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 disposal. 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.” 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.

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194 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 16\textsuperscript{th} 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

\textsuperscript{435} Melun, \textit{Vie de la sœur Rosalie}, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{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.

440 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum Officium Historicum, Parisien, Ioannis 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.\footnote{Ibid.}

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.
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:

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\text{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.
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.\footnote{Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin, 4 February 1855, AFCP, 8]2 - Ro - Le 286 B2.}

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.”
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.

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 Études” (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 Bract, 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?”

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:

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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."  

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."  

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.

That very day, Ozanam wrote to Lallier to tell him of the news, "It was unanimously decided that you and Le Taillandier, as founders

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448 Ibid.
450 Procès-verbaux du Conseil Général, 21 January 1851, ASSP, Registre 111.
FONDATEURS
DE LA SOCIETÉ SAINT-VINCENT-DE-PAUL

A - Frédéric OZANAM
(1813-1853)

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.” 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.

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

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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 intellectual catholique au XIXe siècle (Paris, 2003), 239. See also, Charles Ozanam, Vie de Frédéric Ozanam, Professeur de Littérature Étrangère 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."
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.554

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

554 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." 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

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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.\textsuperscript{56}

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.\textsuperscript{57}

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


\textsuperscript{57} 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.

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.”

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.”

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

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60 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 99-100.
61 "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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{462} Melun, \textit{Vie de la sœur Rosalie}, 123-124.
\textsuperscript{463} Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, \textit{Rendu, Positio; Sommaire}, 63.
\textsuperscript{464} Boissinot, \textit{Un autre Vincent de Paul}, 105.
\textsuperscript{465} "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet," 21 July 1834, \textit{Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam}, 1:143.
\textsuperscript{466} "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Léonce Curnier," 3 November 1834, \textit{Ibid.}, 1:152.
\textsuperscript{467} "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Emmanuel Bailly," 3 November 1834, \textit{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. 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."

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408 Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to François Lallier, 17 May 1838, Ibid., 1:305.
409 Règlement de 1835, article 1 (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.\textsuperscript{470} It claims that unanimity had been reached when it was learned that Sister Rosalie proposed the division.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{470} Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Première Conférence (1833-1835), ASSVP, Registre 101.
\textsuperscript{471} Sacra Congregation 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 confères would turn to Vincent for inspiration. In 1838, Ozanam would confirm this:

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\(^{473}\) *Extrails des procès-verbaux de la Première Conference* (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 upbringing 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


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.”

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

\[\text{\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 24 April 1832, copy ASV: LLP 1:14.}\]
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.” 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’Arbalete, I had already had the

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81 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

(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!\(^4\)

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.\(^5\)

\(^4\) Boissinot, Un autre Vincent de Paul, 247.
\(^5\) “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

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we owe particular devotion, and in whose footsteps we must perseveringly endeavor to follow.\footnote{Ibid., 7-8.}

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 disposal, 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...\footnote{Ibid., 8-9.}

While the members are urged to practice “all virtues,” six are considered as most necessary for the accomplishment of their charitable works.
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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, 14\textsuperscript{th} 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...

\textsuperscript{488} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{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.\footnote{José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, “The Saint Vincent de Paul Society Today,” Echoes of the Company 4 (July-August 2004): 330.}

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 XIX\textsuperscript{th} 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.

\textit{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
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."

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...
l’Épee-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...

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.” Alone, the young man made his way cautiously through the narrow, dirty streets until he found the little

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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."\(^{484}\)

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.\(^{496}\)

\(^{484}\) 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 Monfettard 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

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.
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.\footnote{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,
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.\footnote{Ibid.}

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
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-Regis and Commissioner of Public Assistance for the Bureau of Public Assistance of the X11th 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."  

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."

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504 Letter of the Bureau of Public Assistance of the XI1th 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, AFCP, 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. 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.”

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

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306 Ibid.
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.  

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."

506 Ibid., 12 February 1836, AFCP, SJ2 - Ro - Le 16 L3.
507 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

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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." Other letters likewise seek assistance for those in need, including requests to borrow money. At the same time, Sister Rosalie repeatedly renew her offer to render any service she can to 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."

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:

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\text{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.}\]

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."

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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.
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 Loppe 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.\footnote{Ibid., 28 May 1837.}

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.”\footnote{Ibid.} 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

\footnote{Ibid., 28 May 1837.} \footnote{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.\footnote{Ibid., 8 March 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 60 L16.}

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.\footnote{Ibid.}
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." 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."
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."

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."

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....

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522 Ibid., 21 July 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 70 L.20.
523 Ibid., 10 January 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 86 L.24.
We pray and have others praying for the patient and for you. Send me news as soon as possible.\footnote{Ibid., 19 May 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 64 L17.}

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 

\textit{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...\footnote{Ibid., 28 May 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 65 L18.}

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.”\footnote{Ibid., 15 October 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 80 L21.} 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.\footnote{Ibid., 3 May 1839, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 95 L28.} By 28 June the wait was over. Sister Rosalie exclaimed, “Congratulations on the safe arrival of your dear child. Hug him
tightly for me and do the same twice over for Madame Loppe while assuring her of my sincere and affectionate devotedness."  

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 Boulognesur-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."  

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.  

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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 paté. 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.\(^{331}\)

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.”\(^{332}\)

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.\(^{333}\) 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

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\(^{331}\) Ibid., 13 November 1838, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 84 L22.

\(^{332}\) Ibid., 5 January 1845, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 187 L33.

\(^{333}\) 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.

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.