service of her "beloved poor" of the Mouffetard district. Among these persons were some of the wealthiest and most powerful of the capital. She would not escape criticism for including them in her network of charity, but this did not deter her from doing so.

There were two episodes that raised Sister Rosalie's profile yet more, and certainly did nothing to silence critics who felt she was too close to the rich and powerful. First, she was decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor on 27 February 1852. Second, she welcomed Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie when they came to visit the Day Nursery on 18 March 1854.

The Cross of the Legion of Honor. It must be pointed out immediately that the awarding of the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Sister Rosalie was truly extraordinary and, therefore, destined to attract wide attention to her and to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Instituted by Napoléon I, the Cross of the Legion of Honor was among the highest symbols of recognition in the realm. Moreover, it was generally conferred on men.

We possess two documents relative to this honor. We will cite both textually, beginning with the Emperor's Decree:

**In the name of the French People
Louis Napoléon
President of the French Republic**

On the recommendation of the Minister of the
Interior,

Given the acts of courage, devotedness, and
admirable charity which have marked the long life

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 57.

of Mademoiselle Rendu (in religion Sister Rosalie), superior of the house of charity maintained in Paris by the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul at 5, rue de l'Épée-de-Bois:

Considering that, for 50 years, Sister Rosalie, by all the types of care she has bestowed on the poor and unfortunate, has shown herself to be the worthy imitator of Sister Marthe, gloriously decorated by the Emperor,

Decrees

Art. 1. The decoration of the National Order of the Legion of Honor is accorded to Sister Rosalie of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Art. 2. The Minister of the Interior is charged with the execution of this decree.

Issued at the Tuileries Palace, 27 February 1852.

Louis Napoléon
By the Prince President
Minister of the Interior
*F. DE PERSIGNY*⁶⁰⁴

The second document is a letter to Sister Rosalie from the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Gilbert Victor Fialin, duc de Persigny (1808-1872), dated 28 February 1852, announcing his time of arrival at the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois to confer the honor:

⁶⁰⁴ *Imperial Decree awarding the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Sister Rosalie, 27 February 1852. Original, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Doc. 44.*

*Office
of
The Ministry of the Interior*

Paris, 28 February 1852

Madame, most honored Sister,

The Prince President of the Republic has just awarded you the decoration of the National Order of the Legion of Honor.

The Prince was happy to thus testify to the very special esteem your noble and admirable life has inspired in him, and the value he attaches to the services rendered to the working classes who are the constant object of his solicitude.

I am personally proud that I was able to be associated with the Emperor's thought in this matter. Not wanting to yield to anyone the pleasure of bestowing this richly deserved Cross on you, I plan to be at your house this afternoon at 4 o'clock to bring it to you myself.

Accept, Madame and most honored Sister, the homage of my deep veneration

Minister of the Interior

Signed: F. DE PERSIGNY⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁵ *Letter of Monsieur Jean-Gilbert Victor Fialin, duc de Persigny, Minister of the Interior, to Sister Rosalie, 28 February 1852, Original, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le - 12.*



Jean-Gilbert-Victor Fialin, duc de Persigny.
Minister of the Interior – 1852-1854 and 1860-1863.
Public domain

These are the official documents. We now turn to those who were close to Sister Rosalie at this time and can testify to her reaction to this honor – Armand de Melun, her sister companions, and Mademoiselle Baccoffe. Melun described his friend's reaction when she learned that she was to receive this award:

...she was greatly surprised and extremely distressed because, after having energetically declined it, she yielded only for fear of offending the hand that was presenting it. She never wore it and her humility was so wounded that she was ill for several days. She was always very upset when any allusion was made to this favor that she considered one of the greatest trials of her life.⁶⁰⁶

We learn further details from Sister Costalin, who spoke of the event from the perspective of Sister Rosalie as a Daughter of Charity. When she first learned about the proposed honor, Sister Rosalie thought she was the object of some kind of hoax and was heard to say:

"I have merited this shame because of my sins; but for the Community, I regret it. All Paris will be laughing at us." ...[Sister Rosalie] did [everything she could] so that the Cross would be awarded to

⁶⁰⁶ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 142.

one of our administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance rather than to her.... She also sent Sister [Marguerite-Agl  ] Esparbier, [the oldest sister in vocation in the house – 21 years], to Father   tienne [to learn his opinion]. Here are the exact words of his response, “Tell Sister Rosalie that it is a cross like any other. She should give it no more importance than we will.... She must not cause us any problems with these people.”⁶⁰⁷

Thus, Sister Rosalie, to her chagrin, accepted the honor. The sisters of the house knew of it just two hours before the arrival of Monsieur de Persigny, when a beautiful bouquet of flowers arrived for her from the women working at the market, Les Halles. Indeed, Sister Rosalie’s “beloved poor” rejoiced to see their Mother thus honored. They considered themselves “decorated in her person.”⁶⁰⁸

Sister Costalin graphically described her superior’s reaction immediately following the brief ceremony, “...the door had hardly closed behind Monsieur de Persigny when [Sister Rosalie] ripped the Cross from her collar and threw it behind some furniture exclaiming, ‘It is not with this that the poor are fed.’”⁶⁰⁹



Cross of the Legion of Honor awarded to Sister Rosalie.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris.
 Courtesy of Sister Marie-Genevi  ve Roux, D.C.

⁶⁰⁷ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 47-48.

⁶⁰⁸ Melun, *Vie de la s  ur Rosalie*, 142.

⁶⁰⁹ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 48.

Sister Saillard recounted that, at the time of Sister Rosalie's death, the sisters of the house searched for the Cross; however, "she had hidden it so well that we had great difficulty in finding it. We wanted to place it on her casket along with her crown [the small wreath worn during this era at the celebration following pronouncing vows for the first time] and her side rosary."⁶¹⁰

We know of Sister Rosalie's distress with this whole affair as well as the joy of her friends, collaborators, and the poor whom she and the sisters of her house served. But how did the award come about? Who set it in motion? The culprit, as Sister Rosalie would consider the person behind the honor, was none other than Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe de Montmahaut, a friend and admirer of Sister Rosalie since childhood. As we discussed earlier, her father was the officer of the Civil Guard, whose life Sister Rosalie saved. Years later, now well-placed at the court of Napoléon III, the little girl who, at age six, wanted to buy new chairs for Sister Rosalie's shabby parlor, sought a way to repay her. She explained:

I had an idea that was going to work out for me. I had a number of friends among the great families of the era. I had only one desire, to settle my father's debt to the one who had helped to save his life.... [I went to] Monsieur de Persigny; Monsieur Pépin Saint-Hilaire, who was the defender of Napoléon III and later Secretary of the Works of the Empress; Madame Duclos, who was very loved by Napoléon III; and lastly, Admiral Excelmans....

Finally, I learned from Monsieur de Morny that Sister Rosalie had been proposed for the Cross. I wanted to be certain of this good news so I went to him myself, and he told me that he and Monsieur de Persigny would go to present it to [Sister Rosalie the next day].... I was [then] taken to her house. She was going to rue Pascal... so I accompanied her.... I told her that she would see me the [next day] because she would at last have the Cross. She said, "Come now, little one. You are a foolish child." She had

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

not yet received the letter. From [the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois] I went to thank all those who had supported me. Monsieur de Persigny said, "At last you are happy. You are satisfied and grateful." When I returned home the whole house was as happy as I was. The next day, as I embraced [Sister Rosalie], I said, "I have finally paid a small part of papa's debt. I felt a tear on my cheek as I held her."⁶¹¹

Thus, this event, which added considerably to Sister Rosalie's prestige, while assaulting her humility, was behind her. As far as she was concerned, it was never to be spoken of again.

The Visit of Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie. Two years later, on 18 March 1854, she was once again in the public eye. On that day, Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie visited the Day Nursery of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. This time, however, Sister Rosalie's reaction was very different. She looked upon this expression of interest by the Imperial Couple with respect and gratitude. She saw their example as a lesson, for all administrators, in generosity and charity to the lowly and the weak, and an encouragement for all with power in the public sector, whatever the level, to be attentive and compassionate toward the unfortunate.⁶¹²

The artist Édouard-Alexandre Sain (1830-1910), commemorated the visit in a painting now housed at the Compiègne Museum. However, for Sister Rosalie, there were more lasting reminders. She profited from the occasion to obtain assistance from the Empress for two works dear to her heart, the Day Nursery and a Shelter for the Elderly. She obtained reliable funding so that infants' mothers no longer had to pay to have their babies at the Day Nursery, and had the Shelter for the Elderly placed under the direction of the Daughters of Charity. Thus, this very "high profile" visit brought joy to Sister Rosalie's heart because, as a result, her "beloved poor" would be better served.

In the chapter on Sister Rosalie in his *La charité et la misère à Paris*, Mullois recounted an anecdote related to this Imperial visit. He wrote:

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

⁶¹² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 142-143.

Last year, the Emperor and Empress wanted to visit the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. The news spread [throughout the district] so, several hours ahead of time, the streets adjacent [to the house] were filled with masses of poor persons who... wanted to see [the Imperial Couple]. However, the police had taken over the area and kept them at a distance. Sister Rosalie was very upset by this. She vainly argued that these were her children and she would answer for them. The police remained adamant.

The Emperor had barely descended from his carriage when the good superior expressed her distress and her objections. The order was immediately issued to let everyone approach. The crowd flooded around the carriages. When it was time to leave, [the Imperial Couple and their retinue] could hardly get through. It was truly a pleasure to see the masses so respectful and so filled with enthusiasm. Sister Rosalie had prevailed.⁶¹³

This anecdote once again illustrates Sister Rosalie's love and respect for those whom she and the sisters of the house served. She felt that her "beloved poor" had a right to be present and to share in the visit. She did not stop until that had happened.

Besides General Cavaignac, Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie, there were other very highly placed persons who came to visit Sister Rosalie. Melun writes:

The sovereigns who succeeded one another in France turned to her and paid homage to her charity. Charles X could not overlook her in his truly royal generosity and had large charitable sums pass through her hands. The Dauphine [whom we mentioned in Chapter XI] associated [Sister Rosalie] to her intelligent practice of good deeds and to the numerous works in which she engaged to find comfort in her misfortunes....

⁶¹³ Abbé Jacques-Isidore Mullois, *La charité et la misère à Paris* (Lyon, 1856), 190.

The Revolution of 1830 lessened [Sister Rosalie's] resources but Queen Marie-Amélie [spouse of Louis-Philippe] sought her advice and granted a great deal as a result of her requests and recommendations.⁶¹⁴



Queen Marie-Amélie (1782-1866).
Wife of King Louis-Philippe.
Public domain

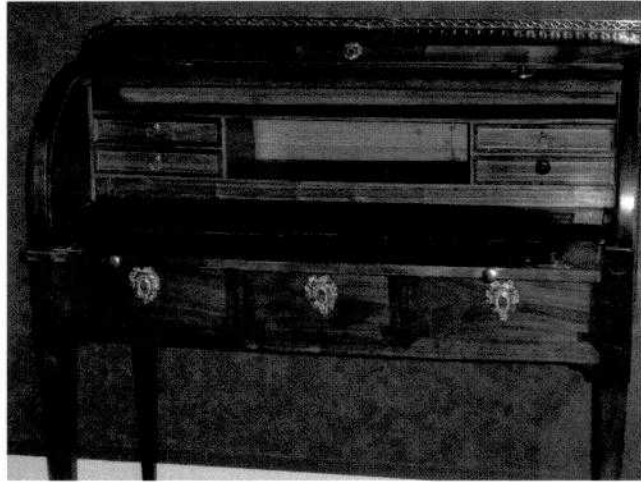
To this enumeration of sovereigns could be added the names of lesser luminaries who also generously shared their wealth and influence with Sister Rosalie. Among them was Madame de La Villette, Reine-Philiberte de Varicourt, the adopted daughter of Voltaire, who had protected and assisted Father Emery during the Revolution of 1789, and, according to Sister Saillard, "came so often to bring alms that the horses headed to the house on their own.... The Duchess of Narbonne was also a generous visitor."⁶¹⁵

There were also simple visitors who came to her, drawn to her little parlor by her reputation and charity. Again, it was Sister Tissot who elaborated on this:

⁶¹⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 141.

⁶¹⁵ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 63.

...[God] directed thousands of charitable souls from all classes and every political sector of society to His servant's humble dwelling. Their abundant donations were put into the little desk in our Mother's office. It was filled and emptied without measure. She drew from it without counting.⁶¹⁶



Sister Rosalie's desk.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris.
 Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

In his discourse, delivered on the occasion of the dedication of a bust of Sister Rosalie to be placed in an assembly room of the town hall of the XIIth arrondissement, the Mayor, Monsieur Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, spoke of Sister Rosalie's extraordinary magnetism:

In the house of charity of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, there was a Sister well known for her gentleness and charity among the poor and her sound advice and Christian humility among the rich and worldly.

She joined a natural dignity in her language and manner to an understanding of life, something that is dead letter for the more experienced but is always

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

an open book to select spirits. Her kind welcome encouraged confidences. Her discretion insured them. She pleased the lowly by her simplicity filled with charm. The great were comfortable with her because of her reserve which awaited their confidences without pushing for or forcing them.⁶¹⁷

The evidence shows that Sister Rosalie's life of service to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district reflected that of the founders. Without their close collaboration with the wealthy and influential of their day, Vincentian works would never have become what they were. Notwithstanding, this resemblance did not necessarily shield Sister Rosalie from disapproval. In her testimony, Sister Costalin, her companion at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois from 1845 until her superior's death in 1856, recounts one incident involving the displeasure of major superiors with Sister Rosalie; a displeasure most likely based on a complaint from a Daughter of Charity of her own house about her close relationship with the rich. She recalls:

One summer day, Sister Assistant sent word that [Sister Rosalie] was to come to the Motherhouse. At [a meeting of] the Council, it had been all but decided that she would be removed [as superior of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois]. Sister Rosalie left immediately [for the Motherhouse] without saying a word to her companions. When she arrived, the Sister Assistant said, without preamble, "Sister Rendu, you are to stay here." That was all.⁶¹⁸

Desmet quotes Sister Costalin's account of this episode textually. However, without indicating it, he inserts a sentence which does not appear in her testimony but which surely reflects her view of the suffering the incident caused Sister Rosalie, and her assessment of the actions of superiors. He comments, "Our good God often tries His saints [this way] and superiors frequently act as He does."⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ "Discours de M. Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, maire du XII^e arrondissement, à l'inauguration du buste de sœur Rosalie dans la salle de la Mairie, lundi, 22 décembre 1856," *Inauguration du buste de sœur Rosalie* (Paris: 1856).

⁶¹⁸ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 45.

⁶¹⁹ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 94.

Sister Rosalie remained at the Motherhouse for about 10 days, quietly and humbly helping where she could. During this time, she had no further direct contact with her superiors. Meanwhile, a steady stream of administrators, poor persons, the mighty and the lowly, came to the parlor of the Motherhouse in an effort to persuade these same superiors to send her back to the Mouffetard district. They also requested to see her, but Sister Rosalie herself refused, judging that it would serve no worthwhile purpose.

Finally, the Sister Assistant asked Sister Rosalie if she would like to explain her actions to the Superioress General. She responded quite simply, "I will see her when she sends for me to place me. There is nothing to say. For the time being I have only to obey."⁶²⁰

Then, the day came when the Superioress General sent for her. Evidently, she and her Council had determined to send Sister Rosalie back to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and leave her as Sister Servant of the house. We have no way of knowing to what extent the pleas of those who came to the Motherhouse to advocate for Sister Rosalie's return entered into this decision. However, the Superioress General's words in sending her back to the Mouffetard district appear to manifest a decision made under pressure that we are certain did not come from Sister Rosalie. Sister Costalin tells us that when Sister Rosalie arrived at the Superioress General's office, the latter did not look up at her but continued writing, saying only, "Sister Rendu, go home." Then she added... "Sister Rendu, go back home. You are an annoyance for us here."⁶²¹

It is not difficult to imagine how devastated Sister Rosalie must have been given her "extreme sensitivity" and respect for and loyalty to her superiors. Nonetheless, she joyfully returned to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and never said a word about the episode to anyone. Sister Costalin undoubtedly learned of this incident from a third party. Sister Rosalie's "beloved poor," her sister companions, the administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance, and her friends and collaborators also rejoiced. The "Apostle of the Mouffetard district" had returned to her "diocese," the Daughter of Charity to her little community of sister companions.

As for her accuser, nothing in Sister Rosalie's comportment would ever reveal who it was. Life in the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois continued as it had been before this painful incident.

⁶²⁰ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 45.*

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*

In addition to the reproof of the Superioress General, this episode also involved a member of the General Council, namely, the Assistant. However, we do not know if she was a simple intermediary or if she agreed with the criticism. Nonetheless, her comportment toward Sister Rosalie showed no understanding of or compassion for her at this distressing time in her life.

There is another incident involving Sister Rosalie and a member of the General Council, this time the Treasurer. We do not know what was behind the disapproval, but it was likely Sister Rosalie's relations with the rich and her practice of receiving money with one hand and immediately giving it to a person who had come to her in distress with the other. This incident occurred late in Sister Rosalie's life so she most probably never knew about it and therefore did not suffer from it.

There is a letter to Sister Rosalie (one of the few that have been preserved), from the then Superioress General, Sister Elisabeth Montcellet (1851-1857 and 1860-1866), dated 3 November 1853, which must have consoled her given her difficulties dealing with this level of the government of the Company. It also illustrates the ambivalence of major superiors in her regard. In Chapter XI, we spoke of the close collaboration between Sister Rosalie and three successive Superioresses General, Sister Marie Boulet (1833-1839), Sister Marie Carrère (1839-1845), and Sister Marie Mazin (1845-1851), for the placement of



Sister Marie Mazin, D.C.
Superioress General – 1845-1851.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

Daughters of Charity at Bon-Sauveur of Caen. While Sister Rosalie placed no one at Caen after 1849, the letter is another request from a major superior for assistance in placing a woman “in keeping with her desires and means.”⁶²²

The letter contains the usual polite formulas used in such correspondence of the time. However, there is a brief phrase that seems to depart a bit from the norm. The Superioress General writes, “I express my sincere gratitude to you in advance while assuring you and your dear family once again of my affectionate and devoted sentiments, *with which I am without reserve*, in the love of Jesus and Mary Immaculate, my very dear Sister, your very humble servant and very affectionate Sister...”⁶²³

The phrase, “with which I am without reserve,” may simply be yet another polite formula. Even so, it may also be a word of encouragement to a sister who experienced little from this level of government in the Company. Be that as it may, Sister Montcellet was asking Sister Rosalie to use her contacts with the rich to find a suitable placement for the woman in question. The letter was hand delivered. We do not know what Sister Rosalie might have been doing when she received it. However, she stops and responds to the Superioress General’s request immediately. On the same letter, dated the same day, she writes to Madame Mégniteaud, at 3, rue Ventadour, asking her to accept the woman into her household:

I am sending you a maid about whom I have good information. Please read what our Mother General wrote to me about her. If you are pleased with her, I think that she will be a good addition.

I am, with all my heart,
Your devoted and grateful...⁶²⁴

As we will see, by the time this letter was written, we begin to approach the final two years of Sister Rosalie’s life, years marked by her failing health and the loss of her sight. Nonetheless, she responded

⁶²² Letter of Sister Elisabeth Montcellet to Sister Rosalie, 3 November 1853, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 268.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁴ Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Mégniteaud, 3 November 1853, on Letter of Sister Elisabeth Montcellet to Sister Rosalie, 3 November 1853.

promptly and graciously to yet another request for assistance from the general level of the Company. There is not the slightest hint of bitterness at being asked to use the very contacts that had been the basis of criticism against her. Here Sister Rosalie demonstrates what Sister Costalin said of her respect for her superiors and desire to be of service to them:

...Her devotion to Superiors was limitless and was equaled only by her discretion.... She considered herself blessed to be able to lighten their burdens or [alleviate] their affectionate concerns. She spared nothing [in trying] to procure the requested result for one of their protégés.⁶²⁵

Despite occasional protests reaching them about Sister Rosalie's relationship with the rich and powerful, it was normal for the superiors of the Daughters of Charity to turn to her for help when her network of contacts would produce a favorable result in important and delicate matters. In this they were following the example of others from all levels of society, both ecclesiastical and civil. As we have seen with Bon-Sauveur of Caen, she was the person to whom one turned in need. There is, however, a rather amusing detail in Sister Saillard's testimony that indicates that Sister Rosalie was called upon to do all types of things which, it appears, at least here, someone else could easily have done. Sister Saillard had been a postulant at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois in 1851-1852. From 22 April to 13 November 1852, she was a novice in the seminary of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity. She recalls, "I had the happiness of seeing Sister Rosalie from time to time when she came with a baby from the Day Nursery to vaccinate the young sisters. She waited respectfully and humbly at the door of the office of the venerable Sister Bouchepot [the Seminary Directress], who considered her a saint."⁶²⁶ Surely there was a sister with more medical background than Sister Rosalie who could have performed this task. But there was a need and, almost out of habit, superiors turned to her. And she always responded.

Thus far, we have seen that, other than her difficulties with the Superior General relating to her actions during the revolutions

⁶²⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 46.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

of 1830 and 1848 and their aftermath, Sister Rosalie's sometimes strained relations with her superiors were with women superiors of the Daughters of Charity. However, "since its origin, the Company, in conformity with the will of Saint Louise, has recognized and accepted the authority of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, the successor of Saint Vincent de Paul."⁶²⁷ We have already discussed in Chapter IV the question of the jurisdiction of the Superior General over the Company of the Daughters of Charity in relation to the re-establishment of the Company after its suppression in 1793. It suffices to say here that, by 1840, it was a long-established principle in the government of the Daughters of Charity. Therefore, when Sister Rosalie entered the fray surrounding what has come to be known as "The Nozo Affair," she was risking not only the wrath of the Superior General, Jean-Baptiste-Rigobert Nozo, C.M. (1835-1842), but more particularly what would turn out to be the lasting enmity of the then Procurator General and Father Nozo's eventual successor, Father Étienne.

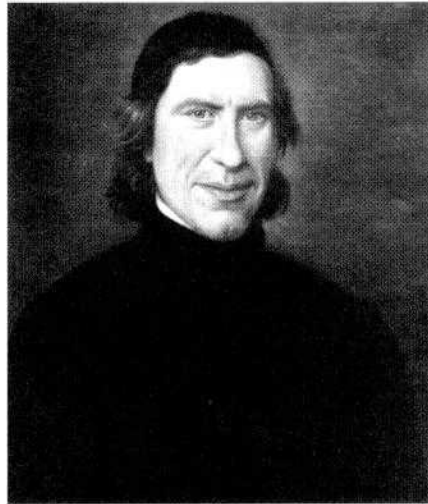
From the outset it must be pointed out that this "affair" was both complex and prolonged. It has also been thoroughly recounted and studied. Father Étienne himself dealt with it in his *Notice sur le rétablissement de la Congrégation de la Mission après la Révolution de 1789*. Édouard Rosset, C.M., does likewise in his 1881 biography of Father Étienne, *Vie de Monsieur Étienne*. Pierre Coste, C.M., returns to it in his 1929 history of the Vincentian Community, *La Congrégation de la Mission, dite de Saint-Lazare*. In 2001, Edward Udovic, C.M., published his *Jean-Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*. In it he devoted 109 pages (143-252) to a critical examination of this subject and the circumstances surrounding it. He challenged both Father Étienne and Father Rosset on inaccuracies revealed by his re-examination of the pertinent documents and events. However, other than in a note, none of these Vincentian scholars spoke of Sister Rosalie's involvement in the matter. Therefore, we shall limit our present consideration to that, while, at the same time, providing some essential, albeit limited, background information.

Our knowledge of Sister Rosalie's role in this affair is based on three letters she sent to Monseigneur Affre, the newly appointed Archbishop of Paris, between 30 July and 17 August 1840, and the

⁶²⁷ *Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul*, 2004, C. 64.

testimonies of Sister Costalin and Sister Saillard. The broad facts are that Dominique Salhorgne, C.M., resigned as Superior General, for reasons of age and health, at the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in May 1835. The question was who would succeed him. Amable-Ferdinand-Joseph Bailly, C.M., enjoyed a certain amount of popularity with the delegates, but he appears to have withdrawn his name as he did not want to leave Amiens where he was director of the major seminary, vicar general of the diocese, and visitor (provincial superior) for Picardy. This left Father Nozo and perhaps Father Étienne. On 20 August 1835, Jean-Baptiste Nozo was elected Superior General, but not by one vote as Father Étienne alleged. The Vincentian scholar, John E. Rybolt, C.M., in his soon to be published *History of the Congregation of the Mission*, clarified the outcome of the vote:

His election must have been a foregone conclusion, since he received sixteen votes. The remaining ones were divided up among the elderly [Pierre] Le Go with four; Salhorgne (who had just resigned), two; [Juan] Roca, visitor of Spain, one; [Filippo] Girodi, an Italian from the province of Lombardy, one; and



Jean-Baptiste Nozo, C.M.
Superior General – 1835-1842.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

Ferdinand Bailly, two. The total was twenty-six, since Salhorgne was absent, alleging illness, and [the Spanish quasi-Delegate Miguel] Gros and Étienne apparently did not vote.⁶²⁸

Clearly Father Nozo had the support of his confreres at the beginning, but this was destined to change once he was in a position of power. Difficulties with his council began when he started acting independently of them. Consequently he often found himself challenged by his Assistants, Fathers Étienne, Aladel, Le Go, and Jean Grappin. Pasquale Fiorillo, the Italian Assistant, seems to have maintained his distance from any controversy. Tensions were high even before Father Nozo returned to Paris in 1838 after a visit to Rome and began to confront the case of Father Bailly. There was a double source of contention, the validity of Father Bailly's vows and his financial management. Both these allegations had some supporting evidence. Moreover, the General Council, despite differences with the Superior General in other matters, supported Father Nozo in this instance.

The question of the date of Ferdinand Bailly's vows was of critical importance as the official date of membership in the Congregation of the Mission, during that era, corresponded to the date of pronouncing vows. Father Bailly pronounced his vows on 16 September 1819. Thus, his membership in the Congregation dated from that day if his vows were valid. Why would they not be?

The response is to be found in the complex situation existing at the time in the Congregation of the Mission. Upon the death of the Superior General, Jean-Félix Cayla de la Garde (1788-1800), in 1800, the Congregation of the Mission, because of its lack of legal status in France, could not convene a General Assembly to elect his successor. Until this could occur, governance devolved on vicars general, both French and Italian simultaneously. There were five French vicars general between 1800 and the election of Pierre-Joseph de Wailly as Superior General (1827-1828) in 1827. The last of the French vicars general was Charles-Vincent de Paul Cathelin Boujard (1819-1827). The drama for Father Bailly and a handful of other Vincentian priests was that they petitioned and received authorization to pronounce

⁶²⁸ John E. Rybolt, C.M., *History of the Congregation of the Mission*, vol. 3, pre-publication manuscript.

their vows from Father Boujard between the time he was elected by the French confreres at an assembly held on 13 May 1819 and his confirmation months later by the Vatican.⁶²⁹ Did he have the authority during this period of admitting candidates to vows?



Charles-Vincent de Paul Cathelin Boujard, C.M.
Vicar General – 1819-1827.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

To address this ambiguity, Father Nozo turned to the Vatican for a decision. John Rybolt wrote concerning the result of this intervention:

...Armed with the papal rescript, Nozo was able to remove the doubt, and the confreres in question apparently requested permission to renew their vows. It appears that Bailly did not make this request, but in any case, he would have been refused. Possibly he understood his situation and decided not to pursue the matter. One of the many briefs stated that Bailly was not permitted to renew his vows, but no evidence for this assertion exists.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ See Udovic, *Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*, 106-109.

⁶³⁰ Rybolt, *History of the Congregation*.

The validity of Ferdinand Bailly's vows was not the only question stirring up concern at the general level of the Congregation. Indeed, his situation could have been resolved as it was for the other Vincentian priests whom Father Boujard authorized to pronounce their vows. However, Father Bailly's financial maneuvers and inappropriate loans, his incomplete and sometimes befuddling reports, and his numerous failures altogether to submit accounts were alarming. Father Grappin's investigation into the matter appeared to support a judgment of financial malfeasance. This, combined with the question of the validity of Father Bailly's vows and his refusal to seek permission to renew them, led the Superior General and his Council to take action against him. According to Rybolt:

...matters moved quickly. In a letter from Nozo to Bailly, dated 29 August 1838, the vows of Ferdinand Bailly were recognized and declared null. This expression was ambiguous. For Nozo it meant that although Bailly had taken vows, even if of doubtful validity, they were declared henceforth to be null or without effect.... [The letter] accompanied his notice of dismissal, and spoke of a dispensation from his vows. Bailly, however, read the expression as meaning that his vows had always been null and, in that sense, he would later demand salary for the years he had worked as an employee of the Congregation beginning in 1807, when he claimed he entered. Nozo and his council would counter that he became a member only on 16 September 1819, the day he took vows.⁶³¹

Following his dismissal, Ferdinand Bailly sued for wages for his services, alleging that if his vows were invalid, he had never been a member of the Congregation and should therefore be compensated.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

Note: Rybolt supplies the following documentation to support his conclusions: "Nozo to Bailly," reprinted in *Précis pour M. Amable-Ferdinand Bailly... contre M. Jean-Baptiste Nozo*, undated legal brief, ACMP, "Affaire Bailly-Nozo," unnumbered folder at liasse 39; also reprinted in *Affaire Bailly contre Nozo, ...conclusions de M. de Charancey*, p. 8-9; undated legal brief, 39 pp., and in other briefs.

The whole matter became bitter and public. Bailly offered to accept arbitration but Father Nozo refused. This decision would ultimately lead to his downfall. Ferdinand Bailly eventually won the judgment and the Superior General was ordered to pay 50,728.57 francs plus 39,150 francs for the years he had been in Amiens, 1807-1838.

Father Nozo reluctantly reported the unfavorable court ruling to his General Council and to the Vincentian local superiors in France. He also presented his side of the affair to Monseigneur Affre, whose support he hoped to have in the event of an appeal.

The council then met to determine what to do next as they felt the matter affected the entire Congregation and not just the Superior General. Although there was reluctance within the General Council to proceed with an appeal, in the end the Assistants acquiesced to Father Nozo's entreaties. Father Étienne and Father Aladel drafted the text. Unfortunately, Father Nozo saw this as vindication of his actions and had 3,000 copies printed and distributed in the dioceses of France. The appeal was rejected in June 1840. However, it almost immediately led to another suit, one that would prove to be even more acrimonious and create wider public scandal.

In the briefs prepared by attorneys, mention was made of an unauthorized loan which Father Bailly was accused of making, from Congregation funds, to his brother Emmanuel, the same Emmanuel who was president of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul from its origin. Emmanuel claimed that the publication of the brief, which was distributed even in Pas-de-Calais where the Bailly family originated, had defamed his family and done irreparable harm to his good name. He demanded monetary damages from the Congregation of the Mission. Ironically enough, the latter were investors in *L'Univers religieux*, which had merged with *La Tribune Catholique* in 1836, and employed Emmanuel as publisher at least until 1839.

The three letters of Sister Rosalie to Archbishop Affre dealt with the defamation suit brought by "Bailly, publisher," as she refers to him in this correspondence, that is Emmanuel Bailly, rather than with his older brother Ferdinand's suit, although both were occasions of wide public scandal which Sister Rosalie sought to alleviate.

Monseigneur Affre had been appointed Archbishop of Paris only in January 1840. Thus, at the time of her first letter, 30 July 1840, Sister Rosalie had no long-standing working relationship with him as she had had with his predecessor, Monseigneur de Quélen. Notwithstanding, she was 55 years of age and reaching the pinnacle

of her influence. Thus, she did not hesitate to use it to try to preserve the Congregation of the Mission from scandal. More astounding yet, Monseigneur Affre heeded her advice.

This first letter seems to indicate that Sister Rosalie had previously either written or spoken to the archbishop requesting his intervention as an arbitrator in the on-going dispute. She wrote:

I need to speak to you of the gratitude and respectful confidence which penetrates my heart because of your receptivity to my request concerning our Vincentian priests. You will retain for this Congregation the honor and reputation that the work of Vincent de Paul merits.

You will bring an end to the scandal that afflicts your truly pastoral and paternal heart. To bring about peace, which has been disturbed by the differences between the two interested parties, is an act worthy of you and will auger well for your episcopacy.

You will begin by an act of the highest importance. You will restore life to the children of Saint Vincent, friend of the blessed Founder of our esteemed Sulpicians [Jean-Jacques Olier], your fathers and friends.⁶³²

Yes, Monseigneur, my heart is filled with gratitude and respect for you. I am so [deeply] touched... I cannot prevent myself from writing [to express this] although my awareness of your retreat should have stopped me. Excuse my indiscretion *due to my*

⁶³² Monseigneur Affre had studied for the priesthood at Saint-Sulpice and later entered the Sulpicians, with whom Sister Rosalie had a close relationship, beginning with her godfather, Father Emery, Superior General at the time of her entrance into the Daughters of Charity in 1802.

motive and accept, Monseigneur, the assurance of my profound esteem in which I have the honor to be,

Your Eminence's very humble daughter,
Sister Rosalie⁶³³

Before continuing, some remarks about this letter, as well as the other two, are in order. While the sentiments expressed are clearly Sister Rosalie's, the style indicates a writer more accustomed to correspondence with the highest levels of society. All the polite formulas are correctly expressed. As pointed out earlier, many of Sister Rosalie's letters were written for her by others. While she expressed herself with a certain degree of elegance, spelling was beyond her. She had the humility and the simplicity to request assistance in this area. The scribe here was most likely Armand de Melun. Cyprien Loppe could also have written them; however, he was no longer in Paris whereas Melun met with Sister Rosalie on a weekly basis. She probably shared her concerns about the scandal with him and asked his assistance in writing to the archbishop.

Monseigneur Affre knew Sister Rosalie mostly through reputation; nonetheless, she signed all three letters as she signed all her correspondence simply, "Sister Rosalie." Such was her renown that even the avenue in Paris named in her honor is "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie." There was no confusion in anyone's mind as to who she was.



Paris street sign indicating avenue named in honor of Sister Rosalie.
Courtesy of Sister Marie-Geneviève Roux, D.C.

⁶³³ Letter of Sister Rosalie to Denis-Auguste Affre, 20 July 1840, Original AAP: 4 R 17.

Note: In the Positio he prepared, page 209, Father Beaudoin indicates the recipient of these three letters as Monseigneur de Quélen. In the text, page 204, however, he speaks of them as written to Monseigneur Affre. The latter was indeed the recipient.

While protesting that she did not want to inconvenience the archbishop, Sister Rosalie wrote again on 13 August urging him “to convince Monsieur Bailly to withdraw his complaint so that Monsieur Nozo will not be obliged to appear in criminal court.” She then told Monseigneur Affre that he had to obtain a written promise from Bailly to do so and forward it to the presiding magistrate. She even supplied the correct address.⁶³⁴

Sister Rosalie wrote to the archbishop again just four days later, on 17 August 1840. The letter contains some revealing points. First, she once again excused herself for intervening, if not interfering, in this delicate matter, as she often said, “because of the motives” that urged her on. Second, she reminded the archbishop that he was aware of these motives so she considered it her “duty to keep him updated on everything concerning the affair between Monsieur Nozo and Monsieur Bailly, publisher.” Third, she had visited Monseigneur Affre about the matter sometime in the intervening three days as she wrote, “after leaving Your Eminence, I went to see Monsieur Aladel, Monsieur Nozo’s Assistant, who said he had hastened to send the document you drew up to Monsieur Nozo in Amiens.” Thus, in this particular matter, she was an intermediary and in direct contact with the Vincentian General Council. Therefore, the long-lasting disapproval of Sister Rosalie on the part of the Congregation of the Mission does not seem to have its roots in the affair of Monsieur Bailly, publisher, versus Monsieur Nozo.

It might also be good to recall again here Father Étienne’s role in the re-establishment of the Ladies of Charity, which likewise occurred in 1840. The Ladies were sent, with Archbishop Affre’s approval, to the parish of Saint-Médard and placed under the guidance of Sister Rosalie. Her reports on their activities were addressed to Father Étienne who had also become the spiritual director of the group. This situation is another illustration of the ambivalence of superiors of both the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission with regard to Sister Rosalie’s comportment. They never ordered her to terminate her relationship with the rich and powerful, nor did they remove her as superior of the house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. Rather they turned to her and her vast network of charity whenever the good

⁶³⁴ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Denis-Auguste Affre*, 13 August 1840, Original AAP: 4 R 17.

Note: Sister Rosalie’s three letters to Monseigneur Affre are all under the same call number at the Archdiocesan Archives in Paris.

of those who were poor, the Daughters of Charity or the Congregation of the Mission called for it.

Fourth, while all this was going on, Sister Rosalie was in communication with Monsieur Bailly, publisher. This is not surprising since, as we have seen in Chapter X concerning the founding of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, both Emmanuel Bailly and his wife were friends and collaborators of Sister Rosalie. Thus, her remarks are somewhat unexpected. At first she spoke of her friend in a conciliatory manner pointing out that, "Monsieur Bailly has told [her] on several occasions that he will abide by your Eminence's decision." However, she then warned the archbishop, "I am taking the liberty, Monseigneur, of begging you to be wary of Monsieur Bailly's allegations. For the most part, they are false and I am certain that he is distorting your thoughts with regard to this affair." Sister Rosalie then stated the desired outcome as she saw it, "It is essential that the Vincentian Congregation owe the conclusion of this affair to the spontaneous movement of your truly pastoral heart and that Monsieur Bailly be convinced that he has no further recourse." She went on to express her confidence in Monseigneur Affre's willingness and ability to resolve the matter as "all persons of good will wanted."⁶³⁵

Father Nozo lost the defamation case but the archbishop did intervene. In the presence of Archbishop Affre, the Superior General was obliged to apologize to Emmanuel Bailly, withdraw the brief from circulation, and delete the offending passage.

While this supposedly ended the matter, the case involving Ferdinand Bailly was far from over. Both parties eventually agreed to arbitration. The outcome would prove disastrous for Bailly who, in the end, would lose on nearly all counts and be obliged to return the money already awarded. In the interim the matter was very public. Sister Costalin revealed just how public it was when she recalled:

The suit continued and the public was captivated. Every day, Sister Rosalie took it upon herself to get newspaper clippings before the [papers] came out. [Thus], the community had time to prepare its response and be on the lookout for the traps set for it.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ *Letter of Sister Rosalie to Denis-Auguste Affre, 17 August 1840, Original AAP: 4 R 17.*

⁶³⁶ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 43.*

Meanwhile, Father Nozo found himself the object of accusations of similar financial malfeasance. His ill-advised investments and loans destroyed his credibility, threatened the solvency of the Congregation of the Mission, and deepened the rift between the Superior General and his Council. It was at this point that Sister Rosalie once again made the move to intervene directly with Monseigneur Affre. It was a decision she made "from the motive" of protecting the Vincentian family from further scandal. While she would ultimately prevail, it would be at high personal cost. Her actions would be a source of long-term suffering for her, and would affect the perception the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity had of her well beyond her death. Sister Saillard was obviously referring to this matter when she testified:

[Sister Rosalie's] soul was too pleasing to Our Lord for her not to be purified by suffering. During the last years of her life, she endured a trial that was even more painful for her heart as she had greater veneration for our Most Honored Superiors and a deeper attachment to the Community. [Thus], her best intentions were misinterpreted. Far from defending herself, she remained silent leaving the task of revealing the truth to Our Lord.⁶³⁷

Then, in Sister Rosalie's eyes, the whole affair reached the crisis stage. Apparently the new archbishop had grown weary of all the infighting between Father Nozo and his Council as well as the resultant scandal in his diocese. Therefore, he decided to take action against the Vincentian General Council, except the Italian Assistant, Father Fiorillo. According to Sister Costalin, Sister Rosalie learned from a "reliable source" that Monseigneur Affre was going to pass a sentence of interdict against Fathers Étienne, Aladel, Le Go, and Grappin for their insubordination to their superior.⁶³⁸ This interdiction would mean they could no longer say mass or administer the sacraments. Without hesitation and without measuring what it might cost her personally she intervened, and this time dramatically.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

According to Sister Costalin, Sister Rosalie rushed to the archbishop's residence, threw herself at his feet, begged him to reconsider, and cast the interdiction into the fire. When the archbishop urged her to rise from her knees, she responded, "No, Monseigneur, I will not get up until I have obtained the grace that I am going to ask of you."⁶³⁹

Sister Rosalie remained kneeling during the "very animated debate" that followed. Archbishop Affre finally yielded to her "humble supplication." He kindly said to her, "Get up from your knees, Sister, and remember that it is only because of your entreaties that I have acquiesced."⁶⁴⁰ He then issued a warning, "Burn it yourself and remember that I am holding you responsible before the judgment seat of God for the action you are causing me to take."⁶⁴¹

The outcome of this intervention is clear. The Congregation of the Mission was spared the disgrace and scandal that would have inevitably followed an order of interdiction in so public a matter. Moreover, it was evident to all who were aware of the threat of interdiction that those involved, and the Congregation as a whole, owed a great debt of gratitude to Sister Rosalie. Nevertheless, no such gratitude was forthcoming. On the contrary, as a result of her involvement in a delicate situation that Father Étienne and the other Assistants considered an internal community matter, and one of which they did not want to be reminded, Sister Rosalie earned their enduring animosity. Sister Costalin was outspoken on this and talked about it twice in her testimony, once in 1893 and again in 1897. Time had not healed her wounds. The bitterness was apparent. In 1893, she wrote:

The Community has remained mute concerning the past of the person who preserved it from the greatest harm, confusion, shame, and scandal by persuading Monseigneur Affre (at whose feet she remained for a fairly long time) to throw the interdiction he had prepared against Monsieur Étienne, Monsieur Aladel, and others into the fire.⁶⁴²

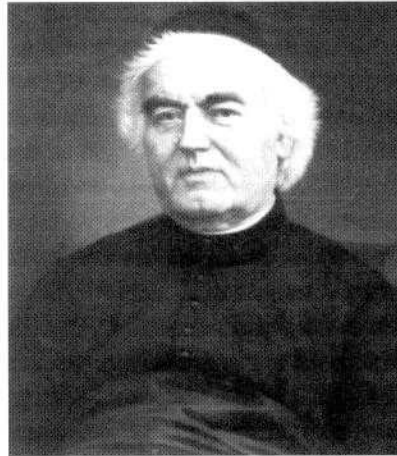
⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*

Sister Rosalie's intervention had another, surely unintended, outcome. It was never her intention to defend Father Nozo either here or in the Emmanuel Bailly suit. However, it could have appeared that way to the parties involved, thus securing their lasting displeasure.



Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M.
Superior General – 1843-1874.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

Sister Costalin returned to the subject in 1897:

I am adding that they have probably forgotten to record this incident in the dossier of the affair that must be located in the archives at Saint-Lazare, as there was only one Vincentian [priest] at Sister Rosalie's funeral. Besides, he told me that he came without telling anyone because he owed so much to Mother Rendu. It was Monsieur Marion.⁶⁴³

In 1935, Maurice Collard, C.M., presented written testimony concerning the possible reasons for Sister Rosalie's difficulties with superiors of the Congregation of the Mission. We have already referred to this text in Chapter IX, when dealing with Sister Rosalie's comportment during and after the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. It is Father Beaudoin's introduction to this testimony that is of interest to

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 43.

us here. He stated that, in 1928, Father Collard was named Director of the Work of Blessed Perboyre and of the *Bulletin des Missions des Lazaristes et des Filles de la Charité*. He remained in this position until his death in 1950. It was during this time that he became interested in Sister Rosalie's Cause and sought to discover the reasons behind her difficulties with the Congregation of the Mission. The text presented for the Cause supposedly begins by enumerating some of the underlying reasons for Sister Rosalie's problems. However, both the beginning and the end of the text have been removed. Father Beaudoin conjectures that these two sections dealt with the "Nozo Affair" and "it was probably this [the Congregation] wanted to conceal." Father Beaudoin concludes by saying that Sister Rosalie's difficulties were only superficial, and examining them as he did in his text only proves "that, for Sister Rosalie, the only thing that mattered was fraternal charity."⁶⁴⁴

This is an apt conclusion for our examination of the voices raised to criticize Sister Rosalie for her high visibility, her relationship with the rich and powerful, and her practice of giving away funds to persons in need almost as soon as she received them. Rather than tarnish her reputation, such criticism served to reveal an extraordinary humility that prevented her from ever seeking to defend or justify herself; (there was one occasion when she knelt before Father Étienne to ask his pardon for having offended him, though it most likely should have been the other way around); her quiet courage that preserved her loyalty to her superiors and forbade any criticism of them; her refusal to be vindictive toward those who may have been the source of blame directed toward her; her willingness to respond promptly and amiably to any request from her superiors even when they were asking her to have recourse to her wealthy collaborators, precisely the comportment for which she was being criticized; her fortitude in acting always *because of the motive*, that is for Jesus Christ loved and served in all those who were poor; in her collaborators be they rich or poor, powerful or lowly; and in a very special way, in the Daughters of Charity with whom she shared her community life and apostolic work, and whom as Sister Servant she formed "to give themselves totally to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor." We will now turn to the voices of respect, admiration, and

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

love rising from those who knew her best, her sister companions of the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.

Voices of love, respect, and admiration for Sister Rosalie. Sister Rosalie spent her entire life as a Daughter of Charity (1802-1856) in what was essentially one house, rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel, which was later transferred to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. From the age of 29 (1815-1856), she was the local superior. So much has been said of her extraordinary service to persons in need that it is essential to look more closely at Sister Rosalie as a sister companion and as the one called upon to safeguard the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the sisters' house. To know more about this, we will turn mostly to her former companions, but also to collaborators who had close contact not only with Sister Rosalie but with the sisters of the house, and to circumstances that reveal Sister Rosalie as a "Daughter of Charity among her sisters."

While speaking of the criticism sometimes leveled at Sister Rosalie and the resultant difficulties with her superiors, we pointed out the seeming ambivalence in their dealings with her. The fact that they left her as Sister Servant in the same house for 41 years is an indication of a level of confidence in her. More striking, however, is the composition of the house itself over the course of these years. The records are incomplete and there are some obvious discrepancies. Notwithstanding, the information available strongly indicates that rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was what is known in religious congregations as "a house of formation." Sister Marie Regnault, archivist for a time at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, compiled a list of sisters who were postulants under the guidance of Sister Rosalie between 1833 and 1856. She names 22. Among them, we find Sister Saillard, whose testimony has provided valuable insights into Sister Rosalie and her companions. Sister Regnault also composed a list of sisters whom Sister Rosalie prepared to pronounce their vows for the first time. There are 18. Among them are Sister Costalin and Sister Tissot who, as we have seen, were also witnesses for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification and were still with her at the time of her death.⁶⁴⁵

When, after two years of increasingly frail health and blindness, Sister Rosalie died in February 1856, there were 12 sisters in the house, including Sister Rosalie herself. Of the remaining 11 sisters, nine were under ten years vocation, thus still in initial formation. Of

⁶⁴⁵ *Registres des entrées* 1801-1855, AFCP.

this number, six were “under vows” that is, under five years vocation, the time at which the Daughters of Charity pronounce their vows for the first time. These young sisters had been members of the Company for one year (1), 15 months (1), 18 months (1), two and one-half years (1), three years (1), and four years (1).⁶⁴⁶

Thus, the number of postulants, young sisters preparing to pronounce vows for the first time, and sisters under ten years vocation placed with Sister Rosalie during this timeframe is significant. While the Daughters of Charity, especially after 1830, were experiencing a period of unprecedented growth in new vocations, formation of recent arrivals was a high priority as these young people are any congregation’s most precious resource. A religious community’s future and mission depend on them.

The responsibility for formation of the postulants and young sisters devolved on the Sister Servant. Moreover, while there were provinces in the Company of the Daughters of Charity by this era, they were all outside of France. The houses of France depended directly on the Motherhouse, and the placement of sisters, as well as postulants, was the prerogative of the Superioress General and her Council. This reality is perhaps the most telling proof that, while situations may have occasionally caused them to act otherwise, the women superiors, at least, trusted and respected Sister Rosalie as a woman who could not only teach the Rule and spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise but, more importantly, could model the Daughter of Charity “totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor” to young women as they took their early steps in the Company. Had they thought otherwise, they never would have placed them with her during their formative years.

We have spoken throughout this text, especially in Chapter VII, of Sister Rosalie’s relationship with her companions. We will not repeat all that here but rather concentrate on her as Sister Servant, the attributes she brought to this office, and the response of others to her in her role as local superior and formator.

Perhaps the essential attribute Sister Rosalie brought to her responsibility as Sister Servant was what Eugène Rendu spoke of as her “infinite tenderness,” which was a by-product of her “extreme sensitivity.”⁶⁴⁷ This tenderness characterized her love for her “beloved

⁶⁴⁶ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, *Positio*, 181.

⁶⁴⁷ Eugène Rendu, in *Messenger de la Charité*, no. 102 (16 February 1856).

poor," her collaborators and friends, and most particularly, her sister companions. Their fatigue or illness, joys and sorrows, successes and difficulties touched her deeply. Melun shared what the sisters told him happened when one of Sister Rosalie's companions fell ill:

As soon as a sister was ill or seemed even slightly indisposed, Sister Rosalie, who was so hard on herself, so mortified, began to worry. She forbade anything tiring or any physical exercise [for the sick sister]. If the sickness worsened, she wanted to spend all of her free time with the patient... and called forth all her resources of knowledge and affection to combat it.⁶⁴⁸

When one of Sister Rosalie's companions died, she was inconsolable. Again, it was Melun, who must also have, on occasion, witnessed her grief, who described it, "The mention of [the deceased sister's] name or the recollection of one of her words or actions caused her to burst into tears."⁶⁴⁹ When a sister she had formed was transferred, she wept. The sisters realized that one of them would be leaving when they saw her sadness. She was always afraid of losing one of her companions to another house, so when there was some ceremony at the Motherhouse she could be heard to say, "Don't go, Sister Mélanie. You are tall. They will notice you and think about you for some other service."⁶⁵⁰ On one such occasion, she had a crisis of conscience, fearing too human an attachment. She revealed her fears to a confidant who responded, "Set your mind at rest. If you did not love your companions so much, you could not love the poor so greatly."⁶⁵¹

How did Sister Rosalie manifest this "infinite tenderness" toward her companions, be they in initial formation or the senior sisters of the house? Sister Rosalie's leadership style is sometimes spoken of as "maternal." Indeed, the sisters most often referred to her as "Our Mother." Within religious congregations of women, this appellation was usually reserved to the Superioress General, though it was sometimes used for local superiors, particularly when they had

⁶⁴⁸ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 201.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁵¹ Rendu, *Messager de la Charité*.

been at the head of both the community house and the apostolic work for a prolonged period of time. This was certainly the case of Sister Rosalie. Moreover, it was the title given her by her “beloved poor” of the Mouffetard district and many of her close collaborators. When her body was moved from the burial vault belonging to the sisters of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois to an individual gravesite nearer the entrance to Montparnasse Cemetery, the new stone was inscribed, “To our good mother Rosalie, her grateful friends, the rich and the poor.” For those who thus spoke of her and were the object of her maternal affection, the word connoted love, self-sacrifice, dedication, concern, in a word, the total gift of self to God and for others. In the early XXIst century, however, the term “maternal,” applied to persons in positions of authority, took on a pejorative meaning and conjures up very different images of infantilism, dependency, and blind obedience. Was Sister Rosalie able to treat her companions with maternal affection while avoiding, especially in the young, the risks it could entail?

The sisters of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois shared Sister Rosalie’s community life and apostolic ministry on a daily basis in a small house. As they worked with her, they were exposed to the same dangers. They lived in a house where fugitives were sheltered and where the wounded on both sides of the conflict were treated in the courtyard. They nursed cholera victims. Sister Rosalie taught them, by her example, the audacity charity demanded. She challenged them, and the postulants and young sisters matured very quickly. However, danger was not an everyday accompaniment of their service. They would learn from her the asceticism of the ordinary. She was called upon to form them for their lives as Daughters of Charity, which involved encouragement and support as well as fraternal correction.

Postulants were first placed at rue de l’Épée-de-Bois in 1830. Melun learned from the sisters of the house how their Sister Servant initiated them to their lives in community and in the service of those who were poor. He described how Sister Rosalie accompanied their first steps:

When [Sister Rosalie] herself was placed at the head of the little community, she brought all the power of her affection to her daughters. She was truly their mother. Those who arrived as postulants... were formed gently to the virtues of their holy vocation and to the love of sacrifice and obedience. As they

advanced in their formation, the work became more demanding; the life more austere. Nothing was spared to test their vocation, to help them to understand the arduous side, the aversions, everything that blocks the stray impulses of devotion and the caprices of charity. At the end of the trial period, the postulant's soul was prepared for the mission and worthy of the honor of serving those who were poor. She had, above all, become their most devoted friend, as she had heard the Superior repeat unceasingly, "Love [the fact that the poor] love you. If you have nothing to give, give yourself."⁶⁵²

Among the postulants formed by Sister Rosalie, three stand out. Sister Alix-Françoise Dubouays de Cousbouc postulated at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois in 1841. After serving in an army field hospital in Constantinople, she founded the mission of the Daughters of Charity in Persia in 1857. Sister Françoise de Paul de Virieu was a postulant formed by Sister Rosalie in 1850. Later, she established the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland. Sister Saillard, of whom we have already spoken, began her testimony, written in 1900, by saying, "It is a great honor for me to speak briefly to you about Venerable Sister Rosalie, whose memory I have... preserved for 48 years."⁶⁵³ Sister Saillard concluded her testimony thus:

I would have wanted... to make you aware of all the virtues practiced by Sister Rosalie, her love of work and her poverty that she loved so much. Of all the sums [of money] that passed through her hands, nothing was ever used for the house which always retained its character of simplicity and the greatest poverty. [To all this I would add] her obedience to our holy Rules and to our Most Honored Superiors; her love for the Company; and her respect and gratitude for the [Vincentian Priests and Brothers], the sons of Saint Vincent, who are responsible for

⁶⁵² Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 200-201.

⁶⁵³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 61.

communicating his spirit to us. However I do not dare to continue an account that is already so long but also very incomplete.⁶⁵⁴

Sister Saillard's vivid memory of Sister Rosalie and her practice of virtue is significant because her testimony was written in 1900, 44 years after her Sister Servant's death. What is perhaps more meaningful is the fact that Sister Saillard was Directress of the Seminary for 15 years. Her instructions to the novices surely included examples drawn from Sister Rosalie's life. As Sister Rosalie's formation of Armand de Melun as servant and advocate for those who were poor extended her influence to the framing of public social policy, so her formation of postulants and young sisters, placed under her guidance, was woven into the preparation of novices for their future lives as Daughters of Charity.

While Sister Rosalie was deeply touched by the loss of a companion, whether it be through a change of mission or death, this does not mean that sorrow marked the community life she shared with her sisters. Again, it is Sister Saillard who spoke of their joyful times together:

After the times of prayer and service of those who were poor, came periods of recreation that were always pleasant and joyful. Each [sister] recounted the most interesting things that had happened with the poor or the children. Everyone took an interest in their companions' service and rejoiced at the good they accomplished in the midst of their duties. However, evening recreation took on a special character. It was the time to open the numerous letters that were addressed to Sister Rosalie.⁶⁵⁵

Sister Saillard provides examples of the content of the letters. Some expressed gratitude. Others were requests for a replacement for a lost horse; a letter of recommendation; even for a wife to be chosen by Sister Rosalie. There were weighty confidences and complaints as well. The sisters enjoyed the different styles of the letters. Once

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

they had been shared... "they were distributed to the Sisters gathered around the table. Our good Mother dictated the responses to the happy secretaries who turned the envelopes so they could be used for the reply."⁶⁵⁶

Mademoiselle Baccoffe, who frequently came to the house and collaborated with both Sister Rosalie and her companions, observed another essential attribute of Sister Rosalie's attitude toward her companions – respect. She said, "Here is this noble Daughter of Charity whose life was filled only with love of the poor. She was equally as good to her companions. She always spoke kindly of them."⁶⁵⁷

Sister Rosalie also demonstrated this respect through the confidence she had in each of her companions, even the youngest and most inexperienced. Thus, she did not hesitate to send Sister Tissot, the youngest sister in vocation in the house at the time, to the most distant working class quarter of the Mouffetard district. When sending her out, she told her, "You will have the better part.... [You are going to] the Cité Dorée, where all that is the most miserable in Paris is huddled. You meet many drunks there. Walk modestly and quickly without rushing. Ask all the children you meet if they are in school. There is much good to be done there. It is the true place for a Daughter of Charity."⁶⁵⁸

So the young sister set out. One day she met a police officer who told her that she was imprudent to come alone to a quarter that harbored the worst sort of "rabble." He added that the police came as a group, and only to put them in prison. Upon returning home, Sister Angélique – the name Sister Rosalie gave Sister Tissot when she arrived at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, in honor of a poor woman who had just died – told her Sister Servant of her encounter with the police. The following dialogue ensued:

You have nothing to fear, my daughter. They are there to execute human justice; you are there to show the mercy of our Good God. You bring them assistance and consolation. You set them on the right path. Are we not blessed in the service of Our Lord?

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

But, Mother, only a small number want to understand.

Always do what you can, my daughter. Our Good God wants us to prepare the land, to sow, and to cultivate. He waters and brings forth fruit. Your efforts will not be lost. Grace will have its time. Pray much. Have the children from the shelter pray. Say a good word about God to your poor and give them your vouchers for meat or wood.⁶⁵⁹

Among the young sisters whom Sister Rosalie prepared to pronounce vows for the first time was Sister Lenain. She postulated in Arras and entered the Company in May 1836. She was first placed in Pamiers then, in 1838, she was sent to Saint-Médard where she pronounced vows for the first time in 1842. After a number of other placements, most often as Sister Servant, she died 7 June 1888.

In Sister Lenain's *Notice*, a brief account of the life of some of the more notable sisters, written in the year following their death, we read of the profound affect the period of preparation for vows with Sister Rosalie had on her life as a Daughter of Charity:

At the House of Charity of the parish of Saint-Médard in Paris, as a companion of the Venerated Sister Rosalie Rendu, whose name has remained, even among non-believers, the synonym of devotedness and charity, Sister Lenain felt her esteem for a vocation, that could produce such souls, grow. From that time and for the rest of her life, Sister Rosalie remained, in her eyes, the perfect model of the Daughter of Charity, not because there was more... in her to attract the attention and esteem of the world so that she could, like our Blessed Father, reach many souls and relieve much misery, but because, in this exceptional situation, where ordinary virtue would have crumbled, she lived and died, like Saint Vincent, in humility, simplicity, and poverty. It was especially these virtues that [Sister

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Rosalie] imprinted indelibly in the heart of Sister Lenain who was like soft wax in the hands of her Sister Servant. After nine years in the house of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, where so many personages whose names were celebrated in the world [came to visit], what distinguished [Sister Rosalie] was humility, the practice and love of self effacement.⁶⁶⁰

Many more examples of Sister Rosalie, the Sister Servant and formator, could be cited here. To this could be added mention of the nine young women she attracted and presented to the community as postulants between 1843 and 1853.⁶⁶¹ We could mention numerous other citations that reflect Sister Costalin's view of Sister Rosalie's charity, "I believe that ever since Saint Vincent, no one has practiced this virtue to the same degree as Sister Rosalie. The misery of the poor was for her, as for our Holy Founder, her burden and her sorrow."⁶⁶² All this, however, would be redundant. We have listened to her critics. Nonetheless, their voices fade before the chorus raised in recognition of an extraordinary Daughter of Saint Vincent, whom major superiors had the confidence and wisdom to entrust with the formation of Daughters of Charity "totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor." As with everything else that was asked of her, she did it lovingly and generously, in a word as a Daughter of Charity.

⁶⁶⁰ "Sister Lenain," *Collection des Notices*, 1889. AFCP.

⁶⁶¹ *Registre des Postulantes*, AFCP.

⁶⁶² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 48.

CHAPTER XIII

LIMITATIONS ON SISTER ROSALIE'S APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

HER TWILIGHT YEARS AND HER DEATH (1851-1856)

One of the more moving texts of Vincent de Paul is a letter of 3 March 1660 to Mathurine Guérin, superior of the Daughters of Charity at La Fère. His personal sense of loss is evident as he informs her of the recent death of Antoine Portail, his earliest confrere and the sisters' first spiritual director, as well as of the impending death of Louise de Marillac, his friend and collaborator for thirty-six years. Vincent urges Mathurine to be at peace and to resign herself to the will of God in what is about to happen. He assures her that God will be her strength and consolation, and finally the recompense of her love, as she and her companions throughout the Company face the loss of their foundress. The letter, however, also contains a poignant note revealing how keenly Vincent felt his coming separation from Louise. He tells Mathurine, "...certainly it is the great secret of the spiritual life to abandon to [God] all that we love by abandoning ourselves to all that He wills.... Pray for me."⁶⁶³

Yet Louise's death was not unexpected. Her health had always been frail due, in no small part, to the conditions caused by war and siege in France at the time of her birth in 1591. She had frequent bouts of illness and was often confined to bed by tertian fever. Vincent jokingly reminded her that she "had been dead" for 10 or even 20 years. Nonetheless, Jean Calvet was correct when he stated, in his 1959 biography of Louise, that Vincentian works "became what they were because Louise de Marillac put her hand to them."⁶⁶⁴ Despite her physical limitations, her seemingly boundless energy and determination, as well as her exceptional organizational ability, enabled her to form the first Daughters of Charity spiritually and for the service of those in need in the yet uncharted works of health, education, and social welfare. Along the way, however, she discovered, as Vincent had, the "great secret of the spiritual life," as she experienced the inevitable call "to abandon to [God] all that [she

⁶⁶³ CED, 8:255-256.

⁶⁶⁴ Jean Calvet, *Louise de Marillac: A Portrait* (New York, 1959), 46.

loved] by abandoning [herself] to all that He [willed]." This gradual "stripping" enabled her to be more fully united with her God, her sisters, those who were poor, and all those she loved. In the end, she could exclaim with the psalmist, "The Lord has been my strength; He has led me into freedom. He saved me because He loves me."⁶⁶⁵



– Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

We do not know how familiar Sister Rosalie was with the life of the foundress, as Louise was not a central part of the formation of the Daughters of Charity until recent years. Moreover, Sister Rosalie's accomplishments, while extraordinary, were generally restricted to the Mouffetard district, while Louise's influence spread throughout France and even to Poland. Notwithstanding, parallels can be drawn between the two women.

In 1851, Sister Rosalie was 65 years-of-age. From childhood her health had been frail, but this never deterred her from giving herself totally to God, her "beloved poor," the Daughters of Charity with whom she shared her community life and apostolic activity, and the many devoted collaborators to whom she imparted the Vincentian vision of service to those who were poor. Her energy and zeal more than made up for her delicate constitution. Moreover, the years following the Revolution of 1848, and particularly the cholera epidemic of 1849, brought relative calm to the capital. Most of the works of the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois – with the exception of the Shelter for the Elderly (1852) and the Day Shelter for Children (1854), of which

⁶⁶⁵ Psalm 18, 19-20.

we spoke in Chapter VIII – were established and running smoothly. The number of sisters increased from 8 to 12 during this period, thus lightening the burden for all. At the same time, Sister Rosalie's health began to further deteriorate. As a result, her service with and for those in need became increasingly more limited. Simultaneously, her reputation at all levels of society, from her "beloved poor" of the Mouffetard district to the circles of the rich and powerful of the capital, continued to grow. As we have seen, it was during this painful period of Sister Rosalie's life that she was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor (February 1852), and Emperor Napoléon III, accompanied by his wife, Empress Eugénie, visited the Day Nursery of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois (March 1854).

In his 1959 history of Saint-Médard parish, Marcel Broginard, pastor at the time, speaks of this phenomenon in the chapter he dedicates to Sister Rosalie:

In recounting the life and actions of Sister Rosalie, we have the history of the quarter during this period.... [After 1848], Sister Rosalie's reputation was astonishing. During the last years of her life, the little parlor on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was never empty. A crowd of people came to her from all over [Paris] because they needed assistance or consolation. And it was not only persons who were poor. She used to say, "A Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul is a milestone on which those who are tired have the right to lay down their burden."

...The poor of the parish of Saint-Médard remained the beneficiaries of this vast influence because the number of persons who owed her gratitude knew to whom and how to repay their debt. Sister Rosalie had become a universal minister of charity.⁶⁶⁶

Armand de Melun, who, as we pointed out earlier, had been Sister Rosalie's close collaborator and friend since they first met during the winter of 1837-1838, is well placed to describe the changes that had come to pass in her "diocese" by the last years of her life. He

⁶⁶⁶ Marcel Broginard, *La Paroisse de Saint-Médard* (Paris, 1951), 135-136.

had walked these streets for nearly two decades when he described them in his biography of Sister Rosalie:

Soon the Saint-Marceau district came forth from its obscurity and abandonment. Visitors traversed its streets to reach Sister Rosalie's [house]. As they came to know her, they became familiar with the misery of her quarter. They took pity on it. They worried about its fate. The wealthiest arrondissements sent her a little of their surplus. They had collections taken up for her ["beloved poor"] in the churches and salons of the Saint-Germain district.⁶⁶⁷

The extent of Sister Rosalie's influence is apparent here because these wealthy and generous people, like Armand de Melun before them, gave not only of their resources but of themselves in personal service, which Sister Rosalie had a genius for calling forth from all who approached her. They joined her other dedicated collaborators to try to improve the lot of the inhabitants of the Saint-Marceau district. Melun described their concerted effort:

A great number of charitable persons shared the [quarter's] streets and sometimes even its housing.... Often in these large buildings, filled from cellar to attic with poor persons, there would be a Sister of Charity dressing a wound on the ground floor, a [Lady of Charity] on the second floor reciting last prayers with a dying person, while a young man from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul comforted a poor family [living] in the attic by bringing a week's supply of bread and teaching catechism to a child.⁶⁶⁸

Based on his close personal observation and experience, Melun, whose social legislation had had a huge impact on the conditions in which the working classes lived and worked, was able to depict the changes in their lives. He acknowledged that the Saint-Marceau district was "still the poorest... in Paris... and that it was beyond

⁶⁶⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 152.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

anyone's power to [change] that." But thanks to the combined efforts of the Daughters of Charity from the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, and the individuals who made up Sister Rosalie's network of charity:

...its poverty was less extreme; most of its families had a bed, a stove, and a chair; their children were better clothed, more polite, and better instructed; Christian practices appeared among the population [which grew more]... attached to order and work.⁶⁶⁹

The inhabitants of the Mouffetard district had direct contact with the committed volunteers who served them, and were certainly grateful to them. However, they recognized that the improvement in their quality of life was due to Sister Rosalie. Under her influence and guidance, class barriers began to crumble. Again it was Melun who explained this extraordinary occurrence taking place in one of the most class-conscious capitals of nineteenth-century Europe:

...[the population] loved very tenderly the [person] to whom it owed its progress; ...Sister Rosalie became the intermediary of reconciliation between society and the Saint-Marceau district. She dissipated the prejudices that existed against it, and defended it... by making it better known.... When some reproach was voiced against it in her presence, she vigorously stood up for it and energetically protested against the injustice.

She often used to say, "It is calumny; [the quarter] is far better than its reputation; its poverty reveals less depravity and malice than many rich quarters conceal under their luxury and wealth."⁶⁷⁰

By the final years of her life, Sister Rosalie had become the voice the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district always listened to; the authority they always respected; the hand they always blessed. In

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

other words, "Throughout her life, [the population] was ever under her influence and paid homage to her authority."⁶⁷¹

While Sister Rosalie's stature continued to grow, her body was finally showing the effects of nearly half-a-century of tireless dedication. Her zeal and enthusiasm could no longer compensate for her frail health. However much she loved the needy surrounding her, she could no longer go out to them as she had always done. Like Vincent and Louise before her, she was discovering the "great secret of the spiritual life" as she too was called upon "to abandon to God all that [she] loved by abandoning [herself] to all that He willed."⁶⁷² The final "stripping" had begun.

Let us now turn to those who intimately shared this arduous journey toward eternity with Sister Rosalie – the sisters of her house, the poor inhabitants of the district, and her longtime friends and collaborators, particularly Armand de Melun. We have seen, mostly in her letters to Mélanie Rendu and Cyprien Loppe, that, throughout her life, Sister Rosalie was no stranger to illness or fatigue. She suffered from the cold; experienced palpitations of the heart even after minor exertion; and like Louise de Marillac, she had annual bouts of tertian fever which confined her to her bed for prolonged periods of time. Moreover, her highly sensitive nature, the death of a companion, family difficulties, and misunderstandings within the Company, caused stress to exacerbate her already delicate health. None of this, however, was permanently debilitating. During the last years, 1854-1856, however, it would be.

What precisely, then, was the nature of this progressively incapacitating illness? Sister Rosalie's apostolic zeal had enabled her to remain active in the service of her "beloved poor" despite her physical limitations. This was different, however. During the final two years of her life, Sister Rosalie lost her sight. While she was not completely blind, her inability to distinguish faces or see things around her on the street restricted her direct service. Her failing sight was caused by cataracts.

For the first time, Sister Rosalie, who had always rushed to the aid of others, needed assistance to carry out her daily activities. Nonetheless, this did not prevent her from fulfilling, albeit in a more restricted way, her vocation as servant of those who were poor. Each

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶⁷² *CED*, 8:255-256.

day she went to her little parlor to support all those who still came to her in their hour of need. At this point in her life, however, she had to be accompanied by a sister of the house; find her chair with an uncertain hand; and, once seated, remain there. She had always moved about, greeting each visitor and bringing them help and consolation. Now though, the visitor had to be identified for her. The inability to see the faces of her “beloved poor” was a cruel suffering. Moreover, the fearless Sister Rosalie saw the approach of death with trepidation. In 1855, the superioress of the Visitation Convent of Paris, Mother Séraphine Fournier, was dying. She and Sister Rosalie were close friends. When the end was near, Mother Séraphine summoned Sister Rosalie because, according to Melun, “she wanted an angel at her side.” After their final farewell, she told Sister Rosalie, “Courage, my Sister. You will soon follow me.” Melun writes that his friend was shaken by these words and repeated them to her sister companions. She added, “I don’t know why this good mother spoke to me in this way. If God wants to leave me on this earth for a few more years, I will not ask to leave it.”⁶⁷³ She, who had faced powerful government officials and warring forces with unshakeable calm and determination, feared appearing before the judgment seat of God. In her testimony for Sister Rosalie’s Cause of Beatification, Sister Tissot spoke of this painful period in her Sister Servant’s life. She wrote:

[During] the last two years of her life, her health, which was already frail, noticeably worsened. She grew resigned. She would say, “Our Good God wanted to create a space between my life and my death so as to give me time to prepare myself. I greatly fear death.” She often asked us to read to her on confidence in God.⁶⁷⁴

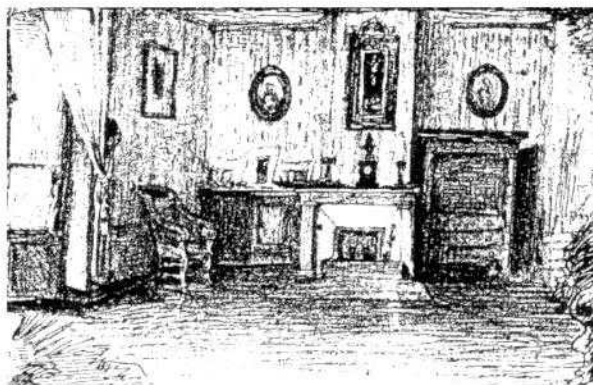
Sister Rosalie’s blindness provided her with the time she felt she needed to prepare to meet her Maker, but she sorrowfully endured the forced inactivity. On one occasion, a young sister told her that a holy priest had said her blindness was a great grace and a sign of divine mercy. Her response reflected the indomitable Sister Rosalie of

⁶⁷³ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 242.

⁶⁷⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 60.

yore. She said that, if she dared, she would ask God to show her His goodness in another way.⁶⁷⁵

In the meantime, she continued to serve those in need as best she could. In her testimony for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification, Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe recounts her experience in the little parlor of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois during this period. In Chapter IX we recounted the events surrounding Sister Rosalie's rescue of her father, an officer in the Civil Guard, during the fierce fighting of the Revolution of 1830. Included, also, were the charming reminiscences of the 80 year-old Mademoiselle Baccoffe concerning her first visit to the little parlor in 1838, when she was a child of six. At that time, the little girl had promised Sister Rosalie that she would assist her when she grew up. She was still faithful to this promise in 1854. In her testimony, she told of her contacts with Sister Rosalie at the time. The First Maid of Honor at Court had given her 500 francs for Sister Rosalie's works. She brought the money to her. When she arrived, she was appalled by what she found. "Alas, it was in February 1854. [Sister Rosalie] was in her little parlor. She was almost blind but she recognized me very well. I gave her the money...."⁶⁷⁶



Sister Rosalie's little office/parlor.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

⁶⁷⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 236-237.

⁶⁷⁶ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 70.

It would be a year before Mademoiselle Baccoffe returned to visit Sister Rosalie. By then her health had visibly deteriorated further. In her testimony, Mademoiselle Baccoffe spoke of the encounter with this woman whom she had admired since childhood:

When I returned in '55, at the end of February, I did not find her very well but [she was] still courageous and still engrossed in her works. When I told her that she should allow herself to be replaced so she could rest, I thought she was going to get angry. I told her that I loved her very much. [She responded], "I know you love me. I also love you. You know this, my little one. So, embrace me."⁶⁷⁷

Mademoiselle Baccoffe left Paris for the south of France on 15 August 1855. Before leaving, she made another vain attempt to persuade her friend to take better care of herself, this time suggesting she leave her "old house." During her travels, she wrote to Sister Rosalie. The response to her letter came from one of Sister Rosalie's companions, Sister Angèle. She did not find it very reassuring. She concluded this episode, "How heavy my heart was to be so far away."⁶⁷⁸

Sister Rosalie resisted any attempt, however well-intentioned, to remove her from her companions, collaborators, and, especially, her "beloved poor." She knew that her time with them was short so, on occasion, she even went to visit the homes of those whom she had served for half a century. Obviously, she could not do this alone. When she felt strong enough to venture out, she called upon a girl from the *ouvroir* to accompany her on her mission of charity. The young girl in question, Félicie, later Madame Petit, was the daughter of a woman who had also been a pupil of Sister Rosalie. The written testimony about her experience was the product of a conversation she had with a Daughter of Charity, Sister Marie Delaage, in 1913, when she was 72 years-of-age. Félicie clearly remembered the scene when Sister Rosalie came looking for her. Sister Delaage transcribes it thus:

...[Sister Rosalie] would open the door slightly and call, "Félicie, are you there?" [The answer came],

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

"Yes, my Good Mother." [Sister Rosalie would then say], "Come." The young girl would grab a cloak, "a very large one trimmed with leather," and... this pair, that was so touching to behold, would walk up and down all the streets of the quarter without being deterred by the greatest distances.

When Sister Rosalie returned home, she would go to a little "treatment" room next to a poor office that her companions called "her salon," and care for the poor who were there.... Félicie said that [Sister Rosalie] seemed to regain her sight so as to recognize the ailment of these poor people. And she scolded them like a mother if their sores were worse because they had not come often enough....⁶⁷⁹

Sister Rosalie's blindness and her failing health also deeply affected her sister companions. Among them was Sister Saillard. Once her former superior had lost her sight, the young sister frequently visited her. As Sister Rosalie's condition worsened, she spent more and more time in her bedroom. Sister Saillard recounts her time with her:

...I often found her alone, thinking only of God who was closing her eyes to the light of day and who would soon manifest Himself to her soul in the splendor of eternal light. She would be reciting her rosary. She received me kindly and would say, "Now, my little postulant, read me a chapter of the *Imitation [of Christ]*. She happily listened to the words of the Divine Master and would say, "That is so beautiful. What happiness to abandon oneself to Him!"⁶⁸⁰

When Sister Rosalie first started to go blind, she was often heard to say, "God has rendered me blind because I took too much pleasure in seeing my poor."⁶⁸¹ Indeed, this time of physical suffering

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁸¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 193.

was also a time of spiritual dryness. Sister Costalin, who was very close to her, understood this. In her testimony she tells us:

A sister told [Sister Rosalie] that Our Lord filled her with [spiritual] consolations. She responded, "You are very blessed. I have served Him for 40 years and I still do not know what spiritual consolations are. I always see God in His holiness and realize that my sins deserve the punishment of His justice."⁶⁸²

The last two years of Sister Rosalie's life were difficult spiritually and apostolically. She struggled to find peace as she prepared for death. She also had to further limit her ministry of service. Confined more and more to her room, Sister Rosalie still attempted to maintain contact with her "beloved poor" by remaining, to the end, interested in the service of the sisters and her collaborators with them. Melun confirmed this:

On the eve of the day when she became [so] ill that she would never again leave her bed, the sister in charge of the soup kitchen had noticed an old man, who looked healthy, draw as near as he could to the oven and remain [there] throughout the distribution [of the soup.] Asked if he was ill, he admitted that he stayed near the fire for such a long time because he did not have a stove or wood to warm him at home. The sister invited him to come back each morning and promised him a place near the oven and a better portion [of soup]. When the Superior learned of this... she scolded her daughter for having been so inflexible as not to have asked the poor man for his name and address. She could not rest until he was found and she could send him a stove and a small stock of wood.⁶⁸³

Melun continues on to say that the next day, when the fever that would take her life had struck, a single thought tormented her because,

⁶⁸² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 53.

⁶⁸³ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 238.

probably for the first time, she had forgotten a request that had been addressed to her the evening before. She spoke of it in the wee hours of the morning and begged one of the sisters to make up for her forgetfulness. She told her companion, "I beg of you, before [doing] anything else, bring this poor man a blanket. He must be very cold because I am shivering in my bed." Melun concluded his account of this episode on a poignant note, "She was, indeed, shivering from her fever. This was her final act."⁶⁸⁴

Earlier, in February 1855, Sister Rosalie's friends, Melun surely among them, wanted to make a novena to Saint Germaine to obtain her cure. When they sought her permission to do so, she categorically refused saying:

Don't do anything! I would be terrified to be the person chosen by God for a miracle. I would think that He was asking extraordinary things of me. I would be troubled by this. Moreover, people would think I obtained this because of my virtue.⁶⁸⁵

Under continued pressure from her friends who were loath to lose her, Sister Rosalie later relented but refused to join in the novena. She told them, "I would rather entrust myself to the will of God. Besides, I would spoil everything by mingling my prayers with yours."⁶⁸⁶

Despite growing limitations, Sister Rosalie still carried out her duties as Sister Servant while asking her companions to take responsibility for the tasks that she could no longer do herself. She wanted anyone who came to the house desiring to see her to be allowed to do so. Melun was surely relating his own experience during this sorrowful time, when he wrote, using the masculine form of friend:

When a friend was announced, she would have him sit near her; look at him with the eyes of her heart; and soon, because of the vivacity of her conversation, the freshness of her ideas, and the interest she took in

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁶⁸⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 237.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

everything, you forgot that you were seated next to a blind person.⁶⁸⁷

In October 1855, when the cataracts were sufficiently “ripe,” a skilled surgeon, who was very fond of Sister Rosalie, performed the operation on her. At first it appeared to be successful. She was able to discern a bit of light and some facial features. She could also distinguish some shades of color. There was hope for continuing improvement. Then, the feeble light vanished and Sister Rosalie was once more plunged into darkness.

Novenas and traditional medicine having been found wanting, an alternative method was tried. It was a form of hydrotherapy in which a burst of cold water was sprayed into Sister Rosalie’s eyes every five minutes in the hope that it would produce a positive reaction and bring them back to life. From all reports it was an excruciatingly painful and ultimately futile procedure. Yet Sister Rosalie never complained nor became impatient. When the sisters caring for her expressed astonishment at this, she would calmly reply, “It isn’t possible for me to get impatient... when all of you give me admirable examples of patience when you are taking care of me.”⁶⁸⁸

In January 1856, there was hope a second operation would improve Sister Rosalie’s vision. It was scheduled for early spring. At the same time, her deteriorating health seemed to improve. Was this a sign of better things to come? Alas, no. Her condition rapidly worsened. The night of 4 February was the turning point. Sister Rosalie was assailed by severe chills. She endured them alone as she did not want to disturb the “well-merited sleep” of the sister in a nearby room, there so she could attend to any of the patient’s needs that might arise during the night. In the morning, she found Sister Rosalie with a very high fever and a sharp pain in her side. Dr. Dewulf was hastily summoned. He arrived without delay and immediately recognized the symptoms of pleurisy, or inflammation of the lungs. Two days of aggressive treatment followed. At the time, the remedy of choice for lung inflammation was to apply a vesicatory, that is, a plaster containing organic matter to draw out the infection by producing blisters which would then drain. It could be a painful procedure and Sister Rosalie did suffer during it. Melun explains:

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 225-226.

...the sister responsible for tending [Sister Rosalie's] wounds noticed that the covering of the [plaster] had doubled over on itself and was pressing on the blister. It was covered with blood. Astonished to hear no complaint or see any emotion on the... patient's calm face, despite what had to be severe pain, she was afraid paralysis was setting in so she cried out in alarm, "Mother, didn't you feel anything?" As Sister Rosalie remained silent, she loudly repeated her question. Then the patient [responded] with a tender smile, "Yes, I felt it, but it is a nail from the cross of Our Lord, so I wanted to keep it."⁶⁸⁹

The treatment may have alleviated the symptoms, at least for the moment. The sisters were encouraged. They had not been informed that this episode was potentially fatal. Moreover, Sister Rosalie remained calm. She even spoke of the tedium of convalescence. When those around her expressed pity for her suffering, she would reply, "The poor are not as well off as I am."⁶⁹⁰ So it was that at this difficult time, as it had been throughout her long life of service, her concern was for others. She worried about the fatigue she was causing the sisters caring for her. Melun tells us that a sister, who had stayed up with her the first night, got up in the middle of the following night to see how the patient was doing. Without saying a word, she gave her something to drink. Sister Rosalie recognized her companion by the way she was caring for her and said, "My child, how you worry me... [by] sparing yourself no trouble on my behalf..."⁶⁹¹

As mentioned earlier, Sister Rosalie, who had fearlessly faced the dangers of revolution and disease, awaited her own death with apprehension. Now, however, when it was imminent, her fears were dissipated and she united her suffering to Jesus Crucified. As it was for Louise de Marillac, this was the center of Sister Rosalie's spirituality. She allowed those around her to apply the treatments they judged best no matter how painful or unpleasant they were. Despite her numerous bouts of illness, she had generally avoided medications.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Now she accepted the medicinal drinks she found the most repugnant in honor of the drink offered to Jesus Christ during his passion.⁶⁹²

By the morning of 6 February, Sister Rosalie's most severe symptoms had abated. At 11 o'clock, she even took a little bouillon. All rejoiced at her recovery. Then at one o'clock, the violent pain in her side reappeared and her pulse became very rapid. Nonetheless, she continued to speak of what was dearest to her heart, her "beloved poor" and her sister companions. As the end approached, she exclaimed, "My children, my dear children, my Poor. When I am no longer here, O my God, You will not abandon them."⁶⁹³ Shortly thereafter, Sister Rosalie took a turn for the worse. Her speech became incomprehensible. Then she slipped into a quiet state, occasionally interrupted by unintelligible sounds, which announced the approach of the end. The pastor of Saint-Médard, Abbé Jean-Joseph Falcimagne, arrived to administer Extreme Unction and recite the prayers for the dying. Sister Rosalie made the sign of the cross and murmured a few words which those around her could not hear but which seemed to be "an echo of an interior prayer." Then she fell into a coma. The next day, 7 February, at 11 o'clock, she died "without agitation or agony, as if she were passing from a light sleep to a more profound repose."⁶⁹⁴

Thus ends Melun's account of the death of his beloved friend and mentor. What we know of Sister Rosalie's last illness essentially comes from him. While it is evident Melun shared in the grief and deep sense of loss of all those who loved her, in his account he is fulfilling his role as her biographer. Sister Costalin, who read his manuscript, noticed this and commented, "Monsieur Melun's book is perfectly true but his style is cold."⁶⁹⁵ His *Mémoires*, as we have already seen, are much more revealing. He tells us:

During her last years, blind and ill, she always received me with the same cordiality.... Infirmity and suffering did not interrupt our relationship.... Thus she was my mentor, my light, and my support until her last moments. [On that day,] I ran just as hurriedly and with the same thoughts [in mind] to

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 240-241.

⁶⁹³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, Sommaire*, 66-67.

⁶⁹⁴ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 242-243.

⁶⁹⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, Sommaire*, 43.

discuss my work of the preceding week with her. Knocking on her door, I learned she was going to die very soon from chest congestion. She was entering her [last] agony at the very moment I arrived in her parlor. I saw the sisters weeping and praying and I wept and prayed with them. I returned [home] with the certainty that, if there was one less angel on earth, there was one more saint in heaven.⁶⁹⁶

Looking back at the loss of Sister Rosalie, Melun recounts in his memoirs what she had meant in his life and even utters a prayer to her:

I can never recall these memories without strong emotion and profound gratitude to Divine Providence which sent me, as mentors and protectresses, these two extraordinary souls in the domain of piety and charity, Madame Swetchine and Sister Rosalie. May you, who are now receiving in heaven the full recompense for all the good you have done on earth, receive me at the end of my career with the same goodness with which you welcomed and guided me [when I was] young, inexperienced, and starting out in life.⁶⁹⁷

As for Sister Rosalie's sister companions, they remained kneeling around her bed. As they contemplated her remains, they reflected on the holiness of her life. They hesitated to pray for the forgiveness of her sins until one of them exclaimed, "Maybe she still needs to expiate the excessive tenderness she had for us."⁶⁹⁸

Word spread quickly that the "Apostle of the Mouffetard district" had died. A seemingly endless procession of those who were rich and those who were poor, those who were lowly and those who were powerful, came silently and in tears to pay their tribute to the Daughter of Charity who, in one way or another, had profoundly touched their lives and the lives of their loved ones. It was perhaps Madame Mallet, with whom, as mentioned in Chapter IX, Sister

⁶⁹⁶ Le Camus, *Mémoires de Melun*.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁸ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 279.

Rosalie collaborated to place children orphaned during the cholera epidemic, who best described the scene around her remains. She had learned from one of the sisters the night before that her friend was dying. The next day a messenger arrived to inform her that the end had come and that “the entire street and the area around the sisters’ house were filled with a crowd in tears.”⁶⁹⁹ At 4 o’clock she went to the little house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois to pay her respects and to comfort the “poor Sisters who had lost... a true mother.”⁷⁰⁰ In her journal entry, dated 10 February 1856, she records what she found:

....[The Sisters] welcomed me with open arms and great affection and led me to the holy deceased [who was] sleeping so peacefully. Her room was connected to the chapel. Through a large open doorway, you could see a small bed, surrounded by tall candles, facing the altar. On it, dressed in the habit of a Daughter of Charity, her hands folded on a small crucifix, the blessed Sister [Rosalie] rested from her labors. Her face was unaltered; her coloring was only as pale as usual. I knelt to pray, not for her, but for her afflicted daughters, the continuation of her works, and my dear ones.⁷⁰¹

Sister Rosalie and Madame Mallet were close friends who shared their hopes and fears. In her journal, Madame Mallet recalls one such confidence:

Ah! How sweet to contemplate such a calm and serene death! What a subject of envy! But let us fear nothing. The Lord is faithful, “He will watch over our departure.” This dear sister was afraid of death. Many times she said to me, “I fear my weakness. I am frightened that suffering will shake my faith.” Several times she expressed the desire not to be told that her last moment was approaching “because,” she used to

⁶⁹⁹ Madame de Witt, *Une belle vie, Madame Jules Mallet, née Oberkampf (1794-1856). Souvenirs et fragments* (Paris, 1881), 124-125.

⁷⁰⁰ de Witt, *Une belle vie*, 125.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*

say, "a Daughter of Charity should always be ready to confess her sins, abandon all, and die." Her sisters also thanked God because her illness led quickly to delirium, thus, the administration of Extreme Unction was the only ceremony that could take place. The good... pastor of Saint-Médard rejoiced with them saying, "Be at peace! She is leaving for Paradise."

I returned from the district very moved but feeling myself more in communion with this holy daughter in heaven than I had been on earth.⁷⁰²

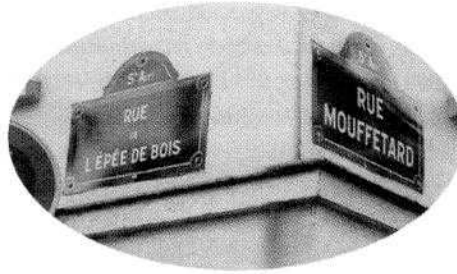
Once again, we turn to Melun, this time in his biography where he describes the crowd that came for two days to pay their respects to the deceased. He writes:

The entire Saint-Marceau district headed for the... house on [rue de] l'Épée-de-Bois. Laborers left their work to join the procession. Mothers brought their children. The elderly and the sick were brought there. They wanted to see, one more time, the [woman] who had been the protectress of all their families, and utter a prayer of gratitude. They kissed her hands and feet. They touched her body with books, rosaries, and handkerchiefs. They argued over pieces of her clothing as if they were relics.... Each person wanted to bring home, as a blessing and a protection, something she had used or [something] that had touched... her earthly remains.⁷⁰³

Perhaps an even greater phenomenon was the religious silence that pervaded the usually boisterous district. Moreover, the inhabitants had a single preoccupation, to pay homage to their benefactress. During the two days between Sister Rosalie's death and her funeral, not one person came to the sisters' house seeking assistance.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 124-125.

⁷⁰³ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 244-245.



Central area of Sister Rosalie's more than 50 years of loving service.
Courtesy of Sister Marie-Geneviève Roux, D.C.

In addition to the inhabitants of the Mouffetard district, a large number of persons came from all over Paris to pay tribute to her. There were her former pupils and collaborators; priests from the parishes of the city; religious men and women; bishops who mingled with the crowds of poor persons to bless her remains, among them Cardinal Louis-Jacques-Maurice de Bonald, Archbishop of Lyons, ordained at Saint-Sulpice (1812), who prayed over her body and expressed his regrets that another commitment would prevent him from presiding at her funeral; and the Archbishop of Rouen, Louis-Marie-Edmond Blanquart de Bailleul, one of her oldest collaborators, also ordained at Saint-Sulpice (1819), who touched his pectoral cross to her body as to the relics of a saint.⁷⁰⁴

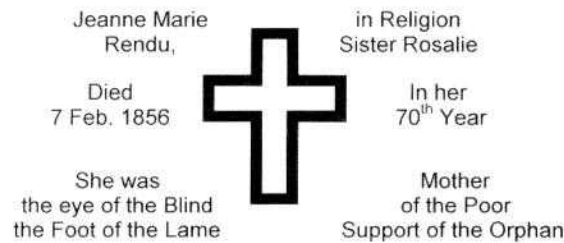
This outpouring of respect and affection, from all levels of society and a broad spectrum of political and religious views, speaks to Sister Rosalie's great gift, her ability to unite all those who shared her Vincentian vision of the service of those who were poor. She died on 7 February 1856, the seventy-first wedding anniversary of her parents, Jean-Antoine Rendu and Marie-Anne Laracine, who were married in the church of Lancrans on 7 February 1785. Moreover, her mother preceded her in death by three days. Marie-Anne Laracine was the earliest and arguably the most significant influence in Sister Rosalie's life. She planted and nourished the seeds of the love of God and those who were poor in little Jeanne-Marie Rendu's heart. These would one day bear fruit in Sister Rosalie, a Daughter of Charity on fire with love for the poor and the "Apostle of the Mouffetard district," to whom thousands would come to express their gratitude and pay their final

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 245-246.

tribute. Sister Rosalie's funeral would be the first decisive act in her growing reputation for sanctity which culminated in her Beatification by Pope John Paul II in Rome on 9 November 2003. Let us now turn to the nearly 150 year process leading to that day.



**THE CHARITY OF JESUS-CHRIST
URGES ME (S.P.)**



She saw only God and Charity
in everyone and everywhere!

Death card of Sister Rosalie Rendu.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

CHAPTER XIV

SISTER ROSALIE'S REPUTATION FOR SANCTITY

FUNERAL, REPUTATION IN PARIS AND BEYOND, CAUSE OF BEATIFICATION, BEATIFICATION

Sister Rosalie was buried from the church of Saint-Médard on 9 February 1856. She was 70 years of age and 54 years of vocation. Nearly her entire life as a Daughter of Charity had been spent in the Mouffetard district. Thus, it was not surprising that her “beloved poor,” who had waited hours in line to view her mortal remains and pay final tribute to their “Mother,” would close their modest businesses or leave their work to accompany, to her final resting place, “the woman who, for such a longtime, had been the instrument of Providence... in their lives.”⁷⁰⁵ According to Sister Saillard, who was present, they numbered 60,000.⁷⁰⁶ Others place the number at 40 or 50,000.

The accounts of the ceremony are nearly identical. We will rely on newspaper reports following the funeral and especially on Melun, as he was in attendance. Descriptions in later biographies are based on his. Amidst his grief and personal sense of loss, his eye recorded for posterity all that was happening around this humble Daughter of Saint Vincent as she left the Mouffetard district for the last time. He recounts the extraordinary event:

At 11 o'clock, the cortège left the house; ...the clergy of Saint-Médard, joined by a large number of ecclesiastics [and representatives of religious orders], walked at the head [of the procession], preceded by the cross [which was permitted to be on public display because of the occasion]; the girls from the school and the workshops honored the works of their Mother; the Sisters of Charity surrounded the casket [that had been] placed on the hearse of the poor, as Sister Rosalie had requested, so that Saint Vincent

⁷⁰⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 67.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

de Paul could recognize her, to the end, as one of his Daughters. They were followed by the municipal administration and the [administrators of the] Bureau of Public Assistance of the XIIth arrondissement. Behind them, crowded together, was one of those multitudes that can neither be counted nor described, from every level of society, every age-group, and every profession; an entire people with its rich and its poor; its intellectuals and its workers; everything in it that was most illustrious and most obscure; all mixed in together, all mingling and expressing in diverse manners and different words the same sorrow and the same admiration. All came to express their gratitude for a service rendered or to praise... [Sister Rosalie] and to convey their last respects. One could say that the holy deceased had made an appointment, around her coffin, with all those she had visited, assisted, and counseled during the long years of her life. Moreover, she still exercised the influence of her presence and her words over them, as these men [and women], belonging to the most widely [diverse sectors] of society, separated by their education, their ideas, and their positions, who perhaps never met until now except to clash, were united that day in the same thought and the same recollection.⁷⁰⁷

Sister Rosalie's funeral was a testimony to her genius for uniting men and women, who had little else in common, in the pursuit of the Vincentian mission of service to those who were poor. Melun describes this exceptional scene in a very polarized society, "Factions vanished; hatreds dissipated; passions were stilled. There were only brothers [and sisters] and children who were accompanying their sister and mother to her final resting place."⁷⁰⁸

The funeral procession did not go directly to the church. Instead it made a rather long detour through the quarter known as Sister Rosalie's "diocese," so she could bid a final farewell to the streets

⁷⁰⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 246-247.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

she had walked and the district she had so deeply loved. And all along the way, those who could not be part of the funeral cortège lined the streets or stood in doorways or at windows with their children, "...bowed their heads, made the sign of the cross, and whispered a prayer."⁷⁰⁹

Those who were present for the funeral procession as it passed through the streets of the Mouffetard district and were there to honor Sister Rosalie for all that she had come to mean in their lives, understood why the shops and factories were closed; why workers had left their employment; why municipal authorities, including the Prefect of Police, as well as Monsieur Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud and his wife, and the mayors of several other Paris arrondissements; the pastors of many parishes of the capital; representatives of religious congregations; and the leadership of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, represented by Emmanuel Bailly and Adolphe Baudon, president of the Society, had come together for the occasion. Visitors could have quite reasonably believed they were witnessing a state funeral.

The only dissonant note was the object of all the attention, a simple, unadorned, wooden casket on a hearse used to transport the bodies of those who were poor to their equally poor resting place. This demonstrated that this was not an example "of human glory or a worldly triumph. What was happening before their eyes was something that earthly ideas cannot explain."⁷¹⁰

The procession finally reached the church of Saint-Médard where the Funeral Mass was celebrated by the pastor, Abbé Jean-Joseph Falcimagne, who had been a close collaborator of Sister Rosalie and had administered the last rites to her. At the end of his sermon, he said, "in a voice that betrayed his emotion" that of all the works in which Sister Rosalie had served those in need in the Mouffetard district the Day Nursery was "closest to her heart. He then invited those in attendance to a sermon on this subject the following Friday at the church of Saint-Roch."⁷¹¹

The doors of the small parish church had been closed earlier so as to leave room for the Daughters of Charity who wanted to bid a final farewell to Sister Rosalie. According to newspaper accounts of the funeral, they filled one side of the nave. The final prayers were

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹¹ P. de Selle, in *La Gazette de France*, 10 February 1856, 1.

offered by Abbé Surat, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Paris, whom the archbishop, Monseigneur Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour, sent as his representative.

As Sister Rosalie had been awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor, there was a military honor guard surrounding the catafalque. A Cross was placed on the pall but it was not hers. The sisters refused to put it there although they had placed it on the coffin during the two days of her wake. They obviously felt that having it on public display during the funeral would be as great an assault on their superior's humility as the reception of the award had been. However, as during her lifetime, she was not to be allowed to pass unnoticed or to receive the simple burial of a humble Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul, which was all she ever aspired to be despite the accolades of the wealthy and powerful as well as her "beloved poor" that enveloped her. The Cross placed on her coffin belonged to one of the administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance. It was perhaps a fitting remembrance of Sister Rosalie's exceptional gift for collaborating with the public sector, whatever the politics of the moment, even the most anti-clerical, for the good of those who were poor.



Crowd outside the church of Saint-Médard for the funeral of Sister Rosalie.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

After the Funeral Mass, the same procession proceeded to Montparnasse Cemetery. Sister Rosalie was laid to rest among many other Daughters of Charity, exhausted, as she was, after giving their lives to God in the Company for the service of those in need. When the ceremony ended, the Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement, Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, who had been Sister Rosalie's friend as well as her collaborator for 40 years, spoke to the mourners. He expressed, with a combination of eloquence, Christian consciousness, and public awareness, the sentiments of all. We cite him textually:

Gentlemen,

Recollection and prayer would have, perhaps, responded with greater dignity to the sentiment of this great mourning.

Indeed, we understand that there is no language worthy of the universal regret united around this grave, of all those present, and this self-impelled crowd. Neither will the majesty of the funeral nor the ever-transfixing spectacle of the grandeur and power placed before us by the Divine Will which is leading us to this inevitable rendezvous.

However, we are accomplishing a pious duty by expressing the final farewell and the manifestation of tender respect of the XIIth arrondissement at Sister Rosalie's grave. If her name and works belong to the Christian world, if all of France lays claim to them, if Paris is proud of them, it is in the XIIth arrondissement that she devoted herself; it is in our midst, in the poorest quarter, among the greatest miseries, that, for more than fifty years, she placed her happiness and found glory by assisting and comforting us.

This is neither the time nor the place to recount her very full life. A single phrase sums it up – born for the world, she lived for charity. A worthy Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul, she wore the habit of her Order in such a way that, difficult as it may appear,

she made it still more respected and more loved by the people.

She lived our civil struggles in an attitude that was true to her Christian mission; one could say that, during each trial, her influence solidified yet more as her charity became more ardent.

An august hand had placed the Cross of the Legion of Honor on her bosom. Her humility would not allow her to leave it there. She thought it could appear that so much merit and virtue was accomplished for our worldly recognition. Her recompense was not of this world.

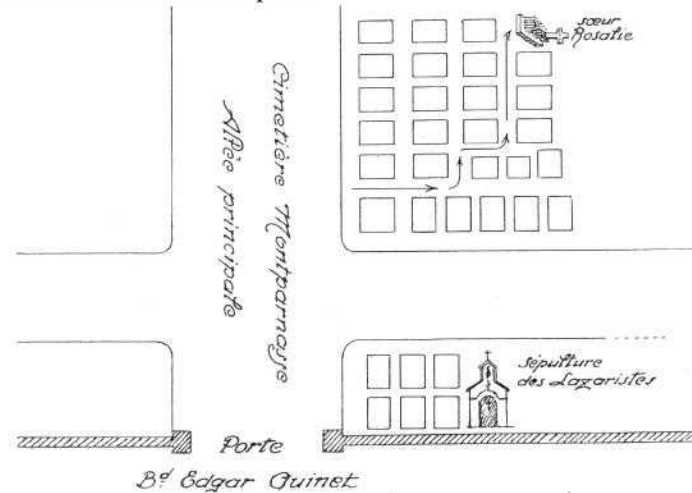
Indulgent and firm, accessible and respected, she joined an understanding, which made it a kind of public function, to the movement of charity. Reliable for advice, zealous to serve, we admired in her the decisiveness of the administrator and this fertility of resources to do good that shone in the heart of the woman. She had received from Heaven, this gift of privileged souls, this power to draw others, whence came forth a part of her strength. She became the depository of secret donations and the source of so many blessings coming from her hands.

We can say that Sister Rosalie's name will be united to public gratitude so long as it will please God to bequeath to us the tribute of suffering and the cult of Charity. You have seen how she filled with her spirit and animated by her great soul, those institutions on which the hope for a better future of our indigent families rest, the Day Nursery, the Shelter, the School, and the Ourvoir. These are the treasures enclosed in the walls of this holy house of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, noble threshold, watered by so many tears of gratitude and which our beloved Empress and Emperor did not hesitate to cross. Desolate threshold

today that Sister Rosalie left only to exchange her too brief existence for eternal life.

Sister Rosalie, farewell! Pray for us!⁷¹²

Following the mayor's discourse, the mourners left the cemetery to return to their elegant homes or miserable hovels, their hearts heavy with the awareness that Sister Rosalie, who had been such an integral part of their lives for so many years, was no longer with them. Some could not bring themselves to depart so, when the gates were closed at dusk, they remained outside them praying to her. A few months later, because of the crowds that continued to visit her grave and to place flowers on it, her remains were transferred to a new resting place, one that was closer to the entrance to the cemetery, so that it would be more accessible to those coming to pray there. This was not a Daughter of Charity vault. Rather, Sister Rosalie was now buried alone. This was highly unusual and one has to wonder if those responsible were not thinking of her future Beatification, which would entail the exhumation of her body. A stone was placed on the grave bearing the inscription, "To our good mother Rosalie, her grateful friends the rich and the poor."



Sister Rosalie's Montparnasse gravesite location from main cemetery entrance.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

⁷¹² Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, "Discours prononcé sur la tombe de Sœur Rosalie, le jour de ses obsèques," 9 February 1856, in *Inauguration du Buste de Sœur Rosalie* (Paris: 1856), 36-38.

Throughout Sister Rosalie's life there were those who spoke of her as a "saint." The wake and funeral, however, seemed to concretize this view among believers and non-believers alike. The days following her death saw numerous newspaper articles on her. Some were simple obituaries. Nonetheless, even these brief accounts acknowledged that those who were poor had lost their "mother" and the woman who had been the incarnation of "Providence" in their lives for better than half a century. In presenting these newspaper accounts at the time of the Process of Beatification, Léonce Celier, Inspector General of the Archives of France wrote:

These eulogies, by their very nature, can be suspected of omissions or exaggerations; however, if one takes into account their number, their unanimity, and their origin, as several appeared in newspapers hostile to the Church, one finds there, at the very least, proof of the admiration that the charitable action of the Servant of God called forth in every milieu.⁷¹³

Some of the articles published after Sister Rosalie's death were longer. They gave details of the public outpouring of respect, love, and gratitude that accompanied Sister Rosalie to her final resting place, as well as details concerning her life. As early as 8 February, *L'Univers*, the principal Catholic newspaper of the era, directed by Louis Veuillot, announced her death and urged readers to join in the tears and prayers of the unfortunate in their time of loss. On 9 February, the news appeared in *Le Constitutionnel*, a leftist publication; *La Gazette de France*, a Catholic newspaper with legitimist leanings, supporting the Bourbons dethroned in 1830 (it would publish more in-depth articles on Sister Rosalie in the 10 and 12 February editions); *Le Journal des Débats*, predecessor of today's wide circulation Paris daily, *Le Monde*; *La Patrie*, another wide circulation daily but directed toward the working classes (the latter also published a longer article in the 11 February edition, both under the by-line of Alfred Tranchant); two smaller papers, *Le Siècle* and *Le Pays*, published the obituary and information concerning funeral arrangements.

On 10 February, *Le Moniteur Universel*, official organ of the Empire, *L'Union Catholique*, and *L'Univers* all published longer tributes

⁷¹³ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 32.

to the woman whose loss so profoundly affected those most in need in the poorest district of the capital. *Le Moniteur Universel* referred to Sister Rosalie as a "holy woman;" *L'Union Catholique* as a "pious and worthy woman." The article in *L'Univers* was by the publisher, Louis Veillot. Among other accolades, he wrote, "The population of the quarter greeted... the mortal remains of this humble and illustrious virgin, who was, for a half-century, the consoling angel for all types of human misery and the perfect model of that marvelous work of faith we call a Sister of Charity."⁷¹⁴

On 11 February, Léon Aubineau published a long eulogy on Sister Rosalie on the first page of *L'Univers* and *L'Union Catholique*. He provided numerous details about the funeral and went on to speak of Sister Rosalie's virtues:

We cannot consider giving a simple overview of Sister Rosalie's works. It suffices to say that, endowed with a prodigious capacity for action, she spent her days solely occupied with her neighbor, without a single moment of rest other than the time she consecrated to prayer. [This time of prayer] is not the period during which she worked the least efficaciously at her daily tasks. We will not speak of her virtues as a religious, her humility, or her love for her Congregation. To see her as she appeared in the midst of the world, we can discern the depth of her heart [and the] spirit of self-sacrifice and humility in which this active charity took root.⁷¹⁵

All this public acclamation would undoubtedly have distressed Sister Rosalie. However, in his article in *La Gazette de France* of 12 February, P. de Selle, speaking for himself and his fellow journalists, was unapologetic for the general praise the press was according Sister Rosalie. She had carefully avoided acclaim during her lifetime but she could not escape it in death. He wrote:

The Saint-Marceau district has just witnessed the extinction of a life that was as great before God as

⁷¹⁴ Louis Veillot, in *L'Univers*, 10 February 1856, 1.

Note: This article appeared in *L'Union Catholique* on the same day.

⁷¹⁵ Léon Aubineau, in *L'Univers* and *L'Union Catholique*, 11 February 1856, 1.

it was humble before the world. Sister Rosalie, the mother of those who were poor and the consolation of all those who suffered, died 7 February... From her resting place with the angels, where she has gone to receive the warranted recompense for her great merit, may she forgive us for the publicity we are according her name. God allows the saints to remove themselves from public veneration while they are on earth. However, the splendor of their virtues betrays them after their death and shines around their memory to serve as a beacon to guide us along the perilous routes of life.⁷¹⁶

Three articles came a bit later: Eugène Rendu's on 16 February in *Le Messager de la Charité*; Sylvain Caubert's in *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*, 24 February - 2 March 1856; and Alexis Chevalier's in *Les Annales de la Charité*, February 1856. In his article, Eugène Rendu described his cousin and collaborator's funeral and recounted some details of her life. He also called for a biography of Sister Rosalie:

We hope that a life of Sister Rosalie will be written. A life that was so humble and so great, so obscure yet so striking, such a life needs to become known. So many secret treasures, so many hidden virtues, so much good buried in grateful memories must be revealed. For the glory of Christianity, this extraordinary authority invested in a Daughter of Charity, this prodigious ascendancy of a modest servant of the poor, which reached the highest levels of society, must be explained by the daily merit of a life of self-giving, poverty, and sacrifice. Sister Rosalie was a force. One after another, those in positions of power fell under the spell of the irresistible magnetism she was able to exert from near and far. All paid homage to her superior virtue.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁶ P. de Selle, in *La Gazette de France*, 12 February 1856, 1.

⁷¹⁷ Eugène Rendu, in *Le Messager de Charité*, no. 102, 16 February 1856, 1.

Sylvain Caubert, a longtime collaborator of Sister Rosalie, paid tribute to her saying, "May one of the oldest friends of this holy woman, ...the most humble and most devoted soldier in her large army, be allowed to add a few flowers to the crown already covering her grave."⁷¹⁸ Nor did he hesitate to address her in prayer, "Holy Sister, who art in heaven, forgive us for having broken the silence you imposed for so long; and see in this vast outpouring [of homage] by your Daughters, your companions, your poor, and your friends, only the triumph of religion and charity."⁷¹⁹

Alexis Chevalier's article confirmed the fulfillment of Eugène Rendu's wish for a biography of Sister Rosalie. After expressing his respect for the deceased, Chevalier announced that the founder of the *Annales*, the Viscount Armand de Melun, would be writing a life of Sister Rosalie.⁷²⁰

It is not at all surprising that Melun would do so. He knew Sister Rosalie very well. As we have seen, she had been his mentor and support for 20 years. However, he also knew her companions and some of her other collaborators, thus eyewitnesses were available to him. Moreover, he had the necessary talent and, although his life was a busy one, he could take the time required to accomplish such a task. He may very well have made the decision to do this the day of Sister Rosalie's death, as he knelt beside her remains and "wept and prayed" with the sisters of the house.

In the preface to his work, published in 1857, Melun wrote of the seminal idea leading to his biography, "The very day of Sister Rosalie's funeral, amidst universal mourning, a thought occurred to some of her friends. They promised, as a means for alleviating their grief, to put together all they remembered of her life and present their recollections [to each other]. This book is the fulfillment of that promise."⁷²¹

While Melun had weekly direct contact with Sister Rosalie, he did not limit his work to his personal recollections. He contacted many of Sister Rosalie's friends and collaborators, particularly the Daughters of Charity who had shared their community lives and ministry with her. He took detailed notes during the interviews because "...he was

⁷¹⁸ Sylvain Caubert, in *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*, 24 February - 2 March 1856, 124.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷²⁰ See Alexis Chevalier, in *Les Annales de la Charité*, February 1856, 127-128.

⁷²¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, IX.

serious about the exactitude and the sincerity of his account. He learned the sayings he repeats from those who heard them. The facts he reports were recounted by participants or witnesses. Moreover, his personal remarks are the fruit of a long and respectful friendship with the person whose life he is writing. [This] friendship must be considered the guarantee and safeguard of his work."⁷²²

Nonetheless, Melun felt obliged to submit his manuscript to the scrutiny of the Daughters of Charity. We have already seen that Sister Costalin was among them. However, there were others. In December 1856, Melun wrote to a certain Monsieur de Lambel saying:

I have gleaned from the mouths of the Sisters everything that could be harvested from this field in which I am the lowly reaper. Finally, yesterday, I took my courage in both hands and, despite snow, rain, and sleet, I went to Chartres and spent four hours reading my book to Sister Constance and asking her about her recollections. She had practically nothing to add to my treasure trove. However, she made my trip worthwhile by telling me, from the bottom of her heart, that while listening to me she thought she could see Sister Rosalie once again. Sister Félicité from Ménilmontant and Sister Louise from Val de Grâce told me the same thing.⁷²³

Beyond the grandiloquence of some of the eulogies, there are certain elements that recur like a leitmotiv in all of them, including Melun's biography. To name a few: the charismatic Sister Rosalie lived a largely hidden life; her earthly existence was marked by heroic action during revolutions and cholera epidemics, nonetheless, she fulfilled her vocation of servant of those who were poor as a humble Daughter of Charity who, united to God, performed the ordinary acts of a dedicated life extraordinarily well; she became a light shining in the darkness of grinding poverty; and, she loved and respected all her friends and collaborators, especially her "beloved poor." Caubert,

⁷²² *Ibid.*, X-XI.

⁷²³ *Letter of Armand de Melun to Monsieur de Lambel*, December 1856. Archives of Viscount Armand de Melun. Cited by Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 307.

perhaps, best articulated the secret of her remarkable magnetism that called forth personal dedication in so many others, both rich and poor, when he wrote:

...[Sister Rosalie] sought only to remain hidden and small and to conceal her merit, stepping back so that others might be in the limelight. Whatever she did, in her eyes, it was never adequate or done well enough. Someone said to her, "Mother, look at your influence. No one [is ever in the situation of] regretting having refused one of your requests. For you, to ask and to obtain are synonymous." [She responded,] "What merit do I have in that? People are so good to me. All the gratitude goes to God and to those who deign to make use of me as an instrument."⁷²⁴

Melun's close relationship with Sister Rosalie for so many years revealed the nature of her sanctity to him – the humble performance of the ordinary done extraordinarily well. As a Catholic intellectual, he most likely also knew that, if the Church was ever going to raise her to the altar as a saint, it would not be because of her heroism on the barricades or even during the cholera epidemics but because of her virtue in carrying out the simple acts of daily charity. Melun, of course, speaks of Sister Rosalie's courage in dangerous situations. However, these episodes play only a small part in his biography which appeared in 13 editions, the final one coming out in 1929. Melun presents her as he knew her, as a "Daughter of Charity and only that." The final two paragraphs of his *Life of Sister Rosalie, Daughter of Charity*, read:

...Through a rare exception, men [and women], who reserve their applause for the ostentatious and resounding, admired obscurity and silence in [Sister Rosalie]. They glorified the humility of simple duty and preferred the perfection of work without pretension. Briefly put, they judged [Sister Rosalie] as God Himself did.

⁷²⁴ Caubert, *La Semaine religieuse*, 126-127.

To accomplish ordinary things as well as possible, this was the rule and aim of Sister Rosalie's entire life. Today this is her merit and her glory in the eyes of God and the world. It will be the great and salutary lesson of her story.⁷²⁵

With the passage of time, eulogies written on the occasion of Sister Rosalie's death, and even Melun's biography, may well have slipped into the obscurity of libraries and researchers' notes. Perhaps, fearing this, some of her friends sought to raise more permanent memorials to her. The Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement was not satisfied to honor Sister Rosalie with a graveside eulogy. On 16 February 1856, only a week after her death, he wrote to the Minister of State and the Imperial Household seeking authorization to have a bust of Sister Rosalie sculpted by the artist Hippolyte Maindron. He also asked the minister to provide a block of marble for the work, which the sculptor had agreed to do gratuitously. By an ordinance of 28 June 1856, Emperor Napoléon III authorized the mayor to place the completed work in the assembly room of the town hall.



Marble bust of Sister Rosalie by Hippolyte Maindron,
located in the Museum of Public Assistance, Paris.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

⁷²⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 263.

The dedication of the bust took place on Monday, 22 December 1856, in the same assembly room where other benefactors of the XIIth arrondissement were likewise memorialized. Monsieur Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, assisted by the Mayor of the Xth arrondissement and Viscount Armand de Melun, presided. In his discourse, the Mayor, Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, remarked that, in these modest surroundings, the inhabitants of the Saint-Marceau district were according Sister Rosalie “a sort of local tribute without fanfare which... respects the touching simplicity of [her] life.” He then added, “You are aware that what is most enlightened in religion, most tender in pity, and most angelic in charity [all] come together in this admirable Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul.”⁷²⁶

Although the ceremony itself was simple, the attendance was impressive. It included, in addition to the Daughters of Charity, members of the Rendu family; the Director, doctors and administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance; officials of French education; a justice of the peace; the Prefect of Police; and the Dean of the church of Sainte-Geneviève.

The bust took a circuitous route before reaching the Museum of Public Assistance on the quai de la Tournelle, where it has been on display since 1934. From the year of Sister Rosalie’s death until 1880, the bust remained in the assembly room where the mayor had put it. In 1880, however, the anti-clerical municipal councilors, profiting from the anti-religious decrees of Jules Ferry, Prime Minister and Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, ordered it removed to the attic of the town hall. The diatribe justifying the removal of the bust appeared in *Le Figaro* of 30 August 1880. Desmet finds this whole affair so ridiculous that he refuses to cite it.⁷²⁷ Be that as it may, the bust was soon taken from its hiding place to the little house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois and placed in Sister Rosalie’s tiny office. It did not remain there very long as the Daughters of Charity were expelled from the house within days. Not wanting to see Sister Rosalie’s work vanish, some Catholics of Paris raised enough money, in five days, to purchase a new location for the sisters at 32, rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire. By October 1880, they were able to reopen the school and, not long after, all the other works of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. The new site would be called “Maison Sœur Rosalie.”⁷²⁸

⁷²⁶ Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, *Inauguration du Buste*, 16.

⁷²⁷ See Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 295-296.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-298.

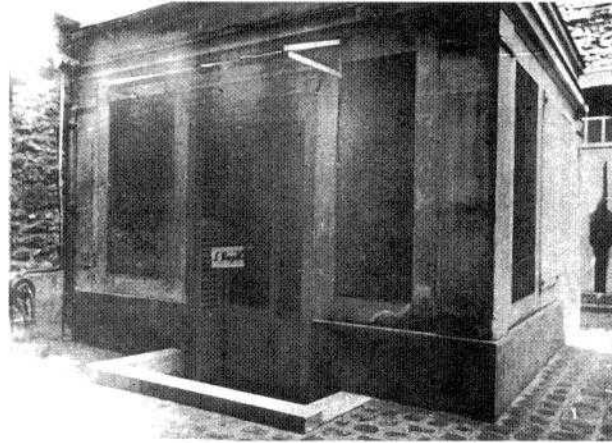
Somehow, Sister Rosalie's little office remained where it was, albeit in poor condition and disuse. One way or another, it had survived moves, construction, political unrest, and two major wars, as a silent reminder of the woman who, for half a century, had made the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois the command post for the service of those in need in the Mouffetard district. Following the celebration of the centenary of Sister Rosalie's death, Henri Desmet, C.M., approached officials of the Bureau of Public Assistance and the city of Paris, expressing his desire to see the office restored and refurnished with the humble objects Sister Rosalie had used and which were then at "Maison Sœur Rosalie" on rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire. Father Desmet hoped to see it subsequently open as a museum in memory of Sister Rosalie. His wish was realized on 1 October 1962 because "Paris remains faithful to all those who have loved and served her; to love and to serve was the rule that directed Sister Rosalie's entire life."⁷²⁹

If the attendance at the Dedication of the Bust was impressive, the group assisting at the Dedication of the Museum, "Sœur Rosalie," was even more so. Included were, Jean Benedetti, Prefect of the Seine; Pierre-Christian Taittinger, President of the Municipal Council of Paris; Édouard Frédéric-Dupont, Vice-President of the National Assembly; Monsieur Damelon, Director General of the Bureau of Public Assistance; four Municipal Councilors; Marcel Candille, Director of Documentation Services and the Archives of the Bureau of Public Assistance; Cardinal Maurice Feltin (1949-1966); and representing the Daughters of Charity, Sister Suzanne Guillemin, Superioress General (1962-1968). While all the speakers spoke glowingly as well as knowledgeably of Sister Rosalie, 106 years after her death, it was, perhaps, Marcel Candille who best expressed the significance of the event for Sister Rosalie, the city of Paris, and the Bureau of Public Assistance when he said:

Today, by dedicating this museum, "Sœur Rosalie," ... the Bureau of Public Assistance of Paris honors itself and, at the same time, it rejoices at invoking one of the purest figures of our own history and the moving history of Parisian charity. We must say that, if

⁷²⁹ "Discours de Pierre-Christian Taittinger, Président du Conseil Municipal de Paris," in *Inauguration du Musée "Sœur Rosalie"* (Paris: 1962), 25.

the objects gathered here are simple, this is less a commemorative museum than a museum of example, example for all those who, like us, share the vocation and the duty to come to the aid of physical and moral suffering as well as misery.⁷³⁰



Photograph of Museum "Sœur Rosalie" commemorating Sister Rosalie's office/parlor.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

The museum has finally given way to construction, but the furnishings from Sister Rosalie's little office are now on display in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris.

As for the building on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, it was partially demolished in 1903. In 1904, a new shelter for the elderly was built. It was taken charge of by the Bureau of Public Assistance and run by lay people. It continued, however, to be named "Hospice Sœur Rosalie."⁷³¹ At this time, the bust was transferred to the Bureau of Public Assistance. It found a permanent home in the museum on the quai de la Tournelle because it was considered "one of the most significant works in the collection." Neither the city of Paris nor the Bureau of Public Assistance will allow Sister Rosalie to be forgotten.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ "Discours de Monsieur Candille," in *Inauguration du Musée*, 12-13.

⁷³¹ See Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 298.

⁷³² "Discours de Monsieur Candille," in *Inauguration du Musée*, 12.

The Church of Paris, however, did not want to be left out of the effusion of admiration showering down on Sister Rosalie. Thus, in 1859, Abbé Le Rebours (1822-1894), pastor of the church of the Madeleine, who had been a collaborator of Sister Rosalie, wanted to continue her work and perpetuate her memory in the quarter where she had labored. He purchased land on rue de Gentilly to build a chapel in honor of Saint Rosalie of Palermo, Sister Rosalie's patroness. Once completed, the chapel was confided to the Congregation of the Mission. In 1861, a workshop for boys was opened near the chapel. This was followed by a workshop and school for girls and a school for boys. In 1867, the complex was expropriated to permit the construction of the short (34 meters) but wide (110 meters) "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie" (rue Mouffetard is only 7 meters wide but considerably longer, 605 meters).

In 1867-1869, the money obtained from the expropriation was employed to rebuild the chapel and the works on what is now the nearby Boulevard Auguste Blanqui. However, the funds proved to be inadequate so the chapel was not completed as designed. Nevertheless, Abbé Le Rebours wanted to be certain that future generations would remember Sister Rosalie. Therefore, he had a stained glass window placed behind the main altar depicting her presenting a model of the chapel to her patroness, Saint Rosalie of Palermo. The Vincentian priests were expelled in 1903 but returned in 1922. Diocesan clergy ministered there in the interim. In 1963, the chapel became the parish Sainte-Rosalie. Georges Allain, C. M., was named the first pastor. The Congregation of the Mission left definitively in 1971 to be replaced by diocesan priests. The church and parish buildings were completely restored in 1985. It remains a thriving parish to this day and Sister Rosalie's memory is very much alive there.⁷³³ Interestingly enough, despite strong waves of anti-clericalism over the years, no one has tried or at least no one has succeeded in having the name of the neighboring "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie" changed.

⁷³³ *Sainte Rosalie de Palermo à la Place d'Italie*, a brochure produced by the parish of Sainte-Rosalie.

Note: The brochure outlines the history of the parish along with brief biographical sketches of Saint Rosalie of Palermo and Sister Rosalie. The same information appears on the parish website, www.paroisse@sainte-rosalie.org



Stained glass window in the church of Sainte-Rosalie.
Courtesy of Sister Marie-Geneviève Roux, D.C.

Nor was Sister Rosalie's reputation for sanctity limited to Paris. Not surprisingly, it remains in Confort, due in no small measure to Sister Costalin who, after Sister Rosalie's death, obtained permission from her superiors to establish a house of the Daughters of Charity on the site of Sister Rosalie's birthplace and committed her considerable inheritance to this endeavor. In her testimony, Sister Marie-Louise Wicquart, Sister Servant in Confort at the time of the 1953 Diocesan Process of Beatification, said:

During her lifetime, Sister Rosalie wanted the poor of Confort to be assisted. She wanted a house of charity to be built in Confort. After her death, the Servant of God's wish was realized by Sister Costalin who supplied the funds necessary for the construction of the building.... It was completed in 1860.... This establishment brought security to the population. We

have a hospice for 40 elderly, out of a population of 300, and an orphanage for 30 children.⁷³⁴

The work in Confort went beyond service to the elderly and orphans. Sister Wicquart explains, "...because of these establishments, Sister Rosalie was [the instrument of] Providence for this entire region. The Daughters of Charity minister to those who are sick and those who are poor. The house also serves as a dispensary and we sometimes go quite a distance to [treat] those who are ill."⁷³⁵

Sister Costalin was also instrumental in the construction of a parish church and a boarding school for boys run by the Christian Brothers. Thus, Sister Rosalie became the protectress of her native village long after she left it definitively at the age of fifteen.

According to Charles-Louis-Marie Baussan, in his 1913 biography of Sister Rosalie, Sister Costalin approached the then Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert (1871-1886), to obtain his authorization to have Sister Rosalie's body transferred to the cemetery of Confort. She met with stony silence. She tried again in 1886 with the support of Monseigneur François-Marie-Benjamin Richard de la Vergne. He had been a seminarian at Saint-Sulpice in the early 1840's and was appointed Bishop of Belley in the Gex region in 1871. At this time, he was coadjutor archbishop of Paris and would shortly succeed Cardinal Guibert as Archbishop of Paris. According to tradition, the 83 year old Cardinal Guibert listened attentively and then responded:

The body of Sister Rosalie is part of the treasure of the Church of Paris of which I am guardian. On the day she will perhaps come forth from the tomb which the Poor and the Rich of this great city have erected in her [honor], she must have the joy of finding herself in their midst and hear them, before all others, call her Saint as they did during her lifetime.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁴ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 14.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁶ Charles-Louis-Marie Baussan, *Une fille de saint Vincent de Paul au quartier Mouffetard. La Sœur Rosalie Intime* (Paris: 1913), 149-150. See also Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 300-301.

It should be noted here that Cardinal Guibert's remarks were made in 1886, 30 years after Sister Rosalie's death. They offer strong proof that her memory and her reputation for sanctity were still alive in the city where she had devoted her life to the service of its most needy inhabitants.

In Chapter XII, we spoke in some detail of Sister Rosalie's sometimes strained relations with her superiors. We will not return to this. It suffices to point out here that the General Superiors and General Councils of both the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission were conspicuously absent from her wake and funeral. In his 1953 biography of Sister Rosalie, which he wrote at the request of the then Superioress General, Sister Antoinette Blanchot (1946-1953), Henri Desmet, C.M., put forth this appeal as his justification for adding his work to the already existing biographies. He wrote in his preface, "The only excuse for our audacity is [to be found in] the deference we owe to a desire coming from on high."⁷³⁷ In the body of the text, however, the usually laudatory Desmet is sharply critical, albeit only briefly, of the General Superiors and General Councils of both Congregations at the time of Sister Rosalie's death. After recounting the wake and funeral and the extraordinary outpouring of esteem that characterized the entire event, he adds, "What spontaneous homage from all sectors of society! Sister Rosalie's superiors had nothing to do with it. They distanced themselves from this ovation."⁷³⁸

A certain level of disapproval accompanied Sister Rosalie to the threshold of eternity and beyond. Recognized as a saint by those who knew her best, nearly a century – 1953 – would pass before the Daughters of Charity would join with the archdiocese of Paris to initiate the long Process of Beatification that would ultimately culminate on 9 November 2003 in Rome with the proclamation of Pope John Paul II declaring her, "Blessed Sister Rosalie Rendu."

This change in attitude toward Sister Rosalie did not occur overnight. There were incremental steps. As we mentioned previously, each year the Daughters of Charity put out *Notices* on some of the more outstanding sisters who had died during the course of the previous year. Sister Rosalie's life was not included in the 1857 *Notices*. Perhaps the first sign of a wide-ranging shift in the Company's view

⁷³⁷ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 10.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

of her is to be found in the *Notices* on sisters who had received their initial formation as Daughters of Charity from her. We have already seen an acknowledgement of Sister Rosalie's influence as a formator in the *Notice* on Sister Lenain, thus we will limit ourselves here to two others, one on Sister Virieu, the second on Sister Tissot.

Sister Virieu (1818-1890). As noted earlier, Sister Virieu was a postulant formed by Sister Rosalie in 1850 and went on to establish the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland in 1855. At first this date seems to be impossible as Sister Virieu pronounced her vows for the first time on 8 September 1855. However, according to her *Notice*, Father Étienne had followed her progress from the day she began her postulancy with Sister Rosalie in 1850 and did not hesitate to name her Sister Servant the day following her vows. She left for Ireland with her three companions on 5 November 1855. She was 37 years of age and five years of vocation. Her work there was exceptional. She died in Dublin in 1890. It is her postulancy that is of interest here. In her *Notice* we read:

Without being deterred by any obstacle, [Sister Virieu] began her postulancy in May 1850 in the house of the parish of Saint-Médard where Sister Rosalie Rendu was the Sister Servant. Throughout her life, Sister Virieu enjoyed speaking to her companions of the lessons she had learned in this school of charity, simplicity, and poverty. Among them was the story of the pitiful little worn-out desk her Sister Servant used. Thinking she was doing something wonderful, the postulant wanted to replace it with a modest writing desk. The sisters she confided in willingly agreed to the exchange. How great was their disappointment when good Sister Rosalie, upon seeing the new furniture, burst into tears. To console her, they had to immediately return it and give the cost to the poor. Such examples could only engrave themselves deeply into a heart like Sister Virieu's. They provided the momentum that would accompany her throughout her life as a Daughter of Charity.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁹ "Sister Virieu," *Collection des Notices*, 1891, AFCP.

Sister Tissot (1826-1899). Sister Tissot's testimony for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification contains some already cited information that likewise appears in her *Notice*. Here, however, we also find a judgment of the period she spent under Sister Rosalie's guidance and on the value it contributed to her future life. We read, "Placed after the seminary at the house of charity of Saint-Médard, Sister Tissot had the happiness of being at the school of Sister Rosalie who communicated a great understanding of those who are poor to her. Our dear Sister gave many proofs of this later on."⁷⁴⁰

In the Archives of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, there is a volume entitled, *Golden Book of Daughters of Charity, or A Simple Glimpse of the Most Beautiful Notices of Sisters Who Returned to God during the First Three Centuries of the Little Company – 1633 to 1870*. The text is undated although it obviously appeared after 1870. Sister Rosalie is included. Each entry presents the deceased sister as a model of some virtue prized in the community. For Sister Rosalie it is "Model of devotion to those who are poor." In speaking of her tireless service to the desperately poor population of the Mouffetard district, the author points out:

...she nourished [the inhabitants] by her faith; by her charity, she compassionated with [their] weaknesses; lifted [them] up from all [their] falls; encouraged [them]; and assisted [them] beyond the imaginable. Such was the power of her action on behalf of those who were poor that she raised them up to the rank of Children of God. [As for those who were] rich, [her action] led them to bend over [the poor] with the heart of a brother or sister.⁷⁴¹

Sister Rosalie's *Notice* also quotes from Melun and announces, in a note, that his life of Sister Rosalie, as well as Baussan's, are available in the shop of the Motherhouse. The *Notice* speaks of Frédéric Ozanam and Sister Rosalie's role at the origin of the Society of Saint Vincent de

⁷⁴⁰ "Sister Tissot," *Collection des Notices*, 1900, AFCP.

⁷⁴¹ *Livre d'or des Filles de la Charité ou Simple aperçu des plus belles Notices des sœurs retournées à Dieu dans les trois premiers siècles de la Petite Compagnie, vol. 1, de 1633 à 1870* (Paris: n.d.), 202.

Paul. Her "tireless charity" is acknowledged and there is recognition of her as "the living image of Divine Goodness."⁷⁴²

In the later years of the XIXth century there was clearly a softening of disapproval, accompanied by general acknowledgement of Sister Rosalie's extraordinary devotedness to God, the Company, and those who were poor. Testimony was also gathered from persons who had known her.

In the early XXth century, Father Collard, in his interview with Father Verdier, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (1919-1933), of whom we have spoken earlier, asked, "How is it that, until now, nothing has been undertaken in favor of the Beatification of Sister Rosalie whose reputation is worldwide?" Father Verdier gave the response that others before and after him offered. He alleged that, "until the Beatification of Blessed Perboyre and the General Assembly of 1890, it was believed that the family of Saint Vincent should refrain, out of a spirit of humility, from introducing Causes of Canonization." By way of exception, Louise de Marillac's Process [of Beatification] had begun a few years previously [1886].⁷⁴³ Father Verdier, who was, without doubt, favorable to Sister Rosalie, admitted that "like all pioneers, she was ahead of her time," and that this could have been a cause of some of the disapproval directed towards her.⁷⁴⁴

Be that as it may, any move toward Beatification was still a long way off. Nonetheless, articles on Sister Rosalie began to appear in the internal organ of communication of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, in February 1926. There was another brief entry in 1944. The articles became much more frequent in the years leading up to and following the opening of the Diocesan Process of Beatification in 1953. There were ten from May 1951-March 1956.

The May 1951 *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère* announced that, at the 21 February 1951 meeting of the General Council of the Daughters of Charity, the decision was made to ask the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Maurice Feltin, to open the Informative Process in view of Sister Rosalie's eventual Beatification and to appoint a Postulator of the Cause. According to the Minutes of the Council Meeting, "...the Council recalled that Sister Rosalie Rendu has continued to be venerated in the Community, the diocese, and well beyond.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 204.

⁷⁴³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 78-79.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

Numerous graces are attributed to her intercession. She is a beautiful model of the Daughter of Charity to present for imitation to persons of the present time."⁷⁴⁵ A letter from William Slattery, C.M., Superior General (1947-1969), informed Sister Antoinette Blanchot, Superioress General (1946-1953), that Cardinal Feltin had willingly agreed; he had named Abbé François Guédon, Archivist of the Archdiocese of Paris, as Postulator and had asked the Congregation of the Mission to name a Vice-Postulator. The choice fell on Raymond Chalumeau, C.M. The announcement of the opening of the Informative Process was to be made in an October issue of *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*, and would ask anyone in possession of letters, writings or recollections of Sister Rosalie to send them to the Postulator. The sisters were asked to send any documents they might have to the Motherhouse. Any cure attributed to Sister Rosalie, accompanied by medical records, was also to be sent to the Motherhouse.

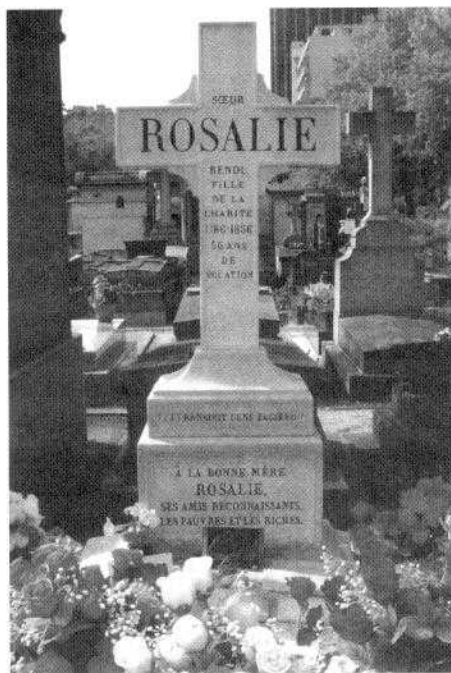
Cardinal Feltin's Ordinance of 24 December 1951 officially opened the Informative Process. An earlier Ordinance, dated 18 December 1951, appointed a three member Historical Commission to collect and review all of Sister Rosalie's writings as well as any texts written concerning her virtue. The members of the commission were, Guillaume-André de Berthier de Sauvigny, C.J.M., professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris; Ferdinand Combaluzier, C.M., Archivist of the Congregation of the Mission; and Léonce Celier, member of the General Council of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Inspector General of the Archives of France. Both ordinances appeared in January 1952 issues of *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*. Sister Blanchot had them reprinted, as was required by Canon Law, in the February 1952 *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*.⁷⁴⁶

For nearly a year, letters of Sister Rosalie were received and examined. It was at this time that Bon-Sauveur of Caen and the families of Monsieur Colette de Baudicour and Cyprien Loppe sent copies of their correspondence with Sister Rosalie. By an Ordinance of 18 December 1952, Cardinal Feltin named the members of the Tribunal that would pass judgment on the work accomplished. The members were, Canon Guédon, president; Canon Lecestre, assistant judge; Canon Dubois, assistant judge; Leonard Peters, C.M., Assistant

⁷⁴⁵ "Excerpts of Council deliberations for 21 February 1951," in *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, February 1951, 270.

⁷⁴⁶ *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, February 1952, 40-42.

of the Congregation of the Mission, Promoter of the Faith; Canon Barthélémy, notary; and Abbé Censier, supplemental notary. The official Diocesan Cause to pass judgment on Sister Rosalie Rendu's reputation for sanctity; on the question of any public cult of her; and on her writings, took place at Saint-Lazare, 20 January-17 February 1953. There were 11 meetings. Sixteen witnesses were deposed. The three members of the Historical Commission, after having carefully examined Sister Rosalie's writings, reported their findings to the Tribunal. The members of the Tribunal were also obliged to go to Montparnasse Cemetery to ascertain the condition of the grave. They were astonished to see fresh flowers on it almost a century after Sister Rosalie's death; and they were even more surprised to find people kneeling there to pray to Sister Rosalie. They also learned the Montparnasse Cemetery Register listed all the graves by number with only the names and dates of birth and death of the deceased. However, there is a text by the entry for Sister Rosalie, "27 July 1856, transfer [of the grave] authorized because of her exceptional service to the people of Paris."



Sister Rosalie's gravesite in the years prior to her Beatification.
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

The closing session of the Diocesan Process took place on 11 June 1953. Cardinal Feltin, Sister Blanchot, her Assistant, and the Director General of the Daughters of Charity were present. All official documents were duly signed and sealed. Father Chalumeau was to present them to the Congregation of Rites in Rome on 23 June 1953. At the final meeting, Cardinal Feltin expressed his hope that Sister Rosalie would soon be raised to the altar.⁷⁴⁷

The Cause did not move forward in the immediate future. Notwithstanding, the centenary of Sister Rosalie's death was commemorated. Cardinal Feltin celebrated Mass for the occasion at Saint-Médard. The houses of the Daughters of Charity of the Province of Paris organized special distributions of food for those who were poor to mark the occasion. On 23 December 1955, the President of the Academy of Science, Humanities, and Art of Lyons, in the Department of l'Ain, wrote to Sister Francine Lepicard, Superioress General (1953-1962):

Among the historical and religious figures that are dearest to me, Saint Vincent de Paul and Sister Rosalie are among the most moving and most beautiful. This is well known around me. Moreover, a number of persons have asked me to commemorate this venerated Sister of the Poor and my compatriot. [At this time,] I serve in the diocese of Belley as Professor of History at the Catholic University of Lyons.

Thus, first, I will lead my colleagues of the Academy Grasset in l'Ain on a pilgrimage to Confort, probably in June; second, I will write two articles for the newspaper, *L'Echo-Liberté*; third, I will prepare two longer studies for publication in the reviews, *Visages de l'Ain* and *Cahiers Grasset*; finally, I will give a conference to the venerable Academy of Lyons and, perhaps, one to the public of Lyons.

Signed: Canon André Chagny⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁷ See *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, October 1953, 270-272.

⁷⁴⁸ Letter of André Chagny to Sister Francine Lepicard, 23 December 1955. Cited in *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, March 1956, 100-101.

On 7 February 1956, the "Maison Sœur Rosalie" on rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, welcomed Sister Lepicard and a group of elderly from the "Hospice Sœur Rosalie," for a dinner with the pastor of Saint-Médard and his assistants. Among the elderly present, the oldest of the group recalled that, when he was a very young child, he had heard of Sister Rosalie from his grandfather.

The largest celebration was also held, fittingly enough, at the "Maison Sœur Rosalie" on rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire on 12 February 1956. The attendance was as notable as it had been for the Dedication of the Bust. Present were: Monseigneur Jean-Marie Villot, Auxiliary Bishop of Paris and Secretary of the French Bishops; Monseigneur André-Jean-François Defebvre, C.M., recently expelled from China; Paul Castelin, C.M., Director of the Daughters of Charity; Sister Francine Lepicard, Superioress General, and her Council; the Visitatrix (Provincial Superior) of the Province of Paris; Édouard Frédéric-Dupont, deputy and municipal councilor of the VIIth arrondissement; and members of the Rendu family.

The children of the school, however, were the center of the celebration with their skits and songs. If there had to be a celebration in her honor, this would surely have been the part dearest to Sister Rosalie's heart, as service to children was a predominant aspect of her ministry to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district.⁷⁴⁹

Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification opened in Rome on 24 November 1953. After the approval of the Decree on Sister Rosalie's writings on 1 February 1974, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints turned the study of the Cause over to the Historical Commission by a rescript of 15 March 1974. Additional research and the preparation of the *Positio super virtutibus et fama sanctitatis* was confided to Étienne Diebold, C.M., under the direction of Monseigneur Giovanni Papa, General Vice-Relator of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Father Diebold had also been charged with the preparation of the *Positio* for Frédéric Ozanam's Cause of Beatification, likewise under the direction of Monseigneur Papa, which he completed only in 1980. This task left Father Diebold little time to work on Sister Rosalie's *Positio*. During this time he became ill. He died on 19 September 1991. On 7 June 1985, Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., was appointed to write the

⁷⁴⁹ See *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, March 1956, 101-102.

Positio for Sister Rosalie's Cause. He submitted the completed work to the Vatican in 1993.⁷⁵⁰

The juridical validity of the Diocesan Process had been recognized by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints by a Decree of 20 January 1992. The *Positio* was carefully studied to determine whether the Servant of God had practiced the theological and cardinal virtues to a heroic degree. The Congress of Theologians of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints agreed that she had done so. This was confirmed by the Cardinals and Bishops on 20 February 2001, during their Ordinary Session. Pope John Paul II concurred and called for a Decree on the Heroicity of Sister Rosalie Rendu's Virtues. On 24 April 2001, the Holy Father solemnly declared:

It is determined that the Servant of God, Sister Rosalie (baptized Jeanne-Marie) Rendu of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, has practiced the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, and courage and their related virtues...

Given in Rome, 24 April 2001.⁷⁵¹

Sister Juana Elizondo, Superioress General (1991-2003), represented the Company of the Daughters of Charity in this vital step leading to Sister Rosalie's Beatification.

While all these aspects of the lengthy and complex Process of Beatification were progressing favorably, there was one vital area in which there was little movement until the summer of 1997. Sister Rosalie's Beatification required a miracle recognized by Rome. In her testimony in 1953, in response to a question asking if she knew of any graces obtained through the intercession of Sister Rosalie, Sister Wicquart spoke of a cure attributed to Sister Rosalie:

...I know only the favor obtained by one of our sisters from rue des Meuniers in Paris. When she was at the house on rue du Foin (in Paris), the superior [there] at the time came to Confort every year to accompany the children at vacation time. One of the sisters of rue

⁷⁵⁰ See Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., "Présentation du Rapporteur," in *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, VI.

⁷⁵¹ See *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 7-8 (July-August 2001): 272-277.

des Meuniers was paralyzed. She could no longer walk. The superior, who had great devotion to Sister Rosalie, had a novena of prayer started and the sick sister was cured instantly during the novena. This cure has been recognized medically.⁷⁵²

The sister in question was Sister Thérèse (Louise) Béquet. Born 15 September 1910 in the Côtes d'Armor, Louise was the daughter of François-Marie Béquet and Louise-Françoise Le Briquier. She entered the seminary of the Daughters of Charity in Paris on 6 March 1936. In 1937, she was placed at the service of those who were poor in the Paris area, where she remained her entire community life. Her health was fragile from the beginning but this never prevented her from wholeheartedly giving of herself as a teacher to those who were poor.

Sister Béquet's health problems worsened in 1939. In 1942-1943, the first joint pain began in her left hip. In 1946, the pain became more intense, accompanied by stiffness of the left hip and difficulty walking. The same trouble walking continued in 1948-1949 but new symptoms appeared, muscle weakness of the neck and left shoulder; severe headaches; back pain; balance problems; limping; and vomiting. After a stay at Saint Joseph's Hospital, Paris, her physician, Doctor Thomas, told her that her spinal fluid was no longer circulating normally and diagnosed her with "syringomyelia," a disorder in which a cyst forms within the spinal cord. Since the spinal cord connects the brain to nerves in the extremities, this condition was thought to be producing Sister Béquet's symptoms. Dr. Thomas recommended radiation of the spinal column twice a week.

The treatment did not alleviate her condition. On the contrary, she became sicker and sicker. Sister Béquet was experiencing total paralysis of her left leg and partial paralysis of her left arm; paralysis of her right leg and contractions of the tendons of her right arm and hand; blindness of the left eye; and the inability to remain standing. At the beginning of January 1952, she had to be brought to her classroom in a wheelchair. By 16 January, she had to stop teaching completely. "The paralysis worsened: I was taken to class in a wheelchair. I was completely bent over and could not see my pupils. They were so overwhelmed by my condition that they were never better behaved." From then on, she was unable to go to school.

⁷⁵² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, Sommaire*, 15.

Urged on by the superior, Sister Anne-Marie Laugier, the sisters, the children, as well as other persons, began a novena, praying for Sister Béquet's cure through the intercession of Sister Rosalie. Sister Laugier even promised to take her sick companion to visit Sister Rosalie's grave. On 31 January, Sister Laugier told her not to rise before 9 o'clock. Sister Béquet went to bed, but the night was a bad one. The next morning, however, everything changed. Sister Béquet recounts her extraordinary experience:

...I got up at the designated time and I could stand up straight. "This is impossible," I thought. While dressing, I realized I was standing straight. I was walking and walking! I asked myself, "What will the others say?" I wanted to leave my room but then I thought it would be better if I waited.

The first sister who came saw me dancing and said, "Are you are crazy?" "No, I am cured," [I responded].

[Sister Laugier] had just returned from the market. [Once she realized what had happened,] we went to the chapel to thank Sister Rosalie and planned to go to her gravesite on 2 February.

As for my pupils, when they saw me, there was dead silence. One of them came up to me and hugged me. Then she said, "It is Sister Thérèse." They ran through the quarter shouting, "Sister Thérèse is cured." In the afternoon, the courtyard was filled with parents who could not believe their eyes.

It was the First Friday of February so, with the sister of the Day Nursery, I began my pilgrimage to Sacré-Coeur of Montmartre. We climbed to the basilica, on foot of course... my companion was tired, but not me! I remained kneeling until we went back down and then took the Metro home. The next morning, I rose at 5 o'clock and have continued to do so since

my cure. I am 87 years old [1997] and am still "hale and hearty."⁷⁵³



Sister Thérèse (Louise) Béquet, D.C., in 1997 at age 87.

Courtesy of the author

As we have seen from Sister Wicquart's testimony, Sister Béquet's cure was well known among the Daughters of Charity as early as 1953. Moreover, it was sudden, complete, enduring and attributable to the intercession of Sister Rosalie. These are necessary elements for a cure to be considered a miracle. In this case, the criteria seem to have been met. Establishing Sister Béquet's complete medical dossier, however, presented some seemingly insurmountable hurdles. Then, on 22 May 1997, Doctor Ennio Ensoli, Consultant to the Sacred

⁷⁵³ Sister Thérèse Béquet, D.C., in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no.12 (December 2003).

Note: The article in *Echos de la Compagnie* is a transcription of the testimony of Sister Béquet, given in the presence of Roberto D'Amico, C.M., Postulator; Léon Lauwerier, C.M., Vice-Postulator; and Sister Marie-Anne Latscha, D.C., Assistant to the Vice-Postulator, on Monday, 18 August 1997, at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. Sister Béquet was also interviewed at the time of the Beatification. She sometimes added details that were not part of her original testimony. We have included them here. The above synopsis of Sister Béquet's medical condition was prepared by Michelle Loisel, D.C., at the author's request.

Congregation of the Saints, agreed to re-examine Sister Béquet's illness and cure. To this end, he submitted a lengthy and detailed questionnaire to ascertain the facts. In 1997, Sister Béquet, who would die on 11 June 2006, was well able to discuss her symptoms and cure, and to assist in this process. Also, on 22 May 1997, Roberto D'Amico, C.M., Postulator General for Causes of Canonization for members of the Vincentian Family, wrote to Paul Henzmann, C.M., Archivist of the Congregation of the Mission, telling him that Dr. Ensoli thought that "chances were good for obtaining a favorable result from the Vatican doctors concerning the miracle benefiting Sister Béquet." He also sought Father Henzmann's assistance in preparing the necessary documentation for the diocesan inquiry "super miro," that is, "concerning the miracle."⁷⁵⁴

All went as hoped. The Decree of Approbation of the cure of Sister Béquet as a miracle attributable to Sister Rosalie, issued by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, was read in the presence of Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Square on 12 April 2003. Sister Juana Elizondo, Superioress General, was again in attendance as representative for the Daughters of Charity. The final obstacle to the Beatification of Sister Rosalie had been overcome. One hundred and forty-one years after her death, this woman whose reputation for sanctity was well established during her lifetime, would finally be raised to the altar. The date was set for 9 November 2003.

During the days prior to the Mass of Beatification, members of the Vincentian Family began arriving in Rome. Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General (2003-present), describes the scene:

This Beatification is also a great family celebration for us. Members of the Vincentian Family have come from the four corners of the world to be here in Saint Peter's Square. There are about 4,000 of us: Daughters of Charity; Vincentian Fathers [and Brothers]; the International Association of Charities, A.I.C. [Ladies of Charity]; the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; as well as the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups; not to mention members of Sister Rosalie's family; and of course, Church representatives from the dioceses of Paris and Belley-Ars.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴ Letter of Roberto D'Amico, C.M., to Paul Henzmann, C.M., 22 May 1997, ACMP.

⁷⁵⁵ Sister Evelyne Franc, D.C., in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 487.

The celebration began with a prayer vigil in the parish church of Saint Joachim on 8 November 2003. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., Superior General (1992-2004), gave a homily in which he spoke of Sister Rosalie's message for today:

Tonight, my brothers and sisters, I ask you to meditate with me on the life of this wonderful woman. The Church holds her up before us as an example of what it means to be a genuine servant of those who are poor. Reflect on her practical charity, her tenderness, her fearlessness, and her faith. Love her in the beauty of her life and in her remarkable works. As the Church beatifies her here tomorrow, I think tonight of Shakespeare's eloquent words:

*When she shall die,
Take her and cut her out in little stars,
And she will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with the night.⁷⁵⁶*

The eve of the Beatification was also marked by Mass at the church of Saint-Louis-des-Français. Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris (1981-2005), presided. In his homily he said of Sister Rosalie:

The mystery of the Redeemer, the central and most hidden mystery of our faith, is the source of that love which enabled Sister Rosalie to go to the poor in the way Vincent de Paul did. When she said she was going to meet Christ, it was Christ, in her, who was going to meet the poor. It is precisely this love which means we can no longer speak in terms of borders but in terms of the greatness of the gift.⁷⁵⁷

The day ended with a dinner for 80 guests hosted by the French Ambassador to the Vatican and his spouse. The French

⁷⁵⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene II, slightly modified. From transcript of Robert P. Maloney, C.M., in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 491.

⁷⁵⁷ Jean-Marie Lustiger, in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 493.

government was represented by the Minister of Transportation, Gilles de Robien. In his talk, he spoke of Sister Rosalie's close collaboration with civil authorities for the good of all in need. As Monsieur de Robien represents civil government and its views of assistance for its less fortunate members, we cite him more extensively:

As Vice-President of the National Council for towns and urban development since 1998, I have a special understanding of the way Sister Rosalie worked for the poor by using all the help the State and society could provide but also by creating, at the grass-roots level, and against all odds, an irreplaceable network of personal presence. At a time of great political instability during which religious institutions had their fierce detractors, Sister Rosalie never wavered. She used every bureau of public assistance that existed but avoided all pointless disputes that might in any way prevent her setting up or maintaining a movement to help and support those who were poor. For two centuries, the State has provided long-term services; it will never be able, however, to dispense with individual, private, and civic initiative, especially when unexpected circumstances call for emergency aid.

Concretely and free from any form of ideology, Sister Rosalie devoted herself to reconciling the different classes of society and to working for the recognition of each person's dignity, in the face of scorn, mistrust and exclusion on all sides... She recognized only two categories of people: those who need to receive help and those who can, should, and above all, need to give it. In bringing together two worlds that wished to ignore each other and making people meet in such a way that it was impossible to say who brought greater benefit to the other, Sister Rosalie, in a simple but extraordinary way, was able to promote an experience that proved contagious! She was one of the founding figures of Catholic social action, as we can see from her contacts with Frédéric Ozanam or

Félicité [Robert] de La Mennais in 1833. Even if she preferred to remain pragmatic and close to the action, as we would say today, her influence extended to the intellectual and political circles of her time.

...we have not finished drawing, from Sister Rosalie's convictions, the intuitions which allow each person to discover his or her role in the society of the epoch. By a different route, she came to develop a delicate conscience akin to that of the young magistrate of the era, Alexis de Tocqueville, who discovered American democracy while studying that country's penal system. He was a visionary who could anticipate the symbolic concept of "a democracy where people are close to each other through listening, sharing, and commitment," one which has confidence "in governing a country at the local level."

Recently, in the church of Saint-Médard... there was a poster announcing the Beatification of Sister Rosalie which said, "The visage of Sister Rosalie, for whom charity was the first concern, responds to the needs of men and women of our day. Today, more than ever before, people feel the need to love and to be loved. The paradox of our modern society, intoxicated by ever more sophisticated means of communication, is this: the poor are not so much people who have nothing as people who have nobody with whom they can share." Allow a Minister of the Republic to go one step further and say, "The most important way of building a friendly society whose members are united and show solidarity, is by putting concern and compassion for other people into the hearts of our fellow citizens." May Sister Rosalie find many to emulate her!⁷⁵⁸

On 9 November Pope John Paul II solemnly beatified Sister Rosalie Rendu in Saint Peter's Square. That morning, under a Roman

⁷⁵⁸ Gilles de Robien, in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 495-496.

sun, thousands of pilgrims gathered to witness five Beatifications. In addition to Sister Rosalie, the Holy Father also declared Blessed:

- Valentin Paquay (1828-1905), Priest of the Order of Friars Minor (Belgium);
- Juan Nepomuceno Zegrí y Moreno (1831-1905), Priest and Founder of the Sisters of Charity of Mercy (Spain);
- Luigi Maria Monti, (1825-1900), Priest and Founder of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Conception (Italy);
- Bonificia Rodríguez Castro (1837-1905), Religious and Foundress of the Congregation of the Servants of Saint Joseph (Spain).⁷⁵⁹

The Beatification, properly so called, took place after the penitential rite of the Mass. During the Liturgy of the Word, each Postulator and bishop, of the place represented by the candidates, addressed the Holy Father and asked him to beatify the future Blesseds presented to him. Cardinal Lustiger presented Sister Rosalie. Pope John Paul II then solemnly proclaimed “Blessed Sister Rosalie Rendu” and set 7 February as her feast day.



Unveiling of Sister Rosalie's portrait during the Beatification in Saint Peter's Square on 9 November 2003.
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

⁷⁵⁹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, No. 46, 12 November 2003, 1.

Immediately following the Holy Father's declaration, the portraits of the newly Beatified, hanging from the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica, were unveiled one after the other, from left to right. Sister Rosalie was in the place she always preferred, last.

The Holy Father then gave his homily, "The Church is composed of living stones held together by the cement of charity." In it he spoke of the newly Beatified saying, "The saints are, in a special way, the precious stones of this spiritual temple. Sanctity, the fruit of the unceasing work of the Spirit of God, shines forth in the new Blessed." Pope John Paul II then spoke of each newly Beatified. Of Sister Rosalie, he said:

In an era troubled by social conflicts, Rosalie Rendu joyfully became a servant to the poorest, restoring dignity to each one by providing material help, education, and the teaching of the Christian mystery, [urging] Frédéric Ozanam to place himself at the service of the poor. Her charity was inventive. Where did she draw the strength to carry out so many things? In her intense prayer life and the continuous praying of the Rosary, which she never abandoned. Her secret was simple: to see the face of Christ in every man and woman, as a true Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul and like another Sister of her epoch, Saint Catherine Labouré. Let us give thanks for the witness of charity the Vincentian Family gives unceasingly to the world!⁷⁶⁰

The ceremony ended with the Angelus after which Pope John Paul II addressed each language group represented by the new Blessed. The celebration for the Vincentian Family, however, did not end there. The following morning, 10 November, Cardinal Lustiger presided at a Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of Blessed Sister Rosalie at the church of Saint Gregory VII. Monseigneur Guy-Marie Bagnard, Bishop of Belley-Ars, the region in which Sister Rosalie was born, who had led a pilgrimage to the Beatification, concelebrated. In his homily, Cardinal Lustiger mentioned one of Sister Rosalie's virtues that he considered capital, her ability to adapt and to change. He said:

⁷⁶⁰ John Paul II, in *Ibid.*, 8-9.

...it is the strength of the Redeemer which animated Sister Rosalie and which allowed her to tirelessly face unheard of changes. During her 50 years in the Mouffetard district, many things changed. Many things changed in the political and social life of this era as it also did in the intellectual life and the manner in which people lived their lives. Sister Rosalie was not attached to her work. Rather, she worked to accomplish the Will of God.⁷⁶¹



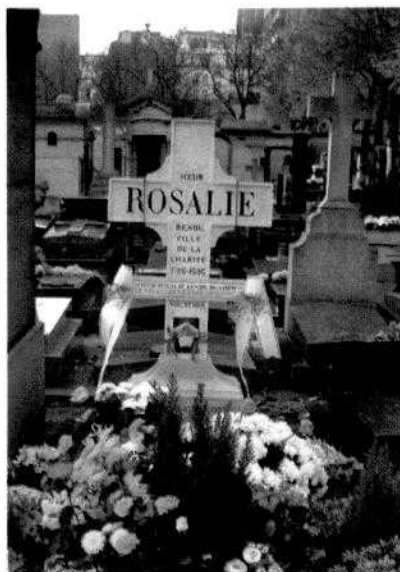
Sister Evelyne Franc, D.C. (left), and Sister Juana Elizondo, D.C. (right), leaving Saint Peter's Square at conclusion of the Beatification Mass.
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

Thus ended three days of celebration in honor of this simple, humble Daughter of Charity who never sought to draw attention to herself but accomplished ordinary things extraordinarily well and was beatified so that her message could reach yet more persons desirous of sharing her Vincentian Mission of service to those who were poor. One week later, the celebration moved to Paris where those who had kept her memory alive for nearly 150 years could honor their "Mother."

⁷⁶¹ Lustiger, *Echos*, 506.

A joyous Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame-de-Paris on Sunday, 16 November, at 6:30 P.M. Once again, Cardinal Lustiger, who had been an integral part of the entire Beatification celebration, presided. This was different, however. This was his diocese and his flock crowded into the cathedral to honor a woman whose "diocese" had been the city's poorest quarter and whose flock had been her "beloved poor." These were the people to whom she belonged. Her reputation for sanctity was passed from generation to generation of Parisians, many of them descendants of those whom Sister Rosalie had served. The Mass included a presentation on her life as well as the Cardinal's homily, and a final expression of gratitude from the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Evelyne Franc.

The previous Tuesday, 11 November, which was a holiday in France, allowed hundreds of people to come and pray at her grave and place flowers on it. A craftsman had made a wooden plaque, to suspend from the stone cross marking her grave, proclaiming "Blessed Sister Rosalie." This inscription would eventually be engraved on the stone. Those who loved her for so long, however, could not wait. Her long-awaited Beatification had to be proclaimed as soon as it was officially allowed.



Gravesite immediately after Sister Rosalie's Beatification.

Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

Life returned to normal. Sister Rosalie, however, is not forgotten. People still continue to come to her grave and also to the little side chapel in her honor in the church of Saint-Médard. One of the more touching examples of this uninterrupted devotion was related to Sister Marie-Anne Latscha, D.C., Assistant to the Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Beatification, by a group of persons who voluntarily tend the grave. They said that one day an old man, who was obviously very poor, approached the grave. He asked why there were so many more flowers. When they told him that Sister Rosalie had been beatified, this man, who perhaps never went to church, leapt for joy and, running from the cemetery, shouted to every passerby, "Our Mother is beatified; our Mother is beatified."

Throughout Sister Rosalie's life, and after, the words "light" and "fire" have frequently been used to describe her. Vincent de Paul told his Sons and Daughters, "If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame."⁷⁶² Sister Rosalie was a light of hope in the darkness of despair. All her love for God, for those who were poor and those who were rich, for her friends and collaborators, for her sister companions, and for the Company came forth from her heart of fire.

Prior to a Beatification, the body of the candidate is exhumed. This was done for Sister Rosalie on 17 October 2003, in the presence of all the required civil and religious authorities. Sometimes the remains are intact, as was the case for Saint Catherine Labouré; others are skeletal, as with Saint Louise de Marillac. When Sister Rosalie's coffin was opened, it contained only "mixture," an ash-like substance. In the ash, there remained the cross from her side rosary, symbol of her spirituality which, like that of Louise de Marillac, was centered on Jesus Crucified; a few beads recalling her devotion to the rosary that, as the Holy Father would point out in his homily, a few weeks later, she always had with her. In addition, there was a little bit of fabric from the sleeve of her Habit and a piece of her apron, the sign she never set aside, symbols of "the Daughter of Charity, totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor."

Blessed Sister Rosalie was, indeed, on fire with love. Thus, in the end, she was completely consumed by the fire of Divine Love.

⁷⁶² CED, 12:307-308.

Chronology of Significant Dates and Events
Prepared by Francine Brown, D.C.

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincetian Family	Political and Social Events
1785	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 February: Marriage of Marie-Anne Laracine to Jean-Antoine Rendu in church of Lancrans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Pius VI (1775-1799). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Sister Renée Dubois (1784-1790). • Superior General – Antoine Jacquier (1762-1787). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 May 1774: Louis XVI succeeds his grandfather, Louis XV. • 16 August 1777: France declares bankruptcy.
1786	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 September: Birth of Jeanne-Marie Rendu at Confort. Baptized in parish church of Lancrans. Jacques-André Emery, S.S., godfather by proxy. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial crisis and civil unrest worsen.
1787		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May: Bishop Joseph-Marie Paget begins episcopacy of diocese of Geneva-Annency. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 September: Louis XVI recalls parlement.
1788	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 September: Birth of Marie-Claudine Rendu. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Jean-Felix Cayla de la Garde (1788-1800). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 July: Troops clash with rioters demanding food.

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1789			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 July: Sacking of Saint-Lazare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 June: Third Estate declares itself the National Assembly. • 9 July: Constituent Assembly begins drafting a Constitution. • 14 July: Storming of the Bastille. • Revolution of 1789 begins. • 2 November: Confiscation of Church property.
1790	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rendu family hides clergy in their home on several occasions during the Revolution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 November: Decree obliging the clergy of France to take "The Civil Oath of the Clergy" in support of the civil Constitution. Refusal was punishable by death. Many "Non-swearing" priests and bishops sought refuge in Switzerland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Antoinette Deleau (1790-1804). • 426 Houses of Daughters of Charity and 4,000+ Daughters of Charity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal of use of guillotine as a humane method of execution.
1792				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 August: Abolition of Monarchy. • 21 September: First Republic (1792-1804). • National Convention (1792-1795). • 11 December: Convention convicts Louis XVI of treason.

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1793	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 May: Birth of Jeanne-Antoinette Rendu. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before 1793: 461 houses of Daughters of Charity and 3,300 Daughters of Charity. • Suppression of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. • Suppression of the Ladies of Charity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 January: Beheading of Louis XVI in Paris. • 6 April: National Convention creates 12 member Committee of Public Safety. • 6 September: Members take office. Robespierre most dominant. • Reign of Terror begins. • 16 October: Beheading of Queen Marie-Antoinette in Paris.
1794	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 1794-1795: Jeanne-Marie receives First Communion from pastor of Lancrans – Monsieur Collieux. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 July: Robespierre dies and The Reign of Terror ends. • General Bonaparte drives British from Toulon.
1795				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directory (1795-1799). • October: Bonaparte takes command of troops for the interior of France.
1796	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 March: Birth of Jeanne-Françoise Rendu. • 12 May: Jean-Antoine Rendu dies at age 33. • 19 July: Jeanne-Françoise dies at age 4 months. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Napoléon weds Rose de Beauharnais (future Empress Josephine). • Bonaparte begins military campaigns against Italy, Austria, and Britain. A brilliant success which turns to disaster.

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1799	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attends Boarding School in Carouge. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9-10 November: Bonaparte enters Paris – end of The French Revolution, beginning of Consulate (1799-1804). Napoléon 1st Consul. More authoritarian than Louis XVI.
1800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (or 1801) Leaves Confort to continue her education with the Dames Maçon (Ursulines) of Gex. Meets the Daughters of Charity of the Hospital of Gex. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pope Pius VII (1800-1823). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jean-Felix Cayla de la Garde dies. Vicar General – François Brunet (1800-1806). 22 December Decree of Minister of the Interior, Antoine Chaptal, authorizing the Daughters of Charity to accept candidates to be trained for the service of the sick. December: Seminary (Novitiate) of the Daughters of Charity reopens in Paris. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrative reforms making France a modern nation. Rules as civilian but authoritarian regime. Military campaigns continue.
1801			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 January: Daughters of Charity begin using 11, rue du Vieux-Colombier as their Motherhouse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concordat with Roman Catholic Church. Napoleonic Code.

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1802	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 February: Begins Postulancy in Gex under the direction of Sister Suzanne Palme, Sister Servant of the hospital. • 25 May: Jeanne-Marie arrives at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris with 2 others to begin the novitiate (Seminary). • Around November: Leaves the Motherhouse to complete her seminary at Maison Saint-Martin on rue Francis-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – at 93 years-of-age – Jean-Baptiste de Belloy-Morangle (1802-1808). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 October: Napoleonic decree seeming to re-establish the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Not implemented until 1809. 	
1803	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returns to the Motherhouse to receive the Habit. • 10 May: Returns to Maison Saint-Martin as first mission. • 1803-1804: "Supernatural test." 			

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1804		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> December: Pius VII in Paris for Napoleon's coronation as Emperor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 January: Sister Antoinette Deleau dies. Superioress General – Sister Thérèse Deschaux (1804-1809). 27 May: Decree re-establishing the Congregation of the Mission for missions outside of France only. December: Pius VII visits the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity at 11, rue du Vieux-Colombier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 May: Proclamation of French Empire. 4 December: Bonaparte assumes title and is crowned Emperor Napoléon I – end of Consulate and beginning of the First Empire (1804-1814).
1805			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 March: Daughters of Charity resume wearing traditional habit with the cornette. Liturgy presided by Cardinal Joseph Fesch and attended by Letizia Bonaparte, mother of Napoléon. 21 houses listed in Paris. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military conquests throughout Europe. France dominant power on the Continent. Britain remains as chief rival.
1806			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vicar General – Claude-Joseph Placard (1806-1807). 	

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1807	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May-June: Sister Rosalie, age 21, pronounces vows for the first time at 5 years of vocation. • 24 September: Birth of Armand de Melun, close collaborator and friend of Sister Rosalie, and his twin, Anatole, in Picardy, France. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September: 260 houses of Daughters of Charity and 1,598 Daughters of Charity. • 16 September: Claude-Joseph Placiard dies. • Vicar General – Dominique-François Hanon (1807-1816). • October: Submission of Daughter of Charity statutes to Napoleonic government omitting constitutional dependence on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. • November: Name "Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul" reserved to the Company with government approval. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 September: Napoléon convokes a General Chapter of Charitable Institutions of Women. • 27 November: Convocation opens at the Tuileries presided by Letizia Bonaparte, Napoléon's mother and attended by Cardinal Fesch, his uncle.
1808		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – seat remains vacant until 1810. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 September: Decree suppressing the Congregation of the Mission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 February: Decree granting governmental financial support to the Daughters of Charity.

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1809			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March: Dominique Hanon, C.M., sends corrected statutes to the Napoleonic government regarding Superior General for the Daughters of Charity. • 17 April: Sister Thérèse Deschaux dies. • Superioress General – Sister Antoinette Beaudoin (April-December), resigned. • Superioress General – Sister Judith Mousteyro (1809-1810), resigned. • 8 November: Napoleonic decree legally re-establishing the Company of the Daughters of Charity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 February: Napoléon decrees all communities of women to submit their Rule for government approval indicating being subject to local bishop. • September: Imperial decree revoking 27 May decree re-establishing the Congregation of the Mission. • 8 November: Imperial Decree granting legal recognition to the Company of the Daughters of Charity.
1810		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Jean-Sifrein Maury (1810-1817) – named by Napoléon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Durgueilh (1810-1815); not validly elected; resigned in 1815. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Napoléon marries Princess Marie-Louise, daughter of Emperor Francis I and Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, after divorcing Josephine.
1811	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 April: Jacques-André Emery, S.S., dies at age 79. 			

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1812				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June: <i>Grande Armée</i> invades Russia. Terrible losses on both sides. • Napoléon leaves his troops to bolster French forces in Paris. • November: Rout for the <i>Grande Armée</i>.
1813			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March: Construction and renovation work begins on Hôtel de Châtillon at 140, rue du Bac. • 23 April: Birth of Frédéric Ozanam in Milan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition of European nations to fight the "War of Liberation." • Allies enter Paris. • 25 March: Imperial decree grants the Hôtel de Châtillon at 140, rue du Bac to the Daughters of Charity as their Motherhouse.
1814	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie pleads for the life of a condemned Russian soldier. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 March: Allies enter Paris. • Military defeat and abdication of Napoléon I; fall of the Napoleonic government. Exiled to Elba. • Louis XVIII – Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy (1814-1830).

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1815	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie becomes superior (Sister Servant) at rue des Francs-Bourgeois (age 28-29). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 January: Papal Brief of Pius VII concerning leadership and government of Daughters of Charity. • 20 February: Paul-Thérèse-David d'Astros, Vicar General of Archdiocese of Paris delivers Papal Brief. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 March: election of Superioress General. • Superioress General – Sister Elisabeth Baudet (1815-1818). • 29 June: Motherhouse of Daughters of Charity relocates to 140, rue du Bac. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 March: Napoléon and a handful of followers arrive in Cannes. • 20 March: Triumphant entry into Paris. Louis XVIII fled. Beginning <i>Rule of 100 Days</i>. • 12-18 June: Loses decisive battle to British at Waterloo. • Exiled to Saint Helena. • 5 May: Napoléon I dies.
1816		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1816-1819: while a seminarian at Saint-Sulpice Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, future founder of the Daughters of Our Lady of Loretto, comes to know and collaborate with Sister Rosalie. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 February: Louis XVIII restores the Congregation of the Mission. • 24 April: Dominique Hanon dies. • Vicar General – Marie-Charles Verbert (1816-1819). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 February: Decree of Louis XVIII restoring the Congregation of the Mission.
1817		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Alexandre-Angelique Talleyrand de Perigord (1817-1821). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregation of the Mission takes possession of the former Hôtel of the duke of Lorges at 95, rue de Sèvres. 	
1818			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Madeleine Besnard (1818-1820). 	

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1819	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maison Saint-Martin on rue des Franks-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel moves to rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vicar General – Charles-Cathelin Boujard (1819-1827). • Ferdinand Bailly pronounces vows in the Congregation of the Mission. 	
1820			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Catherine Amblard (1820-1827). 	
1821		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen (1821-1839). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 May: Napoléon dies at Sainte-Hélène.
1823	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie assists the Daughters of Our Lady of Loretto upon their arrival in Paris. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Leo XII (1823-1829). 		
1824				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 September: Louis XVIII dies. • 27 September: Succession of Charles X to the throne.
1825	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie encourages and supports Pierre-Bienvenue Noailles in his efforts of establishing the Pauvres-Prêtres (Poor Priests) community. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jean-Léon Le Prevost arrives in Paris at age 22. 	

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1826	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February: Jules Gossin, founder of the <i>Society of Saint-François-Régis</i> seeks Sister Rosalie as a collaborator. 			
1827	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 January: School at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois – 221 students and 2 sisters. • 1 January: Ouvroir at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois – 28 girls and 1 sister. • Sister Rosalie tries to prevent Daughters of Our Lady of Loretto from breaking away from superiors in Bordeaux. • 4 December: Sister Rosalie assists the newly arrived community of Augustinians of the Holy Heart of Mary. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Antoinette Beaucourt (1827-1833). • Superior General – Pierre-Joseph de Wailly (1827-1828). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 January: 4 schools for girls in the XIth arrondissement.
1828	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Sisters at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 			
1829	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Sisters at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Pius VIII (1829-1830). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Dominique Salhorgne (1829-1835). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely hard winter in France.

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1830	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revolution of 1830. • July: At the height of the fighting, Sister Rosalie responds to the appeal of Madame Baccoffe de Montmahaut and searches for her missing husband, Louis-Joseph Baccoffe de Montmahaut, an officer in the Civil Guard, who is severely wounded. Rescues him. • Placement of Postulants at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 April: Solemn translation of the relics of Saint Vincent de Paul to the chapel of the new Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission at Saint-Lazare. • 18-19 July: Apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Sister Catherine Labouré in the chapel of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity. • 27 November: 2nd apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Sister Catherine Labouré in the Chapel of rue du Bac. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July: Smallpox outbreak begins in France. • 25 July: Publication of The Four Ordinances by Charles X. • 26 July: Police implement new ordinances against the press. • 27, 28, 29 July Revolution: <i>les Trois Glorieuses</i> – working class riots in Paris. • 2 August: Abdication of Charles X. • 9 August: Crowning of Louis-Philippe "King of the French," July Monarchy (1830-1848). • New wave of anti-clericalism begins.
1831	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February: Archbishop de Quélen and other clergy find refuge at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846). • 15 February: Pillage of Archbishop de Quélen's residence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 February: Archbishop de Quélen finds refuge at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. • 15 February: Archbishop's residence pillaged. • 5 November: 18-year-old Frédéric Ozanam arrives in Paris from Lyons to study at the Sorbonne. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and civil unrest continues.

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1832	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefect of Police issues a warrant for Sister Rosalie's arrest. • Difficulties with Superiors because of her actions during and after the Revolution. • Cyprien Lophe, a law student in Paris, meets Sister Rosalie. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 March: First case of cholera appears in Paris. • 26 March-9 April: Cholera epidemic claims 10,000 victims in Paris. • 5-6 June: Additional bloody conflicts.
1833	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 23 April: Begins mentoring the first members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul at the house of charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superiress General – Sister Marie Boulet (1833-1839). • 23 April: Founding of the Conference of Charity by 6 young members of the History Conference in the parish of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont. • Emmanuel Bailly is the 1st president of the group. • During this year Jean-Léon Le Prevost comes into contact with Frédéric Ozanam and other members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; becomes the oldest member and the first not to be a student; meets Sister Rosalie. 	

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1834			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 February: By unanimous vote, Conference of Charity placed under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul at the suggestion of Jean-Léon Le Prevost and becomes known as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. • 4 February: By unanimous vote, Conference of Charity placed under the protection of the Blessed Virgin at the suggestion of Frédéric Ozanam. • May: At least 70 members in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April: Riots in Paris, Lyons and other cities.

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1835	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor Dewulf, a medical student, meets Sister Rosalie and later becomes her personal physician. • Cyprien Loppe completes his studies, leaves Paris, and moves to Boulogne-sur-Mer. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February: Decision reached to divide the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul into two sections in Paris: Saint-Étienne-du-Mont and Saint-Sulpice. • May: Dominique Salhorgne, C.M., resigns as Superior General during the General Assembly. • 20 August: Election of Jean-Baptiste-Rigobert Nozo as Superior General (1835-1842). • First <i>Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul</i>. Published by Emmanuel Bailly, Publisher, in 1836. 	
1836	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 May: Sister Rosalie seeks to place a former Carmelite at Bon-Saveur of Caen. Beginning of 13 years of collaboration between Sister Rosalie and Mother Renée-Caroline Le Chasseur for the placement of priests, religious, and lay people at Bon-Saveur. Works in close collaboration with bishops, religious superiors, and families of the sick. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooding in Paris, including La Bièvre river.

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1837	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter 1837-1838: Meets Armand de Melun courtesy of a letter of introduction from Madame Anne-Sophie Symonov Swetchine. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe winter in Paris.
1838	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe de Montmahaut, 6 years-of-age, visits Sister Rosalie for the first time. • January: Sister Rosalie learns that Cyprien Loppe is engaged. • February: Monsieur Daniel-Deray takes over bookkeeping duties for those admitted to Bon-Sauveur through Sister Rosalie's intervention. • 30 April: Cyprien Loppe marries Louise-Florence Lefebvre. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armand de Melun opens the Society of the Friends of Children. • Jean-Baptiste Nozo, C.M., begins to confront the case of Ferdinand Bailly, C.M. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe winter in Paris for a second year.
1839	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June: Birth of Cyprien and Louise Loppe's first child. • August: Sister Rosalie assists in the placement of a Vincentian priest at Bon-Sauveur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeanne Jugan founds the Little Sisters of the Poor in Saint-Sevran, France. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Carrère (1839-1845). • By this year, Armand de Melun is an active member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and also opens the Agricultural Camp for Orphans. 	

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1840	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie works with the newly re-established Ladies of Charity. • 30 July: Sister Rosalie writes to Archbishop Affre regarding the Bailly, publisher, case. • 13 August: Sister Rosalie writes again to Archbishop Affre regarding the Bailly case. • 13-17 August: Sister Rosalie visits Archbishop Affre and Jean-Marie Aladel, C.M. • 17 August: Sister Rosalie writes for final time to Archbishop Affre regarding the Bailly, publisher, case. • Successfully persuades Archbishop Affre not to issue an interdict against Fathers Étienne, Aladel, and Le Go, Assistants General of the Congregation of the Mission. • At some point during or after 1840, Sister Rosalie begins a social center for young women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: Archbishop of Paris – Denis-Auguste Affre (1840-1848). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establishment of the Ladies of Charity in the parish of Saint-Médard. • Armand de Melun, in collaboration with Jean-Léon Le Prevost and other members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, open Social Centers for boys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 December: Return of the ashes of Napoléon I.
1841			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 June: Frédéric Ozanam marries Amélie Soulaacroix in Lyons. 	
1843	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie opens an <i>ouvroir</i> at 5, rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Jean-Baptiste Étienne (1843-1874). 	

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1844	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saint-Marcel Day Nursery opens; blessed by Archbishop Affre. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jules Cossin becomes 2nd President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. • <i>Work of the Holy Family</i>, founded by Jean-Léon Le Prevost and confreres of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; begins in parish of Saint-Sulpice. 	
1845	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie encourages the beginnings of <i>Les Amaltes de la Charité</i> (<i>Annals of Charity</i>) founded by Armand de Melun. • Birth of Cyprien and Louise Loppé's second child. • July: Sister Marie-Emile Costalin arrives at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Mazin (1845-1851). • Jean-Leon Le Prevost founds the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul. • 24 July: Birth of Frédéric and Amélie Ozanam's only child, Marie. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe winter in Paris.

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1846	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Rosalie ill for two months. • Sister Rosalie helps to place a child from Boulogne-sur-Mer in Paris. • Sister Rosalie assists 5 Polish Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul expelled from Poland upon their arrival in Paris. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Pius IX (1846-1878). 		
1847	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 September: Sister Angélique (Euphrasie) Tissot arrives at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Famine in France.

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1848	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revolution of 1848. • House on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois becomes a refuge and field hospital. • Sister Rosalie helps fugitive officer escape. • Sister Rosalie saves the life of security police officer. • Difficulties with Superiors because of her actions during the Revolution. • Sister Rosalie collaborates with the Work of the Holy Family at Saint-Médard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 June: Archbishop Denis-Auguste Affre mortally wounded on the barricade at entrance to Saint-Antoine district. • 26-27 June: Archbishop Affre dies of his wounds. • Archbishop of Paris – Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour (1848-1857). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 February: Frédéric Ozanam urges Catholics to adopt a preferential option for the working class and to support efforts toward democracy. • 1848-1849: Work of the Holy Family expands to the parish of Saint-Médard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22-24 February: Working class riots once again in Paris. • 24 February: Abdication of Louis-Philippe. • 25 February: Beginning of Second Republic (1848-1852) with provisional government. • Diminishment of anti-clerical sentiments. • 17 May: General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac arrives in Paris. • 4 June: Election of Victor Hugo as delegate to Constituent Assembly. • 23-26 June: Insurrection explodes with barricades at rue Mouffetard and near rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. • 10 December: Presidential election – Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte defeats Ledru-Rollin and General Cavaignac. • 20 December: Succession of Louis-Napoléon to the Presidency.

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1849	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Outvrois</i> begin. • Madame Mallet opens orphanage on rue Pascal. • Cyprien Loppe instrumental in the establishment of Daughters of Charity where he lives in Boulogne-sur-Mer. • Sister Rosalie assists 2 Little Sisters of the Poor when they arrive in Paris to open a hospice for the elderly. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May: Cholera epidemic. • 19 May: Election of Armand de Melun as delegate to the Legislative Assembly. • Re-election of Victor Hugo. • 9 July: Victor Hugo delivers his <i>Discourse on Misery (Discours sur la Misère)</i>.
1850	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May: Sister Françoise de Paul de Virieu begins Postulancy at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 March: Falloux law gives Catholics the right to set up schools. • 12 April: Adoption of Melun's legislation establishing social centers for young prisoners. • 22 April: Adoption of Melun's legislation addressing unsanitary housing. • 10 December: Adoption of Melun's legislation facilitating marriage for couples who were indigent.

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1851	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 March: Final correspondence between Cyprien Leppe and Sister Rosalie. • Sister Louise-Clémence-Claire Saillard begins Postulancy at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. • Sister Rosalie sends Sisters to serve children at orphanage on rue Pascal. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Elisabeth Montcellet (1851-1857). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 January: Adoption of Melun's legislation providing legal assistance for those in need. • 22 February: Adoption of Melun's legislation regarding apprentices. • 30 June: Adoption of Melun's legislation creating credit unions. • 7 August: Adoption of Melun's legislation reforming hospitals and hospices.
1852	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: Sister Victoire Neyroud, D.C., dies, Sister Rosalie's cousin. • 27 February: Awarded Cross of the Legion of Honor by Napoléon III. • 28 February: Receives Cross of the Legion of Honor from Monsieur de Persigny and Monsieur de Morny. • Moves orphanage to larger location on rue Mémilmontant. • Opens Shelter for the Elderly on rue Pascal. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 April-13 November: Sister Louise-Clémence-Claire Saillard enters the Seminary at the Motherhouse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 January: New French Constitution. • 7 November: Second Empire Napoléon III (1852-1870).

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincetian Family	Political and Social Events
1853	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November: Sight begins to fail and health worsens. • 3 November: Superiress General, Sister Elisabeth Montcellet, seeks Sister Rosalie's assistance in placing a woman. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 September: Frédéric Ozanam dies at age 40 in Marseille. • 24 September: Funeral and burial of Frédéric Ozanam in Paris. 	
1854	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 March: Welcomes Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie to the Day Nursery. • November-December: Day Shelter for Children opens. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 March: Emperor Napoléon III and his wife, Empress Eugénie, visit the Day Nursery on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. • Cholera epidemic. • Crimean War – France and England war against Russia.
1855	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mademoiselle Baccoffe visits Sister Rosalie for the last time. • October: Cataract surgery. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sister Françoise de Paul de Virieu establishes the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland. 	

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1856	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 Sisters at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. • 4 February: Marie-Anne Laracine Rendu dies at age 87, mother of Sister Rosalie. • 4-5 February: Severe chills and fever strike Sister Rosalie as lung congestion worsens. • 6 February: Sister Rosalie receives Extreme Unction; falls into a coma. • 7 February, 11 AM: Sister Rosalie dies at age 69, after a brief acute illness. • 9 February: Sister Rosalie's funeral from the church of Saint-Médard and burial in Montparnasse Cemetery. Attended by an estimated 50,000 people of all sectors of society. • 16 February: Eugène Rendu calls for a biography of Sister Rosalie. • February: Announcement in <i>Annals of Clarity</i> of Melun's intention to write biography of Sister Rosalie. • 27 July: Sister Rosalie's remains are transferred to a single grave near the cemetery entrance. • 1 October: Saint-Rosalie Shelter for the elderly opens. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 February: Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement seeks authorization to have a bust of Sister Rosalie sculpted by artist Hippolyte Maindron. • 6 March: Birth of an Imperial prince to Emperor Napoléon III and his wife, Empress Eugénie. • 28 June: Emperor Napoléon III authorizes the completed sculpture to be placed in the assembly room of the town hall. • 22 December: Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement dedicates bust of Sister Rosalie in the town hall.

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1857	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of Armand de Melun's biography of Sister Rosalie. • Armand de Melun marries Mademoiselle Rochemare. A daughter, Anne de Melun, is born to the couple (date unknown) but dies before 1862. • 10 September: Anne-Sophie Symonov Swetchine dies at age 75. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – François-Nicholas-Madeleine Morlot (1857-1862). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Eulalie Devos (1857-1860). • Sister Alix-Françoise Dubouays de Cousbouc founds mission of the Daughters of Charity in Persia after serving in an army field hospital in Constantinople. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 October: General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac dies at age 55.
1859		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abbé Le Rebours purchases land on rue de Gentilly to build a chapel in honor of Sister Rosalie's patroness, Saint Rosalie of Palermo. 		
1860			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Elisabeth Montcellet (1860-1866). • House of Charity opens in Confort. 	
1862	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth of Joseph de Melun, son of Armand de Melun. 			
1863		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Georges Darboy (1863-1871). 		

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1866			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Félicité Lequette (1866-1872). 	
1867		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demolition of Saint Rosalie chapel to make way for "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie." • 1867-69: Rebuilding of chapel on Boulevard Auguste Blanqui. • Abbé Le Rebours places stained glass window honoring both Saint Rosalie and Sister Rosalie behind main altar. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie."
1870				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Republic (1870-1940).
1871		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert (1871-1886). 		
1872	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 March, Easter: Joseph de Melun, son of Armand de Melun, dies at age 10. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Louise Lequette (1872-1878). 	
1874			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Eugène Boré (1874-1878). 	
1877	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 June: Armand de Melun dies at age 69. 			

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1878		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Juhel (1878-1880). • Superior General – Antoine Fiat (1878-1914). 	
1880			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Derieux (1880-1887). • Expulsion of Daughters of Charity from house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. • New location for Sisters at 32, rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire; with the name "Maison Sœur Rosalie." • October: School reopens, as do all the other works from rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expulsion of Jesuits from France; only congregations with authorization may teach. • Removal from view of bust of Sister Rosalie and placement in attic of town hall due to anti-clerical sentiments. • Removal of bust from attic and placement in Sister Rosalie's tiny office at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.
1885				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 May: Victor Hugo dies at age 83.
1886		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – François-Marie-Benjamin Richard de la Vergne (1886-1908). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process of Beatification begins for Louise de Marillac. 	
1887			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Léonide Havard (1887-1893). 	
1893			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Larmatine (1893-1899). 	

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1899			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Kieffer (1899-1910). 	
1903		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Pius X (1903-1914). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on 3, rue de l'Épée-de-Bois partially demolished. 	
1904			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Hospice Sœur Rosalie is built for the elderly at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of bust of Sister Rosalie to the Bureau of Public Assistance.
1910			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Antoinette Mauche (1910-1912). 	
1912			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Maurice (1912-1918). 	
1914		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Emile Villette (1914-1916). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 June: Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. • 14 August: World War I begins.
1916			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vicar General – Alfred Louwyck (1916-1918). 	
1918			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Emile Maurice (1918-1921). • Superior General – François Verdier (1918-1933). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Troops arrive in France. • 11 November: Armistice.
1919				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 June: Treaty of Versailles.

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1922		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Pius XI (1922-1939). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Mathilde Incheulin (1922-1928). 	
1928			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie Lebrun (1928-1934). 	
1929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of the final edition (13th) of Armand de Melun's biography of Sister Rosalie. 			
1933			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Charles-Léon Souvay (1933-1939). 	
1934		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 March: Canonization of Louise de Marillac. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Marie-Joseph Chaplain (1934-1940). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of bust of Sister Rosalie to Museum of Public Assistance on quai de la Tournelle.
1939		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Pius XII (1939-1958). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vicar General – Édouard Robert (1939-1947). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 September: World War II begins after German invasion of Poland.
1940			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Laure Decq (1940-1946). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • German Occupation; Vichy France (1940-1944).
1944				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberation of France; Provisional Government led by Charles de Gaulle (1944-1946).
1946			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Antoinette Blanchot (1946-1953). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fourth Republic (1946-1958).

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1947			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – William Slattery (1947-1968). 	
1949		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Maurice Felin (1949-1966). 		
1951		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October: Informative Process announcement asking for letters, writings or recollections of Sister Rosalie. • 18 December: Appointment of 3 member Historical Commission. • 24 December: Informative Process officially opens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 February: Sister Antoinette Blanchot and the General Council of the Daughters of Charity decide to ask Cardinal Maurice Felin to open the Informative Process and appoint a Postulator of the Cause in view of the possible Beatification of Sister Rosalie. 	
1952		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 December: Naming of Tribunal members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 February: Instantaneous cure of Sister Thérèse Béquet, D.C., after a novena to Sister Rosalie. 	

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1953	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of Sister Rosalie biography by Henri Desmet, C.M. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 January – 17 February: Official Diocesan Process of Beatification of Sister Rosalie opens at Saint-Lazare. • 11 June: Closing session of Diocesan Process. • 23 June: Official documents presented in Rome. • 24 November: Cause of Beatification opens in Rome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Francine Lepicard (1953-1962). 	
1954		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Frédéric Ozanam's Cause of Beatification. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 1954: Viet Minh defeat the French at Dien Bien Phu leading to the partition of Vietnam and the end of French influence in the region.
1956	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centenary celebrations in Paris in honor of Sister Rosalie. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henri Desmet, C.M., approaches Paris officials requesting Sister Rosalie's office be restored and refurbished. 	
1958		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope John XXIII (1958-1963). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 October: Fifth Republic (1958-present).

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1962			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Suzanne Guillemin (1962-1968). • 1 October: Dedication of "Sœur Rosalie" Museum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 July: Algerian Independence.
1963		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Paul VI (1963-1978). • Chapel in honor of Sister Rosalie becomes Sainte-Rosalie parish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georges Allain, C.M., becomes first pastor of Sainte-Rosalie parish. 	
1966		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Pierre Veuillot (1966-1968). 		
1968		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – François Marty (1968-1981). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Christiane Chiron (1968-1974). • Superior General – James Richardson (1968-1980). 	
1974		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 February: Approval of Decree on Sister Rosalie's writings. • 15 March: Historical Commission receives Study of the Cause. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Lucie Rogé (1974-1985). 	

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1978		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope John Paul I (1978-1978). • Pope John Paul II (1978-2005). 		
1980			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Richard McCullen (1980-1992). 	
1981		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archbishop of Paris – Jean-Marie Lustiger (1981-2005). 		
1982		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 October: Beatification of Jeanne Jugan by Pope John Paul II. 		
1985			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Anne Duzan (1985-1991). 	
1987		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 May: Beatification of Pierre-François Jamet by Pope John Paul II. 		
1991			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Juana Elizondo (1991-2003). 	
1992		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 January: Decree recognizing juridical validity of the Diocesan Process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – Robert P. Maloney (1992-2004). 	
1993		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed <i>Positio</i> submitted to the Vatican. 		

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
1997		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 August: Beatification of Frédéric Ozanam by Pope John Paul II in Paris. 		
2001		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theologians of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints recognize Sister Rosalie's Heroicity of Virtue. • 20 February: Cardinals and bishops confirm Heroicity of Sister Rosalie's Virtue during their ordinary session. • 24 April: Pope John Paul II declares Decree of Heroicity of Sister Rosalie's Virtue. 		

Dates	Sister Rosalie's Life	Church Life	Vincentian Family	Political and Social Events
2003		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 April: Decree of Approbation of the cure of Sister Béquet attributable to Sister Rosalie. • 17 October: Exhumation of Sister Rosalie's remains. • 9 November: Beatification of Sister Rosalie by Pope John Paul II. • 16 November: Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame-de-Paris. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superioress General – Sister Evelyne Franc (2003-present). 	
2004			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior General – G. Gregory Gay (2004-present). 	
2006			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 June: Death of Sister Thérèse Béquet at age 93. 	

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F.19.6256. *Law of 3 messidor an XII (22 June 1804) which orders all groups known under the name of Sisters of Charity to present, within six months, their statutes and rules to be reviewed and verified by the State Counsel.*

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F.19.6343. *Sister Thérèse Deschaux requests that the name "Daughters of Charity of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul" be reserved to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Request was granted. Chapter of "Sisters of Charity" which opened on 27 November 1807.*

F.19.6344. *Decree of the Napoleonic government which seemed to assure the re-establishment of the Company of the Daughters of Charity signed by Napoléon and Portalis, Minister of Cult. October 16, 1802; Remarks of Sister Deleau concerning the house on rue du Vieux-Colombier; Number of houses in 1789 and in 1807.*

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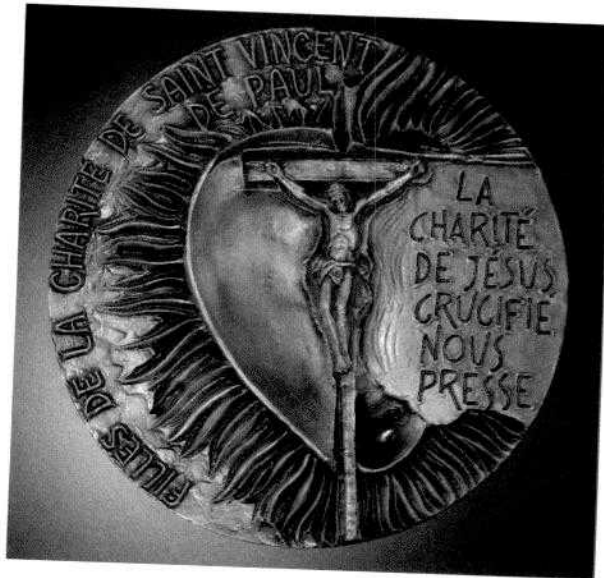
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LOUISE SULLIVAN, D.C., Professor Emeritus of Niagara University, received her bachelor of science degree in elementary education and foreign languages in 1956 from Saint Joseph College, Emmitsburg, MD. She earned her master of arts degree in French language and literature from the Catholic University of America in 1966 and her doctoral degree in French and comparative literature in 1972 from l'Université de Paris IV: Sorbonne. She is the author of several articles and books on Louise de Marillac, the Daughters of Charity, the Core Values of Vincentian Education, and the Vincentian Mission in Health Care. She has given numerous talks and presentations in the United States, Canada, Haiti, Europe and Asia on Louise and the Vincentian charism. Sister Sullivan has served as a translator/interpreter at international meetings in Paris and Rome, and was the recipient of three grants to study archival material in France relative to Vincentian heritage.



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